

We are speaking with Lawrence Schweiger of the 101st, 501st unit. Mr. Schweiger if you could tell us a little bit about your background, your family background and where you are from.

Mr. Schweiger: I am from Detroit, Michigan. I was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. I received my education there. How it all came about, I was in my last year of high school and one day my father came to me and said, "Lawrence, here is \$200.00 I got you a job, I got you a place to live; I'm joining the Marine Corp." My dad previously served in World War I. So he enlisted in the Marine Corp and he said to me, "The Army is going to get you anyway so as soon as you graduate so everything is fine." So from then on I took care of myself until I was inducted. My background, I am of European background. I am of German-Austrian decent; 2nd generation American. My dad never spoke any foreign languages so we were pretty much an American family. My sister, likewise, never spoke any foreign languages. After being inducted I was sent to Camp Custer and from Camp Custer I was forwarded to Camp Wheeler, Georgia, and received my basic training.

Now did you enlist or were you drafted?

Mr. Schweiger: I was actually drafted. Well I mean it wasn't necessarily drafted; you received your group readings from the President of the United States and you had to go down to the induction center and that is where they took you in. So it wasn't a matter of being inducted. You were automatic when you went down there.

Did you have to take any test at that time?

Mr. Schweiger: Yes we took a written test and naturally a physical and I passed all that. I was slated originally to go to an ESTP school. I think they called it some kind of college training and it was to do something with signals; signal corp. An unusual thing happened at the induction center, we were being fitted for uniforms. I was kind of a young man. I had a small waist, a 30-inch waist with large shoulders and the lady couldn't find a uniform to fit me properly. So as a consequence she refused to let a soldier go out of there that wasn't properly fit. So I had to wait until I got a special coat. As a consequence my opportunity to go to training was eliminated. So then I was shipped to Camp Wheeler, Georgia for basic infantry training.

Can you give us a time frame about when you got shipped to Camp Wheeler?

Mr. Schweiger: It was a matter of three or four days after the induction center that I was shipped to Camp Wheeler, Georgia.

About what year did this happen?

Mr. Schweiger: This happened in February of 1943. When in Wheeler I received basically my basic training and on graduation two airborne soldiers were enlisting people for the Airborne; so I enlisted for the Airborne.

Did you learn all your infantry type at Camp Wheeler?

Mr. Schweiger: Yes, the physical training, weapons handling, weapons maintenance, target practice. I made expert. I was an expert rifleman due to the fact that I hunted quite a bit extensively with my dad; him being an ex-Marine so I knew my way around a rifle. I started off in a rifle squad and I was an acting Corporal. I guess in those days to try to train for various leadership which I never particularly wanted to be. But the training was good; very good. Then I was sent to Camp Fort Benning, Georgia, where I received my parachute training.

You said there were two airborne men picking up recruits to go to airborne school right?

Mr. Schweiger: Yes. They were recruiters I guess from Fort Benning.

Did they have certain men in mind or were they just taking volunteers to sign up to go?

Mr. Schweiger: They didn't have certain men in mind. I believe they were just taking volunteers to go at that time. The reason being is that when you reach Fort Benning there was a period during the training that they would weed out those that were incapable of the physical training or the resting or the various elements that would teach you how to be an airborne troop and what they wanted to do I guess was get you used to stress and strain and to be able to cope with this under combat conditions because airborne troops are unique unto themselves. They are individualist, not just normal soldiers. It doesn't mean that the other soldiers weren't good soldiers or weren't brave or strong or whatever you have. It just means that airborne troops are, because of the nature of their tactics, dropping behind enemy lines because they needed those people that were individualist that could think for themselves and could follow through an objective which has been proven on D-Day when small groups of men had created a diversion of fire and blown bridges without the command of officers. They knew their objective.

When you enlisted in 101st in the airborne, not necessarily the 101st, but just the airborne then, were you aware of the tactics you would be using of dropping behind the enemy line?

Mr. Schweiger: No I was unaware of airborne of any way, shape, form or manner. It's just that I didn't particularly want to be in the infantry and as a consequence not realizing that airborne is super infantry and really when you hit the ground you are super infantry. But be as it may that is what I found out later and it didn't bother me that much. It was a service and I had some good times and bad times like everybody else.

What were some of the tactics and stuff that you had learned at Fort Benning that was different than the first camp you ever went to?

Mr. Schweiger: I think the difference between airborne training and normal infantry training is the physical aspect. It's so demanding over the other normal infantry training

that at times it's exhausting. But you find as you go along that you develop a feeling of superior; superiority that you are unconquerable and that there is nothing that you are given to do that you couldn't conquer. This is a mental attitude that they instill in paratroopers. At most times it does work that way. You do feel that you are unconquerable and that is because of the training.

