

Interviewer: This is Mr. Raymond Leon Fitzgerald. Would you please state your full name, when and where you were born please?

Fitzgerald: Raymond Leon Fitzgerald born in Murray County Tennessee 1925.

Interviewer: What branch of service were you in sir?

Fitzgerald: Infantry

Interviewer: In the Army infantry?

Fitzgerald: Army infantry

Interviewer: What was the unit that you served in?

Fitzgerald: The 69th Infantry Division, do you want detail down the line?

Interviewer: Go ahead

Fitzgerald: 271st Regiment 3rd Battalion Company F 3rd Squad.

Interviewer: What were your parent's names and their occupations?

Fitzgerald: Lendo and Gertrude Fitzgerald

Interviewer: What did they do for a living?

Fitzgerald: They were farmers.

Interviewer: Where was their farm?

Fitzgerald: In Columbia Tennessee Murray County Columbia Tennessee.

Interviewer: What kind of things do you remember doing on the farm where you grew up?

Fitzgerald: General farm work milking cows, pulling corn, digging potatoes general farm work.

Interviewer: Do you think that work was good work for somebody that went into the military?

Fitzgerald: Absolutely yes I have a good background.

Interviewer: How many brothers and sister do you have sir?

Fitzgerald: Three brothers and one sister.

Interviewer: Did you have any formal schooling before you went to the military?

Fitzgerald: The 11th grade I finished high school in the military they made provisions for us to finish there. I was drafted my senior year I'm sorry my junior year in high school I was drafted out of high

school. I turned 18 on the 18th day of August and school started something like four or five days after that. So I finished my high school education in the military.

Interviewer: So they were that hard pressed for the bodies?

Fitzgerald: Oh yes yes they needed bodies. And more emphases is put on that a little bit later I might be getting a little ahead of myself here

Interviewer: No go ahead.

Fitzgerald: But I was drafted and sent through Fort Oberthorp Georgia for processing and then shipped to Camp Wheeler Georgia where I took basic training. It was a 16 week infantry basic training course and in December of 44 the Bulge in Belgium broke and they needed bodies bad then. And they gave us a three day pass and routed us to Camp Milestandish in Boston. We boarded ship at Camp Milestandish and went over in convoy about half way across the Atlantic we ran into German sub packs and they sank some they didn't sink a troops ship they sank some tenders and some fuel ships. And we could see they were in sight of us so the convoy broke up and we were on our own.

Interviewer: Lets back up a little bit.

Fitzgerald: I'm sorry if I'm getting ahead.

Interviewer: No that's okay. What kind of recollection how did the depression hit your family?

Fitzgerald: Hard of course but now we didn't know it was a depression we thought everybody and everybody was just about in the same shape we were in. We had plenty to eat we had clothes to ware because we produced our own food. And we had a normal childhood I did and the depression I remember very well it caused problems that we had and that was money problems but at that time being a child we didn't know it was any different from anybody else or any different time.

Interviewer: What was your primary staple? What did your dad farm?

Fitzgerald: Our primary staple was hay and corn we didn't raise tobacco all of our neighbors raised tobacco but we didn't raise tobacco. But mainly corn and hay, cattle, hogs we had horses most of us there was four of us boys and most of us had our own horse.

Interviewer: So you had your own was that horse or pony used for work around the farm or was that recreation?

Fitzgerald: No it was saddle mares saddle ponies we had mules for farm work. And usually by the time we were twelve, fourteen years old we were making a full hand we were we had our own team of mules we had our own equipment that we were assigned. And we became pretty well full blown hands by the time we were twelve, thirteen years old.

Interviewer: So you could you could do the work of a grown man?

Fitzgerald: Grown man right.

Interviewer: Was your dad a disciplinarian?

Fitzgerald: Oh yes very much so and my mother yes.

Interviewer: Now do you think that was good for you?

Fitzgerald: It was absolutely good yes.

Interviewer: Did you have a job other than the farm?

Fitzgerald: No no we had different chores I was next to the youngest and as age progressed in my brothers and myself we graduated from one job to the next up the line. Usually the I say the more undesirable jobs were left for Bill and I he was the youngest I was next to the youngest and my older brothers progressed up the ladder and we were left with feeding the cows everyday or the medial jobs were left to us.

Interviewer: What you consider an unfavorable job?

Fitzgerald: Milking in the winter time outside.

Interviewer: Because it's cold?

Fitzgerald: Yes a cow with a bushy tail filled with cucker burrows and maybe she picked a muddy place to lay down the night before she could switch you in the face and it would draw blood sometime.

Interviewer: So what did you do for recreation?

Fitzgerald: Played in the creek my dad seen to it that we had recreational time he seen to it that we had spare time to play in the creek and fish in creek, play in the hay in the lofts in the barn. We had a pretty rounded

Interviewer: Was it normally a certain day that you had

Fitzgerald: Yeh Saturdays except in gardening time in the spring and early summer when the garden started producing well our chores were to gather to dig potatoes, gather corn, beans, tomatoes you name it that was our living that's how we lived during the depression.

Interviewer: When Pearl Harbor rolled around what do you remember of that?

Fitzgerald: I remember very well the announcement my grandmother lived with us and she had an ole Phil Co battery driven radio. And our house was a gathering place on Saturday night where the neighbors would come and listen to the radio the Grand Ole Opry or whatever and quilt my mother had quilting frames and they made quilts. And I remember very well and I was 16 years old when December 7, 1941. And both older brothers the brother just older than I joined on Monday following Pearl Harbor the news on Sunday. My older brother was married and it was about maybe two or three weeks before he was called and of course that left me I graduated right real quick up the ladder when my two

brothers left home. And then when I turned 18 why it was my turn so I went then of course. Bill during the Korean War my younger brother he went to the Korean War.

Interviewer: So out of the four boys three served in WWII?

Fitzgerald: Right

Interviewer: And then one in Korea?

Fitzgerald: Yes the brother just older than I served in the Pacific. The older brother and I served in the ETO European Theatre and we actually met overseas.

Interviewer: We'll get to that.

Fitzgerald: Okay

Interviewer: How did you feel about the Japanese when you found out about that?

Fitzgerald: I still to this day resent the Japanese. I don't know if I'll ever forgive them the same feeling for the Germans. I will not purchase a Japanese vehicle. My brother was at Quata Canal and they just about killed him there so I don't feel I don't have much feeling for the Japanese to this day.

Interviewer: When your brothers were gone did you keep up with the events that were happening overseas?

Fitzgerald: Yes as well as were informed or as well as information that we had or were privy to. And this I'll go back to the ole Phil Co radio and if you could live through and understand through static we could stay pretty well abreast but our news was several days sometimes weeks old before we got it.

Interviewer: What did your family feel having their two their first two sons go? What did you see?

Fitzgerald: I remember my mother lived in a rather large house two story country home. And the mailbox was some quarter of a mile from our house down to the main road. And when the mail would run my mother would watch for the mail she could see from the house when he stopped at out mailbox. And she knew probably it was a letter form John or Alan one my older brothers. Dad was somewhere on the farm and he too on the farm the way it was the lay of the land was so he could watch and see the road and see the mailman when stopped at the mailbox and he could see mother when she went to the mailbox. And he knew that there was a letter from John or Alan one when he saw my mother not go towards the house she would go towards the field where he was she knew where he was each day. And she didn't go towards the house she went towards my dad where he was working there she wouldn't open the letter until she got to him. And he didn't know and she didn't know what was in the letter whether it was a notice of casualty or whether it was just a regular letter. And I can image no I can't imagine I can't image the feeling having this letter and my dad seeing my mother come to the field and not know what was in the letter.

Interviewer: What do you think about FRDs speech?

Fitzgerald: Oh I loved it I thought it was right on I thought he was right on as a leader.

Interviewer: Well that answered my next question. Seeing the strain that this put on your family did it make you want to join?

Fitzgerald: Yes

Interviewer: Even though you were drafted it made you want to join?

Fitzgerald: Yes in fact my mother and daddy resisted very strongly to my joining and the neighbors would tell them you've got two sons that's enough. But I insisted and eventually joined or was drafted.

Interviewer: What about your younger brother Bill how did he feel? Did he feel the same way you felt about it?

Fitzgerald: I'm sure he did I'm sure he did. Bill and I didn't discuss it Bill and I were closer than either one of us were age wise to my older brothers. Bill and I we had a lot in common and I remember very well Bill's feelings and his appearance the day I left I remember very well.

Interviewer: Let's talk about the day you left.

Fitzgerald: Okay

Interviewer: You finally got your parents to well the had no choice you got drafted really

Fitzgerald: Right right the well there were provisions for farmer if you went through the red tape and the paper work through the channels to get deferred. And I'm sure and I regretted after it was all over that I wasn't quite the son to my parents that I should have been because of my desire to go ahead and join up and be do my part. I felt like I had to do my part because my brothers were doing their part. I was I was I don't know quite the word I'm looking for it wasn't disrespectful I didn't disrespect my parents but I was rather harsh in my desire and didn't pay a whole lot of attention to my parents desire. They wanted to keep me home and I wanted to go and eventually the draft board said go.

Interviewer: So did you have an opportunity to get deferred and you just decided not to?

Fitzgerald: I'm sure the opportunity was there but as I said the paper work and the channels and the red tape to get deferred was probably months and I wanted to go right then. Just as soon as I turned 18 I wanted to go.

Interviewer: So how did you find out that you were drafted?

Fitzgerald: By the local draft board. They were hurting for draftees and the very day that they saw a kid turned 18 years old the notice was in the mail.

Interviewer: I have a question that kind of backs us up a little bit.

Fitzgerald: Okay

Interviewer: Did you now you mentioned how strong of a desire you had did anybody in your community get a letter that one of their sons died?

Fitzgerald: Oh yes

Interviewer: And that still didn't affect you?

Fitzgerald: No not me no it won't happen to me and that feeling followed me throughout my entire military career.

Interviewer: That it will never happen to you?

Fitzgerald: Right but it did happen to some of my high school graduates not graduates some of my high school buddies were casualties.

Interviewer: The day so you found out that day so what happened you went home, told your parents?

Fitzgerald: No it came in the mail and my mother picked it up at the mailbox and I wonder why she didn't hide it or try to, she didn't. Thinking about it since then I wonder why she because they were so intent in keeping me at home. But of course it wouldn't have done any good if she would have hidden it but her thinking right then would be well if I can prolong this just a little bit longer they would but she didn't. The draft notice in fact I think I still have the draft notice the notice that I have that I was being drafted. And seems like maybe three or four days to get my get me in order or get my business in order to leave to be drafted.

Interviewer: What did what were the words exchanged on the day you left?

Fitzgerald: I think my dad left the house I remember my mother wrapping her hands in her apron that's about all a very sad day for them very sad.

Interviewer: Where did you go after?

Fitzgerald: Went to Columbia that's where I was told to report to. Reported to the draft board in Columbia Tennessee. I was made a temporary corporal and was made in charge of the group that was leaving the draft board that day. We boarded a train of course my first train ride to Fort Overthorp Georgia. And was processed and fed at Fort Overthorp and we might have spent the night in Fort Overthorp I don't remember. But then we were again boarded a train and shipped down to Macon Georgia and there was an infantry training base there at Camp Wheeler Georgia in Macon.

Interviewer: Let's talk about you said that was 16 weeks right?

