

Interviewer: What's your full name and when were you born?

Stinson: My full name is Robert Mural Stinson I was born June 6, 1922. D-Day was mine 22 years before.

Interviewer: What town were you born in?

Stinson: A little town called South Fork Pennsylvania coal mining town.

Interviewer: What branch of the service did you end up serving in?

Stinson: End up in the paratroopers in the parachute infantry started out in the engineers.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names and their occupations?

Stinson: My mother's name was Winifred Peal and my father's name was Mural Lee Stinson. He was when they got married he was a coal miner and then the coal mine shut down he had various jobs until 1928 and he became a city policeman. And he was city policeman for 10 years until 1938 and then he died at the age of 42 and we were out we found our own depression. We had went through the depression really good because my father worked it wasn't a great job but he had an income. But then when he died well then we went through our own private depression.

Interviewer: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Stinson: Yeah I had two brothers well I only have one now one died last year. I had two brothers and one sister.

Interviewer: Where do you fit in?

Stinson: I'm the oldest.

Interviewer: The oldest. Did you make it through high school?

Stinson: Oh yeah just lucky because every day I'd go home from 10th grade on lucky to go to school my mother was fighting for that. Because we got kicked out of the house they shut off the water all sorts of things went on with poor people in those days.

Interviewer: You said you made it pretty well through the great depression. Do you have any big memories other than that?

Stinson: Well I remember my friends they went down and stood in line at the Salvation Army while they got milk for their families. I went up to the cemetery plots over one side where now my mother and father are buried but they had them in the depression garden set aside and you growed things then you had to go up and when it started to ripen you had to go up at night and guard them so somebody didn't come up and steal them. There was all sorts of that things going on. Then we had the WPS and the three Cs I remember them they did a lot of good. They laughed at them said the poor workers but they did an awful lot around Johns Town.

Interviewer: Were you old enough to have a job before you went into the service?

Stinson: Oh yeah I well number one I was working while I was in high school I had a newspaper route. Then I had NYA National Youth Association I made \$18 a month at that thing and then when I got out of high school I started working at a dairy. I worked 72 to 75 hours a week for \$23 and after that I got into the mill steel mills and that was 48 hours in which I was making \$90 a tremendous amount of money. Then I could start dating and stuff like that before that I had to save up a month and a half to date a girl just to take her to the movies. In the old days we didn't take a girl out to dinner and then a movie you took her to a movie and out for a soda or a Sunday that was it. But after that then I had enough where I could actually date and take someone out.

Interviewer: Before Pearl Harbor how seriously did you take the Japanese and the German governments?

Stinson: Well I thought Hitler was a numskull. We did have in my hometown we had the Boon the German American Boon which they went around and swastikas and so forth. Japanese didn't know anything about them didn't care anything about them. But the Boon was always in town they were always putting up for Hitler and that sort of stuff.

Interviewer: Did your family and you yourself get newspapers? You said you had the newspaper route did you read the newspapers keep up with news a lot.

Stinson: Oh yeah then we had a radio too and that was in the old days before they had commentators. They used to give you the news and you had to analyze it yourself you didn't have guys doing it for you now. Now you're too stupid to know how to analyze the news.

Interviewer: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Stinson: Oh yeah I had just got up from the dining room table and went in and laid down on the couch because in those days I used to eat like there was no tomorrow. And I'd eat and I'd eat and I had to lie down. I worked hard in the mill and when it came time to eat I'd eat until I couldn't move then I'd go lay down. I had laid down turned on the radio and there it was. Of course we had a special interest my uncle Eddie was there at Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Was he okay?

Stinson: Yeah his ship got bombed he was on the flag ship of the fleet the USS Pennsylvania it was the flag ship of the fleet and he was on that. It got damaged some there were a couple of casualties but he wasn't hurt.

Interviewer: How long was it until you head word from him?

Stinson: Oh my mother stood around for six months before my uncle Eddie he wasn't hurt so he didn't call anybody or anything. He was a funny character been in the Navy all his life never worked a day in his life. Never worked a day in his life didn't even go through boot camp. But he had to marry a woman that already had a family because he would never end a family he was character. Nice guy but a character.

Interviewer: Do you remember FDR's speech the next day?

Stinson: Yeah I heard it.

Interviewer: What did you think about what he said?

Stinson: I thought it was alright. He needed to rally around the troops of course I didn't know what was going to happen you know all of us young fellows of really good soldier material age why what was going to happen.

Interviewer: Did you approve generally of the job he did as president?

