

Norman Neitzke

Interviewer: Tell us your name.

Mr. Neitzke: My name is Norman Neitzke.

Interviewer: And how is that spelled last name?

Mr. Neitzke: Neitzke

Interviewer: Could you tell me your rank during the war and after?

Mr. Neitzke: I went in as a private and I came out a PFC.

Interviewer: PFC and were you I overheard that you were an E8 at some point or retired as an E8.

Mr. Neitzke: I retired from the Reserves as an E8.

Interviewer: Oh so you continued as a Reserve after the war. Unit served.

Mr. Neitzke: E506 transferred to the 82nd airborne for occupation duty in Germany in Frankford and then I came back home and joined the Reserves which was the 84th division.

Interviewer: And what was your job with the unit?

Mr. Neitzke: My job with the unit was like most plain ole infantry men.

Interviewer: Could you tell me your background for a second your parents?

Mr. Neitzke: My parents my father was a fireman for the city of Milwaukee. My mother was a house wife my grandparents came over from Germany so I have a kind of a German background. I can't really speak the language but.

Interviewer: In fighting in the war since your grandparents were from Germany from your personal feeling how did you feel fighting against the Germans?

Mr. Neitzke: I was not too happy with the Germans. I was very far off from my grandparents, nothing close.

Interviewer: And your schooling before you joined the army.

Mr. Neitzke: I was in high school and I was to graduate in the early part of June 1944 however at that time all of the fellows were anxious to take up arms because they didn't like what they saw and so they decided that a bunch of my friends decided we would all go in the army. We all went in the army early in 1944 we were barely just 18 then and we graduated per the school rules with honors because we had come to that point where we had enough points and credit.

Interviewer: Your birth place did you grow born and grew up in Milwaukee?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes I did.

Interviewer: Did you enlist or did you get drafted?

Mr. Neitzke: No I enlisted. All my friends enlisted. We all decided we wanted to do our duty.

Interviewer: With what was happening in Europe and Asia were you pro U.S. involvement in the war?

Mr. Neitzke: I really was yes. I think in those days most of us were.

Interviewer: Just trying to give your peace to what was going on?

Mr. Neitzke: Right we just didn't think it was right what was going on.

Interviewer: Did you take a skills or IQ type test at the induction center?

Mr. Neitzke: I think we did I think we did of course that's so far back I can't remember.

Interviewer: Did you're actually since ah did your civilian job have anything to do with what you did in the army.

Mr. Neitzke: Not really I was an infantry man and I didn't do any infantry work in high school.

Interviewer: Obviously, where did you do your basic training?

Mr. Neitzke: Fort Hood, Texas

Interviewer: What was your basic training like?

Mr. Neitzke: I believe it was 13 weeks and it was a normal basic training starting off with the PT and the skills with the riffle and all of the other necessary skills needed to fight a war.

Interviewer: How was your physical condition?

Mr. Neitzke: I was in real good shape.

Interviewer: What kind of drills did they I guess what I'm asking is did they have any extreme training for you guys to prepare like maybe 25 mile road marches?

Mr. Neitzke: They had one march I believe was like 15 miles nothing catastrophic.

Interviewer: Once you I'll get to that question later but did basic training prepare you for war?

Mr. Neitzke: To some extent yes.

Interviewer: Can you explain a little further to what extent.

Mr. Neitzke: Well after I went to advanced training with the airborne I saw a lot of difference and I felt the basic training only got us to a point and I'm sure that's what most of the fellows went through and were able to carry on from that.

Interviewer: Okay you already answered how long basic training was. How long was your advanced training basic training was 13 weeks was advanced training?

Mr. Neitzke: Advanced training I think was another 4 weeks

Interviewer: There wasn't any difference in that type of training?

Mr. Neitzke: No there was a little more unit type participation.

Interviewer: What was your impression of your fellow recruits during training?

Mr. Neitzke: They were all young like I was and we were all anxious to do our job.

Interviewer: Did you participate in state side or overseas maneuvers before going to war?

Mr. Neitzke: No

Interviewer: No so you ah did you join your unit before or after you arrived overseas?

Mr. Neitzke: After I arrived overseas.

Interviewer: How long was the 506th?

Mr. Neitzke: Well actually I went through jump school after that at Fort Benning so there was a period of time between basic and jump school.

Interviewer: How long a period?

Mr. Neitzke: There again I think it was about four weeks.

Interviewer: So what did you do during that time?

Mr. Neitzke: There you had very rigorous training a lot of additional physical a lot of PT training and a lot of advanced training in the airborne end of it.

Interviewer: Did you have to do a lot of weapons training?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes

Interviewer: Was it primarily because you were a part of the 2nd airborne was it primarily jumping every day.

Mr. Neitzke: No we had 5 jumps when we went to Fort Benning, Georgia five jumps and we qualified for our wings. And then after that we went on another advanced training type situation for the airborne. And then we were shipped overseas right after that.

