

This interview was done on June 9th, 2000 on Mr. Edward Luce about his experience with the 101st during World War II.

Where were you at during Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Luce: I was building model airplanes in the attic in St. Louis, Missouri. I was in high school.

What was kind of your reaction?

Mr. Luce: I was very surprised. I did feel the importance of it though. I had registered for the draft. I graduated midterm, so I started college. Then I got my notice. But the college, Washington University at St. Louis, did refund the tuition. Then I went in the Army. My mother was an Army nurse in France in World War I. It was an advanced field hospital, like a MASH hospital. My sister eventually went in the Army. I'm from a military family. I went in the Army at Jefferson Barracks in Missouri. It was new to me in a way but I had had Junior ROTC experience in high school. So I knew something about the military; especially close order drill. So I joined the Army, inducted in it, and while we are waiting to be shipped out at the St. Louis Induction Center, I remember being on a detail to police up the yard. There were some leaves there. The sergeant handed me a box that had been wet and the bottom was opened. The order to the guys was to pick up the leaves and put it in the box. Some of them were arguing about the box being opened. I was ordered to put it in the box. So I walked behind him holding an empty box. I guess the intent was to do what you are told. It was a little strange to me. We then got on a train to go to (we didn't know at the time) the North Carolina. We went south of St. Louis into Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and I think Alabama. The train turned north to go into North Carolina. It stopped in Durham, North Carolina at Camp Buckner. I think it took three days for that trip. It was a coal-burning locomotive with everybody jammed in. They had a boxcar set up as a kitchen. You had to go into the boxcar to get your food. We got there at night. We got off the train like sheep being herded into the barracks; and then basic training started. Since I had had some military training and I was eighteen years old and didn't give for anything or didn't care, I was going to have fun and I did. I was what they called a yard bird.

Describe what a yard bird is.

Mr. Luce: A yard-bird is a guy who is not military, does not follow command, and messes up all organizations, anything you can. I was very good at that to the extent that I was one of the five people nominated in my barracks in the platoon to be the worst offender. So all the dirty details we caught. But we had fun doing it. I really enjoyed basic training. I had fun.

You actually enjoyed basic training?

Mr. Luce: Yes I did because of the pranks we pulled. There was a kid two bunks down from me that assisted a mail clerk. He would say such things as, "You guys be quiet or I

want give you your mail.” Well nobody liked him. So what we did, we rigged up, the five of us, a number ten can full of water over his bunk. It was open beams then. We ran a string across the room and all the way down to the end. Some likeable guy went to sleep so we woke him up and put the string in his hand. Smitt from Missouri said, “When I whistle, pull the string.” He said, “Yeah, yeah, yeah okay.” Well, the kid came in from the movie and sat down on the edge of his bunk, check to feel if the legs were under it, felt the sheet, and sat down. Smitt whistled, the guy pulled the string, and water comes on him. He screams and hollers and a non-comm comes down from upstairs and turns the lights on. He got five names, nobody else. Neither one of us would admit it, we all had to go out and dig a foxhole. I think we ended up all doing it. This was late at night. But we got our revenge on this kid. We were trouble makers. We were a detriment to the training cadre because they were rated on how good their troops did. We messed up more than one formation. The drill sergeants, the platoon sergeant was a very big man of about 6’ 4” with a very high voice. Sometimes you could hear him, sometimes you couldn’t. So if he said to the right, you didn’t know if it was flank or _____ or what. You did what you didn’t think he said. With the excuse that you didn’t hear him. You take five guys, four rows of men marching and we messed up on everything. It reflects badly on him and he did not like that. I got caught once by him. I had to drill a platoon. Well the guys that would mess up on purpose didn’t and I knew how to give a drill. It worked perfectly, rear march, rear march, _____. Perfect. He didn’t say a word to me because I actually did it better than he did. I had cooperation from the other four guys. Anyways there in North Carolina we went on Tennessee maneuvers even Nashville for three months: January, February, March 1943.

What were the _____?

Mr. Luce: We stayed at the woods all the time. We had tactical problems being expedited for I think like seven or eight days. It took two or three days to get everybody back together again. At the time we could get a pass to go to Nashville. Nashville today, I don’t recognize by any means. So then I went back to Camp Addebury, Indiana. They shipped us there for a very short time. Then we were getting ready to ship over. We went to Fort Meade, Maryland and then went to just north of Boston, _____, assembly area. We then got a cruise ship to go overseas. In basic training we had started doing free hands drill. When you are marching along and get the order, you let go of your rifle. Put it on the ground and let go of it. The guy behind you catches it. We did that going on guard duty. Everything is supposed to be cleaned and right. The guard sergeant just raised hell. But we didn’t drop the rifle. The select guys that the officers met on the troop ship were the guys selected for the free hand drill. We did real good. I think the three of us managed to be in the officer’s mess.

What did they have you doing?

Mr. Luce: Bring the food to the officers, clear the table and set it up again. I didn’t know what lifeboat I was supposed to be assigned to, where the life jackets were; the floats. I didn’t care because I was with the merchant marine. It was only three times a day. The

troops were fed twice. They had confined spaces on the bunks where your unit barracks bag had to sit. We didn't bother with that. I liked my barracks bag.

So you actually enjoyed being on the boat?

Mr. Luce: Yes I did because I got to know the merchant marine. They told us we were going to Liverpool. When you ordered candy you got it the next day. You had bobby pins and _____. You don't want any money. Anything was better than money. Because they hadn't had it in about four years. So we landed in Liverpool, got on this little dinky train and went to Wales. Some place in Wales. Again we camped in the woods with latrine camps over here. It rained every day. Everything I had was wet; my clothes and me. There was no px, no mail, no nothing. We went AWOL a couple of times to a little village nearby. The people there were so poor they were amazed that an infantry man would have a watch. They were amazed we were that rich. Then they came back recruiting airborne; glider infantry. Class A pads every night, all new equipment, everything. They gave it out everything was brand new. I'm not sure if it was to get out of the rain but we knew D-Day was coming up. This was before D-Day. I could not see walking up the beach. Those two reasons, the rain and the repo-depot and the imminent invasion, I decided to go AWOL.

