

Interviewer: We are here with Mr. Joseph Beyrle a veteran of the 506th parachute infantry regiment of the 101st Air Borne division during WWII. This interview is being conducted in San Antonio Texas during the 101st reunion the 9th of August 2001. The interview is being conducted by Scott Showner and John O'Brien of the Pratt Museum. Joe if you could start off and tell us a little bit about your entry into the Army.

Beyrle: Okay I was a young man I graduated from high school on June 7th 1942 I was 18 years old two months later I was 19 years old. I did not pass from the first to the second grade because I could not speck English well enough we spoke German at home. And that's why I was a year behind and graduated a year late. And after I graduated on the 7th of June during that previous time I had played sports in high school and I was a pretty good runner and a baseball player and I had a scholarship to Notre Dame. And I went down and signed up for that and I was supposed to go back on the 15th to start orientation and stuff and I came home earlier from that and all of my buddies were going into the service and everything. So I made up my mind that I was going to join the Army we were at war at that time. So I went down to the recruiting officer, I had never received a draft notice or anything and signed up for the Army. I knew the reason I didn't go to school was I knew I would be there six months and get drafted with my age. So I was sworn in at Kalamazoo Michigan we moved to Camp Custard Michigan I was given a uniform and all the induction stuff sworn oath and everything. We were there for about four or five days and then we were during that time a guy a solder came in a noncom came in and said we're offering any men that want to join the Air Borne a real good deal. And the first question was what is the Air Borne? And he said that is the parachute troops. There was about 12 or there was 12 of us in our group and three of us finally volunteered for the paratroops. What made us volunteer for the paratroops was \$50 extra a month jump pay. So with that a day later being my name being Beyrle I was put in charge of a 12 man group to go to duty. We were put on a train to Camp Custard and we ended up in Tacoma Georgia about a day and a half later. It was in the evening getting dark the Sargent met us there with a 6 x 6 and piled us into a 6 x 6 truck and he says we're going to Camp Tombs. And as we started out he says we're going to take highway 13 and we're going to pass a casket factory. There is nothing symbolic about it it just happens that way by the way he says Camp Tombs has now been changed to Camp Tacoma. We got to Camp Tacoma we quartered us in "W" Company and we were there for a day we had some more physicals we had some we were interviewed and I was one of them that was picked out of many to be interviewed by Colonel Sink. And the first question he asked me he said why in the hell do you want to be a paratrooper? And I had since enough not to say by that time I knew better I didn't mention the 50 bucks I said because I understand we're going to be elite troops after our training and that's the kind of outfit I want to be in. He says okay soldier your going to be part of my organization but we're going to make it real tough on you. He says if you fall out at anytime time during the training he says you're going back to "W" Company and you will be gone by morning. So with that I left I was taken to "I" Company introduced to the First Sargent Garrison and I was assigned to company headquarters. I was about 6'2" at that time still growing and then I went through we took our basic infantry training there and our AIT training there at Tacoma. We also took A and B stage parachute training. And this lasted for approximately two and half months and we had an obstacle course we had a 34 foot jump tower we had everything we needed and we used to do calisthenics everything was done on a double. We trained in olive grab over alls and then our dress uniform for parade was blue trumps

with a parachute patch on it. And after we started A stage we got jump boots and that was very unusual because when we went to Benning wearing jump boots not qualified it was not very well received in Air Borne school. But anyway we to get to the rifle range there was no rifle range at Camp Tacoma there was a rifle range at Clemson College there was a military school at Clemson South Carolina so we marched 48 miles to the rifle range and they bid whacked and shedder halves and stuff for about five days or so and then we marched back 48 miles. And we had no jeeps or anything the General I mean Colonel Sink had a 1939 Ford sedan that was the only vehicle anything we got trucks or anything was support they came from someplace else. Everyplace we went we went double time we run the mountain double time we run anywhere from three to five days a week. We trained real hard for four days sometimes five days sometimes six days when we were through we had a half a day for carrying equipment. And then we passed and reviewed the regiment passed and reviewed on a double time in trunks and run them out and then we were off if we didn't have nay duty. While I was at Tacoma I was promoted to technician fourth grade and that's one of the best ranks you can have in the military at that time. I was the equivalent to a Buck Sargent but I didn't have to pull any guard duty or any charge of quarters or anything. And we continued to train and in late November early December we were alerted to go to Fort Benning and at one of our parades it was announced that the first battalion was already gone and they had rode to Fort Benning. The second battalion marched from Fort Benning to Atlanta and the third battalion was going to whip their butt and march from Atlanta to Fort Benning. And we were also going to break the Japanese record of a forced march we had all of the equipment and everything. And we did we did it in 72 hours 142 miles. And 99 percent of the men in the battalion finished the march. Some of them were being carried if you dropped out the medics has a meat wagon behind you behind us and they'd fix you up and you'd go back in. And Those that could not did not but if you dropped out for medical reasons and the medics determined that you did not wash out if you dropped out because you just couldn't do it you were out of the 506th. But we went to got to Fort Benning and we went through C and D stage in two weeks, made our five jumps, qualified. And I was told that I was going to stay back and go to demolition school and radio school and that was a two week course. And one week each time and place and then after that we joined the regiment at Camp McCall North Carolina. And from there we trained we did additional jumps while I was at Fort Benning we were asked if there were about 12 of us were asked if we would make a jump to test the radios 536 radios we were using at that time SGR536 for distance stuff under normal fighting conditions. And awe said yes I volunteered and we were taken to an air field down to Lawson Field and took off in C47s and we jumped in Panama. We were told in the plane we would jump in Panama and we would use our radios to get back to civilization and we had compasses and after about five days we hit a clearing and we picked up by truck and taken back flown back to Fort Benning. And then after that we left and went to Camp McCall.

