

Wright: Wilbur H Wright, I was born in Nashville, Tennessee. I was in the Army 5th Army 88th Division 5th Army. Well I was 17 years old when I first heard of Pearl Harbor being bombed and of course we hadn't gotten into the war with Germany at that time. We went in conflict with Germany I think in 1942. But I took it pretty serious as a young boy I wanted to do my part. I was in high school still in senior year in high school. Would have graduated probably in 1942. But I was in the first draft of 18 and 19 year olds. Congress approved that in 1942 and I had to go to 1943 to graduate. And the principle of the school got us, there was 50 of us at draft age, and he got us all deferred six months until we could finish high school. And I took it real serious I wanted to do my part and instinct of a young boy you wanted to fight you know. You wanted to get in there and do the fighting. And I took it real serious you had to go register at the draft board and they filled out papers on you and they mailed you a selective service letter telling you when to report to your selective service board. And then it went from there then you get another letter telling you where to meet with your draft board they'd march you to the train station. You'd take the train to Tullahoma they had a well I guess it would be a I don't know whether you would call it, well it was an Army camp selective service board. And they'd give you a physical your eyes your physical examination all that occurred with you. And you'd float back home all by train then you'd get another letter telling you to report to your draft board and they'd take you to the union station. You wound up at Fort Oglethorpe Georgia for after you was drafted. It was physical after physical and trip after trip and back then they had ole train cars that they'd go through a tunnel up in Chattanooga and the soot and stuff out of the steam engine would come through those windows and you'd be filthy by the time you got to Fort Oglethorpe Georgia. And you went through ole they fit you with clothes and you stayed there a week or two then they assigned you to the army camp that you were going to be assigned to which mine was Camp Wheeler Georgia. Well I was sent to Camp Atterbury Indiana and from there to a camp up in up in Pennsylvania I forget the city. Then I wound up at Norfolk Camp Patrick Henry Virginia pretty close to the coast. And shipped out from there overseas but it was quite an experience. You make new buddies, new friends you knew you was going overseas and you didn't know where you were going or all secrete orders. But of course during war time the period of war time things are different. The captain of the ship we pulled out into harbor at Norfolk Virginia the captain of the ship didn't know where he was going. After he got underway my understanding was he got the secrete order to where he was heading and it was they didn't divulge it to us but we wound up in Casablanca Africa North Africa. Now the ship this was a period of time when the Germany U-boats submarines were real active and primarily in the Atlantic Ocean. And the ship took a zig zagged course every 15 minutes. You could stand up on the deck and watch the wake in the ship you could set your watch by it every 15 minutes that ship zig zagged all the way across the Atlantic Ocean. Submarines it takes them, we understood, maybe 15, 20 minutes to zero in on a ship to fire a torpedo. So every 15 minutes that ship would turn, it was amazing. (There seemed to be a skip in the interview) Combat had done left North Africa and had gone into Italy, Sicily and Italy. We had to crawl we stayed two weeks in North Africa in a Danube passage camp. Danube Passage was the first man killed in combat in North Africa with American forces and they named that camp after him, Camp Danube Passage. And we took a train across the dessert to Oran Africa it took us three days to cross the dessert by it was forty and eight they called it forty and eight narrow gauge railroad tracks. Forty and eight boxcars these small boxcars would hold forty horses' eight men or forty horses or vise versa. Some of us could sleep while the others stood up. They put at least bag of water in a boxcar several boxcars some of you had to stand up while the others slept, now this was a three day journey. And they'd stop at every little cow path. And we wound up in Oran and we stayed there several days and they boarded us on ship in a convoy and crossed the Mediterranean and we ran into German U-boats in the Mediterranean. They dropped death charges, we was forced to put on life jackets on deck incase the ship got sunk. And we wound up in Naples Italy at the dock in Naples Italy. (There seemed to be a skip in the interview) I was in the 5th Army under Mark Clark, General Mark Clark. And the British were on the East Coast and we took the 5th Army took the