Interviewer: When you traveled over how did you travel overseas?

Mr. Neitzke: We landed in Glasgow, Scotland took a train through London down to Hortsnell a boat or a ferry boat across the channel in Land La Harve and then from there it was a matter of trucks and trains.

Interviewer: How long did that take from start to finish?

Mr. Neitzke: A couple of weeks I would say. I'm talking about the shipping over the boat itself about 8 days.

Interviewer: How was the conditions on the boat because I read in the 506 story that it was kind of

Mr. Neitzke: Well we were on a larger ship we went on the Aquitania which was a sister ship to the Queen Mary no convoy because it was faster than all the other ships. And airborne and air force were all on the upper levels so we had it fairly decent.

Interviewer: So sleeping arrangements?

Mr. Neitzke: Well we all had bunk ah hammocks and sometimes the men were switching off. One party slept one time and the next party slept the other time.

Interviewer: How as the food?

Mr. Neitzke: The food was really decent. A lot people didn't want to eat it because of the sea sickness. But it was no big problems for us. I felt sorry for the regular infantry troops down in the hole because they rocked a lot more it was a lot hotter and they were always sick.

Interviewer: What was your thinking the days leading toward going overseas to fight I mean in your mind what were you starting to feel?

Mr. Neitzke: Well it I was still in the thinking that we wanted to get over and do our duty we were anxious to get over. And of course you're always a little apprehensive not knowing what to expect. But there were just the it's hard to visualize now in the United States we were also gung hoe that we wanted to get over there and do it. We just thought we could fight the world, see the world.

Interviewer: Where were you housed once you were overseas?

Mr. Neitzke: Various places when we landed we were on the forty and eight trains eventually and we ended up in an area up in Alsace and we were housed for one night in a school house and after that because it was not too far to the front lines we were marched on the staggered formation to the front then we I was very fortunate didn't have to dig a fox hole. We were on a very stable front the Germans were on one side of the River we were on the other side we were at a point and so we were all hiding in basements and buildings in Tonkahagonal and in the Alsace.

Interviewer: Oh once you were there you were basically face to face with the enemy was there any I guess combat going on?

Mr. Neitzke: There were small patrols going on back and forth. Our particular company ended up on one patrol mission bringing three prisoners one that had died or was dying before he could get across the little river and the other two were taken back for interrogation.

Interviewer: Did you have any time to train once you were with your unit?

Mr. Neitzke: Not a lot of time no we were in no position to train. After a while when we pulled back from Alsace then we went through training again.

Interviewer: Now all this period you were with the 506?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes

Interviewer: How long did you how long were you with the 506th?

Mr. Neitzke: Actually I believe I was assigned the end of January 45 and they disbanded I believe it was November of 45. So it would have been about 9 months I believe.

Interviewer: But when you were a part of the 82th airborne was that during the war time?

Mr. Neitzke: No that was after the war. That was in December all of the fellows with a lot of points were sent home from all of the units. And coming in at the end of January I didn't have as many points so all the airborne people were assigned to the 508th parachute infantry regiment in Frankford on special guard did up in Frankford.

Interviewer: What kind of equipment or arms did you train with?

Mr. Neitzke: Basically with the M1 riffle but we also used the Browning automatic rifle we used the mortar we use the machine guns 30 caliber and bazookas.

Interviewer: Did you learn all of this training while in basic and advanced?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes

Interviewer: Was there any additional training when you went to your unit or any new weaponry?

Mr. Neitzke: Not really it then it was squad and unit tactics.

Interviewer: Okay

Mr. Neitzke: When we were pulled back from the lines at times we would go through a couple of hours of tactical training squad training and so forth.

Interviewer: More like buddy set or buddy moving? I don't know if it was that sophisticated but that kind of a grand scale war.

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh with the machine guns firing overhead and you charge silhouette targets.

Interviewer: How well did your weapons operate during combat?

Mr. Neitzke: Very well.

Interviewer: Everything I forgot the word you know locked up on you or jammed?

Mr. Neitzke: No not any big problems oh once in a while but that was to be expected.

Interviewer: Where was your first combat experience?

Mr. Neitzke: Up in Alsace in Hagonof. It was one of the biggest towns we had occupied at that time 20,000 people the Germans on one side of this little river us on the other side.

Interviewer: And the Alsace where is that particularly is that in Belgium?

Mr. Neitzke: No that's in France the north east corner of France.

Interviewer: The north east corner of France.

Mr. Neitzke: The Alsace Lorraine area.

Interviewer: How far is that from Normandy?

Mr. Neitzke: Quit a way.

Interviewer: Quit a way.

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh

Interviewer: Okay since you got there on January 1945 obviously D-day has already passed.

Mr. Neitzke: Yep D-day has past.