Interviewer: Now when you joined the 506th in Tacoma was the regiment formed or was it in the process of being filled?

Beyrle: We were the last company "I" Company the regiment had three battalion's regimental headquarters service company and three battalions. And three battalions had four companies in it headquarters, A, B, C headquarters D, E, F, headquarters G, H, 9 that's how it was formed. And each

company started out with about 140 men and officers' three platoons' two rifle platoons and a mortar platoon 60 millimeter mortar and a company headquarters. The headquarters company had a different configuration it had 81 millimeter mortars and bigger radios they still had more 30 caliber. The rifle companies had a 30 caliber in each squad of the platoon.

Interviewer: When you arrived did they do any kind of interview with you in other words did they find out your German language background or anything?

Beyrle: They never asked me and I never told them because we were at war with the Germans and I did not want to I never told anybody what I told you about my ancestry or anything. Because we were at war with the Germans and I didn't know what that might do. By that time I had lost most of my German because as we grew up my parents quit talking German all of the time and if you don't use the language you lose it. If I came into a conversation I could understand but I couldn't speak. In the prison camp I never let the Germans know it.

Interviewer: When you were in Fort Benning you were selected for the demolitions training and the communications training. Any factors in there on how you got to be selected for those courses?

Beyrle: No I don't know to this day there is a lot of things in my service that I did that I do not know why I was selected to do it. You didn't ask questions most of it was volunteer I was not I volunteered all I can suspect on the radio was they must have picked it up on some of the tests they gave me at Camp Custard the same with demolition school. When I left Fort Benning I had 40 jumps.

Interviewer: You returned to Camp McCall then after Panama and did you go on the Tennessee maneuvers?

Beyrle: Yes yes we went on Tennessee maneuvers and I don't remember too much about them other than we jumped we had to cross the mountain range and attack the enemy at some point. And I don't remember too much about that that's one thing that's almost a blank in my mind other than going over the mountain we ran into a steel and they fired on us because they thought we were revenueurs. And once we found out we were American soldiers they didn't want to let us go. And we were in I was being in company headquarters we traveled most of the time with the Company Commander the First Sargent everybody jumped including the Chaplin the cooks and everything. And so I don't remember much not because of the steel because I did not drink hard liquor by the way never had I tasted it and I dumped it I wouldn't drink any of it. But that's another story anyway we finally after maneuvers we came back to Fort Campbell or Camp McCall by the way after we jumped in Fort Benning we were given a leave to go home. And in the Curie Book there is a very famous speech by Colonel Sink telling us that we were elite soldiers of the United States Army and he expected us while we were on leave to décor ourselves in ordnance with that and for us to stay out of jail. Because down at Fort Benning when we were going through training we used to get to Columbus once in a while and we did some of our men got into some trouble as that would happen. One of the biggest ones was the guy that pawned his jump boots over Beach Hollow in Phoenix City and when he went back to get them Beachy Hollow wouldn't give them to him. So a company of men went over there and got them and tore the place up so saw limits after that. And those kind of things I'm sure the 506th wasn't by the way we were the first outfit to go through the

jump school as a unit. Colonel Sink had a cart launch he was in the original test to one of the parachute troops and he had a cart launched to train this regiment from the civilian life. Previous to that to get in the paratroops you had to have another be qualified in something. And the 502 was that first other regiment the 501 did the same as we did. And the 502 most of the men if you interview any of them you'll find out that there are maybe a year or two older than we were. Because our men that went and most of them were 17, 18, 19 years old. If somebody like our communications Sargent was 29 we called him Gramps. He jumped into Normandy with a cross bow.

Interviewer: So did you have a Cadre then in the 506th?