middle of Italy. We went through Apnea Mountains, Pole Valley across the Pole Valley. I was in all three major battles in Italy. We were sent to a replacement, 2nd replacement depot out of Naples Italy and the battle began in Belgium and Germany, you've heard of the Battle of the Bulge. They broke through our lines, the Germans did, 65 roughly 65 miles. One of the worst battles I guess in military history was the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. Well they were so many men getting killed and wounded they were drawing troops out of other military groups to make up men to send into reinforce the troops in Belgium and they put me in the rangers ranger training and which was real rough training. We had two weeks training in ranger training. Then they sent me and my group to different divisions. They sent me to the 88th Division 5th Army 88th Division and sent me to the front lines. And I had been promoted to Corporal which then was a squad leader and I was assigned 12 men in a squad. (There seemed to be a skip in the interview) But now I've been to _____ they done a lot of the air force done a lot of bombing. They just leveled that place. The Germans had it occupied for several years and I counted, this sounds unrealistic, we got pinned down in a wheat field in Italy this side of the Apnea Mountains and I was lying in a wheat field on my back. I counted five hundred bombers numerous size, B17's, B24's different size bombers they were in groups. I laid on my back, had nothing else to do we was pinned down and here they come over pretty low you could oh they was flying 500 feet I guess over us. But they was on their way to bomb Cascina and that sounds like a lot of planes but that wasn't unusual. They'd send 1,000 planes to bomb Berlin Germany and that wasn't unusual a 1,000 planes in an armada. But I counted 500 hundred laying on my back and lost count I just quit counting. I don't know might have been quite a number more but that's a lot of planes. But I was sitting in an army truck down below Cascina a little further on up as we moved on up into further into enemy territory. We was sitting in an army truck and we could see what was left of Cascina but I wasn't in that fighting of that area at all. They'd leave us on the front line maybe two or three weeks then they'd pull us off to a rest area like a bidwack area and that was relief for us. Then you'd stay there maybe two or three weeks and they'd move us up to another area and we'd relieve another company. But it was well it's hard to explain but it would get you confusing. You never did know how long you was going to stay on the front. Now I got wounded twice and I was in the hospital liked a week being three months. I was in Florence Italy Leghorn Italy in the hospital and they moved me up to Pembina Italy up in the North West point of Italy on the Tyrrhenian Sea that occupied Italian Hospital to treat the wounded. And I stayed there I had two of the operations but you'd stay a while on the front and they'd pull you off and relieve you. We moved up across at night nighttime and I was standing with my platoon behind the company commander. There was a farm a German farm and occupied German farmhouse sitting on a hill and you could see it visually at night it was sort of a moonlight night. He called for artillery support on that hill and I was standing right behind him, he had a radio man with him, and he moved us out before the artillery started falling. And you'd get short rounds in artillery fire they've got an artillery observer he stays pretty well with your company. But those short rounds fell on us and we had a company a full strength company it was probably 200 or more men. And you were short a lot of men because due to being wounded and killed and a full strength company though is about 200 men. Well we at the base of this hill when rounds started falling on us and you could hear men screaming. My lieutenant got hit in the helmet with a slab of shrap metal knocked him down, I jumped on him, it had done got dark, it was dark, to see if he was hurt. He said no, I'm not hurt but where's my helmet? Well we fooled around and helmet and a piece of shrap metal had hit him in the forward part of his helmet knocked him down put a crease in it. If he hadn't had that helmet on it would have killed him see. So he come up to me, they called a little powwow some of the officers did, and he come to me he said take you squad and go up and take that farmhouse. I said well lieutenant I don't have but three men in my squad, now I was squad leader I had 12 men. Several of them had been killed several wounded. He said I'll get you another squad he said he went and got me another squad form another platoon brought me eight or ten more men over there. Well I started leading them up that hill and it was over it had been raining a little bit and the ole muddy bank was slick. I got up the bank and

