

It is the 9th of August and we are at the 101st Airborne Reunion and I am interviewing Mr. Pedro Gomez. Now you were saying Mr. Gomez that before the war that you were learning to be a tailor. Do you remember what you were doing on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Mr. Gomez: I was at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

In 1941 you were at Fort Sill, Oklahoma?

Mr. Gomez: Yes, I got drafted.

You had already been drafted. When did you go into the service? Do you remember?

Mr. Gomez: I was in Fort Sill on December 7, 1941. We were at the PX when they announced it publicly.

Did that scare you?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

You knew we were going to war then.

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

What were you trained as initially before you volunteered for airborne? What was your job in the Army?

Mr. Gomez: I joined the Paratroopers in September 1943.

In September 1943 you joined the Paratroopers?

Mr. Gomez: Yes. I got out of jump school and they sent us to Camp McCall. We made some jumps there and we had to go to Fort Bragg by trucks to get the plane there to make the jump in Fort Bragg.

How did you like jumping?

Mr. Gomez: I liked it but it was still scary.

How rigorous was the training; the jump training? Was it hard physically?

Mr. Gomez: It was pretty rough; physical and a lot of running. You get up a 5 o'clock in the morning and run for two hours, come in and take a shower and grab some ___ in a hurry, and then we start all over again all day. Some people didn't make it because the training was rough.

It was very difficult.

Mr. Gomez: If they get out and they take you out, they just keep you out. Some people they would have made it, they wanted to make it, but they couldn't. We went in 130 something and we just made 83. They took a picture of the whole group and they didn't sale those because there was too many that didn't make it. They sold us only one; one person. That is when they got home.

After you finished jump training, now you went to infantry training first right; before jump training?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

You did that at Fort Benning, Georgia?

Mr. Gomez: No, no. I had already had training in field artillery on the 155 Howitzer when I was at Fort Sill. I got out; my father passed away. I didn't know, I was in the field. I had to go home and take care of my grandfather. I would start work at ___ Field, Lackland. They gave me a letter to guide me. They told me six months, I said nine months. Then they sent me to Fort Lewis, Washington. In May or June we went to California to maneuver school. We wanted to get out of that hot stuff so we signed up for Paratrooper.

So you had to stay through the hot maneuvers and then they sent you to Paratrooper training.

Mr. Gomez: Five guys signed up for it.

Five of you?

Mr. Gomez: They told us that after we got to Fort Sill, Oklahoma; three weeks later they sent us to Fort Benning for jump school.

After jump school where did you go from there?

Mr. Gomez: Camp McCall and we got our _____. That is the last _____. That is when we joined the 101st Airborne Division.

So the 101st was in England when you went over?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

How about the trip over; by boat of course.

Mr. Gomez: By boat and it was rough. There were a lot of submarines, we had to maneuver around.

They were worried about the German submarines so the boat had to take some evasive maneuvers.

Mr. Gomez: It took us eleven days to get there.

Eleven days? What were the conditions like on the ship?

Mr. Gomez: The Liberty; it was pretty rough.

Did you have a bed?

Mr. Gomez: No

No beds, where did you sleep?

Mr. Gomez: You couldn't sleep; I couldn't sleep. A lot of guys couldn't sleep. Two or three hours or more; sometimes if the ocean was smooth, you could sleep. But if it was rough, no.

Did you get seasick?

Mr. Gomez: Yes for three days. Some guys never got out of the toilet.

They stayed on the toilet the whole trip? But you didn't have that?

Mr. Gomez: No.

When you arrived in England you were assigned to the 101st.

Mr. Gomez: We landed in Ireland; Belfast, Ireland. Then they sent us in _____, England. Then they sent some to the 82nd and some to the 101st.

You were fortunate enough to get sent to the 101st.

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

At that time you were assigned to the 501?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

Which company were you with?

Mr. Gomez: Company E, 501st.

Easy Company. Was it easy?

Mr. Gomez: No.

This was in 1943 that you went over?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

Was it winter?

Mr. Gomez: No we went over in 1944; February 5, 1944.

Oh February of 1944 is when you went over? So it was cold. You weren't used to the cold were you?

Mr. Gomez: The Ocean was cold because the boat had to open the ice. It had to break the ice.

How was the training once you arrived in England with the 101st?

Mr. Gomez: We did a lot of training before we jumped in Normandy. We had to keep in touch together because we couldn't see; even at 12 o'clock or 3 o'clock in the afternoon you could see a little bit.

Was it because of fog?

Mr. Gomez: Yes because of fog.