Stinson: Now that it's all over no. I think he did a lot of things he should have been called accounted for. He did a lot of things he shouldn't have done including I'm not too sure that he didn't screw up the Pearl Harbor bit in the first place. Jumped this General and this Admiral out there in Pearl Harbor but I think it went up higher than that. Today's bit of saying they want to know who knew and who knew what we should have went through that back after Pearl Harbor because there were a lot of funny things going on. We had intersected messages and so developed since then we found out the intersected messages they did nothing about them. Even Montgomery when they bombed Pearl Harbor Montgomery was notified about it six hours before they bombed the Philippines. He didn't do anything except line up the planes. Shouldn't have done that there were a lot of things that they shouldn't have done.

Interviewer: you said that as soon as Pearl Harbor was attacked the boys your age knew that military service was coming soon. So when do you think it first dawned on you that that was going to happen besides Pearl Harbor?

Stinson: Well it started number one with Pearl Harbor and then the next day guys from the neighborhood started to go down to the recruiting office and volunteering. Not me but a number of them. See I had little different thing I had my mother two brothers and one sister totally dependent on me. So I couldn't go marching off to a \$50 a month army job because they would starve to death. And there wasn't any allotment for that sort of dependence.

Interviewer 2: How much younger were your siblings?

Stinson: Well they were each five years younger. My brother that just died was five years younger than me he was five years older than my sister and she was five years older than the younger brother and he was fifteen years. They seemed to have children as they could afford them.

Interviewer: When were you drafted?

Stinson: Well I was drafted in December the 3rd or 4th in 1943. That's when they changed the law and said okay people with dependents of parents of brothers and sisters will get an allotment. That's when they changed that changed that December 1st and drafted me on December 3rd.

Interviewer: Did you have a preference where you wanted to go which branch?

Stinson: Oh yeah well I could have went in any of them. The Marine Core you leave that day the Navy you leave on the 23rd of December. The Army you leave January the 3rd so I took the Army who didn't want to stay home for Christmas.

Interviewer: You said earlier that you ended up in the engineer core right?

Stinson: Right I asked for the infantry and they sent me to the engineers anyhow.

Interviewer: You went to an induction center I imagine which one did you go to? Do you remember?

Stinson: Oh Indian Town Gap no it wasn't New Cumberland. It was in mid Pennsylvania and that's where they put me on the train to Missouri.

Interviewer: Do you remember being tested for skill test and IQ test?

Stinson: No they just asked you did you go to high school, yeah, and that was it.

Interviewer: Do you think your

Stinson: They did give me some sort of test because I ended up in Fort Leatherwood when I was trying to qualify with the rifle and not doing very good. The damn lieutenant came up to me and said why aren't you shooting better? You have the highest IQ in the battalion. I said what's that have to do with firing a gun? We left it there a high IQ was nothing but

Interviewer: They had given you a test somewhere.

Stinson: Yeah well the army test was word definitions and figuring out how many blocks was in a collection of blocks. Well word definitions I went through like crazy because I had always been doing crossword puzzles all my life and so I done them and zipped through that like crazy.

Interviewer: Do you think you said they put you in the engineers eventually do you think you working in the steel mill and anything to do with you being put in the engineers?

Stinson: Probably because we ended up putting bridges and stuff together things like that that required some sort of that sort of knowledge. And I'd worked in the riggers putting up scaffolding and things like that. But it was no big deal because still at the end I was qualified as a pioneer engineer which we call pick and shovel that what we you use a pick and shovel and pick up land mines. That's about what you did.

Interviewer: Where did they send you for basic training?

Stinson: Fort Lenard Wood Missouri.

Interviewer: Was that the first time you had been really far away from home?

Stinson: That's the first time I was out of the state of Pennsylvania. I had never crossed the border before.

Interviewer: Did they set you apart for any specialized training?

Stinson: No

Interviewer: What did you think of your fellow recruits that were around you?

Stinson: Well they were all pretty good. The only thing that I ran into any trouble out there was the platoon lieutenant. He was the infantry officer and he was a complete nerd and I think I told him a few times.

Interviewer: Did you do any maneuvers stateside?

Stinson: No we would go out and camp for a week on Fort Leonard Wood but not any great maneuver type bits at all.

Interviewer: Did you think looking back on it that the training prepared you for what you were getting ready to face?

Stinson: Well some of it did because some of it the thing that they taught us was in addition to the engineering you did learn to use certain guns. Well it ended up where I ended up in the paratroopers I had to use those guns 50 caliber 30 caliber machine gun. Never did want to know the mortar then I used the car beam and the M1 riffle threw hand grenades. Did learn some stuff with ammunition with composition C and that sort of stuff. But they never had me blow up anything.