Fitzgerald: Yes

Interviewer: And that was all infantry training right?

Fitzgerald: Exactly

Interviewer: Let's talk about that. What kind of tasks did we you taught there that you recall?

Fitzgerald: we trained on M1 rifle on the water cooled 30 caliber machine gun and on the A1 and 60 millimeter mortar. And I guess the M1 took preference we spent a lot of time on the firing range with the M1. We spent a lot of time in infantry tactics and that's about it we stayed busy they kept us busy. We didn't have much free time.

Interviewer: Did you make good friendships there?

Fitzgerald: Oh yes made good friends there. And as strange as it might seem well it wasn't strange to the military back then there were only about well the boys there were seven of us that left Columbia the day that we boarded the train in Columbia. There was seven of us and about five of us were school mates and we were about only the Southern Boys that were in our cycle. The rest of the boys were from New York, Brooklyn we used to kid them they had never seen trees they'd stand in awe of trees the Brooklyn boys were and the New York boys. And there were all makes I had heard of Pollock's, Jews and of course they had nicknames too that we picked up later on the smokes and the greasers and that sort of thing that might not due for me to mention here. They were mostly not familiar with country or country boys and of course we were the seven of us were all country boys and we had quite a tiff going back and forth.

Interviewer: How did they do as far as withstanding the training as opposed to the country boys?

Fitzgerald: Not as well as the country boys. They didn't stand the long marches the loads that we carried the hours that we put in they just weren't accustomed to that kind of life. And they didn't stand the training as well as we did.

Interviewer: Were you ever selected for any specialized training?

Fitzgerald: No well specialized in that the M1 took preference over the A1 and the water cooled 30.

Interviewer: Was this your first time away from home?

Fitzgerald: For any length of time yes.

Interviewer: Did you how did you feel about that?

Fitzgerald: Well I'm surprised that I didn't get homesick. Because usually when we would go to spend time with a relative or a cousin we were so glad to get back home we would be just right on the edge of being homesick. But I don't know the attitude the surroundings the influence, didn't get homesick. In fact as a child I suffered we called it infant toddler paralyzes then and I rode a pony to school my brothers seen to it that I got on my pony and got to school they took care of my pony after I got to school and I had problems with my legs but that got corrected by a chiropractor when I was 14, 15 years old. And I passed a physical of course it wasn't much problem to pass a physical then because they needed they needed men in a hurry. I passed the physical and it was and I'll give military the credit it was one of the best things that ever happened to my physically.

Interviewer: To go into the military?

Fitzgerald: Right regular training regular schedule regular meals I started putting on weight getting stronger and it was a good thing.

Interviewer: So was that a testament of how hard you worked on the farm?

Fitzgerald: Yes probably probably.

Interviewer: What about your drill Sargent, was there any certain particular drill Sargent that really just ate you guys up or?

Fitzgerald: Yeh but in a way that we respected him. I had respect for my drill Sargent Bullock was his name. He was a he had returned form the Pacific maybe he got out of Japan or somewhere narrowly and we had a lot of respect for him, he was tuff. That was good we learned later that that was good and it was. But I had a lot of respect for him.

Interviewer: What kind of things would he do that was particularly

Fitzgerald: Well not so much to us because we were physically fit. The boys that wasn't taking training too well were the ones that he really worked on and of course he had their benefit in mind when he would really get after them and drive them further than they thought they could go. But I had a lot of respect for my drill Sargent.

Interviewer: Describe a typical day in basic training.

Fitzgerald: Okay basic training start off with revelry and he would want that screen door taken off of that barrack door from upstairs my cot was upstairs. And he would want you down those stairs and take that screen door off as you came out and he would wanted you lined up like ducks going to water in a hurry. And if you if you weren't there as quick as he thought you ought to be there well you did 40 or 50 pushups and you did a lap or two around the barracks or something. You had duty after they turned us loose at night or something. We had that was revelry breakfast was served at a specified time and if you weren't there during that specified time you went without breakfast. Then training would begin maybe we had 30 minutes to eat breakfast. Then we were told either fall out with your helmet, liner and field pack and riffles today or no riffles today or weapons I don't think we called them riffles I think we called them pieces and weapons. And usually had an inspection they usually inspected your weapon and you if you weren't dressed right have your boots on right or he'd find something wrong with you if you was almost perfect he'd find something wrong. And then we spent the day training firing ranges marches depending on how we was supposed to fall out that day whether it was full pack or field pack or with weapons without weapons. And usually it ran pretty well to dark and then a lot of times we'd fall out after chow and do night problems a lot of times.

Interviewer: Do you think your training prepared you for what combat would be like?

Fitzgerald: No I don't know there might be today but then I don't know if there was training that would prepare you for what combat was like. Physically we were in top shape mentally we were alert we respected leadership and we didn't question leadership we didn't question orders. We had little time little free time we could visit the PX maybe three days a weeks or yeh maybe three days a week we could visit the PX. Lights were out usually it seemed to be like 9 o'clock I remember lights were out in the barracks at 9 o'clock. And in the South 9 o'clock in the summer well this was late fall but it might not be totally dark at 9 o'clock. But we were in our beds and a Drill Sargent checked to see that we were in our beds at a certain time when he said lights out he meant lights out there wasn't a whole lot of talking going on after lights were out.

Interviewer: Did you participate in any maneuvers other than this or did you

Fitzgerald: No

Interviewer: So from there what happened?

Fitzgerald: Okay the training cycle we were there for 16 weeks we were in our 12th week of the 16 week cycle and the bulge broke in Belgium and they needed replacements in a hurry. And as far as we knew we were the nearest completed infantry training cycle. And I won't estimate I don't know how many men were in Wheeler at that time in infantry basic training. I won't even attempt to guess but there must have been a pretty good pile of us because that was in December and the commanding general at Wheeler would not turn us loose on the transportation system that was Atlanta we were close to Atlanta. And we would have gone to or gone through Atlanta and he would not turn that many men loose it would have marred the whole transportation system in the south if he would have turned us loose right at Christmas time. So Warner Robins Field was adjacent to Camp Wheeler it was cow pasture runways and they had stored there old goony birds or old C47s that had been flying the hump in China. And they had brought them back there they were worn out the brought them back there to cannibalize them for parts and whatever they were the planes that were not in service anymore. So somebody got the wise idea that they should fly us out of there to our nearest airport to our home nearest to our home. And so they sent word out and if an old goony bird would crank it was air worthy. So they flew us out the flew me in an old goony bird from Warner Robins Field in Camp Wheeler Macon Georgia to Knoxville Tennessee which was just about as far from home as Atlanta was. And they put I don't know how many 25 or 30 men in with full duffle bags and I think they was only supposed to carry about 23 men and but they put us in with our full equipment in those old goony birds. And all of us didn't have a seat and they were unfinished inside they were cargo planes. And I remember very well the old plane I was in they taxied out the runway and they revved up the motors on that old plane getting ready to take off and the racing in turn buckles on the side of the old plane that held it together the old turn buckles was metal rods about that thick. And when he reached the RPM on those old motors those old turn buckles got to flapping on the side of that plane and you thought they were going to break out just any time and break through the skin of that old plane. But he took us off landed us in a cow pasture landing strip at Knoxville Tennessee and by the way we had a three day pass. And I spent the first day on a bus after we landed in Knoxville we had they trucked us to the bus station and I spent the next day or a day of that three day pass on a bus going from Knoxville to Columbia Tennessee I believe to Nashville then

change buses in Nashville down to Columbia and I was into my second day. My wife and I had planned to marry when I went to service when I went to basic and by then we were supposed to get 21 day furlough between basis and assignment but of course when this happened that 21 days disappeared and it wound up being a three day pass. So she was waiting at the bus station I had called ahead and she was waiting at the bus station and met me and I thought we was awful we was fixing to get married like today and leave tomorrow. And but now that didn't suit her too well she had her head set on getting married so we got married on the second day of that three day pass. And the third day I left and I wouldn't have blamed her dad if he would have shot me I think he threatened to and I wouldn't have blamed him a bit. That was his main daughter too but we got married and I left the next day and I believe my brother was back from the Pacific he had had malaria and you name it he had everything in the world wrong with him that he picked up when he was at Guadalcanal. And he was on sick leave and disabled leave and he if I remember right he and my wife drove me to Nashville and I caught a train in Nashville and went I don't how many days seemed like two days on it we stayed it took us to get from Nashville I believe we changed planes in Washington D.C. as well as I remember. And went to Camp Miles Standish in Boston, Massachusetts and boarded ole Ile De France it was an old freight ship it was scudded in WWI. And the British raised it outfitted it, it was a luxury liner. And they scudded it in WWI and the British raised it and went in and completely gutted it everything in it and put in cots bunks and tables and charged our government see let's see what they said they charged the government for meals that they furnished us and they weren't meals at all and the accommodations you could imagine what

Interviewer: Repeat where the port was and what the name of the ship was.

Fitzgerald: The port was Camp Miles Standish.

Interviewer: Okay

Fitzgerald: In Boston Massachusetts and the old ship was the Ile De France the island of France.

Interviewer: Now did you trained straight there

Fitzgerald: Yes

Interviewer: You knew before you left that you were going to leave

Fitzgerald: Yes absolutely.

Interviewer: Okay

Fitzgerald: I knew where we were headed not in detail I knew we were headed for overseas detail. But not I didn't know well of course we knew we was going to Europe by going to New York going to Boston.

Interviewer: So when they gave you the pass they didn't tell you to come back to Georgia they said go ahead and go to Boston.

Fitzgerald: Yes absolutely and gave us a date we had to be there.

Interviewer: Was your unit when you graduated basic training was your unit the same people you were going to deploy with?

Fitzgerald: We were assigned five of us was assigned to the same unit. And it was the five that were in school together some of my school buddies. And later on after we were committed after we were committed to action and assigned to the 69th division at one time I was the only one still on my feet. My best friend was killed at over Riverside that was the first German village that we captured on the Belgium German border. And the rest of the boys was wounded or was killed and at one time I was the only one that was still on my feet.

Interviewer: So you left out of the port in Boston.

Fitzgerald: Right

Interviewer: How many men did they cram on this ship?

Fitzgerald: I have thought I knew you was going to ask that question and I can't give you a good estimate.

Interviewer: What were the living conditions like?

Fitzgerald: Oh gosh I was the 13th man that we loaded through a cat walk through the side of the ship we didn't load on deck we loaded down three or four decks down. I was the 13th man and as were loaded there was a guy standing there with chalk he chalked your steel pot with your number and I was the 13th man that loaded trough that port. We were assigned bread duty and that meant that the bakery was way down in the hole of that old ship and our duty was, I don't know it must have been about a dozen of us, was to take bread from the bakery up to the mess hall or the so called mess hall. That was our duty aboard the ship. Josh I have well we'll get to this later my experience with the British and the British service people were not good at all.

Interviewer: I was going to ask that they didn't treat you very well?