So what was the training like for Airborne?

Mr. Luce: We had to know how to load gliders. We took training flights with the gliders and what to do when the glider lands. You have to check the stick out, you got to go for it; it's an organized patrol you might say.

So what was it like to ride the glider?

Mr. Luce: It's very noisy. It's sealed to a fuselage and the fabric was banging. It was like being inside of a drum. It was very difficult to talk. But I couldn't see anything. Sitting in the glider on a training flight all I could see is the guy in front of me, facing me, knee to knee. There were little round port holes that you couldn't see out of because you were strapped in. You're breaking your neck trying to look even though you couldn't see anything anyway. I wanted to see what was going on. So when we were assigned a glider in a combat flight the ranking non-comm would be copilot; somebody that had experience. I said, "I got experience." He said, "Well what did you do?" I said, "A friend of mine in Vicksburg, Mississippi had a _____." We used to go flying together. I did handle the controls a few times. I built model airplanes. Actually I didn't tell him that. So we took a practice flight. The ranking nine on the glider wanted the job so he went along to. We took off double toed on a C47. He took it off, got up cruising to another airport to deliver their glider and he asked if I wanted to fly it. I said, "Sure!" I was eighteen years old who cares. I knew where the controls were supposed to be although I had never done it. The non-comms didn't know anything. I don't think I was left with a choice. I hadn't done it but I knew what was supposed to be done. I was flying around and enjoying it. He kept saying watch the _____ indicator. Well the turning back was no problem for me to keep the wings level. You don't go anyplace except where the plane pulls you. I got in

the slip screen once and the controls tightened up. So he took it out and I took over again. He asked me if I wanted to land it. I said sure. Today I wouldn't begin to. But anyway I think I made a good approach. I went past the airport swung it around and I knew to give it a little bit of elevator and a little bit of rudder. I guess it was alright. I was coming in for a landing. I thought I was doing good but the pilot got nervous. He kept saying, "Watch the air speed, watch the air speed, watch the air speed!" As I remember an empty glider will quit flying and stall out I think at eighty-five miles an hour; loaded I think it is sixty-five. There were only four instruments. I was concentrating on that continually heading for the runway. He yelled, "I will take it." So I just sat back. I would have landed it roughly pretty good except there was a row of B24 bombers. I would have landed right in the middle of them...sideways. He slide slips and got it down with no problem.

You got to see what was going on outside.

Mr. Luce: Yes. I got a beautiful view at 1500 feet, plexi-glass all the way around you. You could see everything.

How long did you stay over in England?

Mr. Luce: Six months altogether. I joined before D-Day and did not go to D-Day. I was taking my training. I went in in September 17th into Holland; Operation Market Garden. I asked to go on the flight. We had a sand table briefing. It was a big sand table probably about 10 X 5 with miniature houses and trees and what have you. We were told we would cross the channel to France, go north cross Belgium and drop into Holland. The paratroopers went in first a few hours ahead of us to take out the known German emplacements. But then they had heavy anti-aircraft fire. They told us that when we crossed the channel, there would be a whole series of air/sea rescue boats. Then they changed the flight plan when we went over the North Sea. There were no row boats in sight. For 1500 feet, I could see everything. We did get some anti-aircraft fire from near the coast. There were three tow ships staggered abreast with two ___ each, we had three more than three more; a whole stream of aircraft. The tow ship not the one ahead of us, but the one ahead of him, it blew. One glider peeled off and went down the North Sea. The other one tried to dive under. I guess there was plenty of gasoline in it because it burned; I was watching out the side. The flames were out before he hit the North Sea. There were thirteen men aboard. It's just one of those things that happen. In the landing zone, we were ok. He told me to watch the right hand side and up and he would watch the left. We had so many gliders coming in at once. We did have quite a few mid air collisions. I saw two gliders that the wing tips touched and then they bounced apart. I just had time to think that they were lucky when they went back again. The nose went together, the wings went together and it went down. We did have some landing casualties. The pilot was a good one. He set us down in a farmer's field plowed just behind a house. The furlough was like this and he landed like that. I forgot I was told as a copilot to pick my feet up when landing; to put it on a crossbar which held the instruments. I didn't. I left my feet on the floor under the rudder pedals. I could feel the floor doing this as we were tobogganing along because don't forget we lost the landing gear. We were tobogganing along building up dirt in the front. We went through a barbed

wire fence another ditch. We lost the dirt and picked up speed and hit the other embankment. We slid along a little bit, stopped and went up on the nose. So two feet in front of me was dirt. We plopped back down again. It was anti-climatic. It was quiet. The pilot said, "Let's get out of here." The guys threw it off and was just milling around. Three times he yelled, "Let's get out of here." Mortars were landing off at the side and at the time I thought they were close, but later on I realized they weren't. But he got awfully nervous. Most of the guys were gone and we had to wait for the Infantry. He couldn't wait. He spun around between the pilot and co-pilot and he stepped on a ___ and tripped and fell. I stopped and laughed. What the pilots do; we went to our objective and he was with us; which was the same objective as other lighter loads. He goes in the next higher command. He went to platoon, then he went to company and then he went to regiment. He kept going further back. It was almost anti-climatic. In walked a Dutchman with an orange band on his arms who were talking to some officers who had given him some information about where the Germans were. But we just kept on walking. It's a little bit confusing to me after that but we did not run into any hostile fire.

So your landing was....

Mr. Luce: It was good. We were able to walk away from it. Then we formed up across a big open field all strung out to clear the area and a machine gun opened up on us. I was about 20 feet from a deep ditch. I think I took three strides. I hit that ditch face down and slid into it. Meanwhile I had just taken my pack off. It was hot and we had woolen clothes on. I had my combat jacket on over that and combat pants. I had just taken my pack off in which I had a couple cartons of cigarettes, Hershey bars, cleaning equipment, shaving gear and all that. Then the gun opened up. I forgot about all of that. I just ran. I never saw that pack again. We did not have it really bad, mainly because we had the holding action. The Germans were attacking and when you were defending to me it seemed like it was easier, than attacking. You are in a comfortable hold and the other guys around you are holding. We didn't have much action then. So actually those mortar shells was my first introduction to combat than the machine gun. We were supposed to return fire into these woods; we couldn't see anything.