Interviewer: Was there anyone gun that you preferred more than the others?

Stinson: Well the M1 was a good gun and when you hit a guy with that he's going to go down he might get right back up again but he's gonna go down. With a car beam I've seen guys hit with three or four slugs of that and get back up.

Interviewer: So you felt pretty well prepared for the fight that was ahead?

Stinson: Well except when we were going up into battle. We were all marching up the dang highway we don't have we have guns but we don't have ammunition. Not a round. We got up within a mile of where we were supposed to attack and then the jeep came up with ammunition.

Interviewer: That was nice of them to do at least.

Stinson: Oh yeah it would have been fun going up against the German position without any ammunition.

Interviewer: What about the living conditions at Camp Wood?

Stinson: Oh they were nice there was a permanent type installation so it was pretty nice. But its army of course it's the bunks and that sort of stuff but beyond that it was

Interviewer: What do you remember about paratrooper training?

Stinson: It's rough and tough and the hardest physical and mental two weeks I ever went through in my life. It was but I had an incentive if I flunked out as a paratrooper they were going to throw me in the gliders. And I didn't want to go to the gliders so I really didn't want to go into the gliders.

Interviewer: What was it like the first time coming out of the plane?

Stinson: Nothing much to it. You jumped about 500 feet I was the first one out of the plane because we got screwed up. I was the fourth one originally then the first two went out and then the buddy in front of me he froze at the door and by the time I pounded him loose it was too late and they held me and said you go back to the end of the stick. I said I'm not going back there I was ready to jump fine you're going to jump. The thing of it is you put your thumbs on the inside don't put your fingers in because you can hold on to the inside of the door with people beating on you and they can't shake you lose if you're going to hold on. If you do it this way then they can easily break the thumbs lose. I jumped it was nice it's just like stepping out into air. And it's a wonderful feeling when you coming down except all of a sudden you think oh my god here comes the ground.

Interviewer: What kind of unit did you serve in immediately after your basic training?

Stinson: Well I transferred to Camp Relief in North Western Pennsylvania. That was on the way overseas was bunch of pick and shovel engineers ended up in England in Olton Park. Just a bunch of pick and shovel engineers we put bridges across lakes and that sort of stuff and we just kept doing cramp like that until I got sick of it and wrote a letter to Yank Magazine wanting to know how you got in the infantry. They stopped and transferred two of us into the infantry and then when we got down where we went all over England for a week and every camp we went to they had already went over to France because they had landed there already. So I we got down to this final place and they said okay you're in this when they come back you're in this outfit. They came back and it was the same outfit as the engineers the squad leader was Joe Slone who had been my squad leader in the engineers. So it ended up they had all got pushed into the other two were volunteers. But that's the Army.

Interviewer: How did you get from camp Reynolds over to England did you go on troop ships?

Stinson: Went by train into New York and then on a troop ship.

Interviewer: What do you remember about the ride over?

Stinson: Yuk

Interviewer: Did you get sea sick?

Stinson: No but the one day I gave up eating but that was the day they wouldn't let anybody on deck but I'd peak out. And when you have those baby aircraft carriers disappear in the waves then you get these destroyers they'd go out like this and then wham down. You know really high seas I didn't see any I guess that was good because the submarines couldn't do anything in that kind of weather because it was too bad for them to try out operate.

Interviewer: How long was the trip do you remember?

Stinson: Oh something like I don't know 5, 6, 7 days because maybe more because the Queen Mary used to make it in three and they would go by themselves so ours was considerably more. We came into Liverpool and they hadn't heard of the Beatles yet.

Interviewer: What do you remember about you were talking about the weather what about the conditions on the ship. How crowded was it?

Stinson: Well it was about five high in bunks you sort of had to go up and lay sideways get yourself sideways and slip in. And it was then when the weather got real bad then you had the guys throwing up all over the place. And that made you kind of queasy so you just sort of grit your teeth and don't think about stuff like that.

Interviewer: How bad was the food?

Stinson: Well as I remember it was English and the English have never been known for good food. So it was and you only got two meals a day and it wasn't that swift. I never really was around when we got good meals.

Interviewer: Do you happen to remember how many were on the ship just

Stinson: Oh there was at least 5,000 on the ship. The Queen Mary I think they had 10,000 or something this was a pretty big ship. I forget the name of it now but it had thousands on it.

Interviewer: You said you landed at Liverpool right?

Stinson: Right

Interviewer: Did they house you in temporary or did they put you permanent barracks?