Fitzgerald: No no no they charged our government I don't know how much per meal but they charged our government so much per meal. What they called a meal what they fed us or made available to us was I don't know if they were turnips or now I'm an old farm boy and I should have known but I couldn't tell whether they were turnips or another vegetable that was similar to turnips. And you were supposed to eat they I'm getting a little ahead of myself; they had huge vats of boiling water. They boiled these turnip like vegetables top and all and they weren't too clean they still had the water showed they still had some dirt on them when they water boiled. In this vat they would dump those turnip like vegetables into the water and you were expected to get part of our nourishment from the tops from the leaves and nourishment from the turnip itself. Then the next vat was boiled eggs and they would take a crate of eggs and dump them in and of course they would break some of them and the whites would run out of the eggs that were broken. When they hit that boiling water it would chill them. Well they would slap an egg on your mess gear and it might be a what you call a Whifferdill hanging this long from them and some way or other the water from the turnip boiling got mixed up with the water from the egg

boiling and they were greener than that grass out there. And you had to be pretty hungry to eat; of course most of us were sea sick. I remember very well this is a little side and I tell this and get a kick out of it now. I was sea sick and I was really letting her go this was about maybe the third day out and it was rough and it was storming. And I had just about lost everything that I had and I didn't have anything else to come up. And I was trying to get something else up and this old limey seaman was short had whisker and long hair come by with a mop and a bucket he says say old chop, if I can say this and you blank it out if you need to.

Interviewer: No go ahead you can say whatever you want.

Fitzgerald: Okay he said say old chop if you taste something with hair on it you better swoller it back because it's your asshole. If I'd have had a gun I would have shot him I would have killed him dead. And later on I've got anther piece of information about the way the British treated us.

Interviewer: So how long did it take you to get over?

Fitzgerald: You know I don't know exactly. I mentioned that fact that we ran into a sub pack German sub pack in the convoy. And the old ship was pretty slow it wasn't the slowest ship in the convoy but it was pretty it wasn't as fast as the fastest ship in the convoy. I don't know how many troop ships besides us was in the convoy but they sank a fuel ship and they sank a tender to and of course we could see the smoke from them when they were burning. So that scattered the convoy everybody was on their own. We headed for Glasgow Scotland and docked there and I don't remember whether it was five days it wasn't many days. The old ship turned up especially when we ran into that sub this is funny know but they allowed us on deck for a few minutes at a time we could smoke get a little fresh air. But there was so many of us on that ship we had to rotate keep rotating I remember after this episode with the old limey seaman that told me about my asshole, there was another limey come out of the door close to where we were standing and smoking we was out to smoke. Wiping sweat he was just wringing wet with sweat coal dust all over him and he was mumbling something and we could make out he was saying he was talking about his ships captain and he was saying something like the ole SB all he can think of is more turns more turns and I'm sure they were ordered to get all the turns they had on those props. And they were doing a pretty good job they got us out of that mess and I'm going to say we were five days docking in Glasgow Scotland.

Interviewer: How did you feel when those ships were sunk and you were on a ship too?

Fitzgerald: I'll tell you the truth Josh we were so sea sick I don't think it occurred to us what was happening I really don't think it occurred to us really what was happening. Yeh the conditions on that ship had us we were ready to fight the British just turn us loose just let us get a hold of the limies the limies was what we called them. And I really don't think we realized what situation we were in we thought well that's just natural or that's expected. I don't think we thought that was going to happen to us it just happened to somebody else.

Interviewer: What about when you got off the ship? Obviously that was a good feeling.

Fitzgerald: It was a good feeling and another little funny, as I said we landed in Glasgow and I never seen of course I hadn't been on the ocean before hadn't seen a ship until I got on. And there was an aircraft carrier and some destroyers we were told they were destroyers we didn't know the identification but we knew the aircraft carrier we could identify the aircraft carrier. And do you know as big as that ship was we sailed under the front of that aircraft carrier. I mean you had to look up to see it that was a huge thing according to us. I understand they are probably three times bigger than that now the aircraft carriers are but anyway it was a huge ship. And we were in aw at the size of that ship and the other ships there was so many of them after that around. We landed in Glasgow unloaded off of the ship marched to a warehouse that was on the docks there an empty warehouse and they put us in there. I don't know whether we stayed in there maybe not over three or four hours but we was there long enough that there was a parade in Glasgow. And they were decked out in their kilts and their bag pipes. Well some of the boys got to I was standing in aw of that I had never seen anything like that those men wearing skirts. And some of the boys that knew what was going on was saying well wonder if they've got on what kind of underpants they've got on under them skirts. So they'd go out and raise the skirts and take a look and of course the big thing was on then the fight was on they broke the parade up and the fight was on. They finally got things under control and we loaded on trains again within a few hours after landing and we headed across to ready and we went to South Hampton and loaded on a what did they call those little ships cargo ships maybe we loaded on ships across the channel. And we arrived at Normandy and a storm came up.

Interviewer: I have a question when did you get to your unit? Are you still just out in the apparatus?

Fitzgerald: I'm still

Interviewer: Your going through the apparatus to get to your

Fitzgerald: Exactly I don't know it took us eight or ten hours to cross

Interviewer: The channel?

Fitzgerald: No the island the English Island. At South Hampton we loaded on these little ole ships and they locked us and closed the hatches. Now this comes again now this is another reason the limies, anyway we loaded on this ship and they locked us in and closed the hatches in those cargo ships there were no accommodations. We were in the ship like this and when we arrived at Normandy they had had a storm some days before and that concrete dock that they had built in Italy and faired across to was destroyed. And they had to load us into LC Higgins boats. And the storm was so intense they couldn't get the Higgins boats up next to the ship the waves were just whamming whamming and whamming. So we had to stay on over night.

Interviewer: On the Higgins boat in a storm?

Fitzgerald: No on this cargo ship waiting for the Higgins like this dark with the hatches closed. Now granted we realized that they didn't know this was going to happen they was going to have to feed us cause we was on there we hadn't been fed in I guess since we got off the old Ile De France. I don't

remember eating until we were on this cargo ship off the coast of Normandy. And Josh they tried I guess we had to give them some credit for trying to feed us they tied buckets on to ropes opened the hatches and left those buckets down with these greens again on the bottom. Some kind of beans on top of the greens half way mashed potatoes on top of that and they let's see how did they lower some bread down. They lowered down French bread and you was supposed to share with your buddy. Every so often they would lower some bread down and you were supposed to share with your buddy bread. And then they closed the hatch back and it was dark and we was expected to eat out of that bucket in the dark. Now you can imagine the claustrophobia that some guys suffered from. And I don't think I've ever heard since then the screams that was yelled by those guys that was suffering from claustrophobia. And they would scream until they was just completely exhausted and then they would whimper. And I haven't forgiven the English yet for that kind of treatment that they served us with. When the storm subsided the next day, we spent the night there like this standing, and we loaded on to the Higgins boats and there was still pretty good waves. And we loaded down on rope ladders in the ole Higgins boats were still whamming the sides and we had full gear and it was pretty good chore to get down that rope in the Higgins boat with full gear without falling and several did fall. After we loaded on to the Higgins boat and went in to Normandy shore our I forget what they call them the maneuver the driver of the Higgins boat.

Interviewer: Coslam?

Fitzgerald: Coslam that's right. He was excited and something bumped his Higgins boat in the front and he thought he had hit he thought he had grounded so he dropped the front end and we were a good 500 yards out. And we hit the water up to here with full equipment and you can imagine we lost men there getting ashore there. Went ashore

Interviewer: And there's no bullets flying or anything like that?

Fitzgerald: No no people drowned with full loads of equipment. We was in water up to here and waves were still pretty good we were still getting some pretty good size waves.

Interviewer: He just decided not to drive it all the way up there?

Fitzgerald: Well whatever it is that bumped him he thought he had hit ground and he dropped his front end. And of course we were told just as soon as that front end drops you get off. And there was a tent city we went up a grade from the beach up to this tent city which was probably a couple of hundred yards off of the coast off of the beach. And we were assigned there put on forty and eights box cars and do you know about forty and eights? Forty men and eight horses we didn't have anybody in charge in our box cars but we had our form 20s in an ammunition box and as I said earlier after reading history and keeping up and retracting and retracing I'm sure we were bound for the 99th division. Which was in place in Arden Forest. And they were hit let's see this was sometime see they were hit what around the 20th of December or maybe a day or two before Christmas or right at Christmas time. And we were I'm sure were headed towards for the 99th division. We was loaded on these forty and eights and GIs were manning the trains engineers. And the Germans were shelling the tracks and the bridges and of course oh my hats off to those engineers. Just as soon as that shell hit and that bridge was destroyed it

wouldn't take no time for those engineers to get out there and rebuild that bridge. Getting that train going getting that line open and of course I know that front the combat units were yelling for replacements they were yelling for replacements. And so we went to went through League Belgium and I forget the little town. We the engineers the train people were carrying us to where they had been told two days before that they were going to. They were going to take us replacements well the Germans had taken back some of that territory including their destination point. Well here we go chugging up the track and the first thing you know we didn't know but we were beyond our lines. And some GI and this ingenuity of GIs I'm still amazed that ingenuity of GIs and I'll tell you later. Some GI realized what was going on and he just flipped that ole train in reverse and here we go chugging back and if the Germans would have know they could have captured a whole train load of raw recruits right there.

Interviewer: And you still even after all that happened on the ocean and all the British did to you you still didn't feel like your life was in danger?

Fitzgerald: No I don't know the feeling I can't tell you. We didn't know what was going on we didn't know about the train we had no idea we thought everything was

Interviewer: Just fine

Fitzgerald: Copasetic yeh every once in a while you'd see out the train window on a house or something Kill Roy Was Here so you was still within American's control when you seen Kill Roy Was Here. But anyway they backed us out and then we were loaded on trucks and we went as far as the trucks I don't know maybe two or three hours on the trucks getting as closer to the front. And we hit the Arden Forest and as I said the 99th division still wasn't organized it was the most disorganized program you've ever seen. And some replace men captain you didn't see many you saw second lieutenants that were replacements but you didn't see any many captains didn't see any majors. But this enterprising captain and I go back again to the GI ingenuity saw when we got off of the trucks and said now boys you dig in right here the Germans are right there and you don't move they don't get back through here. And they was at the almost at the end of their drive during the Bulge at the hard end.

Interviewer: So this captain just took charge?

Fitzgerald: Just took charge.

Interviewer: He didn't even know who his commander was he just got off took the initiative and got everybody in place.

Fitzgerald: Exactly and we dug in.

Interviewer: Do you recall his name?

Fitzgerald: No I don't' in fact I don't think I ever knew his name I don't think I ever knew the guys name. We everybody well I can't say we were on our own he was organized enough to know what to do and did.

Interviewer: Was there ever a point they told you well it's time to be serious now?

Fitzgerald: Oh yes he did he did he said the war starts right here for us or some words to that affect I might have picked that up from somebody else saying that. But he indicated this is it.

Interviewer: We're in this is Germany?

Fitzgerald: The Germans are right over there and they didn't tell us that stay until the last man hang in till the last man but they said don't let the Germans through here. Don't let them through here stop them.

Interviewer: About how far away from the train was this I'm just curious?

Fitzgerald: Oh maybe two hours by truck. We were trucked in so far as safe as they thought they could go in the trucks then we marched so far.

Interviewer: So how far do you think you marched?

Fitzgerald: A mile

Interviewer: How from the time you left Normandy till this point how long of a time

Fitzgerald: Two days maybe or a day and a half maybe one day and a one night.

Interviewer: Okay I'm just trying to get

Fitzgerald: So the captain was a trained infantry man I'm sure he was right out of OCS I guess he was. DO you make captain out of OCS?