I got up to near that farmhouse and I looked around and there wasn't a man behind me. Well there I was by myself nobody behind me I looked up and turned around and here come a man, I said where the rest of the men are? He said they couldn't get up that slick bank he said they'll get up here directly. Well I heard some American talking and I told this fellow I said where's that coming from? Another platoon had come around and flanked what they call flanked that farmhouse from another end. They took seven Germans out of it took prisoners. Well a lieutenant come to me and said y'all take two and go up the top of that hill and dig in up there. So we get up the top of the hill it had done gotten dark, we was trying to decide where to dig in to secure that hill. I stepped in the face of two Germans in a machine gun nest. You could see their head sticking out about that high. I come near stepping right in their face. I throwed that M1 rifle on them, they come out with their hands up. The sergeant said you and another guy take them down to that farmhouse see if they question them get some information out of them. Well we did and my lieutenant got me he said Wright I just come out of a powwow with the we gotta make a forward attack on a and make an outpost about 400 hundred yards north of here. Get Sargent Fraley to bring the platoon back down to the farmhouse we'll push off from here. He said you know where they are at. So I took off by myself trying to find where they were, I knew pretty well the location. As I got up pretty well close to where they were the Germans started throwing mortar fire on us coming over my head hitting in the valley down below and they just kept getting closer behind me. And I hollered for Sargent Fraley and I never will forget what he said. I said get the platoon we've got to make a forward outpost get them down to the farmhouse, about that time a shell went off behind me and blowed me probably ten, fifteen foot I don't know I didn't get up and measure. But it blowed me unconscious I was unconscious. Hit the ground and woke me up and I was stinging all over. I hollered Sargent Fraley I'm hit and I never will forget what he said never have forgot it, "what do you want me to do come down there and get hit too." I never did forget that, you were supposed to help each other you know. So a fellow next to me he said he hollered over he knew me I don't remember who he was, he said, "Wright are you hit bad?" I said, "I'm stinging all over I don't know." He said well there's another guy got hit in his back he said I'll try to get y'all down to that farmhouse there's medics down there. He got us down to the farmhouse and I told my lieutenant I was hit, he said well I tell you what you've got to go get off that line you've got to get that shrap metal you've got to get medical attention he said let that medic examine you over there. He examined me and poured sulfur powder on my wounds and he said go down the back of this house old farmhouse had two floors in it. He said there's a bunch of wounded in the basement of this farmhouse. He said let them tend to you and they'll take care of you. So I wound up I wound up in another farmhouse they started shelling us again and these medics were carrying little patients down to this farmhouse. They started shelling us again and we dropped them little they did the medics they dropped the litters that they was carrying the wounded on. There was about 15 or 16 of them the rest of us could walk, I could walk alright. But I had shrap metal in me and they had to get it out. But anyway we laid there until four o'clock in the morning. That house was full of wounded oh I don't know 50 to 100 of them in there they was medic treating them the best they could. And this officer said fellow get over there lay down and get you some sleep they are going to try and move y'all out in the morning. So they woke us up at four o'clock in the morning, we walked from four now I could walk I wasn't walking too good but I was walking. They was carrying 15 or 16 little patients on litters and we ran into probably 15, 20, 30 German prisoners that they was taking back to the rear they had captured. And they'd give us a break, we walked from four o'clock in the morning this is in the Apany Mountains hilly country. We walked from four o'clock in the morning to roughly five o'clock in the evening until we got. See they couldn't get they didn't have helicopters then to haul the wounded out and jeeps and trucks couldn't get up in them mountains a lot of mountain areas you know. And we had to walk out they had to carry you out or you had to walk out if you was wounded. It's not like today this was 72 or 3 years ago. They didn't have the helicopters that they've got today. In fact we didn't know what a helicopter was back then. But anyway we got to this little town, there was wounded laying

everywhere. They was laying on the streets, church pews inside the churches some of them hollering, screaming. And they was trying to wait on them the best they could. Well here come the ambulances, they picked me up pretty quick, I didn't have to wait too long. And they took me to Florence Italy and I was on in Florence Italy and they moved me to Leghorn Italy on the West Coast. Then I stayed there two weeks and they moved me to _____ Italy up north, North West corner of Italy. I stayed there roughly two months had two other operations and discharged me. They discharged me around the first of January 1944 and sent me right back to the front lines. We manned defense positions after I got out of the hospital up in the mountains the other side of Bologna, Bologna Italy. And in the snow it come oh several feet of snow two or three feet up to our waist. And we manned defense positions near the front lines for two weeks about two weeks. Then we moved from that location to relief area 15 or 20 miles back off the front. You had to