Stinson: Well they took us out to Holton Park and there was the huts were the semi-permanent type. They weren't like Fort Leonard Wood which was an established post. It would be like a lot of the post were called Camp Picket Virginia and Camp this Camp that. They were temporary type things where the forts they had the really nice barracks and that sort of stuff. And it was an old British estate and you could see where the manor house had been and burnt to the ground but it had lovely grounds and that sort of thing and the big lake down there. We used to put bridges across it and we used to walk out through the grounds out there and they had a hut over there where the people who took care of the place lived. They had Ginny hens I remember them I always wanted to steal one but it was real pretty around there.

Interviewer: Did you have any civilian contact when you first got there?

Stinson: Not really then I wasn't much of a drinker I tasted English beer one time and that was enough for me I didn't like that stuff. I could drink the Ale but not that other stuff. And beside I really couldn't understand the British that was around us was the Cockneys. My mother came from England my mother was born in this country but here parents came from England we didn't have that sort of thing they understood that.

Interviewer: Did you have any more training once you made it

Stinson: Sure doing the same thing we did in Fort Leonard Wood did it all over again in England. That's when I got wrote to Yank Magazine. And they stopped it the censor stopped and called me down, what do you want to go there for, and of course I'm talking to infantry officers and engineers. And they don't want to go in the infantry I said I just want to get in the fighting I think it's gonna be over and I'm not going to get in it and I'm gonna feel like an idiot. Alright so Ted Goldman and I a guy from Texas he and I were transferred we got papers and we went all over England. We were in Bristol and Bab New Castle

Oval and a whole bunch of towns we'd end up there and oh they've already left. Finally came back into this one we were gone a week and ended up in the same damn outfit we had been in before they moved them while we were running around.

Interviewer: What did you do after that once they

Stinson: Started infantry basic which was a lot of the same thing only more with weapons. Not as much you didn't build any more bridges or nothing like that you just learned to use weapons and the bayonet and that sort of stuff.

Interviewer: What was the new unit?

Stinson: It was just Repo Depot called it that was the name for replacements. Which is your in this bunch here and they're all replacements.

Interviewer: So you would just filled gaps in other divisions?

Stinson: Eventually that's what happened because different guys had different specks in there things like this one friend of mine Joe Sloane he had a photographer's speck. He'd been a camp photographer at Camp Leonard Wood until he got run over by a tank. Then they discharged him and then they drafted him back in. But I didn't have any specks at all other than pick and shovel engineer. Then by that time I was sick of that then the 101st came down and asked for volunteers. So I got my buddies together and we decided we'd go down and volunteer because why we'd get three days off for the physical. And any way we could get out of it regular training drake so that's what we did. And we didn't think we'd pass I've got a bum leg at that time had it all my life. Joe Sloane both of his legs had been crushed at Fort Leonard Wood and he didn't think they'd take him. Some of the other guys had something wrong with them but man we went in and took the physical and didn't say anything about it and bam we're in. Then they broke the news to us you're going to jump school. You have passed however if you do not pass jump school you will go not back to your old outfit like it was in the states you will go into the gliders and I didn't want to go into the gliders. But see I had always known paratroopers in the states if you were over 6 feet tall you couldn't become a paratrooper. Well I was 6'2 1/2' well they were forgiving you one sin. That was the only sin they spotted on me so I ended up I swear I was the tallest guy in the regiment. When I found out I had to go to engineers I said by god their going to kill me before they get me in that. And let me tell you it would be four hours in the morning on parachute training how to pack your parachute and everything about a parachute. And the other four hours was exercise drills grass drills they had running five to ten miles all sorts of things going up ropes chinning yourself. That's where they almost got me one time I was chinning myself 20 times and the 18th one I just went part way down and they caught me said you hang there. And I hung there you can bet felt like a week and a half but I vet it was five minutes. Okay not give me 20 good ones or else where I found the energy to do that I don't know but I did it.

Interviewer: What was your impression of the officers and the NCOs that you were under?

Stinson: Well at jump school never did see the officers did see the cadres which were sergeants. And they were some of the roughest toughest characters you ever ran across in your life. Don't mess with those guys they were tough we start complaining to this sergeant Chaney about too many pushups we'd 250, 300 pushups in a day and you do one thing wrong 50 pushups. Of course I see out there at the camp now they get 10 pushups. But we were complaining to him and he says okay you count he gets

down on the left hand and does 100 as fast as I could count one handed pushups. I've never been able to do one at the peak of period and he did 100. And he jumps up and he says of course you know I'm right handed.

Interviewer: Took care of that didn't it.