Interviewer: Describe some of the events of your combat experiences. Or just stories

Mr. Neitzke: Well we had a lot of things that happened. We pulled a lot of guard duty I know when I first went up to the line being brand new I did it by the book. You were supposed to when somebody approached you at night as an example you'd call give a name or something like that a countersign they are supposed give back. But I found out later that the army didn't always do it by the books in some situations where a couple of fellows came walking up to my guard post on this.

Interviewer: I hate to interrupt but your battery has gone dead. (The battery is changed out on his microphone) I guess getting back to describing events or describing anything during your combat experience.

Mr. Neitzke: Well we had a lot of interesting things a lot of these were guard duty situations. And one was the first of second night I was on guard duty just outside this one basement area that we were in. I could hear people walking up the walkway we had cobblestone walks so I challenged them with the

asking them for the password. They were supposed to reply and they didn't and know what do I do and so the next thing I know one of the fellows fell into the shell hole and started cussing in good English. So I knew it was one of ours.

Interviewer: Did you ever come face to face with Germans?

Mr. Neitzke: I did but not in a fighting mode. The prisoners we marched them back and we stood guard duty later on near the end of the war with some German MPs where we were having the Germans surrender to us and the German MPs helped get them to the right position. I later found out there were pictures of me taken with these MPs a friend of mine is a historian he blew up the picture and said my god do you know what this is I never saw it like this one of the fellows was an officer and one was an NCO and they had a gorgon around each of their necks. And they were from the special German core the MP core that had the authority right under Hitler they could shoot anybody they wanted to specifically Germans that were surrendering or not doing what they were supposed to do. And my friend said these were very nasty umbras and we didn't know at the time because they were helping us. Had I of known that I wouldn't have felt so comfortable but we did carry the weapons and they didn't. But then we've had a few other situations that we had people firing our direction as we went through Germany later on. And they would blow up bridges on us and it was getting to the point that they were doing a holding action especially when we went towards Berchtesgaden. And we understood that they were really going to hole up in Berchtesgaden and fight a full scale war from there but it never materialized. But they did all that they could to hold us back with small unit actions.

Interviewer: So you were part of the group that basically went in to what you would call Hitler's nest?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh Hitler's nest in Berchtesgaden and we were there three days before the end of the war we pulled into there the 5th of May 1945.

Interviewer: How was it like just being that area what was that whole thing about Hitler's next?

Mr. Neitzke: Well it was very inspiring he had a beautiful layout there he had his tunnels that were nearby for air raids and things like that. We got into those we found equipment and things like that. There was a bunch of SS barracks' right across the street from their guards. We got into that they had loads of military items there to look at and once we got up we were one of the few that got up to the top and were able to be in his home. We had the opportunity to relieve him of champagne and wine that he had stored. His wine was not all that good either.

Interviewer: You would think him being in France he would take good measure to get some wines.

Mr. Neitzke: Some of the fellows were connoisseurs and they said that was not the best wine. Must have gotten it at the end of the war and he couldn't get the best anymore.

Interviewer: How did you or others in your unit react to combat? But you said you weren't much in the

Mr. Neitzke: I was not in the real ruff part of it.

Interviewer: Now was there any time when you were in what you would call a state of confusion with your comrades you know with things going on even if its guard duty you know with the fact that you might not know if its German or your own?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh we've situations like that and you had to use your own discretion. We had one post that we well all of our many of our people were latching on to taking German vehicles for transportation because we were short of vehicles and we did see this one yellow Volkswagen convertible come through periodically and it was Americans we knew that so one evening the same thing came through again and we challenged and it went right through and we should have shot at it but we were sure it was our but the next guard post down the block was a friend of mine and he didn't see very kindly to letting that thing go by and he shot and he shot the driver through the back and they stopped then. And it turned out that he wasn't wounded real badly but he wound up in the hospital so my buddy ended up visiting him and the fellow said yeh we were wrong we shouldn't have did that we should have stopped. So they court marshaled standard procedure they court marshaled my buddy which was a usual thing. They charged him a dollar and gave him a carton of cigarettes and that was the extent of the court marshal.

Interviewer: Did the guy who was shot was he part of your unit?

Mr. Neitzke: He was part of one of the units. I didn't know him but he was with one of the units.

Interviewer: How many units were generally in the same area?

Mr. Neitzke: Well you've got a number of regiments there so I couldn't really say probably about four regiments right in that area.

Interviewer: In every general area?

Mr. Neitzke: Every general area yes.

Interviewer: Did you have any trouble dealing with the whole combat environment you know loss of appetite sleep?

Mr. Neitzke: No not really I thought I could sleep standing up at times. Actually the sleeping facilities weren't too good usually I would didn't have to dig a fox hole but I was laying in floors and things like that.

Interviewer: Did you have like a sleeping system?

Mr. Neitzke: No we usually we all had little sleeping bags it was just a little blanket type thing with a canvas outside.