So you didn't have anything to aim at?

Mr. Luce: No, just shooting through the woods. About a foot off the ground as low as you could get. As I said Holland was more physically quite comfortable in the beginning than it was dangerous because the Germans had blown the dikes. The countryside was flooded. We walked through arches where the pear trees and apple trees the limbs were breaking. You walked by grabbed a pear took a bite threw it on the ground and grabbed another one. You regretted it later on. It was wet, wet, wet, and wet. The good thing was the soil was such so you could dig a foxhole and it would hold tight. It was real easy to dig into. There was no rock or anything. But it had some handicaps. The sides would have a tendency to come in on you. So you dug it wider than usual than you needed to have. One time later on I sat in a foxhole with water up to my waist for three days and two nights under observation from the Germans shooting from down the road. I couldn't

get out of it. Well, things happen like body functions. What do you do? You don't get out of the hole. You stay there. It was uncomfortable.

Your biggest problem in Holland at first was just getting adjusted to that kind of life.

Mr. Luce: Yes it was.

More than worried about getting shot at?

Mr. Luce: You're right. Later on it got a little more hectic; a little more action. We had a narrow corridor up to Ordenheim (?) with Germans on both sides of it and they would break through every now and again. They rushed us once. They held them. I think it was the 82nd. It was north of Veckel (?). The company battalion commander was riding down the road in the jeep. He said, "Come on they need us up there! Come on they need us up there!" Well about a hundred feet behind him the voices started, "Get up and walk with us, get up and walk with us!" We were double timing all the way. We stopped on one of the fifteen minute breaks after fifty minutes we stopped again and I was out of water again. As it happened on the highway which had built up on the dikes into the lower lever there was a British tanker behind the truck with about ten water spigots. I put my helmet and my rifle down and went over with my canteen and filled it with water. The order came down with a flank attack. The whole town of troops moved off to the side and flanked them. I ran back and got my stuff. Well the call came out to flank to the left; there was an intersecting road. I had the bazooka and ran over to the ditch. ____ my assistant was with me. I set the bazooka up and waited. Our Lieutenant crawled out the ditch and said, "Luce, where is Tyrall (?) the squad leader." I said, "I don't know, I think he is up front." He said, "Go get him!" I said, "There are Germans up front!" He said, "Go get him!" I said, "Yes sir!" I crawled on my hands and knees with a rifle between my elbows and it had just gotten deep; which was fine. After awhile I was able to get off course. I came to a parallel road as the one we had been on. In the intersection of the ditch was a big tree probably about 3 feet in diameter that had been hit and fell and was blocking the ditch. I got myself together jumped up and ran. I put one foot on it and jumped sideways. When I did I saw two Germans in the ditch. Then I saw some GI's that had them covered, prisoners. I landed in the ditch and asked them if they seen a strange _____. We had, I think it was clover leaf on our steel helmets; different regiments had different symbols of the 101st of the 401. They hadn't seen strangers. This guy was setting up an 81 mortar at the bottom of the ditch from the base plate. He asked me if I knew anything about a mortar. I said, "No but you don't point it straight up, I know that!" He said, "Let's take it out on the road." I said, "Ok." I put my rifle down. I kicked the base plate loose and grabbed the tube. We drug it up to the paved road. We put the base under it. He said there is some ammunition in the carts. There were three carts there that the horses were pulling with ammunition on the back. I went up to the first one thinking souvenirs. There was a little mahogany box. Very nice! It had two little clasps. I looked in and there were dynamite caps inside. I closed it very carefully and put it underneath the cart and grabbed some ammunition from the cart. He was trying to put the sights on it. The German sights are good. I said, "You don't know how to use those, throw them away." He said, "Okay." He threw them away. They had been pushed out of a position.

He said, "I know where they are." So we brought it around. He kept kicking and moving the base plate and winding it up so he had where he thought was right. We dropped a few rounds in there and we started hitting the target. We went back and forth, back and forth until we used up all the ammunition. It didn't stop the attack from there. My platoon lieutenant was there. He said, "Where is Tyrall?" I said, "I forgot to get him." I didn't know it but the company commander and a couple of the other guys were there, he put me in for a bronze star. About a week later he said, "Ed we had too many heroes that week, you didn't get the medal." The only reason I wanted the medal was for points. I could carry on a stick you get enough points to be discharged. The bronze star was worth 20 or 25 points. It didn't make me happy. I missed out on it. How long is this interview going on?

As long as you want it to.

Mr. Luce: I got to Holland to a town of Veckel (?).

You didn't want the Bronze Star for the medal, you just wanted the Bronze Star for the...

Mr. Luce: For the points!

How many points did you need to be discharged?

Mr. Luce: Oh it was some tremendous amount; age, length of service, number of dependents and number of days combat. It all amounted up; supposedly! I never met anybody that got enough.

So you wanted the points but you didn't know what they were?

Mr. Luce: I used to carry it on a stick.

About how long were you in Holland?