Stinson: The last time we was in Nashville for this reunion I ran into him and he's still somebody you wouldn't want to tangle with. And he has a wife that I don't think anybody would want to get frisky with her because she looks like she could she wasn't no husky and all like that but you just could tell the way she carried herself that here's a gal in top physical condition. Don't mess with her because she'd throw you over the block. They were tough. I went in to see them there in Nashville and I said you don't know me but I want to thank you I said by going with you I found out more about myself than I never knew before in my life. What I was capable of he said well Colonel Sink told them make them quit. And that's what their deal was push them and push them within limits see if you would quit. I saw a captain go down and of course when you went to jump school you forgot rank. And a captain ran in there and he got a double Charlie horse and went down and they said okay sign this slip and I'll take the Charlie horses out for you. The guy was yelling bloody murder they wouldn't do it until he signed. He signed then they took the Charlie horses out then he was out of the outfit. They were tough.

Interviewer: Where was your first combat experience?

Stinson: Bastogne Belgium

Interviewer: What was your reaction?

Stinson: Scared as hell. See the whole thing was we went out in this stack which we didn't have any ammunition got ammunition and went up the hill started shooting and came back when they knocked us off the hill with the tanks. It was sort of funny the tanks were up the hill shooting at us then I could hear 20 millimeter guns behind me. We were being surrounded so I got a little apprehensive about that. Then I realized paratroopers are always surrounded that's why the rest of the guys weren't excited just me. So okay that's the way you want to be that's the way I'm going to be.

Interviewer: So everybody else sort of reacted the same way you did?

Stinson: Yeah that's the way it is so that's the way I took it too.

Interviewer: How did it feel to be shot at?

Stinson: Well until you hear the snap when it goes by you and it snaps it's pretty close. And that's a little something of course you just don't stand there and talk about it you keep moving and do whatever you have to do. Drop to the ground move whatever it is that you have to do you have to go ahead and do it as fast as you can.

Interviewer: What did it feel like to shoot back?

Stinson: Nothing much just like at a target range because I never had a guy like you and I right here I never had that. I've had them at 200 yards or more with three or four of us shooting and the crowd

would go down, who shot them I don't know. I considered at that time I was a pretty good shot but so were these other guys. So I don't know I never could call any my own.

Interviewer: How would you describe the togetherness of the unit?

Stinson: It was great one thing about paratroopers after you went through all the training they went through you don't have many yellow bellies guys that will run off sobbing and stuff like that you don't have that sort of thing. Where in other outfits that don't have the spear to core that the air borne had that happens. You have so many of those guys can't stand it and their trembling and crying and carrying on. I can't remember any of that going on in our outfit we were expected to be better.

Interviewer: How did that first experience bring the unit together? Are you still really close with a lot of the people that are still alive?

Stinson: Oh yeah although at first I wasn't but you get to thinking about it later on and you realize that this was the greatest events of your life. And you shared it with these guys it's really something.

Interviewer: How long were you in the fire fight at Bastogne?

Stinson: The whole time I was there. Whatever it was 28 days whatever 30 days. Of course as you know we didn't jump out of airplanes to get there we jumped out of the back of a truck. And I was in from jumping off the back of a truck until we came back out and loaded on trucks headed for what was it Hagginar.

Interviewer: Did it ware on you after those 28 days?

Stinson: Oh yeah I don't know to this day whether it was a case of the nerves or whether it was a case of dysentery but I ended up with dysentery so bad that I'd eat something and boom. But in those days the army for cases like that they will not hospitalize you until you get a temperature of 102. So I was we got to Hagginar there I was lying on the floor I went to eat a couple of times and it just went right through me. Then I finally gave that up so the medic would come about every hour or so and take my temperature and finally he says you made it. They got a meat wagon and hauled me away to the hospital. After four days I think they got me stopped then they started to feed me then they couldn't get me started again and I was swelling up from eating so much. Then they managed to get that started and then okay back to your outfit and away I went. So I never was sure if that wasn't just nerves and I was holding myself together or whether it was dysentery. But I can't remember any of the other guys having it but of course I wasn't asking because I was in too much misery to ask anybody anything.

Interviewer: Were you impressed by the leadership and other qualities of the enemy? What did you think

Stinson: Of the who?

Interviewer: Of the Nazis when you met them. What were your impressions of them?

