

Interviewer: We are here with Kelly Stampus who served in the headquarters of the 907th Glider Field Artillery of the 101st Airborne Division during WWII. This interview is being conducted at the 101st airborne reunion in San Antonio, Texas on the 9th of August 2001 and he is being interviewed by Scott Shumate and John O'Brien from the Pratt Museum. Well sir if you can tell us briefly about your joining the army.

Mr. Stampus: Okay I had the privilege you might say of registering for the second draft. I wasn't young enough to qualify for registering for the first draft the second draft and my number came up number one in my draft board in West Las Angeles. So I was one of the first to go on that second draft. And that was on November 5th of 1941 and whenever they say you know when you were drafted in the army of when did you get in the army I keep saying well I was drafted on November 5th 41 as a \$21 a month private. And ended up late 1945 as a captain which you know I reflect favorable now that I'm my age.

Interviewer: Well you went through some officers training and some field artillery training and then can you tell us how you how you came to join the 101st airborne division?

Mr. Stampus: Okay I inducted on November 5th one year to the day I was commissioned by going through the artillery school at Fort Seal, Oklahoma which was November 5th of 1942. My first assignment as an officer was in joining the second infantry division that at that time just recently had moved from of all places Fort Sam in San Antonio here and I joined them in December of 1942. I had great respect and stayed with the second infantry division. I always say I wasn't good enough to go with them overseas because they went overseas in 19 like September 93 so they had a number of second lieutenants that they left behind and I felt very bad about that. But being in the office that I was a that time I understand that and as a result when they went overseas I went with another artillery unit that was on the post and later was assigned to another artillery unit at Fort Riley, Kansas and they had they wanted officers for you know parachute qualified and I did go to Fort Benning, Georgia at my parachute training and after that I was you know assigned to go overseas. And I joined the 101st airborne division in August of 44 right after they came back from Normandy jumped in a hollerd and stayed with the division throughout the end of the war.

Interviewer: What was that like coming into a unit that was filled with these hardened combat veterans and trying to fit in and establish yourself?

Mr. Stampus: Great deal of respect. I respected those individuals that had gone through the Normandy situation and some of them would say it wasn't all that bad depending on their circumstances because you could be with a unit where it's easy for you and you can be with a unit where it's very server for you. Great deal of respect for them and still do have. I'm in awe at the individuals and their experiences that happened. You know to talk to some of these fellows like Joe Barley who got captured on the first day of the jump or others that you know a half hour into the operation they are out of the war completely you know what a disappointment. And it's a shame that these individuals some of which took it as a personal thing from the point of view of look why was I captured it's my fault and the guilt attached to that and we all have certain guilt factors in connection with some of the actions that were taken that you know you were involved with. And I've got a couple of those too.

Interviewer: What was your assignment?

Mr. Stampus: My initial assignment and I why I pulled that assignment I don't know not being that experienced or that long with the 907th. I was the advance man for the 907th which meant that I jumped into Holland on the first day September 17, 1944 and my role was to make sure that the battalion once they came in by gliders got to the *ronda vore* area at which time the battalion commander would take over, not take over the unit he's always in charge of the unit, would you know relieve me of that assignment and assign me to other duties and of course Colonel Clarence Nelson a great soldier and man came in on Tuesday I met him on a jump zone on the drop zone which was the jump zone and that part of the assignment was complete and from there I was assignment to other duties. I was also assigned as an advanced man and I like to say I'll mention that story now that we're into it. Here I am with a number of guys on a Sunday evening in December back at Camp Womalone playing poker middle of 12 o'clock in the evening and someone comes up and says the colonel wants to see you so I went over to his where he stayed and he said look we're being committed get your group together you're going to be artillery liaison with the third battalion of the 501 but as an advance man. Get your group down to division artillery headquarters no later than 3 o'clock in the morning and I'll see you wherever we are going. I got my group together went over there and we convoyed out of Camp Womalone and later that day here it is you know early evening on Monday and we're in the western part of Bastogne the I didn't know was Bastogne at the time. So a few hours later around midnight between midnight and 1 o'clock the battalion comes in I had picked out the area where the battalion vehicles and guns would marshal prior to you know prior to taking off the next day. The Colonel says to me you better get some rest. Had not slept Sunday evening here it is like 2 o'clock in the morning on Tuesday and so you know I get about an hour two hours sleep. I'm awakened, get your group together find the find the 3rd battalion of the 501 and you're the artillery liaison officer for that unit. Well we get into the downtown Bastogne right by the square and colder than heck of course and asking everybody have you do you know where and confusion you know as you can imagine with what was happening at that time. And of course that's like a Tuesday morning with only an hour or two hours sleep. I hold up our group which is four of us in a small barber shop in Bastogne and we take turns an hour at a time trying to get the information as to the units involved. Around 6 o'clock in the morning here comes the 501 with colonel Griswold who had just taken command of the 3rd battalion and what a great guy he was. He says where the heck have you guys been we're looking all over for you which was not the case they were just going where they were going s you know we in joining them we headed through town from the town square where the you know mayor's office and all that right down the main streets past the church heading east and we go to the small town of Mont where we come up with opposition. And of course we're the 3rd battalion and the 1st battalion is on our left which is on the road going to Houfalize and they met opposition and it's there that both battalions more or less establish a defensive position for the you know to secure Bastogne as it was secured. But anyway getting back to Holland. After things sort of stabilized and our battalion got into position I was sent to the Air OP as one of the observers. Each battalion at that point of time had a pilot and a type of aircraft and I was I keep saying I was the first one and I was the first one to you know fly a mission in Holland. The second mission comes up I take that one the third mission comes up the first one I took the major that was in charge of the Air OP the second one with one of the pilots there the third one you know comes up and everybody's looking at each other and I'm saying to