Interviewer: I don't know if they did back then you don't now.

Fitzgerald: Okay well he was an infantry captain. He dug us in in our perimeter snow was on the ground cold lord it was cold. And we lived in those holes for three or four days and finally he said this is enough of this stuff we're getting out of here. So we started advancing and do you know we took back every foot of territory that was lost during the Bulge. Then

Interviewer: So you weren't even really assigned to a unit

Fitzgerald: No wasn't in a unit and the four 20s was on that train and lost.

Interviewer: So how did he did he like establish a structure? He got it all organized he said okay you're a squad leader?

Fitzgerald: Exactly

Interviewer: He just completely formed a unit with no designation put it in place and I can't start a fire.

Fitzgerald: And I can't tell you how big an area we covered I don't know all I knew was what went on within my sight. And we dug in buddy system as I said it was cold oh it was cold.

Interviewer: Did he make you squad leader at this point?

Fitzgerald: No to my knowledge there wasn't any NCOs appointed he didn't appoint any NCOs. I would say that in the area we was in was probably 50, 60 men. And we were in proximity with one another that he could see what was going on within that area all the time, he was completely in charge. And I respect him for doing a great job. Then after we took back the territory that was lost and it wasn't too much going on there was a fire fight every once in awhile. We didn't call them fire fights we called it resistance but we managed to take back the original line that the 99th had lost they were hit so hard unexpected and they were so then. Oh gosh they were thin. And I can't tell you how many days we were in that but I will say this in our advance taking back the territory we had lost, I want to show you this I'm pretty sure you'd be interested in this. That is a ME262 jet German jet they were landing then on the auto bounds and hooking to them with those little ole German jeeps. And hiding them back in the fire breaks back in that forest. And Josh those trees were so close together in the Arden Forest that at 12 o'clock you would almost have to have a flashlight to see what time it was it was that dark under those trees. And of course it was cloudy I don't remember the sun shining it was either snowing or raining cold or. And the Germans would break down their antiaircraft fire and fire into those trees about 20 feet above ground and it was showering tree limbs and shrap metal and stuff down.

Interviewer: Okay let me back up. So once you dug in then you basically got off the train and were in combat immediately.

Fitzgerald: Exactly

Interviewer: How did that feel what was going through your mind?

Fitzgerald: Still we were doing what we were told to do and didn't question it.

Interviewer: So you just focused on your job.

Fitzgerald: Exactly

Interviewer: As good as you could.

Fitzgerald: We knew the basics we had the basics of infantry, tactics, and we didn't question.

Interviewer: Did you ever experience fear during that?

Fitzgerald: Oh my goodness yes lord yes. Not to the point well we did have some guys to take off not many. But not to the point to where we were at a point where we would not obey orders.

Interviewer: How much sleep did you get those first few nights?

Fitzgerald: Fitful sleep you had a buddy in the fox hole with you and by the way I will mention this, because of the shrap metal and the tree limbs falling from those trees that they were shooting down

you had to tunnel back. You dug your fox hole and you'd tunnel back and if you were lucky there was tree limbs around you to cover your fox hole with tree limbs. And we would take turn about and if you could call mud over your combat boots and snow and cold and a little later on I've got another funny, you would get we would take turn about and sleep for 30 minutes and then get up and maybe have to move. I'll bet you a friend of mine went back to the Arden's and I was to go with him and the way things happened I wasn't able to make the trip. And I know some of the fox holes we dug are still there I know there are some holes in the Arden Forest that are still there from us. We might dig in and have an opportunity to advance a hundred yards and dig in again maybe two or three times a day.

Interviewer: How hard was it to dig in that frozen ground?

Fitzgerald: Surprisingly it was easy in that Forest the soil was loamy and loose and it wasn't too hard to dig a hole.

Interviewer: That was a blessing I'm sure.

Fitzgerald: Yes it was yes it was and of course with artillery buzzing around you that helped a whole lot in getting a hold of that helped a whole lot.

Interviewer: Getting motivated

Fitzgerald: Exactly

Interviewer: I can imagine. So you advanced you got back to the point where the 99th had started.

Fitzgerald: The original line and we stayed there a couple of days. The 69th division was in England and was in training there. They moved from Camp Shelby Mississippi to England and was completing their training cycle there. And when the Bulge broke they took they just raked the 69th division of men and sent them. (Tape ended)

Tape #2

Fitzgerald: Too of course the Bulge the Germans hit so hard unexpected it caught everyone with their britches down all of our forces with their britches down. And the move was on to get men get men get cannon fire we had to have bodies up there. And they just completely raked the 69th division and sent all of the noncoms from squad leader down and sent them to Belgium. And by this time the 69th divisions headquarters and unit they had moved it to Belgium and that's when they joined us we didn't join the 69th.

Interviewer: Oh so you were already in country and they came in.

Fitzgerald: That's right.

Interviewer: So it's almost like they were replacements for you.

Fitzgerald: Exactly

Interviewer: So had they seen combat before?

Fitzgerald: No this was the first time.

Interviewer: So you saw combat before your assigned unit saw combat?

Fitzgerald: The first combat we did with the 69th infantry division was out of the Arden Forest out of Belgium into we crossed the border and the officers and squad leaders and Platoon Sargents were assembled up and they were what they called committed to action. It was artillery they was given there what would it leaves me know destination we had maps about the size of a county map here and each company commander had that map and his area was mapped out for him. And they was issued until they got to moving so fast they couldn't keep up with them anyway. The first action we saw with the 69th division as a member of the 69th division was a little village over Riverside and my grandson did some research and I've got it on my computer at home about over Riverside. And that was the first combat that the organized combat that we saw and the first combat that the 69th division saw or that we saw with the 69th division.

Interviewer: So let's tell me how you guys linked up. You had gotten to that point where they advanced how did they

Fitzgerald: You know the thing I remember most about that? Is we were issued goulashes we were issued overcoats and if I'm not mistaken two pair of socks went along with it. And that was oh

Interviewer: That was like Christmas.

Fitzgerald: Exactly that was like two Christmases to have an overcoat, goulashes and clean socks or dry socks. And I don't remember too much else about the original meeting with them or being included with the 69th division.

Interviewer: It was almost like they said okay you guys are a part of us now.

Fitzgerald: Exactly and were fixing to jump off here across the German border and over Riversides on that hill right over yonder we're going to take it.

Interviewer: So tell me about taking over Riverside.

Fitzgerald: Okay I remember very well we had a First Lieutenant that had been washed out of Air Borne he had suffered an accident in jump. And it wasn't bad enough to issue him out of service but it was bad enough they issued him out of the Air Borne division. He was a replacement too not with us during the Arden Forest but with the 69th division. Anyway we had these little platoon size meetings and our objective was outlined our mission was outlined and our order of attack was outlined. And I remember very well this First Lieutenant he was sort of stiff shouldered and was a reasonable short guy and arrogant oh lord he was one of the most arrogant persons I met the whole time I was in service. And at the completion of his presentation at this meeting we had before we were to jump off to this take over

Riverside he said the first blankety blank that I see that's seeking souvenirs or items that might be available for souvenirs. Said I will not buy an apple from him when he gets home with no legs sitting on the street side selling apples or pencils I will not buy one from him or something to that affect he was getting the message over to us. Okay when we cleared the Arden Forest and crossed the border into Germany every one of us seen it. We had to get rid of our overcoat we had to get rid of our galoshes that we'd had for one day and one night. And they told us to shove them off in ditches with this line with gas masks overcoats and galoshes. I bet you could have loaded a truck load in 50 yards in stuff out of the ditches. Anyway as we cleared the forest into open space there was open space about 500 yards from the forest edge to the little village over Riverside and it was kind of a depression and there was a little branch running through this little valley. And we all seen it as we passed by all that was there. There was a pair of binoculars and a German luger hanging on a bush and guess who was the first guy who reached for it and go this head off the First Lieutenant that had just told us that he wouldn't buy an apple or

Interviewer: It killed him

Fitzgerald: Killed him blew him

Interviewer: Is that the first time you saw

Fitzgerald: That's the first time I saw somebody get killed. We had managed to get through this other ordeal in the Pacific and didn't lose a man. We saw dead Germans but I hadn't seen a dead American.

Interviewer: How did it, what went through your mind?

Fitzgerald: That affected the advance from there to over Riverside.

Interviewer: Surprise your element of surprise was gone.

Fitzgerald: Exactly, it can happen it happens they are shooting real bullets at us.

Interviewer: So then the Germans in the city started firing on you.

Fitzgerald: Oh gosh artillery this one of my school mates, Richard Hagwood, there were that 88 they could drop one in your pocket I mean they could drop it they were accurate with that thing. They said that our 105 guys was the same way they respected our 105 guys. But the German 88 was their main artillery they could drop that thing. If you got a short and a long you better move because they next one would be in your pocket. And this was open terrain as I said it went down in a little valley and they were pouring artillery on us. We didn't know it at the time and I later found out accidentally that a guy from K Company was on our right and they were waiting on us to clear over Riverside before they advanced. And they knew that the artillery pieces were in and around over Riverside. And they were oh they were cutting us down, a little side note here, my friend from high school Richard Haywood I bet he didn't he never fired his riffle in that attack. He got almost a direct hit and another friend of mine from Columbia from high school was a gunner on a 30 caliber water cooled machine gun. And of course they were broke down they had them on their backs and we were advancing. He was hit and for some reason or

another a artillery shell went over close to him and the concussion blew him off into another hole where an artillery shell had exploded. He I guess he looked around and nothing was wrong with him maybe he was a little dizzy from that explosion, got up and went and was blown into another hole. And he was wounded a little bit then and a gunner on a 30 caliber water cool side arm was a 45 a Browning automatic pistol. We went on and took the town and he was wounded that time didn't kill him he was wounded we went on and took seven prisoners out of the little town over Riverside and by the way another I went from first scout that day to assistant squad leader to squad leader. And I don't remember must have took us the best of a day I guess to get across that terrain into and I had another boy from high school was shot right through the cheek of his butt. He was crawling under a fence and got shot right through the cheek of his butt no bone just a flesh wound right through both cheeks. This boy I was telling you about Vance Montgomery was blown out of two holes and the medics had patched him up and he was still conscious. And the medic drug him off in the same hole that he was blown out of. And we took seven prisoners out of that town and the old man said get them out of here get them said and said I don't care more or less said take them out there somewhere and get rid of them and get back here. And as they were carrying them out over the ground we had just come over with all of this artillery barrage that was going on Vance was in this hole patched up with a medic. The prisoners walked by this hole he whips out his automatic and starts shooting them as they went by the hole. I don't know how many of them he killed.

Interviewer: Did he know they were prisoners?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh they had their hands on their head had two guys taking them back. Randolph Davis who was the squad leader well first

Interviewer: Your squad leader?

Fitzgerald: Yeh Mudley Graves was a boy from Milam Tennessee my best buddy was from Chattanooga Ed Fitch. And the reason he was my best buddy he was Fitch and I was Fitzgerald and we were right in line alphabetically. But we learned we were real close Red Dog Vegas was our squad leader and Mudley Graves who was a rifleman in the squad got hit and I saw Mudley reach up and rub his face like this and I saw his teeth all the way back to his he just wiped his whole cheek off. Red Dog Vegas went over to assist Red Dog the squad leader he went over to assist Mudley Graves and get his first aid pack and his tablet sulphur tablet and what else. Anyway Both of them still conscious Red Dog was attending to Mudley and got shot right through the prettiest little hole you ever seem through his ear right there. And he was bleeding pretty bad and they got a hold of the medic and they evacuated him and that's when I was moved from assistant squad leader to squad leader.