You had already received your infantry training so you already knew some of the tactics that you needed to know. How exactly did they prepare you for the jumps that you made? How many jumps would you take to be qualified as a parachutist and stuff like that?

Mr. Schweiger: You have to prepare for five jumps to qualify. With the rigorous physical training you were climbing ropes, you were pulled up in various towers and there was parachute drops from the towers that allowed you to learn how to maneuver the chutes, how to hit the ground and roll in various ways so that you would take up the slack of jumping. There was training in various elements of how to handle parachute; how to slip from one way to the other or maybe direct it depending on which way you were coming in, forward or backwards. This was basically the training of the chute part of it.

So how well did you actually think you could control your chute? Did you feel like you could move fairly well?

Mr. Schweiger: Yes I had no problem with. That wasn't a difficult thing because I think I was considered a pretty good athlete in high school. I played baseball, football and track. I was a typical young man in those days. The training we adapted easily. I didn't find anything that I couldn't adapt to. That doesn't necessarily mean that I liked it. But that doesn't mean that I wasn't adaptable to situations, especially from the jumpmasters.

Now with the infantry training you trained basically as units. But with the 101st you said it was more individual like? In your training did you have more individual like combat situations to prepare yourself?

Mr. Schweiger: Basically when I was transferred from Fort Benning to the 501 regiment which so happens was at Camp McCall in North Carolina that was when I picked up on my outfit, the 501. As we trained I was in the machine gun company for a while and then when we went overseas I was part of the service company with supplies and things of that nature. I was well-trained. I was an expert rifleman so I knew my way around. On D-Day I was more or less considered a public security. When we made the drop my main objective was to get back to Headquarters Company and follow their demands to do whatever I had to do.

I'm aware of the North Carolina and the Tennessee maneuvers. This was kind of an American-made practice jump so that we could see exactly how the airborne would be able to react in war situations. Did you participate in one of those maneuvers or both?

Mr. Schweiger: I'm not quite sure of what jump you were referring to.

There were two large scale jumps; maneuvers.

Oh in Kentucky?

Mr. Schweiger: Yeah, the Kentucky, Tennessee.

Mr. Schweiger: Yes, I was in those maneuvers. In Kentucky I was assigned to a Service Company in a motor pool at that time. Also, we were in combat conditions. When I was driving we were under various combat conditions and trying to take our objectives and things of that nature. What I can try to say is training in a sense of how to take control of situations is about all I can really tell you that you go through. I can't think of any specific tactical problem that I myself would have been one that had to figure out. It was more or less doing what I was told.

From airborne school you were assigned to the 501st. Around what time was this? Can you recall a day, month, time; spring or fall?

Mr. Schweiger: Well it was in the fall because my basic training was in the early parts of 1943 and then I had a month of training at Fort Benning. I would say it was pretty close to August probably before I was shipped to Camp McCall and then from there I was shipped overseas from that camp. I mean we shipped to New York and then overseas.

So you went from Fort Benning to Camp McCall and what all went on there? Was that just a holding station?

Mr. Schweiger: The 501 was an established outfit at that time at Camp McCall so I was like a new recruit in a sense. I wasn't assigned to any particular group at that time until they could see where they wanted to put me, which was typical of most of us. There were other fellows in the same situation as ours. They put me in a machine gun platoon. We went on maneuvers and were taught tactical problems; machine gunning and whatever; firing and how to throw a hand grenade, various things of that nature. Field tactics I guess you would call it. This is such a while back. This is what I remember more or less of the training itself, how to throw a hand grenade, how to use a machine gun, how to use your weapon on range, hand-to-hand combat to a degree and things of that nature. Also, how to approach a particular object or objective and how to crawl and various elements that goes with being a soldier. I learned all that but it was just part of the training.

You had talked about that you had to make five jumps before you could be considered a parachutist. Now on D-Day you'll jumped at night. In your training did you ever have a night jump that you had to make?

Mr. Schweiger: I don't remember ever having a night jump in training. We used to have to pack our chutes which were part of our training. So as a consequence you were confident that your chute was packed when you made the practice jumps. The funny part about it being a poor kid during the Depression time I had never been close to an airplane; an actual airplane. The first time I was near one I had to jump out of it. But I

didn't find that as being traumatic because we were so well trained to do what we had to do. Enough jumping has never been difficult for me. It was the rigors of the training that was more difficult, not the jumping.

So you don't feel that not having a night jump would have helped out during the D-Day Campaign?