How many jumps did you make while you were training in England?

Mr. Gomez: Five in school and I think before we jumped into Normandy; we made quite a few jumps at Fort Bragg and then in England before Normandy we made practice jumps. I don't remember; all together with the company jumps I made 17.

How many combat jumps?

Mr. Gomez: Two.

Normandy and Market Garden?

Mr. Gomez: Holland.

You had a lot of false starts before they actually kicked off Normandy right? You loaded up several times but because of the weather things were cancelled. How did that affect your moral? Were you anxious to go?

Mr. Gomez: Well yeah and everybody thinks that somebody has to do it. We volunteered so we have to do it.

You felt it was the right thing for you to do. Let's talk about June 6, 1944, your jump into Normandy.

Mr. Gomez: We jumped at 1:30 in the morning; 1st Battalion went at 1:30 in the morning; 2nd Battalion went at 1:36 in the morning; six minutes after. I got wounded on the 10th of June and they sent me to England; not only me but many. Some died on the way to the hospital.

So you were wounded on the 10th at Normandy?

Mr. Gomez: Yes at Normandy.

Can you tell me what happened? How were you wounded?

Mr. Gomez: My arm and my leg from shrapnel.

Was it from the artillery?

Mr. Gomez: It was from a hand grenade.

From a German grenade? Were in close combat or were you ambushed?

Mr. Gomez: No, they threw it at us and when it hit the ground it exploded. It wasn't too bad but they sent me back to the division. They gave me the Purple Heart but I didn't get a pension because it wasn't too bad. Some they sent up to the hospital because it was too bad. Some they gave limited service and they stayed not in the division, but with some other division. When we were getting well, they would send us to the division and then we prepared for the invasion of Holland. We jumped into Holland on September 17, it was daytime on a Sunday. That day was pretty nice. It was a nice day but at night it was rough from there on.

Going back to Normandy when you jumped, when you were going out the door were you taking a lot of anti-aircraft fire?

Mr. Gomez: Oh yeah. They were all firing up.

How did that make you feel?

Mr. Gomez: It was terrible to see the tracers coming up. A lot of men got killed on the way down.

When you got down was your unit all together or were you all scattered?

Mr. Gomez: Some were scattered.

How about you? Were you with your squad at all?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

So you had some men there that you knew?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

What was fighting in the hedgerow country like; the China fight?

Mr. Gomez: Well, it wasn't too much of a hassle. But it was pretty rough. I just had four days of combat there and after Normandy when we jumped in Holland; I stayed all the way until we got out. I think it was 73 days in Holland and then three weeks later we headed to Bastogne. We just got back from Holland and they had a breakthrough so they had to grab us and put us in trucks like cows and carrying machine guns and everything. We took Bastogne on December 19, 1944. We went to Lynn Village at 5 o'clock. About 9 o'clock in the morning we got in touch with the enemy. They were firing at us and a bullet hit my helmet. It stayed inside the liner.

A bullet hit your helmet?

Mr. Gomez: Yes. It hit right here and went around and stayed right here in the middle; between the liner and the helmet. I don't remember how long or where it was in Bastogne but they let us rest for 24 hours and there was snow up to our knees and a thing was put in another thing. They said move to the side and so everybody did. I moved too but it wasn't enough and the thing that was pulling was way out here and it came and hit me right here in the back and threw me to the snow. I lost my helmet there. Everybody was saying, "Come on let's go, hurry!" We all scattered and were all scared. I looked for my helmet and couldn't find it.

So you lost your helmet completely? So you didn't even have a hat?

Mr. Gomez: They gave us another one.

So the weather was terrible at Bastogne.

Mr. Gomez: The snow was up to our knees and it was cold. A lot of guys got trench foot; a lot of people. We were lucky we didn't get it.

You were living in holes in the ground right; living in foxholes at Bastogne?

Mr. Gomez: Yes most of the time. They gave us 24 hours to surrender. The German general told General McAuliffe, our general, he would give us 24 hours to surrender. He told him, "Nuts!" He said, "Dig! Come over here and dig!" So that is what we did. I think the English were supposed to help us but they never got in touch with us so the Americans had to come. It was Patton's Third Army and from there we went with them.

Then we got out and headed to Aginaw and then where Hitler was. They bombed the house of Hitler. We went inside the house anyway and it went way up in the hill.

You went up to the Eagles Nest?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

You were there?

Mr. Gomez: Yes we were there and kids were firing at us, kids. They had propaganda. They had one Washington, D.C., Leon Milton, and they gave us a picture like this.