Interviewer: But that was did you ever sleep indoors or was it sometimes outdoors?

Mr. Neitzke: A combination mainly indoors if we could find a cellar or something like that.

Interviewer: How was your unit cohesion?

Mr. Neitzke: Very good very good.

Interviewer: Were you a close unit you know did you get to know certain individuals?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes we have a lot of comradely E 506 was very close we are still very close. We had a book written about our unit Band of Brothers and HBO is making a miniseries coming out September 9th. And we were flown to Normandy France in June to view the part of the series and be honored on June 6th at Normandy took us from Paris to Normandy. So they took good care of us then. As far as we know we have 51 men that are still alive and out of the 51, 45 came to the reunion in Branson.

Interviewer: How many was when you were there how many was part of the 506th at that time do you recall was it about 140 or so?

Mr. Neitzke: E Company was about 130 something yes, of course throughout the war when you say 130 to make that you would probably ended up with about 180 men there because you had some killed in action some wounded and some that were rotated for reasons and some of them were captured.

Interviewer: Did you lose and close friends to battle?

Mr. Neitzke: Not close friends no. I lost some people in the unit that I knew but they weren't real close.

Interviewer: How well was your unit supplied during combat or during the war?

Mr. Neitzke: Sometimes good and sometimes not so good. When we were going through France and Germany supplies often times did not catch up to us and so we had some pretty good cooks that would improvise. Once in a while you would see a cow in the field and we ate good for awhile.

Interviewer: What did the supplies you got sea rations?

Mr. Neitzke: Sea rations I believe we had some K if I recall.

Interviewer: What were C and K?

Mr. Neitzke: C rations was a can or a couple of cans with different types of things like beans and things like that. And K rations were more like a big candy bar like things with crackers and cheeses and things like that in them.

Interviewer: You would have that for breakfast lunch and dinner or was it rationed to the point at anytime that you only had one a day or two a day?

Mr. Neitzke: Well usually we had about two a day and it wasn't really rationed it was just what we could come back with. Sometimes we were more over one and some of the fellows didn't like it so those that did like it we had a little spam there too, made it interesting.

Interviewer: How was the food like spam?

Mr. Neitzke: I liked it.

Interviewer: You liked it?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh I came back and I eat spam now.

Interviewer: How did you take care of your personal hygiene did you get enough time did you get chances to shower and shave?

Mr. Neitzke: Not as often as you would like to because we had shower units that would try and keep up with us but there were many days or maybe weeks that went by that we couldn't do it because in combat you just didn't have in combat areas you just didn't have the opportunity to set up. And when we were moving right through Germany we didn't stay any place very long we just kept moving from area to area.

Interviewer: Was that something you really thought of especially with the environment? Okay I didn't shower today no big deal?

Mr. Neitzke: No everybody was just as bad.

Interviewer: That's true that's true. How did you deal with the weather conditions?

Mr. Neitzke: When I was over there we started in kind of a winterish environment and within a month or so it started thawing out we had mud a lot of mud. But after that it got to be spring and was very nice and I appreciated the scenery after that.

Interviewer: Did would you say you had the proper gear to deal with the weather?

Mr. Neitzke: At that time yeh. The fellows that were in just before me that were in Bastogne did not have the proper gear. They were pushed in there in a hurry and they did not have any winter gear to speak of. A lot of fellows that I knew and my best buddy ended up going back to England with trench foot and wounds in his hand because he wasn't properly dressed.

Interviewer: Was this was that kind of gear issued I mean properly issued in terms of gloves and or it just wasn't good enough for the weather?

Mr. Neitzke: No they were properly issued but they didn't have it ready to go when they packed up I guess in like 12 hours notice or something like that they would go Bastogne and were up there in Belgium when the Germans were trying to push through the Alicia and so they took what they could. And could and ran and just had regular boots and no rubber or galas ions or anything like that.

Interviewer: What was your impression of the officers and NCOs in your command?

Mr. Neitzke: They were very good. In fact when I came in most of the NCOs and officers were remaining personnel from the original group and so there was about only a half of the total compliment of men and they were well trained they had seen a lot of combat. And we could lean on them for advice or help.

Interviewer: How do you know about how great was it to have somebody with that kind of experience?

Mr. Neitzke: It was great because when you first get into an area like that you're very apprehensive. Just out of high school you've never seen anything like that and most of us had never been too far from home in the past. And here we come into a unit that's got people that are very skilled kind of lead us by the hand a little bit which we appreciated.

Interviewer: How strict were they?

Mr. Neitzke: When we were in the front areas or going through the they were strict to a point but they were very fair.

Interviewer: Did you notice any discipline going on? Or was everyone just focused on the mission and there wasn't really that kind of

Mr. Neitzke: I think they were focused on the mission more. We had a couple of fellows went astray with drinking once in a while they're take a pistol out and maybe run through a town firing. But that was kind of overlooked after a while. It was not one of these things that was a big problem.