Beyrle: Yes Cadre King we were regular Army the First Sargent all the officers were West point or ROTC most of them were Southern. And it wasn't until after the war I really found out why most of them had trained in ROTC and the others were West Point officers. We had a quite a sprinkling of West Point officers. Most of the battalion commanders started out were West Point officers. And most of Colonel Sink's staff were West Point officers. He did have a sprinkling of others and the noncommissioned officers First Sargent and the Platoon Sargents were all Cadre. And they were there when we got there and most of them did not go with us when we left because during the two and a half months one in particular on paydays he wouldn't show up for two or three days after that. So I got in trouble with him I dug a 6 x 6 and filled it up with cigarette butts and then filled it back up because I told them they came in the Army when they needed them not when they were feeding them. It was my first mistake I learned a lesson. But they were good men most of them were good men. And they made all of the noncoms then during the training the squad leaders and when we left they already had platoon leaders the Cadre man was just an observer. And all of the noncommissioned officers were picked. And one thing Colonel Sink said that you had to have an IQ of over 100 to get in there that was the other one to get into the regiment. And he said nobody is going to OCS all of the officers are going to be made on the battle field. And he was able to do that until after Holland and then the casualties the officer casualties was just great that he had to take replacements. Then about maybe 25 percent of the officers were battle field commissions after Normandy and Holland.

Interviewer: What kind of impact did your officers have on your training while you were in the U.S.?

Beyrle: The officers our officers I would say were all good officers they were well trained they were able to train us along with the directives that Colonel Sink put out. And we had an "I" Company for instance we had one GI officer you know what a GI officer is the one he lives by the rules. And he was in the 3rd platoon he's still alive so I won't mention his name but the rest of the officers were very good as we went down the road we became a very close unit a company a squad a platoon company headquarters. And then our officers under the PX they would come in there and drink beer with us and stuff but the next morning at 5 o'clock they were the officers we were the enlisted men the noncoms were noncoms. And if you didn't live up to that you were gone if you ever tried to use that against them or anything. There were occasions that happened but they kept their distance during training they were the officers and noncoms were the enlisted. See I was not considered a noncom I was considered a technician but I got a Sargents a Buck Sargents pay so. And we did we had some guys that three letter words you know I've got a lady here so I can't say GFU. But most of them if we had a guy that had trouble we had one guy

that was in my company and on occasion that he went a wall right before we went overseas he came from Chicago and I came from Michigan so I got the longest straw and I had to go pick him up. At Fort Sheridan I got him released and then I came home for five days because I knew we were going overseas. And when I got back I got him out of the brigade at Fort Sheridan and he begged with me he wanted to see his mother and father before he went overseas and I said okay you've got two days I have to be with you had a 45 and a stock car beam and handcuffs I never handcuffed him but I said I'll kill you if you try and escape. He took e home his home was next door to Al Capone's home on South Prairie Avenue in Chicago on the Southside. His dad ran a gambling joint in the Harbor and he was part of the mafia I found out and he was an associate of Al Capons'. Anyway he screwed up regularly and he did not jump with us in Normandy they washed him out because he went a wall in England and he left us. Then we had a supply Sargent that refused to jump in Normandy he wouldn't go so they replaced him. He was out company "I" supply Sargent and along the way there were some guys the quit. Not many after got to England but during the training they just disappeared and word came out that they had quit. Then they went to regular infantry outfit someplace.

Interviewer: One of the things you touched on was unit cohesion. What were some of the things that made your unit tight?

Beyrle: We trained together we lived together we were trained to operate in small groups two or three men trained to operate seven to ten men by squads and my platoons. And we went through training that way we started out training as platoons in the company and then we went to battalion then we went to regimental operations exercises we had. We would have an exercise as a battalion we would have an exercise training exercise as a company we would have a training exercise as a platoon. And I use platoon I'm talking about somebody else and we would either support with the radios and stuff to the platoons. And the men got to know everybody pretty well and they had to depend on these men. We were told right in the beginning when we went into combat we would in doubtable jump on the enemy. We would not jump assembled we would jump assembled among the enemy and then move out and go to your objective and that's what we always trained on. It wasn't until we went go tin England we really found out we never knew what we were doing but we had at least three or four jumps as a battalion and the different companies in that battalion had objectives that they captured or liberated whether it be a town or a place in the woods. What they were going to do in Normandy and it wasn't you didn't know that at the time but afterwards and I can only speak about Normandy. I can remember capturing a couple of bridges and that was out objective in "I" company.

Interviewer: I'm sorry I'm going to have to interrupt I've got to change the tapes out. Okay this is tape number 2 with Mr. Joseph Beyrle WWII veteran the 50th parachute infantry. Now Joe you've told us about training the U.S. now lets go ahead and move forward to England and your arrival and some of the training that the 506 conducted in England prior to Normandy.