Interviewer: And you're still in the open ground?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh they were still in open Larry Harris when he crawled under the fence he got shot Vance got blown out of a hole out of the artillery shell hole twice and Red Dog was attending to Mudley where artillery had gotten a hold of his face.

Interviewer: So these are all guys in your squad

Fitzgerald: Yeh right around

Interviewer: All going across this 500 yard field getting shot up to pieces

Fitzgerald: Right we were receiving small arm fire

Interviewer: And artillery

Fitzgerald: So they were zeroed in on you they knew

Interviewer: It wasn't a surprise to them they had already zeroed in on you.

Fitzgerald: They had a pattern later on after we took the town and set up company headquarters or what we called CPs in a basement of one of the houses that was still standing and we set up a parameter. Anytime you take a town of any size a small village or a big town you immediately went through and set up a parameter outside of town that was our tactics. And the old man wanted that artillery he wanted that artillery. So he chose me, Fitch, Sargent Tidwell, Sargent Tidwell was a platoon leader and who was that other squad leader I can't think of his name right off. But he wasted it patrolled he said now boys I want to know where those artillery pieces are find them for me. We waited till dark and set off until we found them and brought our artillery into service then. And those 105s took care of them they saved our skin many times as well as the P51s did later on.

Interviewer: So when you were getting shot in the field when did you get to the foot of the city? When did you displace the Germans out of the city?

Fitzgerald: Well they left most of them.

Interviewer: They broke contact

Fitzgerald: They broke contact but we took seven prisoners.

Interviewer: So seven of them stayed and fought?

Fitzgerald: Evidently they were told to stay until you die or whatever.

Interviewer: well they did die anyway.

Fitzgerald: Yeh some of them did I don't remember how many Vance shot but we took we had the prisoners lined up behind a wall a wall of a house I remember this very well. One of the of course you get all mixed up units, squads, platoons, companies get mixed up of course L Company was the only one cause K Company was sitting off up there watching us get cut all to pieces they were sitting on the next hill. Anyway the prisoners were lined up we lined them up at a wall and was shaking them down when two or three of us had our guns on them and the others were shaking them down getting their helmets off, ammunition, weapons frisking them down. And the guy on the end down here was opened his coat pocket and reached in here and the guy on my right down here that was had a gun on them on that end of the group just cut loose on an M1 and emptied a clip on him. And somebody rolled him over and looked and it was a medic card he was looking for his medic card to show that he was protected by the

Geneva Convention. But of course the guy that shot him thought he was reaching for a weapon and he just emptied an M1 in him. I set off a Bouncing Betty.

Interviewer: Oh let's back up let's get this in chronological order. You left the Arden's you crossed the forest you squad and your company got cut to pieces

Fitzgerald: Yes

Interviewer: Then finally the Germans displaced you got through the artillery you took the village and seven prisoners, set up a parameter then some of those fellows got shot some of those prisoners a few of the seven got shot.

Fitzgerald: I don't know how many.

Interviewer: Or killed when they were searching them then once the darkness fell you went on this patrol did you set off the Bouncing Betty before or after that patrol?

Fitzgerald: No we went on a patrol found the artillery pieces reported back and they brought our artillery in and silenced those 88s. Then a parameter had been set up and this was I don't remember what time of night we got back I don't remember how long it took us to find those artillery pieces. But we stayed until we found them and the next morning my squad was supposed to go, I was the 3rd squad, and I was told by the platoon leader you go down there by the edge of those woods and relieve 1st squadron and let them come back and have some rest and some K-rations C-rations whatever. So I gathered they had some blankets they had given some blankets to us during the night and some GI cans of water. And I knew that my squad was going to need some water and some blankets so I went back myself I carried the I'm sorry I'm getting mixed up here. We went down and relieved the 1st squad before daylight and I got to asking did anybody have any water, nobody had any water, anybody pick up any blankets, nobody picked up any blankets. So I take off back to CP where there was GI cans of water and some blankets. And daylight caught me before I got back to my squad and the squad ahead of us during the time they were setting up the parameter had marked the mine field with toilet paper. That's the way we usually did most of us had a package of toilet paper come in the K-rations in our pocket and they had marked the mine field. Well I was receiving small arms fire they was popping pretty good over my head well I just forgot about the mine field.

Interviewer: You were by yourself and

Fitzgerald: Yeh I had blankets under this arm a GI can and an M1 was slung over my shoulder.

Interviewer: And you're trying to get back to your squad.

Fitzgerald: Trying to get back to my squad where their dug in.

Interviewer: And you're getting shot at

Fitzgerald: And I receiving small arms not artillery I was receiving small arm fire and I tripped a Bouncing Betty. And I was moving pretty fast as fast as I could move with that GI can of water well I didn't know it

at the time until I got to the squad area I had a chunk of shrap metal as big as a marble big as my thumb imbedded in my stock of my M1 that I had slung over my shoulder. It drained my water can cut those blankets to pieces and I had one entry of shrap metal in the back of the neck. And I didn't know that for a while some body said hell Fitz you're bleeding and I reached back there and felt and had a little blood. Now this is interesting at this time this was in December late December could have been first of January of 45 so many guys had received the Purple Heart from cutting their hand on a C-ration scratching their hand on a barbed wire fence crossing or cut their or had a M1 thumb that brought blood. Had received a Purple Heart the order came down that Purple Hearts would not be issued unless you were evacuated unless you were wounded bad enough to be evacuated and of course I wasn't. So I didn't get a Purple and it didn't matter then I then but it would have been five points towards coming home if I would have received it. But that took care of then our executive after over Riverside if you're ready to move on

Interviewer: Yeh I'm ready to move on. So your squad didn't get water?

Fitzgerald: No it drained that GI can I mean it drained all of the water out of it and the blankets were not in shreds but they had holes in them.

Interviewer: So next what happened what was the objective?

Fitzgerald: Well it's a little vague from there our next objective was sin zing on the Rhine River. Which was a pretty good distance.

Interviewer: Did you get trucked?

Fitzgerald: No not there we didn't get trucked. We moved on and maybe took the next town maybe it comes back, K-Company who watched us get cut to pieces crossing that open terrain attacked the next village while we, we must have stayed a couple of days or at least a day and a night over Riverside. And K Company got knocked out of the next town, they attacked and was pushed back and I don't know if I should use this term or not the African Americans who were caught up in a why can't I think of it they were caught up in a deal where they were black marketing goods. And it wasn't only African Americans their leaders some of their leaders officers had been court marshaled. The guys the grunts of course was doing what the officers was telling them to do and they had a black market thing going back at the coast where ever. And they were black marketing stuff off right and left and they were big time dealer. Anyway they were caught and they were court marshaled and they told the African American if they would go to the front and present themselves as soldiers and act like soldiers and fight they would delete their sentence they would what am I trying to say. Anyway they were assigned to K Company then I remember very well.

Interviewer: So K Company had white and black soldiers?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh well no this was a platoon African American was a platoon.

Interviewer: K Company had an African American

Fitzgerald: And the orders came with them to use them in spear head attacks. And they were getting shot up pretty bad.

Interviewer: That's amazing I didn't realize there was a unit that was black and white before the Korean War that's

Fitzgerald: Now you might say these were special because they made a unit out of them platoon size unit. And they were ordered to come to the front and present themselves and if they presented themselves and they did a good job their sentence would be suspended. And they did they came to the front and they did a good job they did a good job they attacked they were the spearhead of K Company. And their attacked on this other village I don't remember the name of it and we were moving in that direction and moved and the African American team had gotten pushed back and as a result K Company got pushed back and it was left up to us to push through it and we did. But I don't know I can't say I'm not throwing off on K Company and I'm not throwing off on the African American platoon. But it wasn't that much trouble to us I mean we more or less took the town without too much resistance and we never did understand why K Company fell back and why the African American company fell back. Anyway we was receiving some artillery fire as we were taking charge taking over the attack from K Company K Company was filtering back and the African American one African American was helping his buddy who had been shot somewhere in his leg here and he couldn't use his leg and he had his arm around his buddies neck. And you could hear blood gushing in his combat boot every time he hit and his leg was bloody and we were in a ditch on the side of the road and this guy with this wounded buddy was right in the middle of road walking back as if a lot of them had been wounded it's ain't going to happen to me anymore and artillery was falling everywhere small arms too. And I'll never forget the words he said he said ya'll look out up there said they're shooting real bullets said they'll hit you if they can. Just like that might have been their first action I don't know but they were surprised at the action going on as we were back center. I'll never forget a shell had hit a stable of horses and you know a horse won't leave a burning building you have to blindfold a horse to get him out of a burning building and these horses were standing in this burning building that was on fire. And the grease from their bodies was dripping off their underside they were still standing. From there maybe a couple of days later the front was expanding or moving so fast we got a break for clean clothes, hot chow

Interviewer: Let me ask you this how far how many guys in your squad had gotten wounded? How big was your squad when you left the Arden's and how many guys got wounded?

Fitzgerald: Okay I had a full squad when we left the Arden's.

Interviewer: Nine men?

Fitzgerald: Twelve men.

Interviewer: Okay twelve men.

Fitzgerald: And when we got through over Riverside I had eight. And that eight stayed in tact pretty well for the next several days and our objective was sin zig on the Rhine River. And we made it pretty good we traveled and didn't lose

Interviewer: Did you ever feel the burden of leading your men?

Fitzgerald: No

Interviewer: Did you think you were a natural at it is that part of the reason why you

Fitzgerald: I thought it came natural yes.

Interviewer: Did your men respect you?

Fitzgerald: Yes I would have went the distance with them and every one of them would have went the distance with me.

Interviewer: Did you ever have any issues in your squad? Guys get mad or

Fitzgerald: Well yeh Levandoski was my BAR man Levandoski was a big tall something he was a Pollok I might not want to use that term and a complainer. Oh gosh this guy complained he told me one day said Fitz I'll tell you what said that BARs so heavy said its making me walk one sided when I don't even have the thing on my shoulder. And it finally got to the point that we had to I discussed it with the Platoon Sargent and he said well you've got to take care of it said you've got to take care of it. So and he made it all the way through no I take that back that was Levandoski. Mudd an Indian from the reservation great big guy Mudd saved out hide with that BAR. Levandoski I don't know I think he finally complained himself on to sick call and we never did see him anymore once he was relieved and went back for sick call. Mudd came in as a replacement long about not to long after over Riverside. The reason I remember over Riverside so well and remember the name of the little village most of the stuff that happened right around me we lost more people there until we got on to where did we lose the most people around Sin Zig somewhere around Sin Zig.

Interviewer: Hold on for about two minutes I'm going to change out the tape.