Interviewer: I guess I will get us back into this right now. Where we left off was with the NCOs. Did they and the officers provide the knowledge needed to survive the best way possible?

Mr. Neitzke: I would say yes they did a good job.

Interviewer: So how long did you actually serve? You said January 45 until the end of the war?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes I stayed with them until they were disbanded I believe it was December or November 45.

Interviewer: Did you get any leave time?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes

Interviewer: Where did you spend your leave time?

Mr. Neitzke: I spent leave time up in London went down to I think I was in the 82nd at that time went down to East France and also I was very fortunate when I was back in Marmiton, France with the 101st they didn't know what to do with us so they were trying to give us all kinds of training and other things and of course being what we call the veterans from the war we didn't want to do any training anymore so we had the opportunity to do a number of different things. One thing that intrigued me I used to caddy at a golf course in Milwaukie and when they asked if any of us knew how to golf and I say you never volunteer in the army but I raised my hand and I said yes I knew how to golf and I was not a good golfer. And they said you and one other fellow from your regimen and they had about 12 of us every other day they would truck up to Fontainebleau, France to the golf course give us four clubs and two golf balls. And they said go. Cook had to make lunch for us because he didn't have any food to serve us at the golf course and it was just great for about two months we did that.

Interviewer: This was after the war?

Mr. Neitzke: It was after the war yeh.

Interviewer: Actually in such a war torn country especially England and London area how was it during your leave time?

Mr. Neitzke: When I got back there on leave it wasn't too terrible bad. Germany and France though was pretty bad.

Interviewer: I know they had night raids in London so as it wasn't as destructive?

Mr. Neitzke: Well they had cleaned it up pretty well by that time. When we went through London at night to go to the channel they took us right through on the train or the tube so we didn't see much of London.

Interviewer: What did you do during you're down time or free time?

Mr. Neitzke: I did a lot of traveling I like to travel and whenever they gave me a chance to go someplace I'd go.

Interviewer: Did you do a lot of letter writing?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes a lot of letter writing.

Interviewer: Who did you usually keep contact with?

Mr. Neitzke: Mainly my girlfriend who is my wife now.

Interviewer: How long have you been married?

Mr. Neitzke: Fifty three years.

Interviewer: So you got married after the war?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes 1958

Interviewer: So how long were you actually dating during that time period?

Mr. Neitzke: We used to fly together in the civil air patrol before I went in so we dated a little bit then and when we got out we dated about 2 years and then got married.

Interviewer: Did you have children?

Mr. Neitzke: We have four children two boys and two girls.

Interviewer: Was any of your leadership pre army pre war army?

Mr. Neitzke: I would say not really.

Interviewer: So most of them were trained during?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes I had a lot of leadership training in the military which I think did me a lot of good.

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded?

Mr. Neitzke: No

Interviewer: Did you ever meet any guys who were you in a situation where you were around a lot of wounded?

Mr. Neitzke: Oh yeh

Interviewer: How would you say their medical treatment was?

Mr. Neitzke: As good as possible, they would evacuate them from the location as quickly as possible so that they'd get them back either to France or England for treatment. If it was major if it was minor just a little aid station.

Interviewer: How well trained do you think the combat medics were during that time?

Mr. Neitzke: Very good there are some very good combat medics I know.

Interviewer: How did they give all you guys classes or any kind of preparation for helping out if there wasn't a combat medic?

Mr. Neitzke: Not a great deal not a great deal no. We had our basic kit there.

Interviewer: So everyone had a kit?

Mr. Neitzke: Everybody had a kit yes.

Interviewer: So what was involved in the kit?

Mr. Neitzke: I can't really remember too much I know we had some bandages what do they give you not insulin but cortisone or whatever they give you when you've got a wound. Not anything very proficient that I'd do myself.

Interviewer: Did you earn metals for your combat action?

Mr. Neitzke: Just the combat infantry barge and that was about all and of course the battle stars I got two battle stars for our Europe.

Interviewer: Two battle stars?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh one was central Europe and I'm trying to think of how the other one tied in there I think it was possible Germany or somewhere like that.

Interviewer: I'm trying to recall what was the question I was going to ask sorry about that. Oh yeh I was going to mention with the combat infantry that was started by General Marshall wasn't it?

Mr. Neitzke: I believe so yes to reward you. You got \$10 extra for being combat infantry.

Interviewer: Oh so you got paid extra?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh we were paid very well we got \$10 there and we got \$50 for jump pay then we got a regular \$50 pay so we got \$110 a month.

Interviewer: With the jumps did you actually make any jumps while you were in Germany?

Mr. Neitzke: We made one jump in France but it was more of a training jump.

Interviewer: So you weren't actually involved in what you would call

Mr. Neitzke: No that 101st we only made two jumps one was in Normandy and one was in Holland.