Beyrle: Okay in England we crossed the ocean without incident on a troop ship. And we landed in Liverpool. We were quartered in Rams Berry the regime the 506th regiment was in Wilkshire and Berkshire states counties or whatever they call them over there. And I was at Ramsbury and that was where battalion headquarters was at Camp Ramsbury. There were hutches tarp paper hutches just we

had in Decoy. And we trained again as started out as platoons and companies regiments divisions we made maybe 10 or 12 jumps while we were in England several of them were night jumps. We made two truck jumps off the back end of a 6 x 6 as we call it. And we went down the South Coast at it was on the English Channel I can't remember the name right now. And we jumped and ended up and there we was quartered and ended up in a sea side hotel and had kind of R&R for three days after the jump. And that operation was in April was pretty much what we were going to do in Normandy we didn't know it but we jumped in behind what was the North Sea Beach. High ground assembles and that was the night jump and then in May we actually did a dry run in the same area but once we went to the objective so called objective whatever it was we the operation was ceased we were picked up in buses or trucks or railcar and taken back to where we came from. We did three of these dry runs we moved out of the areas on buses went to a marshal area was locked in and our marshal area that 3rd battalion was Exeter England which is quite a ways from the rest of them if you look at the map and we flew back and flew as a regiment into France. And these were mostly night drops I made about 20 jumps testing the leg pack I don't know if they still use a leg pack.

Interviewer: No

Beyrle: They don't? Well this was the initial one it started off with a duffle bag cut off wrapped around your leg and 50 feet off the ground you were supposed to pull the rip cord. That dropped your bag on a rope down around 25 feet and when you hit the ground the weight of that bag coming off the string of your parachute was just like on air if everything worked okay which it didn't. Because the other thing was that when you hit that prop blast the C47 it could rip your canteen off or your helmet off the opening shock was so great. It was like being on the end of a rope and knot and snap you ended up in your groin of strawberries because the harness and stuff you didn't have that baby tight enough and other things.

Interviewer: Now some of the other jumps that you did you made several jumps into occupied France prior to the Normandy invasion could you tell us a little bit about those?

Beyrle: Well the first experience was I was told to report to the battalion orderly room and called down our company headquarters and Sargent Derision said go up and see so and so at the First Sargent at the battalion headquarters. I said what about and he said I don't know. So I went up there and I walked in the First Sargent I said Technician Beyrle reporting as ordered he said just a minute he walks into the Colonel's office and he says Beyrle is here, send him in. I walked in there's Colonel Walverton and a civilian. Christ what did I do now and he says you just volunteered for a mission he says this man will brief you as he takes you. He says you're going to leave us and you volunteered for a mission. He says I can't tell you anything more about it he'll tell you all about it. And I'm sure I look back at it what in the hell is going on here. And once we left we got in a jeep and went to Hungerford got on a train and ended up Millwall England air field. All during this time this guys talking to me we had a compartment all to our self. And he explained what I was going to do now at no time did they ask me if I would do it, it was always in the positive I was going to do it just like I volunteered for it which. Anyway we got to Millwall and we got a briefing we were told where we were going the guy the civilian never told me where we were going and I was in uniform all the time. He never told me anything about where we were

going until I got to Millwall and that's where I found out that we were going to make a jump into occupied France at night we would be taken to an airfield north of Bournemouth and flown to an area in France and jump and that I would be carrying a bandoleer of gold coins. And the mission was to turn the gold coins over to free French when I hit the ground they had a password I don't remember what it was. And they would relieve me from the coins and then they would take over from there and I would be there for seven to ten days I would be moved continually and then I would be picked up at night. My first question I said by whom? And he says you don't have to know that but you will be back picked up and flown back to France well then I knew it was bad but I didn't know how. And I jumped the first time I went there were four of us lie sander there were three men I met at the air field north or Bournemouth England. I met them I never talked to them I just saw them they told me these three men will jump in France but not with you. And they were beefed along the way I was not to talk to them because if we were captured which we weren't going to be but they didn't want me to have any information about anyone else but me. And I was never came up if we were shot down or captured or crash landed and I lived what I was doing carrying maybe \$100,000 worth of gold coins or whatever. They weighted somewhere between 50 and 75 pounds that bandoleer and it was all GI I'm sure the riggers somewhere along the line concocted this thing.

Interviewer: Now was that jump conducted in uniform or in civilian clothes?

Beyrle: In uniform I never was out of uniform all the time I was in France. That was the other thing they said make sure you stay in uniform don't let the French talk you into going into civilian clothes if you have to go to civilian clothes they are over you uniform. Never take that uniform off. And they never once I wore a jacket and a pair of pants over my uniform then we passed two German check points and I was in a wagon on the back end under the hay they never probed the wagon or anything. And I was just moved form house to house the one time I got on a horse I said where am I going and the guy said the horse knows where he's going. I always kept a 45 with me by the way had a 45. The horse knows where your going he said if you're stopped and captured shoot the horse. Because they don't he knows where your going and your going to another safe house. Now those kind of things I was 20 year old kid at that time. Anyway

Interviewer: When you returned back to the unit what was the reaction of your service men?