walk everywhere see I was in the infantry. Had to walk nearly everywhere you went, we had to walk about 15 miles back to this area for sort of relief area. And we got worried we was going to have to cross the Pole River and the Germans had retreated across the Pole River on the other side. I had a man in my platoon which is a good friend of mine a good buddy he was he stayed with the company commander sort of a body guard you might say with the company commander and he carried a Thompson machine gun. Well we waited in the rain it started raining we waited in the rain for amphibious ducks to come up and take us across the river. So it got to getting late in the evening and the commander said we've got to get across this river before it gets dark. Somebody found five rubber German rafts that they had left on our side. We confiscated those rubber rafts and put two men in each raft and the lieutenant told me said you stay last to make sure all the men get across y'all get that last raft. We got caught in a whirlpool in the Pole River oh I guess it was probably a half acre taking us around in circles. And they were firing tank guns at us the Germans were and firing mortars at us in that river. And we were in a rubber raft, I can't swim, I was scared to death. There was three of us that raft, there wasn't supposed to be but two, but we got and didn't have no paddles we was picking up boards plants we could find for paddles. But we got across without getting injured my buddy climbed a tree to spot that German tank. A sniper shot him, killed him, he fell roughly 50 foot down a base the base of the tree. And we put him in for a Silver Star _____ awarded him but he got killed. But anyway he spotted that tank and had an artillery observer with him and they opened artillery fire from our side and knocked that tank out. They brought those ducks over later, we'd done crossed the river when those ducks got to us. We was crossing a canal real rough moving canal of water a double canal. They brought these amphibious ducks up and they would hold 20 men and we had our packs, a rifle, all our ammunition. We'd get in that duck and they had been bombing shell holes along the bank of this canal, this duck slid off I was on the low side 20 of us in this duck with all our gear on steel helmet and all. That duck slid off in that canal that dirt give away with it and it was sitting like that. Now I've told this, it's hard to believe, I don't know where this bulldozer come from, we didn't have a bulldozer with us. That bulldozer put a train around that amphibious duck and pulled us out of that shell hole. Now I don't know where he come from one of them big bulldozers. Now whether it was German troops had it on that side but I think God played a hand in that. I don't know where that see the bridge had done been blown out on our side they blew the _____ bridge out. And vehicles couldn't come over the bridge, where that tank came from I don't know but he saved us, pulled us out of that shell hole. That is one thing after another now we got to a point in, have you ever heard of Verona Italy, Verona? I helped take Verona Italy I volunteered and was awarded the Bronze Star for it. They brought four T34 hellcat tank destroyers four of them up. They formed a spearhead to go into Verona to take Verona. They had four tank destroyers they called them T34 hellcats had a big long gun on them. I turned around to my lieutenant and said can I take a squad of our men and ride that last tank. He said if you hadn't got no more sense get a squad of our men get on that tank if you want to do it. I took 12 men got on that tank and we road on top of them tanks 35 miles into German territory and took the town of Verona as it got dark. And we had a number of skirmishes throughout the whole period of time there. They had blowed

a German tank was in a roadblock at the edge of this town one of them big Panzer German tanks. He fired a tank round and hit the tank that the company commander was on the lead tank killed the tank driver, blew the turret off the tank. And we were the last tank we heard the explosion and we moved up and to see what was going on. They had fired a 20 millimeter ack-ack gun and hit my company commander in the side and blew him off of the tank he was on. He slid in that canal the ____ canal down there the radio man jumped off of the tank and pulled him out of the canal saved his life and I never saw him anymore. But we took that tank driver prisoner. He come out of the tank one of our tanks fired a round that Panzer tank and the driver come out. He surrendered and we took him prisoner of course. But we went into Verona at eleven about eleven o'clock that night awful awful fire fight. I don't remember killing any but there were dead Germans laying everywhere. This tank I was on fired now this the moon had come out it was sort of a little light at night. He took his tank gun there was a German truck they thought it was their troops retreating see into Verona. They didn't know we was coming in on them. He took that tank gun hit a German truck and I saw fifteen, twenty Germans running to jump in that truck an open top truck. He took that tank gun and fired around hit that truck it wasn't nothing