Interviewer: The Battle of the Bulge

Mr. Neitzke: No not the Battle of the Bulge that was Bastogne up in Holland that was a Bridge too Far if you read that. That's where they tried to take the bridges to get closer to Germany there to cut off the Germans it didn't work out.

Interviewer: To get on the other side with the enemy were you impressed with the enemy in what you would call leadership skills tonality?

Mr. Neitzke: I would say so they had very good leadership skills it looked like. And they were very regimented more so than we were. We kind of looked like slobs once in a while compared to them.

Interviewer: So you would say that Hitler really not necessarily him but he really prepared his country to fight?

Mr. Neitzke: I think the German region from way back when they were very military oriented and they knew how to train and they had discipline that was very strict.

Interviewer: More so than your guys?

Mr. Neitzke: I would say so. I had an interesting side issue here when I was with the 101st we were in Austria right after the end of the war and we were given R&R at a lake there Shanzay and we were given boats that we could paddle and I was left behind because I didn't get back in time to go to the main road and so I hitched a ride I ended up hitching a ride with a German staff car with a German Lieutenant Colonel and a German Major. And when this staff car rolled up I had two pistols in my holster we had weapons and I didn't know what to do. And one of the gentlemen said where are you going and I told him and he said we're going down that direction too they had two drivers so the officer stepped out let me in very polite. And he explained he was in General Kesselring's surrender team and so they took me right to the corner where I wanted to go and I got out and then I gave them a sharp salute and they gave me a sharp salute so. I just felt that they were very disciplined.

Interviewer: Now what period of time was this?

Mr. Neitzke: This was back in May of 45 right during the surrender period.

Interviewer: Oh so you didn't have that feeling that you were

Mr. Neitzke: Going to be shot at? No

Interviewer: Cause that would scare me a little bit if you're basically within the enemy's grasp.

Mr. Neitzke: I think the officers were a little bit concerned too the German officers because I guess they didn't want to have anything incidents at that time. That's where I felt after I talked to them they spoke perfect English.

Interviewer: When was I was trying to recall when was VE Day?

Mr. Neitzke: May 8th.

Interviewer: So that was?

Mr. Neitzke: Right at that point there or a week or two after. About a week after I think so there were Germans running around surrendering and so when they came along we rode by that was another things we rode by a lot of Germans that were surrendering and these Germans even they were dogged marching back when they saw this staff car come by they'd snap to and do their saluting and all. So this is why I think they were trying to help me in a way I didn't get in trouble with their troops.

Interviewer: Did you come to respect the average enemy soldier?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh they were doing it the way they saw it.

Interviewer: Is there in your time while you were overseas did you have much contact with civilians?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes

Interviewer: And what was their reaction towards American soldiers?

Mr. Neitzke: Depends on what country you're talking about. Are you talking about Germany or France?

Interviewer: Actually any country that you were in from England to it doesn't matter what type of civilians.

Mr. Neitzke: The British were quite happy to see us come obviously because we kind of saved them. And France it was we were we done very well although you had to be careful they could give you a hard time at times there if they wanted to and they'd help us and we'd help them. When we got to Germany it was a different story they were very somber and it was one of these they knew we were the victors and they did not want to irritate us. And I really had to feel sorry for some of the Germans after awhile because we'd go through towns they were really starving and the mother or women would come out with three pound or five pound coffee cans they would scoop in our garbage pails and they would take

garbage out to feed their families. So you knew things were kind of ruff there even though they were the enemy you'd feel for them.

Interviewer: And you really couldn't help them out.

Mr. Neitzke: No you weren't supposed to fraternize with them to being with. Then you'd see these people so once in a while you'd put a little extra on your plate just so you could pour it in for them. Which wasn't the prescribed way but I think everybody did that.

Interviewer: Actually to get back I lost the train of thought when we were talking about you know in that time in May. That day the victory in Europe happened what was the excitement in your group and all around?

Mr. Neitzke: Well I hate to say it but we were all drinking pretty heavily. We had just come down two days or three days prior to that from Hitler's Nest and we had access to some of his best champagne and wine that was there and we loaded up our trucks and we had a few long days with a lot of drinking.

Interviewer: As time went n did they happen to mention to you that you were going to be involved in the Jap in the Pacific?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh we had we were looking not forward to but we anticipated. And they were talking to about going to Marsa and shipping over to the other direction.

Interviewer: About what time period?

Mr. Neitzke: That would have been May or June of sometime in June probably.

Interviewer: So it was like right after the victory in Europe they were talking about. So but you never really went right?

Mr. Neitzke: No they were just talking about it rumors then came July and rumors got hot and heavy and I guess some units did move in that direction. But of course August took care of that.

Interviewer: That is true. So they were actually preparing you guys for the invasion of Japan.

Mr. Neitzke: I think so yeh, they didn't say specifically but they were going to need the bodies over there.