Mr. Luce: We landed in September and we didn't pull out until the end of November; which unsettled us. We didn't like it because they were using us as regular infantry and that is an insult for airborne. Montgomery took that law to clean up the ghost line of Holland. It shouldn't have been but it was. Evidently I was among a volunteer patrol that took a British artillery observer up towards Arnheim (?). I did see it in the distance; all I could see was smoke from the buildings which was famous for the bridges up there. They lost something like 8,000 men out of 12,000 in three days. They got wiped out. At that place the observation point was in a farm house; a two story farmhouse. The British observer wanted to protect this patrol that went out with him. They would dig in close at the house. There were two ditches that crossed and the house sits here. You couldn't see 20 feet with the bushes and weeds growing up. I didn't like that at all. So where they crossed, I waded across there with water up to my waist. I stayed wet for a couple of days. I lay down in the pasture; I could see Arnheim then, looking for the Germans coming toward me. At the original position we wouldn't have seen them from twenty feet

away. That was significant to see Arnheim under siege. We stayed there until the middle of November. We were relieved by the Canadian troops. I remember we were in a subdivision near a farm house. I was in the shed and somebody had broken planks away from the end, out of the rain laying there looking through the planks ___ down the road. When the Canadians came we were glad to see them. They took us to trucks down to ___, Le Petite, France. It was kind of a long ride, but we were glad to get out of there. We got to the barracks and these were French barracks and they had beds, sheets and showers. It was heaven. I had one shower in three months in Holland when the Army mobile shower came by. I hadn't had a shower. I was weak as a kid. I think I washed all the strength out of me for about an hour. I couldn't hardly pick up my rifle. Down in France I took a shower. Some of the guys went to _____ on pass that night. I didn't I just wanted to get in bed; a bed. I hadn't been in a bed for three months. One of the problems in action in Holland we stayed in a foxhole front line maybe eight days and go back in reserve about four. But when you were on reserves you went out on patrols. You might as well stay in the hole. But the biggest problem with that are your knees. You can't straighten out your legs. You're in a foxhole; your legs are curled up. So it's hard on the knees to be in a foxhole for any length of time, much less find a bed. We out posted in a little town called Alfhusen (?). It had changed hands two or three times. We were going at night and it was real dark or getting dark. One night I slept in pig sty; a two-story pig sty with hay in the top and it was raining. What do you do? You take off one end of it and crawl in the hay. I was into it but wasn't supposed to be, but I was out of the rain. Another time I was in a house in the same little village. That village looked the worst than any I had ever seen. There were tanks and half-tracks and German motorcycles and every kind of vehicle you can imagine on the road because of the deep ditches to the houses and a few bridges. Some tanks tried to drive across the bridge and went in; American and German. That was a movie nightmare going down that road. The Germans motorcycles cart lying there with the bodies were still in it. The grave registration team hadn't even gotten there. I seen this house with double windows; the front of them had been blown off. There was a single sewing machine there between the windows. I set my luger on there and a couple of grenades and brought my M1. There was a machine gun on one side of me and a BAR on the other. So I figured a little machine gun would be a little more effective than a BAR.

What is a BAR?

Mr. Luce: It's a Browning automatic rifle. It will hold a magazine of 20 rounds; but then you got to change your magazine where the machine gun belt is at. It got quiet and my squad leader said, "I will be by about 12 o'clock." He said, "I will be whistling slowly. It will be me." He did he came by and the rain was coming in the broken windows. I went into one of the bedrooms and in Holland they had a bedroom with no windows in the middle of the house except the doorway. There were two mattresses. So I had a straight chair to sit in next to the sewing machine. I took a mattress out and sprayed it on the bottom and got in the front. I took another mattress and threw it over me over my waist so I got out of the rain. It worked fine. But then I heard pigs. They had the wildest pigs; domestic sty's that roamed the countryside. The pig had gotten to eating something. I didn't know what it was. Then I got to thinking it was probably somebody dead. That got on my nerves. I pulled the pin on the grenade and threw it out there. I started a small war.

The machine gun cut loose, the Germans fired, the BAR cut loose; everybody was shooting.

All for grenading a pig.

Mr. Luce: It squealed, it was a pig. I guess it ran off. I didn't do any shooting; I knew what was going on.

Did you tell anyone that?

Mr. Luce: Lord no I didn't tell anybody!

So about how long were you stationed in Holland before you left?

Mr. Luce: September 17th until November 29th or something like that.

They shipped you down to south of France?

Mr. Luce: They took us in trucks; it was not south of France. It was near north of Paris near _____. It was a long truck drive.

How long were you around ___?

Mr. Luce: The moment I left (I can't remember the name of the town), it was French barracks; maybe two weeks three at the most.

What did you do while you were there?

Mr. Luce: Almost nothing because for the first time in my life I have ever heard that the American Army we didn't have to get up in the morning. The mess hall was opened all day long. There was nothing to do; whatever you wanted to do. About two days later we had reveling. The next day we had reveling and calisthenics. It started building back up again. But meanwhile they had a few passes to go to Paris. We had to cut a card to see who would win out of each squad. I was lucky, I went to Paris. I got back and maybe two days later we fell out in the morning for reveling. The company commander said, "We are not going to have any duty today. You got until 2 o'clock this afternoon to draw your ammunition. We are going back in action." Just like that. Some guys were still on leave. We didn't ever wait for them. The trucks pulled out before dark. This was in December. It was cold as the devil; an open truck going down the highway. They didn't stop until we got to Bastogne. There was a problem there to that you don't read about in books. You're in the trucks, it was cold but your body functions had to work. So what do you do? You go over the side. I hung over the tail gate. There was a truck about maybe 20 or 30 feet behind me with just its black-out lights on. If I would have fallen off they never would have found me. There was a whole string of trucks. I didn't fall. I have never really gotten into the town of Bastogne. It was always on the perimeter. The trucks dropped us off at I don't know where. But when we got off the trucks it was kind of high to jump off

so I had to jump off. So I jumped into Bastogne from the back of the truck. We were kind of milling around and somebody asked Lieutenant Adams where we were. He said, "I don't know, we are either in Belgium, Holland, or Germany. It doesn't matter, we are digging along this ridge." We didn't know what country we were in. So that was really my introduction to Bastogne. They moved us several times. We never knew where we were. You just dig in where they tell you. The ground was frozen probably about 8 inches down and then it was mud; which froze within 10 minutes. It was very difficult to dig a foxhole. In fact one night I think we dug three holes. They kept moving. The situation was so fluid; nobody knew what was really going on. I think it was the next day or the day after when we completely circled the Germans. They told us we had surrounded them. It didn't really bother us at all. We were used to that. When we dropped into Holland we encircled. You just operate that way. But that didn't bother me. The lack of ammunition and the lack of food started to get to us. One time I was down to the ammunition in my belt; that's all, two K-rations a day. It was a cardboard box; two a day.