Fitzgerald: On the way after over Riverside on our objective at Sin Zig I don't remember if it were the second or third village or town we ran into some pretty good size little towns in there but we ran into one town and had a pretty good little skirmish and we took prisoners and the company commanders always set up in a basement or something like a basement a CP. So Fitch and I had taken a couple of prisoners and we were directed to take them back to the CP to the Company Commander. And this one was a German officer equivalent to our Captain was a Company Commander spoke perfect English fluent English used correct grammar spoke better grammar than we did. And he was of course low he was very depressed and he was talking to us the whole time we was carrying him back to the CP and when we got back to the CP the Captain was busy interrogating another prisoner that could speak pretty good English. But when he found out we told the Company Commander said this guy speaks perfect English. So he quit this guy and comes over to our Captain and started questioning him and he wasn't

getting too much information out of him and batted him around a little bit a Captain carried an M1 carbine and they carried a pouch of ammunition on the stock of it, it just fit right down fell in to is so he whacked him a little bit with the stock of his carbine. And the Captain broke down and wept and before the Captain released us to go back to our squad we heard him question we heard and saw him question this guy. And he broke down and began weeping and finally got control of himself and told the Captain voluntarily that what amazed the German high command most was the ability of the American noncoms even down to Corporals. Their ability to make decisions, and most of the time right decisions, and leadership and the noncoms would equal the leadership of the American noncoms would equal to the Lieutenants and the Captains in the German commands. And he went ahead and volunteered the reason was and the military people knew it but this was Hitler's came down from the higher command. The Germans would not act on their own they were programmed against making decisions on their own. They only acted on orders from somebody else. And this guy he just couldn't believe the leadership capabilities of American GIs. And we didn't know that we had no idea about that we did what was necessary to be done. And we usually done it the easiest way we could or figure out instead of making a head on assault if you was just getting cut all to pieces with small arms well we'd figure out there was a ditch over there somewhere we'd just back up and get in that ditch and flank them or go at it a different direction. And my brother was a he said the same thing the one that was in the Pacific and when they were really fighting to hold on to Hickam Field and he was an armor man Sergeant on a P38 and a P38 squadron. And they had to go out with the mud marines every night and do duty out there and their other duty in the day time. But he said the Japanese was that way that they would attack to cross that river in the same force and the same places every day make the same attacks. And it was amazing to that German Captain how the leadership of the American GI.

Interviewer: Did you ever make a decision in combat?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh oh yes

Interviewer: That you thought was key or paramount?

Fitzgerald: Well yes at the time I don't know how important it was to the whole to the big picture but before we reached Sinzig our objective we were assigned to an armor outfit and they put a squad of men on the tank. And we would maybe make 8, 10, 12, 15 miles a day we came to a little town of Wetzlar Germany

Interviewer: Our whole company was had

Fitzgerald: As far as knew

Interviewer: You had each squad on one tank.

Fitzgerald: Yeh I knew that our three squads in the 3rd platoon was attached to tanks.

Interviewer: How a question that just kind of popped in my mind. That Captain when you first got off the train was he your Company Commander?

Fitzgerald: I don't know if he'd ever commanded a company or not I really don't.

Interviewer: But did he stay with

Fitzgerald: No I never saw him again he was reassigned somewhere else and we was assigned somewhere I don't even know that he was assigned to the 69th division. When we were assigned to tank and they put a squadron in on a tank and as I said some days we'd make 12, 15 miles a day and we were really rolling across we were really rolling across Germany then. And we ran off of the map we stayed lost most of the time as I told you before they would issue a Company Commander an area map and it was about like a county map here and of course we stayed off them we was moving fast and we'd move off of the map. And we were on our own and the tankers were on their own a lot of time but we stayed in contact. We knew this little town of Wetzlar was there and both the tank commander and the infantry commander decided to by pass us. But dark caught us and we built back down with the tankers and whipped out our K-rations or C-rations or whatever we had and swapped around. And the next morning before we moved out shortly after daylight or maybe it was daylight here come this German on a bicycle just screaming his head off it was an elderly man. Just waving one hand and just screaming his head off well the old man said get my interpreter up here and let's see what this fools got on his mind something. So he got his interpreter and this guy was telling him there was a concentration camp in Wetzlar now if you're familiar with liker cameras liker cameras was made the liker factor was made in Wetzlar. And they had since turned into a bomb sight factory and we didn't know this until this German come down the road. And had concentration camp there for workers in that plant so he was telling that they were breaking out of the concentration camp and they were killing people and the old man pointed to me and said get your squad on your tank and ya'll ahead and see what this guy has to say. So here this guy takes off on his bicycle and we take off right behind him and must have been I don't know a couple of miles into the little ole town. And sure enough when we got into the little ole town the ones that were able to get out and do anything and a lot of them was women they were finding the guards and the commanders of that concentration camp. We got in town in time to see these two women, pretty good size women, run this man down caught him throwed him down on the sidewalk and the Germans wore hot nail boots and they took that man's boots off and killed him beat him to death with his boots and we watched them. But I got something I want to show you. This concentration camp

Interviewer: How did they get out of the camp?

Fitzgerald: They broke out.

Interviewer: So they had an uprising.

Fitzgerald: They realized the Americans were pretty close. This is what we found when we got into the camp (handing the interviewer a photo).

Interviewer: This is amazing, oh my God.

Fitzgerald: When you get to the carts where this body is on a cart that's what they picked up every morning. They had the ones that made the round with the cart and picked up the bodies that died during the night.

Interviewer: Is this what these people looked like when they broke out?

Fitzgerald: Well they were at different stages these were the worst people these was still at the camp these people weren't able to get out of camp. The ones that was able was the ones that broke out of camp.

Interviewer: What is this furnace?

Fitzgerald: That's where they burned

Interviewer: Looks like a crematory.

Fitzgerald: Crematory yeh

Interviewer: So did your company go up into this?

Fitzgerald: We didn't go all the way through it in fact when the somebody saw

Interviewer: While you're talking I'm going to show these pictures (holding the pictures in front of the camera)

Fitzgerald: Okay somebody that had a brain for this decided that it wasn't best for us to see them for the Americans to see them. So we saw this what your seeing but there was more to the camp than what your seeing there.

Interviewer: So that whole what did that German want you to do did he want

Fitzgerald: He was trying to get us in there

Interviewer: To keep them from beating him up?

Fitzgerald: Cause they were killing and beating them.

Interviewer: So here's the carts right there.

Fitzgerald: Okay well that's the carts the daily rounds every morning was to go around there in concentration camp and pick up the dead the ones that died during the night.

Interviewer: This picture kills me this guy right here is just skin and bones.

Fitzgerald: Those didn't make it they were so far gone.

Interviewer: He's just a stick.

Fitzgerald: Right

Interviewer: This is a sad picture.

Fitzgerald: Those are mostly the ones that were starved to the point that they weren't fit for labor anymore.

Interviewer: Human bones in a crematory. Here's the last picture.

Now my buddy Ed Fitch was my best buddy and we had it through in one piece this far he knew what a liker camera was so we had the chance I think maybe they radioed back for the rest of the group to come on in to Wetzlar. And while we waited and he knew the liker camera was there the factory was there so GIs had a nose for good looting if I might use that term for cameras, guns, jewelry and Fitch was our supply guy. If we needed something we'd say Fitch we need so and so and so and so and he'd get it he'd round it up from somewhere he was our scrounger. And he knew about the liker cameras so he told me said Fitz when we get a chance let's go into that factory somewhere in the back of that factory there was like a camera store and sure enough there was. And that boy knew what liker cameras were so he found the ones that was packaged in brief case like containers that had lens, tripods you name it all in a package in those things. And he managed to get some of those and talk his ole our attack buddy into letting him tie them on to the tank. He managed to send those things home and when he got back home, he had a widowed mother and a younger brother, and he built that mother a house and sent his brother through Cumberland University with the funds that he received from selling those

Interviewer: Cameras

Fitzgerald: Those liker cameras he'd go to California and he'd sell one of those packages for eight, ten thousand dollars.

Interviewer: Wow

Fitzgerald: Liker cameras and he sent his brother through school and built his mother a home from the sale of those cameras. I'd find a weapon say a custom made shot gun and I'd want it do bad it would be beautifully engraved they were masters at they were craftsman in this respect. And I'd keep one and carry it with me and baby it and maybe after a few days didn't get a chance to send it home I'd throw it away or break it up and maybe the next day I could have sent it home. And I got

Interviewer: And you'd kick yourself wouldn't you.

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh I got home with a double barrel shot gun a German luger a pair of field glass and three or four knives and that's about all of the souvenirs I got home.

Interviewer: And you didn't get rid of that stuff did you?

Fitzgerald: No

Interviewer: Good

Fitzgerald: Well I had a little there's a story that goes along with this. On the way to Sin Zig another little village we had a pretty good little fire fight and Mudd with his BAR this is when he saved our hid. I don't remember the name of this village we went through but in this village was located the water works for several villages around and furnished water to then and we knew this the Captain knew this. So we were intent on taking that water works. Well the Germans lay low and we had to go through an orchid we advanced through an orchid and was receiving some small arm fire we wasn't receiving any artillery we was receiving small arm fire. And the Captain located the building and the water works unit and it was in operation it was working then they were filtering water and treating water. And we had to go through this orchid and the Germans laid low it was late in the afternoon right into dark before we got to the water works. And the Germans just sort of pulled back and laid low and let us come through then the next morning they raise up and we were cut off.

Interviewer: Your company?

Fitzgerald: No my platoon. Your platoon I didn't know what was going on even company wide squad wide and platoon wide was about all we knew what was going on. So the old man told me said you take your squad and go out and set up a road block on that paved road yonder you could see the road from where we were. We had taken the water works and but we were cut off back here so I took my squad and Mudd wanted to do something and he didn't leave with us something he had to do or wanted to do. So he stayed behind said he'd come on later and we went out set up a road block and fell off into the ditches on both sides of the road. And looked up the road and I was in the lead the lead one on the right hand side of the road. And it was pretty level land and it was trees on the side of the road made a sweeping curve about four or five hundred yards up the road there was a sweeping curve to the left. And I saw these bob up running bob up running they were Germans coming back in to this town. They didn't know we were in there they might have I don't know but they was trying to take the town back. So this guy was coming this artillery observer I found out later was coming down the road on a bicycle my side of the road he was just peddling his tail off coming back into town. As he got closer I see his field glasses I could see his little Belgium 42, 32 automatic on his hip and I could see everything and he was within 50 yards of me I guess. And he was on my side of the road we had bayonets fixed and I didn't know what I was going to do because I didn't want to let them guys that was bobbing up and coming down four or five hundred yards up the road I didn't want to let them know it. And I kept hearing safeties click off the M1s behind me. And I got word to them to cool it and they hadn't seen these guys that was coming down the road four or five hundred yards off so I didn't know what I was going to do and the guy was getting closer and closer. Finally he was right at me on the shoulder of the road and I just up and heaved bayonet ruffle and all at the front wheel of that bicycle and here he come spread eagle right in the ditch right on top of me. And he was I'd say 35, 40 year old man and of course to me then 18 year old 35 or 40 was an old man. And he kept fiddling for his he had a potato masher grenade had that little Belgium 32 had knife on his belt and had his field glasses around his neck. So he loaded off his bicycle and he was as surprised as I was when he landed but he was trying to fish out his little 32 automatic and I got behind him and got that strap on his Adams apple here. And I don't know I'm sure I sat down on him with all of my strength and finally he went limp and I turned him loose didn't kill him. But I got his little 32 got his field glasses and I didn't want the potato masher had grenade and his knife I

got his knife. And I made it home with the field glasses and the knife but I didn't make it home with the little 32 and I'm getting way ahead now. But on the boat coming back home we were told about one day out you could have one weapon no ammunition you could get it checked back in you could check in one weapon and no ammunition I had two or three socks full of ammunition. So I heaved them overboard my socks of ammunition and there was a boy from Tenuk New Jersey, I'm not going to call his name, but he I thought was a pretty good buddy. And I asked him I said would you carry this little 32 to check point for me he said why yeh I'll be glad to. So I had the holster the original holster that was in a little Belgium 32 I give it to him and of course I could have drawn in a sack full of weapons they didn't check nothing. So they this was at Camp Killman is it on the coast would that have been Camp Killman New Jersey? Well anyway we landed in New Jersey and I saw the barracks when he went through the check points I saw the barracks that he went into and I went right after him and he saw me coming I'm sure and he took out the back door of the barracks

Interviewer: The 32 with him

Fitzgerald: I had my knife ready no I knew it was in his barracks bag and I had my knife ready to slash his barracks bag. And there was two or three other guys in bunks laying there and I said no I better not do that I might get my tail whipped if I cut into that barracks bag. So he's still got my little 32 my little Belgium 32. But I made it home with the ruger and the knife and the field glasses.