Interviewer: Your thoughts on that whole process I mean obviously it didn't happen but were you happy that we took the way out that we did to win the war in Japan or would you have gone a little further would you have minded the invasion of Japan?

Mr. Neitzke: I don't think an invasion would have been very good because we would have lost millions and so would have the Japanese. And when you read about the raids over Tokyo and they said 100,000 or more people killed from some fire bomb raids and I've gone out to Hawaii a number of times to view Pearl Harbor, Arizona and what have you and last time I was out there they had some posters out there too. If there had not have been a Pearl Harbor there would not have been a Hera Schema. So it made

me think a little bit you know even though there's controversy as to right or wrong I think it was right we saved lives all the way around.

Interviewer: Looking back at history on what you would say the big picture how to you think your part in the war helped win the war?

Mr. Neitzke: Well I guess we all collectively won the war no matter who was doing what by numbers we were there to win the war and hold the peace.

Interviewer: With does war seem real with all the death and destruction that it brings I mean when you're out there I'm sure you had your fair share of what you were seeing around did it seem real to you?

Mr. Neitzke: No it didn't it didn't really seem real it was just when the buildings were destroyed things were going over it just seemed like it was a movie in a way. It was just it's hard to visualize or comprehend exactly what you felt.

Interviewer: Because I was going to ask what occupies your mind during those moments and also brings to your own your immortality that maybe you would be next. Did you ever have those thoughts of dying?

Mr. Neitzke: Not directly I think we all were concerned I guess we always felt it would probably be the other guy not me. Like in so many things you do.

Interviewer: What positives did you take from your army experience and also serving with the 101st Airborne?

Mr. Neitzke: Well I felt I was with one of the best units in the world. And I felt I had learned a lot from those that were there before I came and I felt a lot more confident when I came home I felt I was a lot more mature. I could handle myself I could handle jobs and do things I would not have been able to do otherwise and it made me I think a much better person. And I was one of the lucky ones to not end up getting wounded or killed or anything like that. So I think for me it had a lot of positives although in many cases I was a little bit concerned even scared you might say. There were times we were all scared and you always thought that could be coming over in my direction but you just never felt it was going to hit you anyway.

Interviewer: After war experiences one you were done and came home what type of as we were talking earlier but what type of things did you end up doing?

Mr. Neitzke: Well I ended up going to college for about a year then I also worked part-time in an airport which eventually I ended up working at for a fulltime basis for a short period of time. And then I went to sales after that first bakery and after that insurance sales I spent about 40 years in that. I think all of my training over the years kind of helped me along one thing followed the other thing.

Interviewer: And also you continued serving in the army as a reserve?

Mr. Neitzke: Right in the Army Reserve. I think that helped me a great deal I ended up with promotions and ended up doing things I wanted to do and I could help the army in the ways that they needed help.

Interviewer: Any you worked with public affairs?

Mr. Neitzke: Yes I worked with public affairs office 84th division for about 17 or 18 years.

Interviewer: So that was out of Milwaukee?

Mr. Neitzke: Out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin yeh.

Interviewer: So what type of things did you do while you were in public affairs I mean?

Mr. Neitzke: Well we put out the unit newspaper the Real Splitter we'd view the different regiments' brigades going into the post and different types of training. We were training with the units at times photos interviews and general work with the Generals their activities they'd have civilians come on post we'd escort them to the various sites and so forth. In general just a like a PR type of operation which I enjoyed very much.

Interviewer: I'm trying to remember back I just want to make sure that I have everything clear. You served with the 506th from January 1945 through the end of May?

Mr. Neitzke: No, until the end of November.

Interviewer: November 1945

Mr. Neitzke: Started December when they broke up.

Interviewer: Then after they disbanded you went to the 82nd Airborne to finish out your

Mr. Neitzke: To finish out my time. I ended up staying with them until June of 1946.

Interviewer: June 1946 and during your time in the 82nd you were serving?

Mr. Neitzke: The 508th parachute infantry regiment in Frankfurt, Germany on special sheaf guard duty. That was Eisenhower's special guard duty.

Interviewer: Did you ever get to meet Eisenhower?

Mr. Neitzke: No personally I got to shake hands we were inspected by him and Churchill and so forth.

Interviewer: In retrospect with obviously the history that's behind guys like Eisenhower and Churchill I mean how did it feel serving obviously serving under Eisenhower during that time period?

Mr. Neitzke: It was an awe inspiring it was something that I'm glad I had the opportunity to see them and realize I was working with them or for them you might say. I thought we had some pretty good Commanders.

Interviewer: I'm trying to think I'm actually out of questions right now I'm just trying to think. Do you have anything that just popped in your mind?

Mr. Neitzke: No

Interviewer: Cause I know we were talking I know just for me personally in terms of you got married and you had four children two boys and two girls what did they turn out to do?