Beyrle: Well I've learned since then that and I know a guy was where have you been Beyrle and I said my brother was sick up north. I had a brother that served Manchester with the Air Force ground forces and he had come down to visit me at Ramsbury. And so my cover was that he was sick and I got leave to go see him. The second time that I came back was so close to when we were leaving that when somebody questioned me made a couple of remarks well I guess you got another special furlough some place you concocted. But we were so we knew this was the third time we were going to move to the marshaling area and we figured three times was enough this was the real thing. So I had very little trouble for cover at that time. But that's what we used and we talked about this when my debriefing when I came back from France about how I was going to do this. And I suggested to my debriefer I said by brother came down to see me at Ramsbury and we visited got leave for a couple of days and we went to London or someplace. I says that would be a cover that I he was sick or something I went to visit him I got

permission. The guy said what a story so that's how I did the second time again I didn't really have to because there was so much tension I would say because we figured that was the real thing because they had already been alerted by the time.

Interviewer: Since you conducted those two missions have you ever had the opportunity to meet again anybody who was involved?

Beyrle: No no because I never knew who the three men were the only thing is that I suspected that they were Jed Bird Team after the war I never knew anything about a Jed Bird Team. I belong to the Association of Former Intelligence Officers and I Bill Colby was the Jed Bergin and we've talked about that and he's now dead but he said all it was mostly was dead bird deep.

Interviewer: Getting back to your return to your unit you were under preparation to go into the Normandy invasion how would you access the moral and the readiness of the 506th?

Beyrle: Couldn't wait to go we had trained and trained and trained we knew we were going to go and we got to the marshalling area and when they brought out the sand bag or the sand tables and many was remarked God we've had these same damn two bridges on three exercises. This was our objective for my "I" Company. The Company had the batteries and the 502 or another platoon had one of or one of the companies and the capture and hold one of the claws ways coming up from Utah beach the 502 had the other three claws ways coming up from Utah beach. And to capture the bridges over the Duve River and the Marot River leading to Charente and hold them. That was pretty much the overall objective of the 3rd battalion. We did not know beyond that and more of less in the company what all of the objectives were. I learned about what they were talking to the guys afterwards after the war. You were so closely net that even within the company was closely net we didn't know many times what "G" Company was doing or "H" Company was doing our battalion or headquarters company on a operation. I'm sure our officers did but in my job as a radio operator I did not know.

Interviewer: Take us through the last minute preparations then the jump into Normandy.

Beyrle: Okay we once we got the French franks phrase book and the sand tables and live ammunition we knew it was real for real. And we were told that we would load in the plane we would rendezvous and we would fly to France the troop carrier had all the information on that and we were jumping over France behind Utah beach. That's the first time I hear Utah and our object was going to be we were briefed two wooden bridges to capture and hold them. Well the 506th or the 101st was on the right hand of the most right handed section behind Utah beach the 82nd was on the most left hand. And we had to capture and secure that agent that area so we jumped about starting at 12 o'clock until about 2 o'clock and four hours to clear that so when they came in at 6:30 in the morning on Utah beach that they could move on the beach onto the beach then they would pass through us because that's where they had all the heavy equipment the tanks and all that stuff. And then we were going to be there for three days and brought back to England.

Interviewer: Okay and what about your personal experiences during the jump?

Beyrle: Well we took off and we flew I would say for an hour and a half I'm not real I don't even know. And we jumped we made two left turns we flew from England around the Isles of White and made a left turn and then we flew across and made another left turn and they were heading back to England. We were supposed to jump at 700 feet about I would say five minutes before we jumped we started taking ground fire because we were at 700 feet and as we flew then we got to France we were planes had jumped before us and the Germans had been alert. And they were firing at us in the air and they were supposed to throttle down from about 120 miles an hour to about 90 miles an hour. Well we hit a cloud blank and planes were getting hit there was a plane on my left we flew VVs like upside down and over on the other VVs the first plane under was evidently carrying nitro starch in the spare packs. I got hit by a tracer and blew and a concussion we were closed up so close a concussion from that we were all already standing up hooked up fortunately to jump. And a concussion from that must have blew us up a couple of hundred feet and we came back down and we recovered by that time we had the red light then we had the green light. And we were so damn glad to get out of that airplane because planes were getting hit I was number three man and I could look out the door and see those planes some of them getting hit and going down and some of them that one blew up and there was a couple. Out of the 3rd battalion we lost I think three planes that crash landed never one plane load never made the last left turn and was hit before it made it never made the last left turn and the first four men out of that plane jumped on point the hawk. About 1:30 in the morning on D-Day and the rest of them jumped in the channel either that or crashed in the channel. And one of our planes was hit and crash landed at Magnaville with the whole first platoon and a lot of company headquarters. My best buddy was in there so "I" Company actually lost three planes the battalion I think the total was 6. We lost the only one battalion commander survived Normandy the others were killed. The casualty rate in Normandy was very high but they achieved all of their objectives and the fought in Normandy for 21 days instead of three days. Because after the initial capture and holding our objectives then the 501 the 502 or the 501 and the 506 and the 502 moved out and attacked and captured Carrington. And that was the final objective which we did not know about I wasn't there anymore by that time and they captured that on the 12th of June. We call it not captured liberated but they didn't capture anything until we got into Germany then they started capturing Holland we captured they were liberated too.