So you'll were really low on ___?

Mr. Luce: We knew it was bad. The American Army said, "Ammunition we can throw away and food we can throw away!" It was cold as the devil. It was the coldest winter in 20 years.

So what did they have you doing in Bastogne?

Mr. Luce: Sitting in the hole looking out at the Germans. When they would attack, it always mortars first. Then came rushing and you just lay down and fired back and forth, back and forth. If you have a field of fire you are responsible for it; nobody else. You don't worry about anybody else. You don't worry about the Germans from over here because somebody will take care of them within their perimeter of defense. Bastogne is a perimeter of defense and each company was a perimeter of defense. So if they broke perimeter they couldn't get you in the rear. Patrols were the worst kind. I guess in my military experience I have been on about six "voluntary" battalion patrols. Voluntary, hell, I was told to go and I went. But battalion patrols were bad. They got volunteers from each company; not just one company.

So what kind of patrols did they have you doing?

Mr. Luce: To go where the Germans were. The worst thing you can do is not know where you enemy is at. Go out and find them even at night. I went out on one patrol and got totally and completely lost. There were five of us. We didn't know where we were. We were in Europe that is all we knew. It was snowing and it was the great big flakes. It was already about a foot and a half deep. We were walking along this little road three of us in one ditch and two in the other slightly uphill and a 50 caliber machine gun that they had opened up. When a 50 caliber bullet goes through the snow and hits something it ricochets and leaves a big hole in the snow. The gunners were smart. He said, "What is the password?" We didn't know but we started talking. He said, "Come on in." So we

went in and saw his uniform. I think it was a 777; a black artillery outfit. They gave us some food and told us where our unit was and we went to it.

So you'll got turned around and eventually ended up making a circle?

Mr. Luce: Right. We didn't come in where we went out. We made a loop somewhere. We got completely lost. Another thing we were on patrol at night and a jeep came down this side road through the snow going slow. We stopped it of course. It was an American jeep; the recon patrol. Why they were out there, I don't know. The jeep making all that noise. They don't like noise at night. Another patrol was coming back into the area; again a voluntary battalion patrol. I recognized where we were. I went up and told the patrol leader, I said, "My unit is right over here why don't I just cut across?" He said, "Okay." I shouldn't have but I did. I was in the middle of the field with great heaps of turnips. They pile them up and put dirt over them. Tanks were coming just as I was by myself. I didn't know whether to do this or that. I crouched down for awhile. I figured it wasn't doing any good because they could see me. So I just went back to my company. But it got through to me. You could hear those tanks, you knew they were close and they were German tanks. We had some tanks there in Bastogne and we had tank destroyers. The tank destroyers would not come out of town to repel a tank attack unless they broke through our line. I have seen on a patrol again a farmhouse where we stopped to eat. We took our food. A farmhouse with smoke out the ceiling was no danger. They would think we were civilians. So we cooked our food with the wooden cardboard boxes of food that was heavily in wax to burn through that you could heat with a canteen full cup of water. I saw the tank attack off in the distance. It broke through the line. The tanks would go and put the tread on top of the foxhole for 380 degrees and spin around. The next foxhole they would lock up their tread and spin around. The guys inside were buried. If that happened to me I had a bazooka, at least I would hit the tread on the tank to stop them. It would stop the turret which co-anchors the machine gun. But if it's close enough he couldn't depress the gun enough to get it. Then men I saw on another patrol; three of our half-tracks were heading up a hill. They were maybe 5 car lengths between each one. I heard the German mortars go off; the 81 mortar, three times. There were three hits. Three half-tracks were hit. Three rounds three targets. They guys were good. The Germans were good which was more unusual than anything. Three out of three. The half-tracks have been burned. I'm not sure but I think one of them had a quad 50; four 50 caliber machine guns. You can break down a brick wall with a four 50 caliber machine gun. It has tremendous fire power. The last position I was in we were on patrol and went by a deep ravine. About 10 feet out you could see the top of a tree. It was that deep. We walked up to his barn and we stopped. There was a jeep parked there, then a big stone house and then a highway; which was a nice wide highway. You couldn't see the road because it was covered in snow. It had great big trees on the embankment over the culverts. We stopped because I was out of water and my buddies were to. There was a rain barrel there so they could divert the rain water underneath the barrel so it could go into the ground. I think it was full of water; I kicked it myself. The ice was very thick on top of it. I walked up to the officers and a Sergeant. I was quiet, I was very polite. I said, "Tyrall I am out of water and the guys are too. Why don't I put a round through the rain barrel so we can get water?" Both Lieutenants jumped all over me. They said, "It will give our position

away!" I knew I was right. I said, "They know where we are anyway." They didn't like that. You don't talk back to officers; especially engineering officers. He really got excited about it. He said, "I want you to carry the anti-tank mine back to the road!" I knew that no one man could do it. I had two pair of gloves on and the wire could almost cut through them. You could really feel them. You had a slinging rifle that every step you took, the barrel hit your helmet. I had to walk side step with the guy on the side of you. We went maybe 30-50 yards to the highway kicking the snow out of the way. The Lieutenant finally stopped and said, "I think this is a good place." I said, "Good!" and let go. I dropped the mine. I was so mad I didn't care if it went off or not. He jumped about three feet in the air. He was screaming at me. He made more damn noise than if I would have shot through the rain barrel. He was excited. He wanted me to dig a foxhole on the other side of the road. He wanted me to chain a mine with my chain and blow it across the highway. We had to leave it open to try to break out of Bastogne. I had to dig the hole. He said, "I want you to stay there." I said, "Sir I got the bazooka, I am detailed on the other side of the woods. He turned to the squad leader and he said, "Tyrall is that right?" He said, "Yes sir that's right. So I didn't dig the hole. I did see a jeep try to break out. There was a guy named Truitt spread-eagled with a Thompson machine gun. The windshield was down. The driver was hunched over the wheel. The guy in the back had a Thompson. They were going down this hill and started up the other one, they hit a mine and the whole thing went up in the air and sat down. That killed all three of them. It was an unsuccessful breakout.