I've never heard that before.

Mr. Gomez: It was propaganda for them so they could believe they were winning the war. But it was the other way around.

It was definitely the other way around.

Mr. Gomez: When the war ended, they told us we had to make another jump to keep jump status until we got out. We made the jump December 1945 and I got out December 2, 1945, so everybody got it for jumping. Then they sent us home. I got out December 2, 1945.

So you got out of the Army on December 2, 1945?

Mr. Gomez: I got out here at Fort Sam.

I want to ask you some questions about the campaigns. Market Garden; when you jumped into Holland the historians called it Operation Market Garden. That was the name of the operation. You said it was a daytime jump. Did you have any resistance on the ground when you jumped?

Mr. Gomez: No, nobody fired at us. We jumped at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. Some guys came back from Normandy; one guy was from New Orleans and he was a French guy and he said, "I want to see combat, I want to see combat." Nobody would tell him anything. One of the guys said, "If you stay here you will see plenty." When we jumped into Holland, we were in front and he was in front of us. When they started firing at us, he was way back there.

He ran?

Mr. Gomez: Yeah and he started getting sick and his stomach ached. We all told him to go to a medic. Everybody didn't want it. It makes you scared more than him.

Sure because you can't depend on him. Was he a replacement or was he with the unit the whole time?

Mr. Gomez: He was a replacement after Normandy.

How were the replacements treated? After Normandy you had a lot of people wounded in combat. How were they treated when they came into the unit?

Mr. Gomez: They were treated pretty nice. We trained together like when we were in jump school, together. Everybody was treated the same.

So the old-timers, the vets, took care of the young kids coming in to try to help them.

Mr. Gomez: Yes. I remember in Bastogne one of the replacements had gone marching back and they started firing at us and he left it about 20 feet and went back. I called to get ammunition because we needed ammunition and I got it back. They fired at me but I was crawling. Anyway I got that ammunition back. This guy was a young guy, he was younger than me. He said, "Thank you!" I said, "Don't thank me, thank God because we are together. We have to help each other." I don't remember if he came back or not. He went with us in Bastogne. There are a lot of people here from World War II. Last night I called one of my friends. He couldn't make it. He was in the Holland invasion. He didn't make Normandy. He got there when we were already on the way to Normandy. On the second bus he came in. He wanted to come over here but he got sick. He got hit right here pretty bad; but he is still living.

How well were the casualties taken care of? If you were wounded did you feel confident if you got hurt that you would have a medic there to take care of you?

Mr. Gomez: Oh yeah. The medic that we had, every time you would call him, he was right there. From there on if you needed to be sent to the hospital, they would send you to the hospital or they would treat you.

When you got evacuated to England were there good medical people there; the doctors and nurses took good care of you?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

How were you lucky enough; usually if you got wounded once you got healed and they sent you back you could wind up anywhere? How were you lucky enough to get back to your old unit?

Mr. Gomez: I liked to get back to it. I don't think that if they go to the front and I don't go because we are together.

You felt like you belong there with them.

Mr. Gomez: Yeah. This guy was taken to; they sent him to the hospital and they wanted to send him to the states because he got hurt bad; but he wanted to go back with us. They didn't send him over to the states. He didn't make it to the division but he got back. Another guy, his name was Heraldez and he was from Los Angeles. We were in line together and he was next to me. They asked to get two Pathfinders from each company. They said you and you; he got one of them. He jumped as a Pathfinder and he got captured. After the end of the war he was pretty close to our unit. He went and talked to our company and lieutenant commander and he wanted to stay. He wanted to join the 501 again. He wasn't mad at the Germans. He said that they treated him good. They said, "Go and fight the Japs." He said, "No I don't want to fight the Japs, I want to fight the Germans." Anyway they sent him home.

They sent him back to the states. In Holland, you said that when you first jumped in you had no resistance.

Mr. Gomez: It was at night from that night on.

It was continuous for more than two months?

Mr. Gomez: One of my friends lost an eye from hand to hand fighting in Holland that night. He lives in Riverside, California, and I wrote him a letter about the division but I don't know if he thought it was the division. But I told him about the division here. I never heard from him. When he wanted to find out about a 1st Lieutenant from Company E, I told him. I had a copy of two letters with the 101st with the company and I haven't heard from him. I don't know what happened.

Who was your commander?

Mr. Gomez: The company commander at that time, the commander was Morgan.

Your platoon commander was Lieutenant Morgan? How was he; talk about him; was he good?