Stinson: Well I thought the one guy was a stupid embasel because we captured a bunch of them had come through our perimeter and we found out they were there and they sent A and C Company around and fired them and fluffed them through to us and we were on the other side. I lost a good friend there

he got right between the eyes in the skull. We got these guys out and had that commander now he was something like a major and this guy from Macon Georgia Carver Ralph Carver went up to him and grabbed his pistol started to grab his binoculars and this goes and spits on him. That was not the right thing to do because Carver turned around and boom boom boom boom ran out of ammunition and this just to show you then he takes his gun and turns it around and smashes the guy's head in. Carver was no guy to mess around with and then I thought wow this is only a few days combat and this is going on. Where's the officers were one was there the officer said take him home. And I found out that meant take all the rest back in the woods and shoot them. That's what they did took them all back and shot them all. These weren't SS but they were Herman Goring Elite Division that did a lot of nasty stuff. But when a guy's got a gun on you and your captured you don't go out and call him a damn dirty pog. You just don't do things like that if you have any brains in you at all. Sure you want a grandstand for your troops but that's being stupid.

Interviewer: You didn't have much respect for them at that point in time did you?

Stinson: No although they were they were good soldiers mainly. Compared to the French the French were crummy soldiers and the British were when you got the British in a fight they were alright. But at four o'clock in the afternoon they had to have tea and they'd stop the whole world to have tea. The Germans were the regular German soldier was better than almost anybody except some of ours.

Interviewer: Did you run into many civilians and refugees around Bastogne or in other fights?

Stinson: No they were all hiding out in the basements and we didn't go down there and bother them. They had enough problems their houses being blown up and they'd take off. Only one time I remember going through this one part an old mans out with a kid and tanks are right over here. And suddenly the Germans start shelling the tanks and this old man's walking with his kid. I came up behind him and I said get the hell over in that house and I grabbed the kid and put him in the house and said stay the hell in here you don't go out walking in a battlefield you dummy. Of course he probably didn't understand a word I said but you don't go our wondering around.

Interviewer: Were you part of an occupation force?

Stinson: No well I guess there at the very end we would consider ourselves an occupation force in Austria Birches Garden. We were still looking for crowd so as along as we were still looking for them we didn't consider it occupation. Occupation was when everybody surrendered.

Interviewer: How did the civilians at Birches garden act towards you?

Stinson: I can't even remember talking to any of them I guess they were hiding out too. I can't remember when we went over to the town of Brooke a little town in Austria I talked to some there. But for the most part we didn't associate with them they didn't associate with us. We'd do things like we want to build a tennis court today take the first 50 people who came down the street and put them to work. Didn't make any difference what they were going to do. We found out later the big line of people up at the bakery they were waiting for the baker but he was out building a tennis court. So we let the baker through after that.

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded?

Stinson: No

Interviewer: You said that you had dysentery one time how good was the medical treatment?

Stinson: They were good as soon as I got the temperature of 102

Interviewer: They were real good.

Stinson: Yeah you had to get the temperature of 102.

Interviewer: Were you ever recommended for a medal?

Stinson: Well I got the Bronze Star but that's you got that because you survived Bastogne what we call the ship lay badge that's the expert infantry man's badge. And of course they announced that at the end of the war you were supposed to get the Bronze Star but they didn't hand them out until oh god 40 years later. For meritorious service but I didn't go charging up any hills by myself or anything like that. You could get killed doing stuff like that. Didn't they said go up that hill I went up that hill go down that hill I went down that hill you go over that hill you go on combat patrol I went on combat patrols whatever they said I did.

Interviewer: You weren't too much into the heroics huh?

Stinson: No I wasn't gonna just go charging out there.

Interviewer: Were you ever promoted while you were there?

Stinson: No my trouble was I always had trouble with authority. If I didn't like if I didn't respect the guy that had authority over me I let him know it. And that was you can't get along that's not the way to get along in the army. You have to sort or to put it politely you have to cater to the ranks. And I couldn't do that that's not in my nature it wasn't in my civilian nature either when I was held some pretty good jobs. They'd tell me certain things and I'd say that's a bunch of crap you can't do that.

Interviewer: What did you think of your commanding officer in the 101st?

Stinson: Well the platoon leader was excellent my company commander was good the battalion commander at first he was lousy but he got killed. He very fortunately got killed I heard a number of guys saying they were going to kill him because they didn't like him. And then my regimental commander he was one of the most highly respected officers in the US Army Colonel Sink. And then of course Taylor was alright and McCollum he was the guy they said nuts he was alright. I spoke to him one time said General McCratcher is down in those woods right there he said okay then he just walks across the line. I stood up there and they would have blown my head off.

Interviewer: Could you tell the difference between those that had been in the army before the war and those that hadn't like yourself?