So about how long were you in Bastogne?

Mr. Luce: I would say maybe about a week at the most when I was taken prisoner. At the same place where I was talking about the mines; Christmas Day we had the worst day of combat of the week. What happened was the Germans came in from the west to get Bastogne. That didn't work. So this one group came in to the east which is where I was. We got three very heavy attacks Christmas Day. After that was when I was just down to the ammunition on my belt. It was all I had. The engineers were across the road in some houses. They pulled back Christmas night. As far as I know my Lieutenant and squad leader pulled back Christmas night and did not tell us. We were left to perimeter the back of those woods. The next morning maybe 4 o'clock they hit us again with mortar shells and then attacked. Then they brought a tank in. I guess we were holding our own until they brought the tank up. It hit the barn and set it on fire. We were in the circle of light and the Germans were in the dark. They had an advantage on us. Before the tank came the German machine gun that was in that ravine seemed to me to be shooting at the tree up the hill; not down the hill where I was, but up the hill where the other guy were. I got angry so I fired the bazooka at them. A bazooka shell and the flames came out four feet. I think every German that side of Berlin was shooting at us. There was a little machine in front of my hole that literally cut that thing down and fell over. They returned fire. I just laid back and looked up at him. About half an hour later I did it again. Neither shell went off. I think what happened it was maybe 100 yards maybe 120; the snow was about a foot and a half deep. I think the shell hit snow and just slid along and stopped. Until somebody came by and kicked it it wouldn't go off. It didn't do any good. The tank came and burned the barn. The firing increased. The German rifle was a sharp crack. The M1

rifle was two sounds, capow, capow. The firing died down. This kid from Nebraska or someplace up there rolled over to our hole and asked a buddy of mine, "What are we going to do?" I said, "We don't know. There were no orders or instructions. I said to him, "If you go, we'll go; if you stay, we'll stay." He crawled back down the hill again and we never saw him again. I don't know what happened. But then I saw a couple of guys crawling up the hill. I told _____, "Lets get out of here!" I grabbed the Luger I had that I got in Holland from _____; I put in my coat pocket and started crawling. We went by an engineer further up the hill that had been hit in the leg. He couldn't move his legs. He begged us not to leave him. We said, "We don't know where we are going, man!" He cried for us not to leave him. I grabbed his harness on the shoulder and _____ grabbed his belt. We started dragging him when the machine gun hit us. I was on my hands and knees and it flipped me over on my back. The engineer was killed right off. What we had heard was true. A _____ 1200 rounds per minute; the first burst of the first firing was accurate then it starts to wonder around the landscape. That's what happened. It got us on the first burst and then it wondered around.

How many times were you shot?

Mr. Luce: I was hit six times but only drew blood once. The _____ tore up my right boot and went through the blouse of my pant leg and three of them through the clothes of my hip and one in my arm through the elbow. That one through my waist went through my overcoat, combat jacket, sweater and I think it was an undershirt. Two bullets made a long hole and one bullet made 7 holes. I thought I was very lucky. So when the fighting died down I called up to _____ in Jacksonville, Florida who had been hit in the leg earlier and Bill Barrett from southern Arkansas. We were together, the three of us. We saw the Germans walking in. We lay like we were pretending like we were dead. The German came up and kicked _____ on his bad leg that he hit the day before. He was sore. So he yelled. So he got up. My arm wasn't working so I was holding it and Bill Barrett was frisked by the Germans. There was a non-comm I guess because of the insignia on his sleeve, holding a _____ machine gun who was maybe six feet from us. The three of us were standing there. Another German walked behind us and was patting us down. They found the Luger. They took it out. There was a lot of German talk going on. So they went around and gave it to the guy with the sub-machine gun. So he held it on one hip and had the Luger in the other holding it up to the light of the burning barn. He talked uglier than me. He was pissed off. Normally in the German army only officers carried Lugers and only in the early part of the war. Later on they were issued _____ P38s. He talked ugly to me. I was more scared than then during the fire fight. He could have literally cut me in two with his miser. Luckily it was right during the German Jahrmarkt.

Was it SF?

Mr. Luce: No. Sometimes I think they get a bum rap. All of us were not that bad. You have to remember that early in the war joining SF took mental tests and physical test. It was the cream of the crop; like the green berets. Nothing but the best. Then with the casualties later on they would take anybody. They had a bunch of clowns; they had a bunch of no goods; real bad guys. But originally the SF was good. After I stayed in