Interviewer: What happened to you on the night of the jump?

Beyrle: I landed on the church in Saint Palm Dema and I must have jumped at 400 feet I would say because I got the opening shock and it the church roof at the same time and that saved my life because I did not hit the steeple I hit the pecks of the rook. And I hit and bounced off because they were shooting at me from the steeple and once I dropped down my shoot came down behind me. I was out of their line of fire and they were shooting at the planes that followed us. I got out of my harness and I was in the cemetery in the church that surrounded the church and I started without looking at my compass I says I've got to get out of this cemetery over that fence and behind those houses where there's some cover. Draw a fifth ace to a honest deck I made a decision at that time not to raise my 45 I mean my Thompson sub machine gun so I became a guest of the German government at that point. Now I was again fortunate because I was captured by German parachute troops they moved the 6th German Balchumy regiment into the area about two weeks before the Normandy invasion. They had been pulled

back off the Russian front and were being retrained regrouped in that area. The other coincidence about that was I found out afterwards we fought them Normandy, Holland and Bastogne the same six Fonderhighs regiment. They were now acting as ground infantry they made no jumps after Crete. So anyway that I would say saved my life there was an incident later on the static troops after I was a prisoner wanted my boots and I told them they were the occupation troops in that area wanted my jump boots. And he wasn't speaking English and I wasn't speaking French or Polish or whatever he was and I told him he was in English he would have to kill me to get my jump boots and with that a German Foltenyager came up I think he was a Sargent and in pretty good English he said what's going on here. And I says this man soldier wants my boots and I said I told him he's going to have to kill me to get them and he pulled out this he had this weapon this I don't know what he had and he in German he told the guy to take off and he said to me he said don't ever give anybody your jump boots that's a symbol because they wore them too. And I figured that enemy saved my life that was one and then we were moved to from St. Palm Demon they had collected by that time they had collected quite a few prisoners there was maybe 50 of us. They moved us down highway 13 to Carentan and we came under an artillery barrage from somewhere and we were blown in I was blown into the ditch along with some other people there were guys killed and some Americans lost legs. I ended up in the ditch with five men two of them had lost legs it was Captain Harwich, Lambert. Tucker and myself and the other two men were paratroopers they lost legs and we turnkey on them pulled them up along the road and waited until patrol picked them up and they were taken to an aid station. I know what happened to them I found out one died in France and one I met in 1971 when we dedicated the 101st Memorial in Washington. It was a pretty symbolic meeting because he introduced me to his wife and said this man saved my life, cut it off (he was referring to them turning off the tape because he became upset).

Interviewer: Continuing your

Beyrle: We regrouped they pulled us up and three of us took off and our plan we were on the wrong side of the road again highway 13. And I finally decided we'd go down to the first bridge the Douve River and crawl or claw our self underneath the bridge and get on the other side and then come back up because it was all swamp there. And then we would move the first ground that we could travel on we'd go what would have been north to the bridges because that was our objective. We started out we never made it to the Douve River because I turned around I was leading I was the point man and I was leading the other two men Captain Harwich and Lambert Tucker I turned around and they were gone. So I decided that to go it alone but I had to get back up on high ground to do it so I went the other way and again get back across highway 13 I figured I had to get in the Sink Comb Demon and take that road the junction right by the church. So I went the other way and I had to go through a field an orchard and I hit a hedge row I went over the same way and I did the same damn thing in a machine gun position. And they had me again and this time they had stripped me I had nothing but no weapons nothing. And I was taken in a group behind Sing Comb Demon they had a compound with a bunch of American prisoners there. And down a little bit further towards Carentan in that orchard they had an underground the polchernagers had an underground headquarters and I was taken down there for interrogation. And at that point is where I was being interrogated and they moved me from one room to the other and that's where I ran into this young lady who had been in England who knew me knew of me and told me all