Stinson: No you've got to remember there were about 13 and half no 16 million people in the armed forces. There was that many people in the armed forces but only 2 and a half million saw combat. So there was a lot of people you know shuffling papers and running around like a friend of mine rowing

across the lake up in Seattle for three years all he did was go back and forth on the lake. There was a lot of people doing crap like that.

Interviewer: Did you have much free time?

Stinson: Well during combat time no none but then when you came back to the rest area then you'd have some free time.

Interviewer: Did you write a lot of letter home?

Stinson: Yeah most as I could. Got hell for that from some of our guys they we're not going up there you're gonna get hit you better go out there and have yourself a good time. Went out and got drunk that night but I felt better writing home.

Interviewer: Did you get a lot of letters from home?

Stinson: I got well I got letters from my mother and my girlfriend that later became my wife. But that I wasn't looking for any letters other than that.

Interviewer: Did you play any cards or anything during those free times?

Stinson: No I wasn't much of a card player especially when they want to play for money. I can't stand to lose money faster than I made it so I don't do that.

Interviewer: Did you play sports a lot you talked about having them build tennis courts for you.

Stinson: Well that was for somebody else. No I didn't do any of that stuff I like I say with this bum leg that I have I couldn't do stuff like that. They wouldn't take me in high school things football or basketball. And they didn't spot it in the army or they didn't spot it in the paratroopers until I showed it to them after I finished my jumps. Then they said we can put this off well you put it off for seven months and I went back again before it was over and the battalion sergeant says I've seen a leg like that before. And I said yes it was mine prior to Bastogne and he said what did I do then and I said you sent me back to General Hospital you're going tomorrow. I went back first thing I know I'm on the way home boom boom I'm home and out.

Interviewer: When you were in the field did you get hot food or did they give you c-rations?

Stinson: Where?

Interviewer: In Bastogne and other places.

Stinson: K-rations mostly you've got to remember the combat man is at the end of the food chain. And they complain about these guys in the trucking companies and that hells fire there eating good. It ends up when you get the stuff delivered you get the bottom of the barrel delivered. I ended up we ended up we went to Decal one day after the end of the war we went from Austria to Decal and we stopped at an army bakery company quarter master company. Oh my god the food they had big roasts how big a piece do you want boom. And they had ice cream my god I hadn't seen or even heard of ice cream. And we

decided to go into Decal and all that crap out there we came back through and they had ham that night. God that's the only good two meals I had the whole time over there.

Interviewer: When you were in Bastogne and under fire were you on the ground or were you in tents?

Stinson: Ground we never used any tents we were on the ground dig in. No see we weren't as fortunate the Germans they had labor battalions come dig dug outs for them but we dug our own.

Interviewer: During those 28 days did you ever feel sleep deprived exhausted?

Stinson: Certainly one time I went 72 hours without sleep. I remember when I fell asleep. We was marching up this hill they said wait here I can remember falling down don't remember hitting. They were shaking me come on get awake it's time to go just did things like that.

Interviewer: After the fight at Bastogne walk me through to the end of the war where you went.

Stinson: Well the next place was Hagginar and that was on the motor river where you had to skip by certain streets because the Germans would fire up those streets. After that we went back to Marmaton we came back up again on the Rhine we got across the Rhine at DS Enpocken were closing and the open end of it was we were across the Rhine. And we got to go out in factories and shoot at civilians over there. Found out when they sent a combat patrol over there that the civilians turned them in. So we thought the civilians were fair game so I sat out there with my BAR and wait for them to come across. A couple went down but they got back up.

Interviewer: Then you said you ended up in Munich area right?

Stinson: Well actually then we ended up going through the Black Forest and places like Sternberg Rosenheim and then into Burkes Garden. Then from Burkes Garden we took off and went to Austria and of course on the way over there is when we saw Herman Goring coming down. And saw him taken prisoner went over to Austria and we over there in a nice little town Brooke. We had our own swimming pool and stuff like that. At first they didn't want us to associate with the girls and then they finally decided well you're not going to stop them. So they said any girl with an armband alright then they printed a whole bunch of armbands and put boxes of them in the middle of the hallway in the company headquarters. So every girl within 30 miles had an armband of course they wouldn't show their parents but I bet if Adolph Hitler's daughters had been there they had an arm band too.

Interviewer: Were you in Austria when it was time to go home is that where you were?

Stinson: I was actually when they announced the end of the European war I was at Birches Garden. And that's where I was in an apartment there for a couple of days and that's when they announced we were going home.

Interviewer: How close was that apartment to Hitler's big headquarters there?