the other guys we're supposed to be sharing this responsibility you know some of you so. The pilot a lieutenant Sherry from our unit the 907th and an observer from the 907th lieutenant Williamson they took it and of all things at that time the road was cut by the Germans and they downed (Mr. Stampus became upset and could not longer continue on the subject).

Interviewer: To pick back up you know in August of 44 you had just joined the 907 and it would not be until September that Market garden actually occurred and the 101st was in a holding pattern because Patton was moving so quickly.

Mr. Stampus: Very true.

Interviewer: There were three missions that the 101st was supposed to go on can you talk a little about the frustration that the paratroopers were feeling? Did you feel like you were getting left behind in a very fast moving war?

Mr. Stampus: Not necessarily because most of the conversation you know as far as the and maybe this was prompted more by those that had seen combat before they were thrilled at they didn't have to go on those other missions. Now in connection with that another oddity that took place one Wednesday evening in England the supply sergeant of headquarters a fellow by the name of Ray Janice and a couple of other guys another lieutenant and the other one our jeep driver Harry Detinger . We you know had made arrangements you know let's go to a couple of pubs and have a few drinks and all which we did. In one of the pubs we bumped into two women. One was of all things and Indian Princess and her companion and when the pub closed she said why don't you come over to where we live and you know we'll play some rickets and socialize. Fine, the four of us and the two women we got there and she was a fan of the Ink Spots and she had all of the Ink Spot records that she loved playing. So we left there around 5 o'clock in the morning 4:30, 5 o'clock she says why don't you come back Sunday and we'll have a picnic we'll do something. Fine we'll do that so we get back to camp and you know that's it you know you can't get out and they said we're going on a mission to Holland. And it's the thing that amazed me about that was that they had a map and a ground layout of where we were going where we would jump and what we would take off from there. So looking at that ground layout they dropped us exactly where we were supposed to be it was like a parade ground jump but here we were a few days later expecting to go back on a Sunday picnic and we end up in Holland at the time. By chance though Ray Janice coming in Tuesday his plane did not land on the supposed drop zone or glider zone and he got captured and I didn't find out until like 40 years later that he survived that. It was on the 40th anniversary of going back to Holland and once I saw his name on the roster of those visiting Holland he was in the Cleveland area I called him. Naturally later that he had made it.

Interviewer: Sometimes there are stories about a little bit of dissention between the glider riders and the paratroopers you were in an unusual unit that did both.

Mr. Stampus: Well the paratroopers always felt that they were better but better soldiers because they were paratroopers. They had to volunteer for that the glider units they didn't have a choice you were just like my battalion 907 they made them a glider unit and as a result they had no choice, that's it. And of course when we went into Holland you know those a lot of I'd say the majority of the glider people

went in where normally you would have a glider pilot and his assistant who would be a glider pilot. They went in just with a glider pilot and you know half hour instruction of who wants to be the co-pilot. You know that's kind of tough. And for those that came in by glider those things were rickety those things any disturbance would be difficult for the glider pilot to bring through.

Interviewer: Did you ever hear any stories of rigging a glider to be destroyed in case the Germans might get a hold of it once on the ground? Putting an explosive device on the glider to destroy it after it completed its mission?

Mr. Stampus: I have not heard that, I have not heard that. The only thing I heard was you know the aerodynamics of the glider that General Pratt came in was changed because of a metal plate that was put underneath the and I don't know the whether that's true or not but apparently it was.