about my regiment and everything. And I would never give them anything but my name, rank and serial number when they found that out then they I don't know why they took me there to interrogate me because they knew everything they wanted to now from that woman. All I can figure is she was a spy and how she got from she may have got the same way I did anyway that's the story. And from there on they had me and they moved us to starvation hill on St. Low where they collected a bunch of prisoners. And then from there we were moved to Alencon France and from there we were moved to Char France outside of Paris until we were dirty and marched us through Paris a propaganda march. French people or whoever they were threw garbage at us and rotten eggs and everything. We were loaded in a 48 ox 50 men to a 45 box car and we were on the road for seven days and seven nights they never opened the railroad cars for anything. No food not water nothing and the second day out we were strafed and it had to be by our own planes and my car there was maybe 10, 15 men killed outright I was not hit. By the way in Normandy I took a piece of shrap metal in my left buttocks from an artillery mirage. But that was nothing that was superficial. And we had about 15 guys that were wounded and they were there for five days in July in that box car it became pretty rough. We ended up in Lindbergh and they marched us from the railroad sighting to Lindbergh 12A and that's where we were registered as American prisoner of war. You've seen the picture with my number in front of me and everything Stalin 12. We were three for about three weeks two weeks and moved to Muhlenberg Germany 40 miles east of Berlin or south of Berlin. That was an English camp and it was the first prisoner of war camp in WWII. Had the first Sargent pilot who was shot down September 12, 1939 there and he walked the wave all day and they had two guys guarding him so he didn't cross the trip wire because if you cross that trip wire the guard could shoot you. We were there for about a week or 10 days I celebrated my 21st birthday there. And they concocted a birthday cake for me this is a well organized camp you could buy your was to switch out of it with cigarettes. They were getting packages the English or Canadians we getting packages from home. One of my buddies I met after WWII was with me and I didn't know it and he got promoted the manacondance was Canadian that was the NCO they separated you by nationality and by rank. Officers' noncoms and enlisted men they could force the enlisted men to work in nonmilitary projects which they did. Noncoms they could not we could volunteer but they couldn't make us work. We did every chance we got to get out of the camp liberate stuff and I after they moved us out of there on the 17th of September 1944 and they the Sargent that was guarding us to the train told me that my outfit was jumping in Holland that afternoon. They moved us right before in the evening and we ended up at Stalin 3C in Poland that's about 80 miles east of Berlin in Poland at Crusteen Germany. I was there from September until January and I escaped from there twice and the first time I escaped from there I bought my way out of the prison camp with American cigarettes which were cigarettes we got in the Red Cross parcels. I did not smoke and I won 60 packs in a crap game and I bought the guard off for 40 packs. We paid him 20 packs I didn't once we made the contact they took over for the payoff and everything we gave him 20 packs somehow a head of time and they gave him 20 packs after we got out. There was three of us and we cut the wire while he was walking post and we went through the wire two hours later because they changed guards walking posts every hour. And there was a train run down below the camp and it was going east so we figured it was going to Poland it was a freight train so every night at about the same time an hour or so. So we hopped on that train and rode it got an empty box car and rode it and it hit a junction and it started west well we figured we'd ride it out we didn't know where it was going we'd ride it out and see where it went. We ended up in the salt yard of Berlin two or three

days later. We tried to make our way across the railroad yards figuring we could link up with the underground in Germany which we knew was there. Instead we linked up with the Gestapo and they had us for about two weeks and beat the living hell out of us and we got caught up in the politics of war. We were escaped prisoners of war we were the property of the German Vermock and the Gestapolis civilian outfit. So three officers came after us somehow they found out we were there and came after us and they pulled us out of our cells we were all in three of us were individually held never seen one another until that time. We were brought upstairs out of that basement and by that time I had my most of my German came back to me even in all of the prison camps I never let the Germans know that I understood I never talked German. Always English to them and I understood what was going on in the session and they told the Gestapo people they came after us that we were the property of the Vermock and they were going to take us back to the prison camp we escaped. And they got into a not a shouting match but an argument and the three officers pulled their lugers and with that 12 men German soldiers shows up and he told me said we're going to take these prisoners by force because they are our property and we're not going to be accused of war crimes because we know your going to kill them. And with that the 12 men moved forward for in between Gestapo and they never did anything. They took us back to 3C eventually a couple of days later we ended up in 3C and we were fined sentenced to 30 days in a prison or solitary confinement on bread and water. That time this was in January and it was 20 or 30 below zero we were in a building in a cage separated each of us little cubical I laid down and we had bread and water and you had to drink the water right away or it would freeze on you and we got caught up again in the politics of war. International Red Cross representative was making an inspection of the camp which they did periodically and when he came we found out afterwards after we got out that he the Germans let us out because they would have to show him we were there. So we were let out of our solitary confinement taken back I went back with hot showers and we got extra food and everything we were in pretty rough shape about a month later I escaped again with these two men. This time we pulled a fake seizure on our exercise grounds and someone went and got a stretcher because Brewer passed out had a seizure we had a Shultz by the way who was the faired in the compound. He was a WWI veteran who had been called back in the service he just stayed in the compound he carried a riffle we never knew if it was loaded or not. Several times when something happened he handed it to a guy so he could help a prisoner get up or something. Anyway he was a good guy I consider him a good guy. So Shultz is yelling at the guards in our compound to open the gate to let us out because this man had to go to the hospital medical. And so I got on one end of the stretcher Brewer was on the stretcher and I don't even remember the other guys name to this day he escaped he was the same guy that escaped with us before. And we put the guy on the stretcher they opened the double compound gate and we got outside of our compound and we started to an area where we knew every afternoon a German came in there with a horse and wagon and three great big barrels on it. So we took off and hid out until this guy came through jumped in the barrels and rode out the front gate. We went down a little incline that made a right turn and it was a brick stone road not a brick road a stone road very irregular. I went back there in 92 and found it. And the stones are still there and they are very and this was not a rubber tired wagon it was hard wood wagon the barrels sat as he made this turn down there. When we recovered we were in a ditch and we took off down through some scrub bushes pines because we knew there was a creek down there. We made the creek then if we went down stream because by that time they had opened fire on us they killed the two guys that were with me and they had released the dogs and when the dogs