Mr. Gomez: Oh yeah. He was very nice. Before Normandy they had charcoal to put on their face. I told him, "I don't have to, I am dark. I'm a charcoal Indian from Oklahoma." I had to put it on too. We all had to put it on. My complexion is bright. He was very nice. In Holland we had a good friend, his name was Frats. Some boys were mean and made fun of him because he didn't see combat in Normandy.

He was a replacement too. Was Morgan wounded?

Mr. Gomez: No he was a replacement from the states. He took over as a commander of us. When we jumped in Holland, he didn't have any business going in front of us or the scouts. We said, "Lieutenant, stay back." He wanted to show those guys. The day, my birthday was December 22, he got killed; five days in combat. Everybody liked him except those smartelic guys. It's all the time somebody that way.

Do you think it is because he was so new that is why he got killed; because he didn't know yet; he was still trying to learn?

Mr. Gomez: Oh yeah; who knows, nobody knows until you get there. We kept telling him to go back but he kept going in front of us and he got killed. Another guy he was from Pennsylvania, his name is Wilson, he said, "Gomez, what a birthday!" They were firing at us.

Artillery and machine guns; fireworks for your birthday.

Mr. Gomez: In Holland, our regimental commander, Colonel Johnson, he got killed. He was on the front lines too. He had no business there. He wanted to see what we were doing. On the way back artillery shells came in and the General _____, he took over. In Holland I made Sergeant because a lot of guys got killed. I had to take his place. I took over until the end of Holland. I didn't want that sergeant because I didn't have much school. That is why I returned it.

But you had the experience, you could lead.

Mr. Gomez: They said, "You have to take it." I said, "No I don't because if something happens and I have to answer the phone and I do something wrong then I pay for it."

You must have done something right because you survived the whole war from Normandy all the way to the end.

Mr. Gomez: I refused the sergeant. I took over the squad until the end of the Holland invasion. But when we got back I told them that I didn't want it. I was afraid that I would do something wrong so I didn't take it.

When they pulled you out of Holland, you went to France. It was supposed to be for R & R and resupply of equipment and things like that. But you were only there for only a short time right?

Mr. Gomez: Yes for three weeks and then we went back into Bastogne.

Then they trucked you into Belgium. Did you have all of the equipment that you were supposed to have?

Mr. Gomez: Yes. You know what they did? They made us take off the 101st patch and unblouse the boots.

Unblouse the boots so you will look like foot soldiers.

Mr. Gomez: Yes; like if we were coming from the states, nothing at all. We had to pull it off in Holland because if the enemy knew we were there they would take any of us. That is why they did that.

Did you have enough blankets, tents, coats and things to keep you warm in Bastogne?

Mr. Gomez: We had an overcoat but it was a lot of weight but we couldn't take it. It was too heavy. Sometimes we had to run. We had all of this and we had long johns. I didn't want to take an overcoat; a lot of guys didn't want to. We had them but I didn't want to carry them. It was too heavy with ammunition and everything.

How about at night, how did you stay warm?

Mr. Gomez: By continually moving.

How about when you slept?

Mr. Gomez: We couldn't sleep.

No sleep?

Mr. Gomez: Well just for a few minutes. One guy we were at a point on a post and Cummings started snoring and the enemy could hear you. We kicked him and told him to stop snoring. He said, "I'm not snoring, I am resting."

It must have been exhausted. Your cold and you can't sleep. What were you being fed?

Mr. Gomez: Sometimes nothing at all.

Sometimes you didn't get fed at all?

Mr. Gomez: No. We had K-rations.

But they weren't; did you have a way to heat them up, to get them hot or did you eat them cold?

Mr. Gomez: Cold; I remember in Holland, I think it was two days we were in a little village. We asked for hot water and an old lady came out. We had a little book that was in German, we need some hot water. She said, "Okay." We put it in our helmet and we shaved outside. We offered her some money. She said, "No." So we gave them K-rations.

The K-rations, she was hungry too.

Mr. Gomez: they didn't want any money, where would they spend it?

How could your mind take the cold, nowhere to get warm, cold food? How did you carry on? How did you keep going?

Mr. Gomez: I don't know I'm still here.

I know you are still here so you did but I mean with that type of hardship?

Mr. Gomez: We were cold; we had to move around. A lot of people got frozen feet and trench foot.

There was probably a lot of frostbite too; fingers and toes.

Mr. Gomez: Oh yeah. We got a lot of frosts in England around May or June. We could hardly see each other. In France it was different; not as damp.

Did you get a lot of snow in Bastogne?

Mr. Gomez: Oh yes, a lot of snow; up to the knees. It got so cold that when you stepped on the snow, it was just ice.