Stinson: Half a mile to the bridge then you go on up the road the windy road went up to the thing. Hitler's chateau had been all blown to hell it was all completely. the British had bombed that. But we would go up there and loot go down in the bunkers had bomb shelters underneath. Then the Eagle's

Nest all of the glass was blown out of that. The C Company lieutenant stole the silverware or he liberated the silverware.

Interviewer: When it was time to come home where did they ship you from Birches Garden?

Stinson: Well I went to the hospital in Nancy France. Then they ZI me and that was called the zone of interior then I went in the hospital train to Shemberg. Shemberg got on a hospital ship and came back and that wasn't like going over. Man I was up on B deck with what five of us where they had room enough to put 20 some of us. We each had our own bunks wonder around and the air force being KP attendants and stuff we ate pretty good. Came into Camp Kilmer and I got shipped down to Black Camp Pickett Virginia which is down in Blackpoll or something like that in Virginia. That was a put together camp that was a hospital type deal so it was nicer. The food there was good and we had Croats taking care of we had an orderly for every ward. And we had all the kitchen help and all the clean ups was all German prisoners.

Interviewer: Is there any reason they sent you home on the hospital ship? Were you sick or anything?

Stinson: Well I had this bum leg and they declared that they were afraid to operate on it so they sent me home. And in Camp Pickett Virginia they gave me the choice whether I wanted to be operated on. And they told me the guy that had the operation go talk to him. I talked to him and he said don't let them touch you he said now it's so ulcerated I take a shower and just touch it and it just bleeds and oozes out like crazy it's horrible. He said don't let them touch you. So I didn't but I can touch it four years ago if I did that I would fall in the floor.

Interviewer: Did you have a lot of close, how many close friends did you lose in combat?

Stinson: In where?

Interviewer: In close combat?

Stinson: Well the only one I knew was Skovan but then the rest of them within my own outfit I didn't ask who got killed or how or why. I didn't really want to know all of that sort of stuff because then if I knew it I would worry about it. Skovan I knew about because we were pretty close the six of us. But then Alvarez who was our machine gunner I saw him he was about to here from the doorway carrying his machine gun on his shoulder. And we heard this stuff coming in but a German 88 had a flat projector instead of going up like this you could hear it coming and we dived to the ground. He took the gun cradled it then went forward too late it went right into him. The thing of it was the battalion sergeant was right there and he was the first one to him and he was already dead. Then I seen other guys hit medics took care of them you can't go running around like John Wayne or John F Kennedy.

Interviewer: So it was hard to see that but you couldn't really focus on it right?

Stinson: No you couldn't because what you had to do you had a mission to get from here to there. You had to get there if somebody went down you yelled to the medic. Medic over here to get that guy then you went on you had to get your mission completed.

Interviewer: Looking back on it how would you characterize your entire experience?

Stinson: The greatest adventure of my life. Do I care to repeat it? No way because I of course the size I am now I make twice the target I did in the old days. In those days I was 6 foot 2 and a half what was I 46 chest 34 waist and then I went to the hospital and ended up with a 50 inch chest and a 46 inch waist. And that was clean living and going to bed early and being fed by a good girl who knew how to cook all this cooking is very filling. Sticks to your bones as she used to say.

Interviewer: So you think it helped make you the person you are now?

Stinson: Well it helped mold certain parts of me. I haven't really changed a great deal I was always sort of shy when I was growing up you know I would never get belligerent. I used to run rather than fight I was big enough to run because when you have a bigger size nose you don't want it hit. You wouldn't know about things like that but I did. Then when I found out later on what am I running from these guys for. I can beat them just as much or better than they can beat me. And I found out that just the approach you know just get up and say who in the hell do you think you're talking to and going up towards people. One guy told me he said Bob do you realize what an imposing figure you make when you come out like that. I said I never really think about I'm just not going to take any more crap off this guy and that's it. But I would never do that as a kid years ago I would avoid all of that sort of stuff. And of course it helped me in my career.

Interviewer: What did you end up doing?

Stinson: I ended up well I went into accounting and wound up being a plant controller in a number of plants and then I ended up being a division controller based in New York. Which I had 80 something branches all over the country but you'd get challenged by guys that would pull something especially if you had a union like in New Castle. One union president said oh I'll punch you out I said do you want to go out in the lot? We'll go out now forget my job forget your job let's go. He backed down well then you know you've got him. Just decided if you have to go you have to go and tell them that. I learned to fight with them you're not going to push me around. That sort of stuff I never would have done as a kid but to my wife I think I stayed the same guy. I certainly never tried to push her around because I know I couldn't get away with it. She was a quit a gal.

Tape ended