hit these two bodies they stopped barking. Waited for the troops to catch up with them and I went down stream down this stream because I figured if there were more dogs they would throw off the scent and I woke up the next morning on the bank of the stream scared shitless. How did I get here what am I doing here what am I going to do? So I had a compass and I said I'm going east so I started east and I graveled for maybe three or four or five days and the farm yard you could hear the Russians coming you know the noise and stuff. Every morning when the Russians started out they laid down an artillery borage and it was a walking borage when I was with the armored outfit they would when you moved out then once you broke out them they would stop. Anyway I waited in this farm yard figuring that when they came through I'd go down and identify myself but they came back one night into this farm yard. First I tried to get some food from people the old man and woman at the farm yard house and they said they didn't have any food and if they had any they couldn't give it to me because if the Russians or the Germans found out they would kill them. So I said okay and I left and I circled around and went up in their hay loft and waited. That night the Soviets came back that armored outfit came back there part of and they stayed there for the night they did not fight at night for this night anyway and never afterwards they never fought at night. They always pulled back set up the defensive position the infantry moved around them set up a defensive position. And the second night they came back in the morning before they took off I went down and identified myself as an American hands up. And I was able to get from here maybe about three to five feet from the Russians Soviets and pretty soon a civilian came out of the group he was a commissar and I'm telling them in English and the Americonstie Debarish prisoner of war he understood some English. And pretty soon the battalion commander who was a female came up and they said something in Russian and I said by that time I said I want to go with you to Berlin to defeat the Hilarities. Beucase I had been told as a prisoner of war you never told the Russians referred to them as Nazis because that's a symbolism of National Socialistic Party and they had the corner on it. And they never used it the Germans called the Russians velchuris the Russians called the Germans Hilarities. So anyway after some negotiations I told them I wanted to go with them and defeat the Hilarities and there was some conversation with the Comisar and the battalion commander. And finally they said okay but the Comisar told me I would have to stick close to him he didn't want me to leave him because he said he never said it but I assumed he thought I might have been a whoever or whatever. And it wasn't until maybe 20 days later we got caught. We'd move out in the morning advance at night they would pull back. There was about 100 somewhere around 50, 60 tags I don't really know how many because they were never really all together in there but the battalion commander was a woman. And about 30, 40 percent of the personnel in that battalion were females. Now I had never seen this before one of the things the Comisar told me he said there is no fraternization between the sexes if you are caught you are both executed. That left an impression and that was the furtherist thing from my mind believe me. I was starving and by the way they lived off the land the only thing they carried with them was vodka and number ten cans of Hormel back fat. And that's what they out in their Koshka that was their main dish. It was unclean drained and they would cook it with back fat and eat it. It was pretty good but and there was a lot of jam and they had bread and stuff but they lived off the land. I never did see any k-rations or c-rations they never had them. They had Studebaker trucks 6 x 6s they had ton and half Dodge trucks they had Sherman tanks that's what our battalion was made up. We used to drink vodka toasts to Stalin, Roosevelt, Churchill and Studebakers truck and the German tank. And one morning after about a month I don't know you know you lose time it was quite a length of time I was with them. We were moving out

and one morning beautiful morning real crisp maybe it was 10 below zero or something we had to keep the tanks running at night because they couldn't get them started in the morning because it was so cold. And we started out and we were attacked by stupid dive bombers. They came out of the sun and I woke up in a Soviet hospital the one thing in the last camp I was in I was on work detail one time I volunteered for a bunch of us and this truck going a wagon going the other way passed us and it had potatoes on it. We used to carry in our when we went on work detail we had pants that had inside pockets sewn into them and we were liberating potatoes off of this truck and the guards saw us and shot at us and I got hit in the shoulder the upper shoulder I took a round it went in and out through my arm. And I made it back to the it wasn't anything disabling and I made it back to the compound there just back to the compound after that then I had it fixed up there. But and I still had it when I (tape ended).