The snow would freeze on top that it was so cold that when you stepped on it would break into ice?

Mr. Gomez: Yes. It was so cold that when you stepped on it, it cracked. Me and another guy went to the front lines of our post and I had two guys at that time that I had to post. Another guy was in charge of the two guys. At night he came over there and he wanted us out of there and he would take over. I told him no and that we had to be there until a certain time and that when we got off, then he could take over. We were still arguing and they were still firing at us.

This was at night?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

Now in the daytime you couldn't move at all from hole to hole could you, because the Germans had you surrounded.

Mr. Gomez: No. We started arguing because I didn't want to come out of there until we got done. The Germans would hear us arguing and they would start firing mortar shells. It ended the argument.

When you broke out of Bastogne, Patton's Third Army came up and helped you break out. Where did you go then?

Mr. Gomez: We went to Haginaw and from there we went to Berchtesgaden and that was the end of the war.

That was the rest of the winter and on to the spring.

Mr. Gomez: We spend in Haginaw, two months and after that the 36th Airborne Division relieved us. No we relieved the 36th and the 42nd relieved us and then they took us to Berchtesgaden and that was the end of the war.

Again by trucks; no airborne this time.

Mr. Gomez: No. The MP's were directing the traffic and some guys of ours were like, "Who won the war?" "MP's", you know there is always somebody.

The infantry always has something to say to the MP's.

Mr. Gomez: Then the unit had to make a jump to keep their jump status.

Now they did tell you, did they not, that you may be going to Japan? Did they tell you that you might have to go to Japan after the war was over in Europe?

Mr. Gomez: No, no, no. When we got back from Holland, General Taylor came to Washington and he wanted to send us to the Pacific. He put General McAuliffe in charge and he took over while he was in Washington trying to get us over there.

So he was trying to get you to Japan?

Mr. Gomez: Yes, trying to get the division to Japan.

Now after the war was over, after V-E Day, after the victory in Europe in May....

Mr. Gomez: I don't know where he wanted to send us but right after Holland; he let General McAuliffe take over the division when he was gone. When he came back they didn't send anybody because I guess they said the war was ending over there. When we got out they asked if we wanted to stay. I didn't want to stay; some people did and people don't.

At the end of the war you had enough points that you could get out right away?

Mr. Gomez: No, I had 89 points. That is when they sent if you had less than 100 to the 506th and the 502nd. The _____, 502nd, and 506th got sent to the 101st. The high points of the 101st, they sent them to the states. We came in the second bunch. I had 89 points.

So they kept you in Europe?

Mr. Gomez: Yes, we came in, in the second bunch.

So in November they sent you home?

Mr. Gomez: Yes.

Another troop ship coming back from Europe?

Mr. Gomez: No, it was the same Liberty boat we came on and the weather was better than when we went over. When we went over the weather was bad. We took off from Norfolk, Virginia, and went back to Norfolk, Virginia on the way back. I thought we were going to land in New York.

So you didn't get to see New York?

Mr. Gomez: No, I didn't. I had a lot of friends over there. Me and another guy from, he went to Special Forces; at the end of the war in Bastogne we had two from each company and this guy was with me. He was from there. We stayed together until the end of the war. He's from New York.

At the end of the war did you get to meet any girls; did you meet any German girls or French girls?

Mr. Gomez: Well let me tell you when we were over there, if they seen you talking to a German girl they charged you \$65.00.

Fraternization will get you in trouble.

Mr. Gomez: They would take it out of your pay. Nobody wanted to talk to them.

How about the German kids; the little kids?

Mr. Gomez: Well when you were eating, when they gave us the food I would put it on top of the _____ that I was going to give away. This side I would eat and we gave it to these young people. Some would ask, "Why would you give it." I said, "Leave them alone it's not their fault!" We would give and some guys would not give.

Some guys were bitter and it's understandable; different things affect people differently. Your attitude towards the Germans is a very positive one really. You can understand though why some people have a very negative attitude.

Mr. Gomez: It could happen to us too if they were over here. Some people got mad because they were sent overseas to help the armed forces. I told one guy, "This is the service." I said, "If we don't go, they come over here." If you don't want to go get out of the service. But somebody has to do it; somebody has to go.

You are justifiably proud that you did your part.

Mr. Gomez: Yes I am.

You did what needed to be done t protect our country.

Mr. Gomez: Somebody had to do it and we did it.

God Bless those who do. I thank you!

(end of tape)

This transcript was completed on April 26, 2009.