Mr. Schweiger: I don't think so because every situation is different. You can't duplicate situations. The minute you try then everything goes awry. Because of the night drop and the flank and the brightness of the sky from various elements being they were shooting at us, you could see pretty well when you hit the ground. That is when we went into those fields. That is how I was able to locate that other paratrooper.

You left Camp Benning to go to New York to go to Europe.

Mr. Schweiger: I believe that we took off from New York but I am not sure.

Did you'll go over on boat?

Mr. Schweiger: Yes it was what they called a Liberty ship. It was called a Kaiser Freighter Liberty Ship. That was a very rough time. It was January when we went over in 1944. The sea was rolling people were getting sick.

Was it jammed pack to where people were on deck in the middle of January?

Mr. Schweiger: Yes and you had what they called torpedo drills, disembarkment drills and things of that nature in case a submarine hit you and you could save yourself. I remember being the troopers a lot of them getting seasick and actually throwing up all over. I was never really seasick myself but it was a miserable trip as far as I was concerned.

Do you remember how many people were actually on the boat? How many people were actually, supposedly the boat could hold?

Mr. Schweiger: I wouldn't have any way of knowing that but I think that the 501 regiment was on this boat and if that is the case it would probably be close to 1,200 to 1,500 I would imagine. I'm not for sure if I am right on that.

Now on the trip over did you'll have to run certain patterns; zigzag patterns to try to avoid submarines?

Mr. Schweiger: They did say they had a zigzag pattern but there was one sailor that got washed over. I remember that and they announced it. They never stopped to pick him up they just kept going.

Did you'll have an escort?

Mr. Schweiger: Yeah, there were some other ships you could see in the distance. I don't know whether they were considered an escort or just another ship.

Upon arrival at Europe where were you stationed at?

Mr. Schweiger: When we got into Europe we first were disembarked in Scotland and then were taken to; we were stationed in two places Lanborn which was a Headquarters Company. It was a huge estate. It was considered a horse country. The rest of the regiment was to Newbury.

So they actually split the 501?

Mr. Schweiger: The 501 was split because there was a headquarters at Lanborn and then at Newbury which was not too far from there was another part of the regiment.

From there is that where you'll got deployed to go into Normandy?

Mr. Schweiger: Yes. When they decided to make the drop in Normandy they took us by truck and they brought us to a marshalling area near the coast. In this marshalling area you couldn't get in or out because it was secret and you were guarded by other troops from getting out.

Upon arrival at the marshalling station what rank were you? You were in the machine gun squad?

Mr. Schweiger: I was a T3 which was a Technical Sergeant. It's like a buck but it is called a Technical Sergeant.

When you get into the marshalling station that is when they finally tell you of the plans of the objectives of your mission; or did you actually know before entering the marshalling station?

Mr. Schweiger: No, you didn't know anything before the marshalling. In the marshalling area they indoctrinated you as to what your objectives were going to be; they had sand castles and various diagrams of the terrain that you were going to be dropped in. But unfortunately due to the nature of the drop we were scattered all over so those were not very effective for our use at that time. The territory that I dropped in was unfamiliar to me as far as those diagrams were concerned.

In the marshalling area what kind of security did you go through and personal things that happened to you in the marshalling area?

Mr. Schweiger: Well I remember in the marshalling area was that we were in barracks and things like that. We were indoctrinated and we had food. It was more or less getting your equipment ready; make sure you had your knife sharpened that you had the proper

gear and the proper ammunition for various things that you were going to use. I remember feeling kind of lonesome at that time and I decided to take a walk around the compound. A flock of geese flew over and I looked at the geese and I had never really seen geese in that fashion before. I looked at some trees and I had never seen a tree the way it looked to me at that time. I began to realize that tomorrow I may never be around to see anything like that again. So it was something unique that I experienced. It was a mental feeling of not hopelessness but seeing things and thinking things about my dad and sister and things that I had really not thought about. I'm sure this went through the minds of many other troopers. Basically being human animals I think we all think pretty much alike; our emotions are pretty normal.

As the security part of it, do you feel like the reason that you are indoctrinated into the aspects of your mission and held in this area was just for national security or do you feel like it was overkill and feel like you should still be among your own people.

Mr. Schweiger: No I hardly think it was overkill. I think that they tried to prepare you as well as they could because it was very important. We were preparing for the greatest invasion since the beginning of mankind. The ballistics was unbelievable of what was actually involved in it. I think they did everything our officers and the high command did everything possible to prepare us to be able to take our objective and do what we were supposed to do. I have no qualms about that. I think that I had the best training that you could get and probably the best officers I could have.