Interviewer: So did you want to kill that guy?

Fitzgerald: My intent was to kill him right then but when I felt him go limp there wasn't no use me killing this guy.

Interviewer: What amazing control. Did you feel raged?

Fitzgerald: Yeh well no I felt fear.

Interviewer: You were scared.

Fitzgerald: And to finish the story what I started out to tell you is Mudd came up about this time he came up and joined us. And it was a paved road two lane road and he saw what was happening he saw what was happening with the bicycle man he saw what was happening with these guys that were coming and advancing in that ditch around the crave up there. And he just waited for a few minutes and popped that BAR down right out exposed he was excited I know and wasn't really thinking about himself. He just dropped down with that BAR and took care of the guys that was coming down the road.

Interviewer: How many do you think he killed?

Fitzgerald: I would say that it was probably a German platoon and their platoons were depleted to the point where it was probably not over 16 maybe 18 men. And I don't know how many he killed I don't know how many he wounded we didn't go back that away.

Interviewer: So he just he repelled the attack.

Fitzgerald: He saved our bacon he saved our bacon yes with that BAR.

Interviewer: He was a good shot with it?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh he was a full blooded what tribe was he from not Sue

Interviewer: Navaho, Apache

Fitzgerald: No it wasn't one of those it was a lesser known tribe.

Interviewer: Where was his reservation?

Fitzgerald: Somewhere in Arizona not too far from the Grand Canyon I believe he said.

Interviewer: Pablo

Fitzgerald: What

Interviewer: Pablo

Fitzgerald: Pablo yeh Pablo I wanted to say Navaho and I knew that wasn't right. Pablo he was a good guy he was a good guy I've got some one unit picture that's all I've got of him I don't have it with me.

Interviewer: Tell me about this railroad gun you've got a picture of how did you take that?

Fitzgerald: Well it wasn't dramatic they had abandoned it. We beat them out of the little ole village where it was located and we were traveling so fast they didn't have time to get it out so they just abandoned it.

Interviewer: So the Germans were continually breaking contact putting up some resistance breaking contact so there are several stories that you can tell where they put up a resistance but they really weren't there to fight too much just to slow you down enough for them to move back.

Fitzgerald: The moral had a lot to do with it they were breaking ranks they were deserting I remember in this little town I was telling about where Mudd saved our skin. We after the ole man sent a relief after we was out there oh I don't know six or seven hours he sent a relief squad our there to relieve us to come back in to get k-rations c-rations whatever. And after we ate whatever it was and was dug in around this water works we took a position so the other guys had already dug a whole. And got mail to us by the way we received mail from home there. And way down the railroad was on our left and they had blown our P51 pilots had blown a bridge and the railroad was elevated probably 15, 18 feet elevation on the railroad. And they had blown the bridge and we could see Germans going where the bridge was from one side of the bridge to the other. And there wasn't anything there the bridge was blown and you could see the gap when they was going when they was running across there. Well we was taking punt shots at them as they was running across there and there was a building some three or four hundred yards and they were going in the building and civilians was coming out this end of the building. The Germans had clothes that they had looted or confiscated and they were ditching their military uniforms and putting on civilian clothes and going out this end of the barn as a civilian. And they

were breaking ranks and the moral was bad as I said if most of the time when you captured an officer educated officer they were very depressed the moral had gone to nothing and well they knew the jig was up they knew that it was a lost cause. But still you had your diehards still resisting. We crossed the Rhine on a pontoon bridge and here again my hats off to the engineers the Remagen Bridge was in sight that was before it collapsed.

Interviewer: This was shortly after this road block when you got cut off across the Rhine?

Fitzgerald: Yeh I think maybe the next objective was Sin Zig and it was

Interviewer: I had one question, don't lose that thought, but what did you think about the American tanks because you rode on one as opposed to the German tanks?

Fitzgerald: They wasn't even close.

Interviewer: The Germans had us beat?

Fitzgerald: Oh gosh that Tiger tank it won't equal the Abrams now but it was the Abrams of the day then.

Interviewer: Did you ever have any contact with other German tanks with German tanks while you were on that tank?

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: How did the tankers perform?

Fitzgerald: They would stay the last minute they would stay with their tank until they had to get out if they were able to get out. Those tankers were issued grease guns we called them it's that little pressed steel gun with a wire barrel for a shorter stock. And they would aw they would beg us to swap that for M1s and the reason they couldn't have M1s is they would block the escape hatch. If they weren't careful if they was excited and started out with an M1 an M1 wouldn't go this way through the escape hatch and it would block the escape hatches that's why they had those little grease guns is what we called them. They put out a lot of gosh I forgot how many rounds a minute but they weren't very accurate. I've seen those Tigers blow a hole in a Sherman tank you could stick your fist through. And when they would blow a hole in it the secondary explosive would bounce around inside that tank and there was no way a Jap could live through all of that shrap metal red hot bouncing around inside that tank. The tank might look like if you didn't see the hole most of the time it set them on fire sometimes it didn't most of the time it set them on fire inside.

Interviewer: Did you ever have to dismount the tank?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh we'd this reminded me we'd run into resistance when we was traveling on tanks and we'd run into small arms the ole tanker would say boys ya'll bail off and we'll take care of this one. And they would button up and they would locate the building that that fire was coming from. And most of the buildings in Germany had long since lost all the windows and they was boarded up with boards. If

the window was low enough on that particular building they would run up and hang a track in that in them boards and just peel them off of there. Back off about as far as from here to your pickup out there and wheel that what was it a millimeter on the Sherman they'd wheel that thing around there and put a 90 millimeter and then you'd see the roof blow off. Now if we ran into antitank they'd say boys ya'll bail off said we're getting out of here. And they'd back off to a safe distance and they'd start placing fire on where they thought the fire was coming from the antitank fire.

Interviewer: So the American tanks wouldn't fight the Panzers or the Tigers?

Fitzgerald: They fought them but it was a lost cause. That Panzer tank with a bazooka placed just right would knock the track off a tank.

Interviewer: Did you ever shoot a tank with a bazooka?

Fitzgerald: No Fitch my buddy was a bazooka man.

Interviewer: He shot tanks?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh we shot tanks I can't say we knocked out a tank I don't remember if we knocked out a tank or not. But you had to place the shot just right to get a tank.

Interviewer: Was the fear different apposed to when you were like for instance you had small arms fire there was probably a certain amount of fear adrenalin you know with artillery it probably feels different because you really can't do anything about it your in a hole.

Fitzgerald: That's right

Interviewer: What was the feeling when you would see a German tank and how close were you?

Fitzgerald: The most fearful thing to me was to hear that tank rattle that track rattle on a Tiger tank that was one of the most fearful to me that I experienced. We felt like we could do something about a machine gun we felt like we could do something about a artillery an 88. But there wasn't anything a guy could do to that tank with an M1riffle not a thing you could do to it.

Interviewer: Just get in a hole and wait it out.

Fitzgerald: Get in a hole that's right.

Interviewer: What was the closest you were ever to a tank a German tank?

Fitzgerald: I'd say 300 yards.

Interviewer: Close enough for them to shoot you.

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh I've experienced and received fire from a tank. Not shooting at us particularly but a larger target. Those Tiger tanks were they were tough and we were scared to death of them they would scare you to death. You'd hear one of those ole tracks rattling it was fearful. (Tape ended)

Tape 3

Interviewer: Okay back you were talking about crossing the Rhine you crossed it on a

Fitzgerald: Pontoon bridge they started out building a double to accommodate vehicles and they were getting blown up about a third of the way we watched we were watching engineers built we were sitting on the bank ready to cross. And the tanks they were putting the tanks across the Remagen Bridge it hadn't collapsed yet but they was putting foot soldiers across they was building that pontoon to put foot soldiers across. And they'd get they had got about a third of the way across with a double pontoon and the Germans setting off over there with artillery and they was blasting them just about as fast as they could put a pontoon up there they would blast it out. They concentrated on just putting a single pontoon bridge across just to get us across to get the foot soldiers across and they did. But near the closer they got to the far wide the more accurate the artillery became. And boy those guys would get blown up and they'd be right back in there with another pontoon they hadn't much more than gone down the river until they'd be right back in there with another one putting it across. And they finally got it across and something I don't know maybe someone called in air support or something. Any how the artillery was taken care of but we crossed under fire under small arms fire across that single bridge.

Interviewer: What was that like knowing that there was no place to hide?

Fitzgerald: That's right and

Interviewer: I mean at least in a field you can get down in the grass.

Fitzgerald: The way you knew you was being fired on when we were crossing the bridge you didn't hear the report from the piece as it left as the projectile left the piece. But you'd see the water jump up and it cracked when it went over your head if you've ever been on a firing range and had shots going over your head it pops almost like it does when it leaves the weapon. And you knew you was of course you would see a pontoon get shot once in a while with a 30 caliber they had 9 millimeters instead of 30 calibers pretty close to the same thing. But I don't remember a single man getting hit as I crossed ahead of me or behind me.

Interviewer: How did your squad cross ducks in a row?

Fitzgerald: Ducks in a row wide open.

Interviewer: Run as fast as you can go.

Fitzgerald: As fast as you can don't stop don't stop. Your natural your natural instincts told you when you was receiving fire get on the ground hit the ground and of course they were yelling up and down the line don't stop keep going don't stop.

Interviewer: So you got all of your eight men across just fine?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh we crossed.

Interviewer: And your 18 years old

Fitzgerald: I'm 18 years old.

Interviewer: And a squad leader with 8 guys

Fitzgerald: Right and I came home and couldn't vote.

Interviewer: That's amazing

Fitzgerald: Yes it is it's amazing.

Interviewer: So when you got to the other side was there a spot you could jump down on the ground?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh

Interviewer: Get out of the way and let the other guys come through.

Fitzgerald: Disperse we'd flake off to the side.

Interviewer: Were you the lead man across?

Fitzgerald: Most of the time most of the time sometimes you'd put your BAR man your heavy fire power ahead. And you had a first scout and if you had a good first scout most of the time he would spearhead.

Interviewer: I had a specific question it just left me go ahead sorry.