prison from walking down the road and no reaction yet from each _____. They stopped us in an apple orchard and standing next to a tree and then it hit me. I was shivering like you wouldn't believe. I was shaking all over the place. Meanwhile Bill Barrett had taken my scarf and made a sling for my arm. They put us in a barn attached to a house out in the orchards. When I was in the orchard I saw a Red Cross ambulance come up and I noted mortar ammunition. So I went back. When I first saw it I thought they had taken us someplace, but they didn't. They put us in this barn attached to the house and sat down and wanted to know what the hell was going on. The Germans came in locked it. We stood up and for the first time in my life I fainted. I think it was from loss of blood. I have been hit with shrapnel in the back of my head and back of my arm. There were some engineers with us, probably about six of us altogether. At one time eight men in our squad and I don't know how many engineers but six of us survived. They separated me from my two buddies. I didn't want to go to this house. I knew what it was; it had a big white flag hanging out front with a Red Cross on it, aid station. They poked a miser in my back so I went. I walked in and this room was empty of all furniture except a coal-burning stove in the middle of the room with wounded Germans all the way around the walls. When I walk in and seen everyone in uniform it felt like I was walking naked down 5th street in New York. It was an eerie feeling. So I walked across the room to an empty space on the wall and sat down. I took my overshoe off and unbuckled it and kicked it off. My toe was hung out but my boot wasn't penetrated. It was hit and damaged and the cap was depressed and the half moon of the soul. So I put it back on and reached in my pocket and took out a tin can that had ____ candy. It held old tobacco cigarettes; mine was water tight. With one arm and one hand I couldn't open it. The wounded German right next to me, knee to knee, took it away from me and opened it and gave it back to me. I said hey he lit my cigarette for me. I passed it to him. It went all the way around the room and nobody took more than one cigarette. They gave it back to me and that surprised the devil out of me. If it had been reversed, I would have never gotten it back. If I would have been German and a wounded American, I would have never gotten it back. But I did and that impressed me. Later on they brought some food in. I did have a German kit which was a fork and a spoon; aluminum with the ends together. You could open it and put it together which is better. I wasn't hungry so I decided I didn't want any. But the big German soldier from across the room had been hit in the shoulder. He had a temporary cast type support for his arm. He was fixing himself a sandwich on his leg. He got up and gave me that thing. These were front line troops; combat troops. Number one they were tired of the war and number two they knew what I had done; the same thing they had done, so they got wounded. The further back in Germany I went the more indifferent we were eating. There were no meats and not groceries. If you lived okay, you died okay. It's up to you. I have to say I was by myself with the wounded Germans for three days. I was getting kind of worried about that. I wanted to see a friendly face. As they would come in and call German names, the guys would get up and go out; they would evacuate them. They came in and yelled, "Americana!" That was me so I got up and walked out. They put me in the back of a dump truck with wounded Germans. And we went to a more advanced hospital I guess. It was temporary shelter out in the woods. I had to form in line behind the Germans off the trucks. They went in and pulled their pants down and got a shot in the butt. It was probably Tetanus. I pulled my pants down and got a shot in my butt. We stayed there that

night and the next day, I'm kind of confused but I ended up in a hospital which was part of a wing of a castle. Where that was I don't know. It was a big, big castle. There were some more Americans there. I didn't like it because the first lieutenant that was there went all the way to the end he came to me and said, "Do you happen to have one of those chocolate bars on you?" if I had I would not have given it to him. I said, "No sir!" The nerve of that guy. There was one American laying there that had no clothes on. He had been sewn up from the crotch to the chest; operated on. I don't think he made it. I don't see how he could have. He was semi-conscious. It happens.

All in all how were you treated by the Germans in the hospital visits?

Mr. Luce: It was pretty good. There were not very many Americans there; maybe twenty. Some of us were taken to a town called _____, an SF hospital. There were about twelve of us altogether. At first at the aid station, they would put a piece of gauze and wrap it in a paper bag which was standard for them. They didn't have cloth, they used paper. They took me under guard down to the doctors. Going through the wards the soldiers there didn't like my airborne uniform. One of the guards had to un-sling his miser rifle and yell at them. They were ready to come out of their beds and yank me. They were tough. But the doctor had spent his residency at the University of Chicago, Illinois. Being young and dumb, I said, "What are you doing here?" He didn't answer, he just shrugged his shoulders. They put a cast on my arm from my wrist to my shoulder. It was nice of them. They moved us to another camp and that is where I met this guy Angelo M. from New York City. He had been hit with shrapnel on the back of his leg, taken to the American hospital and was operated on. He was lying in a cot waiting evacuation with no place to go. When the Germans came they captured the whole hospital; patients, operating room, everything. He didn't have any socks on and the bullet went right through him. He was cold. I found a pair of socks in my pocket. I gave it to him. He owes me for that foot that he kept. We were together for awhile. But then I lost track of him, I don't know what happened to Angelo. But I remember his name. Then I ended up at _____; which is near Limburg, Germany. It was a prison camp but not the normal type prison camp. They had two systems in Germany; the Luftstally (?) and the Stahmhager (?). The Luftstally (luft means air) was the air crew. The Stahmhager was the ground troops. The difference between a campground and a hilltop; they had barracks, they had food, they had heat, they had blankets, they had prisoner of war packages. The Stahmhager had nothing. I was put into a building like an airplane hangar. Nothing but straw on the floor in rows. That was the heat; the body heat. From there walking back to find a place to lie down, I found my two buddies that I had been separated from. They had been working for _____ railroad. They were bitter about it. They said, "Go out and fix the rails for today, the British would come over and bomb it at night, go back the next day and fix the same place all over again. They were living in boxcars. It was bad. During this whole turn I did take a boxcar ride when they booted us from one camp to the other. They put us in the boxcar and locked the doors. I had heard about it. I was boosted into a boxcar. In one end of it I could see about six bullet holes where a 50 caliber had gone through it. I said, "Now this is going to be crowded." So I moved. They slammed the door and locked it. If the Air Corp saw anything moving; plane, train, or car they would come down spraying. That's probably the most dangerous situation you could be in in