In anticipation of leaving you had told me earlier about your religious background. How did your religious background prepare you for what you were going to face?

Mr. Schweiger: Well Father Sampson, which was our battalion priest who ended up as General Sampson, was a great man. He knew all of his Catholic boys and just before D-Day before we left for the marshalling area he came around to and heard our last confessions and gave us Holy Communion. From then on I didn't care whether I lived or died. I was fearless. I had said to myself that if I couldn't control my life. If I got killed so be it. I would find out what it is all about. If I didn't get killed then I would take it from there and go forward. Consequently it helped me a great deal on the drop itself, but I didn't care, I was fairly psyched. It didn't bother me at all that we were being shot at and the plane was bouncing around and we were trying to get out the door. I was really in a state of calmness.

In anticipation of actual leaving into Normandy, now there were stories that were postponed a couple of times due to the weather and they wanted the best possible way or the best possible conditions for the ships and for the paratroopers going in. What kind of anticipation did you go into as for the jump into Normandy?

Mr. Schweiger: I remember them calling off the drop. They said, "Well you can write a few more letters because you are not going to go at the original time." After the postponement then they said to prepare to go and that is when we went.

So you'll only got postponed one time?

Mr. Schweiger: One time that I remember. They took us to the airfield and I remember seeing Eisenhower and Churchill. I think it was Churchill. They waved to us as we were embarking on the planes getting ready for the planes. As far as I can remember I don't remember any chaos or any of the troopers being overly demonstrative or things like that. They were more concerned about getting their equipment together and making sure that it was latched down properly and making sure that they had the proper equipment that they needed and to be equipped for whatever assignment that they had- demolitions, machine gunner or whatever. When you really think about it this was a great generation of young men. The training that we had received certainly went a long ways toward making a success on D-Day because of the diversional and the scattering and the mishappened circumstances that they all pulled together. It was because of that training I think that we made it possible for those troops to actually to a degree.

From there you got the call and you'll boarded the plane and jumped into Europe. Can you tell me about the flight over and some of the things that you'll went through; anticipation of getting out the door?

Mr. Schweiger: We were in a glider and it wasn't the smoothest ride that I remember. It wasn't really that bad going up the channel. When we hit the coast that is when the ack-ack and the tracer bullets and various other arms fire from the Germans elements started to hit the planes. As a consequence some of the pilots went off course and tried to be diversional and fly in different directions to avoid the flack and the fire. But when the final green light was given to go, everybody just stood up and was fighting to get off the plane. They didn't want to ride in that thing. They were fighting to get out. As soon as you got everything went quiet and it just seemed to stop. When you hit the ground then you took it from there and that is what I did.

With the pushing out of the door every paratrooper jumps out every second of the ____, right?

Mr. Schweiger: I'm not quite sure but you followed right on his back, rear end more or less and kind of held on.

Did you see any accidents with guys trying to get out the door instead of going through...

Mr. Schweiger: I have seen them in training where they would run past the door. But in combat I never saw that. It seemed to be a successful drop.

Upon landing in Normandy what was your objective? What was your company supposed to take?

Mr. Schweiger: My main objective was to get back to Headquarters Company. From there we were going to take our orders accordingly what was necessary because I was security. It was a week or two before I found out that my company I was told was in

Hiesville I believe it was. Then I got back to a unit and then from then on in I did what I was told.

Can you kind of tell me some of your personal accounts from when you landed to the time you got back to your headquarters?

Mr. Schweiger: I remember before I got back to my battalion headquarters, I remember walking down a road and this was by Saint M____. There was a half-track coming up; an armored train coming up and in the lead was a fellow. He looked at me as I was walking down and he stopped the half-track. He ran over to me and he hugged me. I looked and he was a General. He was a tall, lengthy General and he thanked me. Now at that I was unaware of and taken back and I didn't know. But he was glad, I suppose, to see some troops there that actually jumped. Then he took on toward Saint M____ and I continued on to pick up some other fellows and there was a group of us that ended up in Hiesville. One time I did stop at an aid station and the wounded were lying on the ground and in the floor. There was one young fellow my age I guess. He looked at me and he said, "I am so tired." I picked him up and I cradled him. He needed a whole blood. We didn't have any. So he said to me once more, "I am so tired" and he died in my arms. At that time I thought, "If his parents only knew that he died because he didn't have whole blood." That is what the doctor told him he needed. I thought, "Wow, what a waste." After he died I took off and went back to work my way back to my company and then rejoining them there.

Upon rejoining your company, where did you'll move from there?