Interviewer: Can you recall when you heard that?

Mr. Stampus: Well after I was out of the service, well after I was out of the service.

Interviewer: Not a rumor that you remember while you were serving with the 101st?

Mr. Stampus: No

Interviewer: Well let's go back to Holland and talk about shooting up and getting ready for that mission.

Mr. Stampus: Okay as I mentioned before you know I was assigned to the air observation team that you know was outstanding by the point of view of what they accomplished in the air observations involved. Once the road was secured and the Britain in Arnon had lost their, we from the 101st move up toward the are we called the Island and I observed from behind the dykes in a house farm house you could look over the dyke and look across the river and we were just in the defensive pattern for some length of time and were out there for about 73 days.

Interviewer: Let me follow up with a couple of questions about the area observation. Because the 101st today as area observers and the aviation branch is very interested in that whole story also. Did you learn anything about areal observation at Fort Seal before you joined the 101st?

Mr. Stampus: No, they no after all the techniques are the same instead of from a ground or hill observation you're observing from an aircraft. And The only respective difference is the height involved as were used for observation as well as firing missions and I know when we were up in the Highland one time you get a little reckless you might say and I know like one time we got a call from the ground that says you are now over enemy territory get back.

Interviewer: Did the airplanes belong to the battalion?

Mr. Stampus: Each battalion had an aircraft a piper and of course the observers would be pulled out of the ranks when needed. Like when I well Williams and I were the two observers to begin with. When Williamson got killed another officer took his place.

Interviewer: You flew a good number of missions do you recall how many?

Mr. Stampus: Around 50 we didn't keep track of them I didn't keep track of them. I suppose the air observant should have you know would record all of them and I'm sure he did.

Interviewer: Do you recall how many pilots you had for that one airplane?

Mr. Stampus: Each airplane had their own pilot.

Interviewer: One pilot per plane?

Mr. Stampus: One pilot per plane because the pilot and the plane came from a separate battalion. I suppose the air observer Chief Major he had a plane as well. So you probably had three battalions maybe and maybe four aircraft something like that four or five.

Interviewer: Would you say that your firer was affective I mean did you have a chance to see your rounds impacting German formations or on German targets?

Mr. Stampus: Well you know from that height it would be pretty difficult to see you know you would probably say okay in those woods are Germans you know observe our battalion shooting into that area and you would identify the results of those observations.

Interviewer: When you were calling in your observations was that to division artillery headquarters?

Mr. Stampus: No, I would say to your own battalion because division artillery didn't have fire center a fire direction center. The battalions would have a fire direction center.

Interviewer: Would you have the frequency for multiple battalions or were you working for one?

Mr. Stampus: No, they would only one. They would identify who would be shooting.

Interviewer: Do you have any recollection of who would assign the missions that an aerial observer needed to go up?

Mr. Stampus: Well it's incumbent on the aerial observer to identify his own targets but there would also be targets that the battalion would identify for you to observe.

Interviewer: So if an infantry regimen were in contact an infantry regimen may call an artillery battalion who would in turn call you to go observe? I'm trying to draw a wire diagram.

Mr. Stampus: We always took our direction from the one in charge of the inner observation post. Otherwise the Major he would be the one okay call in the shots and identify the mission. And it's unfortunate that if you especially in the early stages to go up and you know observe whether the line you know cause you would be pretty low in flying they would be pretty low in flying the plane. And you wouldn't be from a larger height and if they broke you know a small arms fire would easily bring down a plane. And that's what happened in this one particular case.

Interviewer: After the Holland campaign the 101st rested briefly and then they got called into Bastogne you've already talked a little about going into Bastogne but could you describe a little bit of what you were doing with the 3rd of 501st and how you worked together with the infantry unit?

Mr. Stampus: The role of the of the battalion liaison officer was to assist the battalion commander and his role in supporting the company's because we would have a forward observer team a team of four individuals headed by a lieutenant to with a company and more specifically with a platoon of infantry. In their missions because the first thing artillery liaison officer and also forward observers would do once a company got into a certain area would be to fire the weapons of the battalion to certain key points that might be targets where the enemy would be coming in and as a result they would just fire and assign a number to that specific target so that if it just happened that the enemy would be coming through that area whether it's an open field whether it's a wooded area you could call on fire and you would not have to ingest the fire to get to that target. You would just call concentration number so and so and you would let the artillery fire for effect in those particular targets.

Interviewer: When you were with 3rd of the 501st at Bastogne and working as a forward observer the targets were preplanned and that was the mission that you were doing and the each one of those preplanned targets was in fact fired and adjusted.