Mr. Neitzke: Well my oldest son ended up in the Army Reserve unfortunately he had a motorcycle accident before he went in and he had a bad ankle a heel and he had to be discharged medically discharged.

Interviewer: So he never really had to serve?

Mr. Neitzke: No he never served.

Interviewer: And he would have probably served during Vietnam?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh I felt bad about that in a way that he didn't stay in because my dad was in the First World War and I followed him. He was up in Chatoterry up near where I was in the Alsace.

Interviewer: So your dad obviously there was military experience previously?

Mr. Neitzke: I guess my Grandfather served on the German side in with the Kiser in Bismarck back there I guess middle of the 1800s or something like that. I don't know what my great-grandfather did but it seems like everyone in my family went into the military.

Interviewer: Oh he just served under that was out of Bismarck right?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh

Interviewer: He just served in no wars or anything back then?

Mr. Neitzke: I don't know what he had back there. We have a let's see I have a grandson that was in the National Guard for a period of time. So right down the line grandfather, father, myself then son and then grandson.

Interviewer: That's interesting. So your grandson is currently in the National Guard?

Mr. Neitzke: He took a discharge this was last year.

Interviewer: This was also in the Milwaukee area?

Mr. Neitzke: Milwaukee area National Guard.

Interviewer: Did he ever get to travel or anything?

Mr. Neitzke: No

Interviewer: And how about your girls.

Mr. Neitzke: The girls weren't interested.

Interviewer: I was just trying to get what things did they do?

Mr. Neitzke: Oh I see the one worked for Straw Investment and the other one has been a house wife basically.

Interviewer: Really how many grandchildren do you have?

Mr. Neitzke: As of two weeks ago I have nine.

Interviewer: Oh just recently that's nice.

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh I can't keep up with them.

Interviewer: But it's nice to have grand how often do you get to see them do you get to see them all of the time?

Mr. Neitzke: Quite often.

Interviewer: And do you still live in the Milwaukee area?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh we live in Menomonee Falls. It's the next county North West of Milwaukee.

Interviewer: Would you mind spelling that out for me?

Mr. Neitzke: Menomonee Falls. We always say me no money.

Interviewer: You get a chance to travel a lot?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh we do a lot of traveling.

Interviewer: I know you did say like to travel. What kind of places do you go to?

Mr. Neitzke: Well in June we were in France for the D-Day activities.

Interviewer: Did you actually get to meet Mr. Spielberg and Tom Hanks?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh oh yeh got their signatures. Tom Hanks was with us last year and so was Spielberg. Got their signatures in my Band of Brothers book and then this year Tom Hanks was over in France with us again. And they hosted both reunions for E Company. Last year they hosted it at Biloxi, Mississippi and New Orleans and this year they hosted us in France there taking care of all of our expenses going over there and spending about a week over there.

Interviewer: From a little bit of what you say where you were at obviously you weren't part of D-Day but what you did see, did you see Saving Private Ryan?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh

Interviewer: I mean how much of that was as realistic as what was out there?

Mr. Neitzke: Not too much.

Interviewer: Not too much?

Mr. Neitzke: The historical part was good but unfortunately I hate to say this about Tom Hanks because he did a great job on the part but there was no squad saving Private Ryan. Private Ryan was a guy by the name of Fence Nilan he's in our Band of Brothers book in there and he has one brother who died if I can remember 2nd Airborne I forgot what unit he was in he was killed. And then their brother was over in Asia and he was missing but he came back again. But the squad idea wasn't because the unit the 506th knew exactly where he was at all times and when it came to finding out that some of the brothers had died the government said we want him back and they just took Catholic Chaplain Father Samson and walked him out of France to a waiting boat over to England and he went home from there already got home.

Interviewer: So the basic Idea of that movie was actually in your unit?

Mr. Neitzke: Yeh in our unit there. The Pegasus Bridge and all that were interesting but as I saw was really not factual. But it made a good movie.

Interviewer: Yes it did.

Mr. Neitzke: And the actual fighting part of it that was a lot of truth in the way that they were fighting and everything.

Interviewer: Of course I haven't gotten a chance to see the Longest Day.

Mr. Neitzke: That's a good one to see.

Interviewer: I was just wondering how just knowing again that you were in part of the I was just wondering in the vastness what happened in the beaches if that was somewhat

Mr. Neitzke: Well you know I came back from England for R&R shortly after the war they had still all of the barricades out in Utah Omaha beach and so forth like railroad ties were crisscrossed and they had barbed wire there and when I looked at that I thought how could these fellows get up these cliffs. There were cliffs over where Omaha beach was and it was suicide and they still got up there. It's just amazing I think the Airborne was luckier in a way because the Germans were not as prepared for the airborne landings as what they were for the beaches. The Germans were all confused they didn't know where we were and we didn't know where we were.

Interviewer: That should be about it of what I had to ask you.