Mr. Schweiger: From then on we worked our way up to Carentan which is one of the major cities which was actually taken by us at that time. We had a lot of combat there. There was one hill that I think we took three times. We would take the Germans and then the Germans would, we would take it back and they would take it back and so finally we did take the hill. When I was on top of the hill, they shelled us again and I jumped into a hole. I saved myself from the shell fire and from then on we did take Carentan. After Carentan there were ceremonies and we were then getting ready to ship back to England for the next drum. That was the end of my D-Day experience as far as that drop was concerned.

When you talk about ceremonies are you talking about the....

Mr. Schweiger: They were giving medals and various things to groups because the town was recaptured and this was a way of I think the 502 was instrumental in capturing that town. They were awarding various medals for bravery to various soldiers.

So this was considered way behind the lines by this time?

Mr. Schweiger: Carentan is not really, it's on its way down the coast. This was a major city that was taken.

In the southern part of France?

Mr. Schweiger: Well it would be in the southern part of France. I would say it was really east of Saint M_____ down the coast back toward Kohn and all the various major cities. People were grateful and rejoiced because of their liberation at that time.

Did you see that all over the place or just in the major cities; people rejoicing and thanking you for liberating their city?

Mr. Schweiger: I thought that the French were very grateful. Even in Holland and Belgium and other parts of France they were always very grateful and especially the airborne because of their liberation. These people had suffered tremendously through the German occupation; especially the Dutch, Belgium and French under the German occupation. So when they were liberated they were reborn. When we go back now you can't find nicer people in England. They just treat you marvelous.

From there where did you end up at?

Mr. Schweiger: When we dropped in Holland I was attached to a heavy duty mortar unit.

Was this still in the 101st?

Mr. Schweiger: Yes still in the 101st. When we dropped in Holland it was a very nice day and it was a very pleasant drop; until we actually came in contact with the enemy and then it was quite hectic and quite dramatic. So I had been sent up to the front lines to observe and try to locate a small mortar that had been discharging shells in our area. When I was up there at the front line it was by a farm house and Father Sampson worked his way up because he knew I was up there. He asked me if I wanted to go to communion. Here I am peering through my glasses being a forward observed trying to locate where this was so I could radio back and have it knocked out by a small mortar.

So the priest was up on the front line?

Mr. Schweiger: The priest actually came up on the front line and asked me if I wanted to go to communion. I was quite irritated at that time and I told him, "Gee, Father at a time like this you want me to go to communion?" As soon as I said this, a mortar that I had been trying to locate hit very close to me. It wounded me. It picked me up in the air and busted my arm. Father Sampson didn't get hit so he dragged me into an underground shelter that the Dutch had dug for protection and he gave me shots of Morphine and literally helped carry me back down a long road back to the main unit and to the hospital. From that point on that is just about where my Army career ended because I was in the hospital a year from September to September.

Looking back as you see yourself before the war and through the war, how do you see yourself changing emotionally as how you look at things? You talked about when you

were at marshalling you said there that you noticed the geese, you noticed the trees and you noticed different things that you normally overlook. How hard did you turn? How did the war harden you as a person?

Mr. Schweiger: When you are once out of the combat situations and you get back to the rest areas and you get back to the various other areas that they switch you to, you have a tendency to re-become a civilian again. But I think the airborne training with me on, I was a supervisor at Ford motor and under strain many times. Fortunately with my training it helped me. I was never one to get overly really excited or get frustrated. I was able to handle chaotic situations because I think a lot of the airborne training. I am today now I guess considered a low-key type individual. I'm not an excitable type. This is attributable probably to the training. So in a way I have been very fortunate. I thank God that I have been able to live as I have. My fellow troopers over here which I dearly love, they are all great men. I think that it has been worthwhile. Now that I am reaching an old man I think that I have been very fortunate. God has been good to me.

There is one thing I overlooked that I didn't mention in the interview. Would you tell around the age you were when you enlisted in 1943?

Mr. Schweiger: Well I was just out of high school. I was eighteen.

When you got out was 1945 so you were twenty.

Mr. Schweiger: Twenty-one or twenty in that area.

So your total reflection of everything that happened with war looking back now and being able to see the things you went through and the different things you have been to and everything. How do you see everything in the overall picture of the war in general?

Mr. Schweiger: Well it was necessary at the time. It did in a way pull us out of the Depression which the country needed. It did because of the GI Bill; it gave to a generation education that the other too poor probably would have been unable to have. It made us a generation that knew how to equip ourselves a little better. I think it has made us a greater nation. Even today we are still considered the greatest nation in the world. I think that is partly because of people like me who grew up in a society of a great generation. So I am hoping that the young people can carry on and continue to make this a great generation.