Mr. Stampus: That is correct and you might have had four or five targets out there where.

Interviewer: Just to follow up the battalion would register one gun per target.

Mr. Stampus: That is correct.

Interviewer: Would they register a final protective fire with more than one gun did they use the term final protective fire then?

Mr. Stampus: I don't think I've ever been involved with a protective fire. In other words you're thinking of possible the enemy encroaching on your line of defense. No I tell you in the Bastogne area on that first day once we got in contact with the enemy which was about a mile we were about a mile east of Bastogne in a small village of Mont meaning mountain high ground. And we had some fire artillery. I was shooting artillery from that area down to the south side of Neff. Neff even though I may have been encroaching on their but the battalion fire direction center should have alerted me that I was encroaching on their area. The 1st battalion of the 501st you know was in that area and I was quite some distance away and I was firing on some tanks and personnel that I could see in spite of the distance. And while I was up there at that time the radio communication that I had was a big radio unit that was mounted on the jeep with a large antenna and the pack the power was from the battery from the. When we were there you know I was pulled off one of the missions to go inside headquarters because they had established wire communication with a battalion so I went in and talked to the battalion talked to our Major Jones who was our fire direction center Chief. And did what we did I go back to the area that I was observing and that area along with the jeep was hit by artillery or mortar or whatever it was and there goes my first jeep and radio of the day. That evening after being replaced with a new jeep and new radio around 7 or 8 around 7 o'clock in the evening here come the Germans up through that area

up the side of the hill which were all farmlands and pens that were identified with barbed wire in certain section maybe 50 or 75 yards square and their trying to approach into Bastogne through Mont and of course they didn't realize that that area had pens that were of the nature that they would have to climb over them and as a result even though it was dark all of these pens had German soldiers hung up in them that were killed. And that's really what helped the 3rd battalion hold off the attack that evening. Of course that evening I'm in the farmhouse with Colonel Griswold and all and we're we get the 4th of July treatment and of course the first thing Colonel Griswold says is okay Kelly let's get some artillery fire out there. So and I know my sergeant a great guy when he said get out there I felt as though I didn't want to leave the comfort of that farmhouse. Anyway I go out there and here's the jeep all shot up. So who was I working for that day I mentioned later on you know here I have two jeeps two radios in one day, I think that's a record for my battalion.

Interviewer: When you're on the defensive there what was the primary means of communication that you used?

Mr. Stampus: Well to being with we had wire communication but once they started shelling the wire communication was gone you know. And mind you it didn't have these jeeps out where they were you know in the open they were both pretty secure against buildings and they got both of them. Radio was the second line of communication after that you know you hope the fellows on the line the forward observers with the radios did their jobs and they did. So but the one you know I've often been asked what was the most severe situation you were in as far as you know as far as fighting was concerned. And that occurred with the 3rd battalion of the 501st and that was when we went on the attack when the division you know was more or less saved by our tank commanders. And we went to an area where the first battalion was north and east of Bastogne in a wooded area that where I saw the most severe fighting of the war where I was concerned. And that was in the Wajacks area the first day the 3rd battalion attempted to take these woods could not, had to retreat and on the retreat that evening or late afternoon one of the forward observer group in a you know secured area received a couple of tree bursts and this is where one of our well a fellow by the name of John Minick Sergeant John Minick from Toledo, Ohio got killed. And the next day the battalion was told okay you're gonna to go through there again and of course you know at evening. This area very unusual and now you know why did we have to do it this way, was divided by a railroad and here the Germans were on that side the north side of the railroad and we were on the south side and for us and we knew we had to go there the next day and they knew we were coming. That evening you would hear the Germans chopping down the trees in front of them to get fields of fire and boy that was tough that was tough and I know I was. And of course Colonel Griswold a West Pointer before the war was a lieutenant a second lieutenant with the 501 battalion a pioneer in the paratroop field he was fearless and he made you fearless. You'd get artillery fire and he was up there showing no fear showing his manhood you know don't be afraid all that bit that was tough that was tough. And I know he wanted and later on that day he wanted to go and see the companies and see what they were doing. He had no business doing that but any way he's gone but I had a great deal of respect for him.

Interviewer: Were you ever aware that Bastogne had been surrounded?

Mr. Stampus: Oh yes, everybody knew that everybody knew that.

Interviewer: Did you ever have an occasion as an artillery man to know General McCulla?