Germany during those days on a train. The last place I was in, Eppenheim, Germany, just north of Heidelberg, was a mental hospital. Why they took me there I don't know. There were French, Polish and Americans there. At the hospital we had a doctor; He was a Major in the Medical Corp. He didn't have any aspirin; nothing. But he was a doctor. We were there I guess over a month when the 3rd Division crossed the Rhein. They came in the front gate and the Germans ran out the back gate. They wouldn't let us out of there. They put mp's on the door; on the gate. There were snipers in the area. I didn't see it I was in _____. The army division; 3rd Division parked right next to it, the big brick wall. I think it was the 2nd or 3rd morning the courtyard was full of American ambulances being evacuated. I overheard talk that a unit was crossing a pontoon bridge over the Rhein River. I was the last one on the ambulance right at the back door. It thought that if this thing rolls over, I am out. It was like a boat the way it moved. But we made it across the Rhein through a corn field really with burrows that was almost level but not quite and a DC-3 was there waiting for us for evacuation. They doused us with DDT; we were lousy we had lice all over us. They flew us into Paris. Before we left Eppenheim, the Red Cross came to me. This was the 2nd time I saw the Red Cross there. The 1st time a kid by the name of _____ from Maine who could speak French told them the French and Polish prisoners had gotten American Red Cross prisoner of war packages. But we didn't, the French wouldn't give us any. Nothing! I don't like the Red Cross anyway. They came in and took our name, address and next of kin. As it happened, the army hospital in Paris sent a notice to my parents. Well it got there the same day the Red Cross delivered the message and the Red Cross had three or four days of advance notice. That was the same day. I could have used US mail. I don't like the Red Cross. So while we were there in Paris, we got partial payment of \$20. We had been treated for malnutrition. I broke the cast off myself after awhile. I didn't need it. So what did we do? Cognac! I had horse pills as big as the end of my thumb and other kind of pills to take. I used cognac to chase it down. We were there not even a week I guess when they put us on a DC-4. It had four engines in it. We took off from there about noon. We had some dinner first. We landed in Azores and had supper. We went in New Foundland and had breakfast and then went in to New York City; Garden City, Long Island. They wouldn't let us go into town unless we had a relative to vouch for us; in New York. I told them my uncle was ____ editor of Life and Times. They didn't believe me until I insisted on it. They tried three phone calls to try and reach him. They never did so we went AWOL. There was only a low fence around the back of it. We went to Garden City. We got another partial payment of \$20. We took a cab back. I don't remember the name of the airfield with a hospital there. It was a big Buick Sentra. There were five of us. We pulled up and the mp's were at the gate. The kid in the middle reached over and stomped the accelerator pad. We just lunged ahead. The cab driver said, "Oh well we are in here, which barracks are you going to?"

So you'll went right through the front gate.

Mr. Luce: Yeah. That was about a week I guess and they flew me to Battle Creek, Michigan. Because I was an ex-POW, I could go to any hospital that treated what I needed; like if I needed an orthopedic hospital. I was going to Battle Creek and my parents were in Kalamazoo, Michigan which was about 30 miles away. I met my parents for the first time in well over a year. Again you had to know the rules. Every patient that

was there and ambulatory had a job to do. It may be bringing clean linens and taking dirty linens or maybe bringing the bed patient food. Whatever it was, you were assigned a duty unless you were being treated. They were treating me for my arm. The doctor came by about once a week and asked how I was doing. I said, "They are trying to break my arm." He said, "What do you mean?" He looked at his notes. I said, "They got me down there with weights on my arm to try to straighten it out." He looked at his notes and said, "Come and see me after rounds." He didn't say anything. So I did. He called down to where they were giving me physical therapy and gave them hell because it was a damn bone condition. They couldn't even recognize x-rays. I was taken off that but I didn't have to report back to be put on duty. So in the morning when I came through they disbursed. I went downstairs where the px was or the coffee shop type thing was that had movies going all the time. It was previously a civilian hospital. All I remember is that they were vegetarian. But the mess hall had crystal chandeliers in it and each room had a private bath. Before this it was one patient per room, but the Army put us three or four of us in one room. But we had a private bath. I swear that ninety percent of the toilet bowls had a bottle of whiskey in it. I think the staff knew it but they didn't note it; neither the medicine bottle nor the whiskey bottle. One guy came back, I had been to see my parents and they dropped me off. I came back and the driver opened the trunk. He had a wheelchair. I flipped it open and the guy got in it. He was drunk out of his mind. I took him up to the mp's and they asked for his pass. He said (drunkenly), "I don't have one." He had been AWOL for a week. He lost both legs what do you do to him? They put him in Ward 8; no mail and no PX. It was a detention center.

So where did you go after ___?

Mr. Luce: I was discharged from there. I lived with my parents for a year but I guess I was grown. I was going to school and went back to college; western Michigan. I learned how to drink beer. I think that is all I learned. But I recognized I was spinning my wheels and not doing anything. So I transferred back to St. Louis University. It was a day and night difference. There was more than one instructor (civilian) that would say, "I am here to teach this course and you are welcome to learn. Just show up and I will teach you. If you don't show up don't bother me. They never took roll calls. If you're here I will teach you if you listen.

Well I am out of questions unless you have any more stories you would like to add.

Mr. Luce: No not really; odds and ends here and there. That just about does it I guess.

(Tape jumped from 22 to 34 in the seconds so there is a gap)

All right your big escape!

Mr. Luce: As well known that anything moved in Germany would be straight. We were being moved from one camp to another; walking. They issued us a little bit of rations; some black and red stuff to put on it.

Now when was this?

Mr. Luce: this was between prison camps. We formed up; maybe about 30 of us. I told the guy ahead of us that I was waiting for an air strike to come down us because we were moving. I forgot the guy's name. He was on crutches. It was not Angelo. It was another guy; a non-com. He was hit in the shoulder and had a cast on him. The three of us had decided we needed to escape but we were on the wrong side of the Rhein River. But we were going to escape. We started walking like the American Army for 50 minutes and take a 10 minute break. We went in the woods and kept on doing it. The guy ahead of me promised to answer my name. They took a roll call before we left. They counted; they didn't call a roll call. They were three short. The guards scattered. They saw us. Rifles were right over our head. When they _____ you could hear them snap. So we stopped. This guy was on crutches going fast. They put us back on the column and started walking. Now isn't that a good movie? We figured we would crawl up under the bridges and cross the Rhein River.

There weren't many left at that point were there?

Mr. Luce: Well not too many. We figured we would find one. We had a little bit of food in our pocket and we were gone. But also speaking of ground spraying we were at Bastogne on patrol, the snow was deep, a B-47 came down and sprayed us and dropped a F1 bomb on us. He didn't miss a column; not a column even but maybe ten or twelve of us. It was maybe 20 yards off. It was like a football falling and tumbling and then flames came out. I brought my M1 out. I hit the right elevation, the right lead and I was _____. We got back and they were going to court martial me for shooting an American airplane. I said, "Well damn you tried to hit me!" they didn't do anything. They called it friendly fire. But you don't argue with a guy with a full rifle.

End of Tape