left of it. And here come two on a motorcycle and a side car they come down this side road and I wasn't a hundred foot from them. They was going to make a quick getaway, he took that tank gun hit that motorcycle blew it all over the street arms and legs went everywhere. But its war is horrible it's a horrible thing. But I wound up in occupation and spent a couple of months in occupation then I was sent home and I flew back in a B17 bomber from Naples to Casablanca. They called it the Green Project I had high points. I had the Bronze Star and Purple Heart and this and that gives you higher points. They was sending the high point men back home and flying them back to get them back we were supposed to go take Japan. And the war ended we got word I was in the air playing over the Atlantic Ocean when the pilot come in on the intercoms said the war's over they signed a surrender the Japs and they said we're on the way home. So I stayed a while in a couple of camps and they sent me to Fort Oglethorpe George to discharge me. Put me in the military police and assigned me to a bus station in Fort Oglethorpe. I had seven MPs under me, I was a Platoon Sargent and I had seven MPs working under me. But then I got discharged. (Tape shifts to photographs) Basically they were like us, I was around them quite a bit and a lot of them could speak English. In fact I got an assignment to carry Naval German high ranking Naval Officer from Trento up in Northern Italy to Rimini Italy an all day journey I was by myself with him and two German drivers to turn him over to the British. The British was on the Adriatic Sea side of Italy and he had been responsible for laying a minefield in the Adriatic Sea and I got orders to take him and take to Rimini Italy and turn him over. And he could speak perfect English the nicest fellow you wouldn't have wanted to be around any nicer fellow, high ranking they were German they could speak perfect English. I was in the backseat with him, he turned around to me he said Sargent how long have you been in the army? I told him, he said what state you from? I said Tennessee, he looked up he said beautiful state he said I was over in your state in 1939. Said I've got a sister lives in Dallas Texas and he said that's beautiful country up there said I love those mountains. Oh just like talking to you he was and he was a high ranking German. I've talked to German soldiers a lot of them could speak English. Hitler saw to that that they could in high school could learn English because he was wanting to take the world over you see. And they were I've talked to them in fact when we took that castle where I got all the weapons and stuff, they built a bonfire we'd swap rations. They were just like us you couldn't have told any difference if they didn't have their uniform on. They were good people now there were certain elements of the German Army Gestapo and they had an army called War Mont War Mont I believe I can't spell it but they was tough troops. Gestapo they were the secret police they were brutal they were brutal. They had a high ranking his name was Himmler he was right next to Hitler. He was the most vicious man in the German Army he was responsible for killing thousands and thousands of people German Jews. And he was a vicious man I've got a picture of him at home and I've got a picture of two German Generals that was over the German Army in Italy 8 x 10 pictures of them. I've got a few things left at home but this is a

Gestapo pin a German compass, a Gestapo stamp I took a Gestapo stamp and stamped that to get the emblem up. That's a German belt buckle and so on. I remember where I was standing when they announced that President Roosevelt had died. I remember exactly where I was standing in Italy of course. We were still fighting and it was before I got wounded. They announced over a loud speaker system that President Roosevelt had just died and the President Truman, I'd never heard of President Truman I didn't know, he was the vice-president of course. But a young man I had never heard of President Truman, Vice-President Truman. But anyway I thought well the war will never end you know. But President Truman came in there and he took over and he was responsible for the Atomic bomb that ended the war. And shortly after he took over as president, Roosevelt died in April I believe April 16th 45, and Truman come in as vice-president took over they were creating the atomic bomb then. They had done had it perfected I'm sure. But he gave the order to drop it and it saved, if we had invaded Japan there had been millions of American troops killed if we had invaded Japan. But that ended the war and I've got a picture of the Enola Gay a friend gave me his daddy worked on the Enola Gay and Tenia Island and Okinawa. Enola Gay was stationed on those two points and his daddy when he died his daddy died I was working in the police department and we had a dark room and he brought some pictures down. He said these pictures of the Enola Gay my daddy worked on it and he said I'd appreciate it if you're copy it and make some copies of it. So he said make you a copy of it. So I got a copy of the Enola Gay that come from his daddy who was dead and anyway it's a lot of stories.