Mr. Stampus: We General McCulla when I joined the 101st he was the artillery commander and he introduced himself to replacement officers. And there was about a dozen of us that came in at that time of for just the 907th I don't know how many others were involved. But he also at that time as division artillery commander greeted all of us that joined the artillery units. And I know after the war he was very social and you know the fact that he had has no big airs about him his importance was not that much to him and a good indication of that is in Arlington Cemetery he has just a small normal tombstone. And he has a great deal of respect from the 101st.

Interviewer: Do you recall while you were there hearing of his response to the German surrender?

Mr. Stampus: Oh yes everybody heard that. We were really got 101st really got a lot of publicity from that and justifiably so. I know after the you know like the middle of January we were sent down the division was sent down to the Colmar area and I was the advance man to go down there not knowing where the heck I'm going and it came fast. We were told it might be another Bastogne I said don't tell me that. So I know that crew and I when we went down still the middle of winter I'm wearing a GI coat and not much identification and we made one stop overnight to not only sleep but to also get a shave and have some food. And pulled into the headquarters area and they pull a couple of cots in for us and I go into the officers mess and take my coat off and all of those fellows (Mr. Stampus gets upset and the camera is turned off for a bit). How did we leave that?

Interviewer: Well you had just come towards Colmar and you were describing an incident where you stopped.

Mr. Stampus: Oh yeh stopped at a it must have been some kind of a headquarters on the way and we went in there to get a meal and get cleaned and I went into the mess hall and took my coat off GI coat off and those that were there were probably wondering who's this guy. Whose this grubby looking guy so I took my coat off they saw the 101 patch and number of them came over and we chatted they were interested in finding out what was taking place up there and how I felt about it. And I knew when they were questioning me pretty proud.

Interviewer: Great sense of pride.

Mr. Stampus: No question about it.

Interviewer: Do you have any memories of or any anecdotes of Christmas in Bastogne?

Mr. Stampus: No except that I know when our Christmas meal in the field we anticipated that and when it came it came around 10 o'clock in the evening and most of the guys were a sleep and I was up and grabbed some food and ate it the next day but you know once the guys got in the sack and were comfortable a lot of them just didn't care to go out and get some food. But I might add maybe with my group it was that Sergeant John Sinick was with me and he was a nice young man good looking kid a

butcher by trade. Now when we were in Bastogne we didn't have too much food and of course we're out with the infantry 5th battalion and we didn't eat with them we carried our own meals and John whenever we would go close to a house and would have the time he would run in there and get whatever food was there he'd come out he was a great Chef he was very very good at that. He later up in the second day of the Bastogne deal that's after the Bon Shacks area was secured and we were advancing towards Houfalize and as a result we were in a hole a fox hole one night and we got a tree burst and he got his 3 o'clock in the morning I hollow to my other guys give me some help. And got some medics there evacuated him and he went home and that's the last time I saw him even though I had spoken to him over the years. And of course he's pasted away. At my age most of those guys you know are gone. Even in my business associates you know of course I always associated with older people as well. That is okay but in the service I was an old guy in 1944 I was 24 years old and most of the guys were you know two three or four years younger. My battalion commander was five years older but as some of the guys would call me grandpa.

Interviewer: One of the things you had touched on I think when the tape was off was talking about Colonel Griswold and working with him. Infantry guy wants a lot of artillery fire and you're the guy he looks to to make that happen can you talk about that relationship especially a situation like Bastogne or where your supplies are running down?

Mr. Stampus: When supplies were running down in Bastogne we were told by our battalion I was told by my battalion commander you don't shoot any artillery fire until you get my permission. It was the ammunition was so critical that you just couldn't shoot it. So that was when that was when that was told to me that made my job easy. You know I'm out there my purpose is you know furnishing artillery support they've got no support unless it's a very very critical situation. But I will say one thing 907 glider field artillery battalion in the Bastogne area they sat down and established the batteries they had two batteries 6 in each in one location during the seize shot 360 around they'd never got and artillery shell within that area with the area the two batteries. Very very unusual and if you've been to Bastogne where the monument is up on top of the hill it's like 200 yards toward the city from where that monument is now. They did they were very lucky and they did a lot of good work.

Interviewer: Are there any question we didn't ask you that you would like us to ask you?

Mr. Stampus: I don't think so, I will think of them tomorrow.

Interviewer: Will you be coming to the week of the Eagles?

Mr. Stampus: In next year? That's where the reunion will be held right? It's Nashville.

Interviewer: I believe so.

Mr. Stampus: Of course.

Interview: We'd like to stay in contact with you if you've got more stories we'd like those young artillery men to hear them.

Mr. Stampus: Yeh, I've met a few of them.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Mr. Stampus: Thank you.