Fitzgerald: From the Rhine we got back on our tanks we linked back up with our tank and I don't know how that happened.

Interviewer: It was the same tank with the cameras on it?

Fitzgerald: Yeh same tank same crew and somebody had radio control that caused that to happen I don't know how the happened. I thought at the time it was just coincidental but it was bound it wasn't coincidental it was bound to be arranged. They might have crossed say 30, 40 minutes as hour ahead of us and they were advised to wait up to go to a certain location wait up and then we were advised to go to that point and meet back up.

Interviewer: I remember my question and it's kind of a strange question but when you were running and you were scared and people were shooting at you did you ever fell like your legs wouldn't move?

Fitzgerald: No

Interviewer: Or did you always seem to have enough energy to

Fitzgerald: No it's amazing how the adrenaline flows at this incident and maybe in an hour more that adrenelines there again. I hesitate to say this I know where your questions coming from. And some guys couldn't take it some guys just could not stand the pressure or for a better word why they just couldn't

stand it. Once in a while you'd run into not very often but once in awhile you'd run into a guy that would submit to the fear and fear would take over fear would absolutely take over. It happened normally it didn't happen very often it didn't happen very often. Where I guess I saw mostly out of control soldiers was the night of that division during they took the brunt of that hit

Interviewer: In the Bulge

Fitzgerald: Right it was chaos.

Interviewer: Okay so you get across the Rhine disperse and you link up with your tank.

Fitzgerald: Right

Interviewer: With cameras thank god for your buddy.

Fitzgerald: Yeh of course as you can understand ole Any Rooney for instance if things got pretty tough Andy would say I've got to get back and dispatch my report. He probably wouldn't appreciate me saying that.

Well can you blame the guy?

No sir I can't blame him no and I don't blame him no. Our next objective after we crossed the Rhine was Linzi. Did Linzi come first or Castle? I don't remember Linzi or Castle was our was the biggest two cities that we took we took several small cities but Linzi was pretty good size city so was castle. Linzi had a monument in a zoo they had a tremendous zoo in Linzi. And you know their concern the residence that we saw in Linzi the civilians were concerned about the zoo animals. They approached us now there's something I left out with all of these little towns and large towns that we took. The mayor of these towns was called the Bergie Master. And the Captain learned well I'll go back a little bit further. We received small arms fire sniper fire going into a village and we'd get there and there'd be nobody there. And there wouldn't be no sign or evidence of a military resistance and we learned at 13, 14, 12, 15 year old kids would great us and want bubble gum cigarettes this sort of stuff and we learned to look at their shoulder. You take a 14, 15 year old kid that was begging for bubble gum and rip his shirt off and look at his shoulder if his shoulder was bruised he'd been firing a sniper riffle. And we learned right quick how to detect when we'd get into a village or a town how to detect to find the snipers they were shooting. And of course they'd throw their ole sniper riffles away and come out and beg for bubble gum.

Interviewer: Did the German population ever greet you with like welcome you to their town?

Fitzgerald: Oh yes it was.

Interviewer: So that's very confusing some kids would shoot at you and then want bubble gum from you and then other people would be praising you for being there.

Fitzgerald: And it was mostly the elderly people that would greet us with a white flag in their hand and they would beg for cigarettes and coffee, chocolate bars they were hungry of course and they had kids that was hungry. There's a there's a false hood our propaganda department did a good job in convincing

us that all Germans were Nazis and all followed Nazi tactics but that's not true. The elderly people they welcomed us if we stayed in a village overnight they'd cook for us if we had could get them the food knock an old goose in the head or a rabbit all of them had rabbits over there cages. And they'd cook a rabbit for us welcome us and of course we'd give them cigarettes. Funny thing maybe an elderly lady 50, 60s, 65, 70 years old would welcome us and want to cook for us want to do something for us and want a cigarette. Maybe they had never smoked in her life but she'd snap down on a cigarette and cough and the smoke just blow and she'd draw a red ash on a cigarette that long. Maybe never smoked a cigarette in her life but she wanted an American cigarette. I think we did more diplomacy work diplomatic work with bubble gum and Nescafe chocolate bars k-ration I think we did more diplomacy with those to the kids that's grown up now. I think we did as much diplomatic work as our diplomats did. We set a they didn't believe they were in aw of Josh we could be in a fire fight pretty bad for two or three hours and take the town and those people were in aw that we could be soldiers and firing weapons and killing and in an hour and a half be dishing out bubble gums to kids. That of course their propaganda department was a lot better than ours was. We were they were taught we were all cowboys and we shot people without cause we just shot people just to be shooting people. And they were in aw with the way we conducted ourselves the friendliness we responded to their friendliness and it was it was quite a contrast.

Interviewer: What was the next most memorable event after you crossed those Rhine those two towns that you took?

Fitzgerald: I guess probably Josh skip to the Ebb River skip Linzi and I think I mentioned the fact that the people in Linzi they loved their zoo and they were concerned about the zoo and they wanted to protect the animals in their zoo. Anyway in Castle I don't remember too much about Castle capturing Castle I know that there was a monument in Linzi that was similar to the Washington monument in Washington. And the 105 boy those guys Josh could be on a road with the 105 hooked to a 6 by going down the road and get a fire order and they would have that thing loose from that truck turned around and have a smoke bomb in the air a smoke shell in the air in three minutes. They were good those guys were good. And you'd call them and long about towards the end of the war I'd say after we crossed the Rhine everyone knew the jig was about up it was just a matter of time the Germans included. The P51s come into being and aw boy you talk about an airplane to us guys. Those guys would kill for a target targets became less and less as we advanced. And for a mission those guys would kill for a mission those P51 guys would. And they'd fly under bridges they'd all of it they were dare devils cowboys we called them cowboys. And they would kill for a mission and they saved our bacon. And I remember talking about fear those guys would we would radio back we got in contact we had air ground communications and that was some of the first air ground programs. We'd call them back and tell the radio man to call back and they'd be in touch with the P51 squadron and give them fire information give them a co-ordination. And those guys would come in with their approach to the target right over us and you'd think they was going to bomb us or turn their fire power on us. They'd be right on us you might could throw a rock up at them and those guys could take out an artillery piece like that I mean they could they were good. They could take out targets machine guns or artillery pieces tanks now they were affective against tanks. They

had a I don't what projectile they had on them but they could take a tank out. We advanced up to the Baldy River.

Interviewer: This is after the Ebb?

Fitzgerald: Did I say Baldy we had already cross the Baldy. Ebb River and the terrain was flat it was delta like and they had levies back away from the main body away from the stream. And on our way up at one of the levies there was a shack there and a boat I guess it was a fisherman shack and a little ole john boat. So we made it up to the Ebb River and we had instructions not to cross the Ebb River. Come to the Ebb River dig in. And of course the officers knew that somebody was going to get some PR that made first contact with the Russians. And everybody was on the move to make first contact with the Russians. Our Company Commander was Captain Davidson and he was from Texas the Second Company Commander we had and he knew somebody was going to get some PR. So he sent for my squad me and my squad. No he didn't send for the whole squad he sent for me and Fitch and Gall who was from Kansas and Mudd and Sargent Tidwell who was the Platoon Sargent. And they were both from Texas him and the company commander. So when he sent for us and we got up to him he said did anybody see a boat anywhere on the way up? We said we say a little oh shack back there and we saw a little aluminum it wasn't aluminum some kind of boat a little ole fishing boat. And they had blown a dam on the Ebb River and it was running level with the banks just about and so he said ya'll go back there and get that boat and bring it up here. So we went back and got the boat and he said now just before dark we are going to cross that river. And we didn't know what his intent was then but it was to meet make first contact with the Russians. So dusty dark we gathered where he told us to and we had that little ole boat and he said now lets go and it was five of us and Sargent Tidwell told him said Captain let me take two or three of across and come back and get the other. Captain said no sir we're not going to put a man over there or two men over there stranded without some protection said we're not going to do it we're all going to go together. So we all loaded in that little ole short boat combat loaded and started across and it was getting dark then and I was holding on to the side like crazy and I felt the water lapping against these fingers where I was holding on to the side. And after a while it got up on my hand and of course then about that time the boat just kerplunk just sunk right out form under us it was over loaded. And I bet you we weren't as far from the bank we left as from here to your pickup and every one of us headed for the opposite bank. We could have turned around and been back on our bank where we left in no time but anyway every one of us struck out for that furtherist bank and as I said the river was swift. And everybody we would holler every once in a while you okay you okay everybody would answer yeh I'm okay okay and we all made it to the far bank. But we had one M1 we had two hand grenades and the ole man had his 45 that's all

Interviewer: Everybody else lost

Fitzgerald: Everybody else lost their weapons crossing over including me I lost my weapon. And here we were over there with those weapons that I mentioned and it dark. And he had posted as century at the place where we left and of course as swift as the water was we come out pretty good ways down. We had to make it back up the river to where we thought the century was on the other side and start trying to get his attention. And finally did and they went back and found the engineers or somebody not too

far back that had a rubber boat and they come and got us. And as a result of that now this was about dark this afternoon and about daylight the next morning the 272nd met the Russians up at Targo about oh a couple of miles up the river from us. And they the 69th got the credit for it but the 272nd got credit for it their division made first contact with the Russians.

Interviewer: Not your regiment?

Fitzgerald: No I was the 271st it was the 272nd. So we missed out on it but we went in and got in on the parties. They blew the bridge at Targo and the super structure was still visible above water and you could manage to hop from beam to beam and get over to the other side. And we went over off the record I better not say that on the record. We went over and swapped knives and watches and pistols and looted items and ole Ruskie would come at you and motion for you to get your canteen cup canteen cup and we'd get our canteen cup and he'd come around with an ole dirty jug or some kind of bucket and pour in there I think the stuff was made from diesel fuel and ole wore out tires and turnips and whatever else they could find. Potato peelings and lord have mercy we thought we was pretty tough we thought we was pretty thought because GIs were pretty bad after French schnapps and champagne and German beer but lord have mercy they didn't come close to that stuff them Russians was making on their own they were making stuff on there own. And it was something else I mean it would set you on fire.

Interviewer: So there was a lot of drinking in combat?

Fitzgerald: Yes it was yes it was not to the point of

Interviewer: Where you couldn't function.

Fitzgerald: Right where you couldn't function but that ole German black beer was good. Of course I thought and I was taught as a youngster boy if you drank whisky or beer you better just get ready a leg was going to fall off or you was going to go blind or something bad was going to happen to you and that was from strict parents. And I would stand in aw to see a guy turn up a quart bottle of champagne down half of it so I thought I could. In the town of Wetzlar back to Wetzlar at the same time Fitch found the liker cameras in the camera factory building somebody else found a champagne distillery and here comes the champagne and they were drinking champagne. And I took a swig of mine and I said that's just like 7-UP and you can drink that all day. And in about I don't know 12 or 15 minutes later I was just about out like a light I mean that stuff put you out in a hurry.

Interviewer: That's the first time you ever drank any alcohol?

Fitzgerald: That's the first time I ever tasted alcohol yeh.

Interviewer: That's amazing you had a lot of firsts.

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh

Interviewer: All during that one.

Fitzgerald: Sailed the ocean had a train ride had a boat ride had clothes furnished.

Interviewer: Combat first time you ever got drunk that's a lot of firsts. Got married

Fitzgerald: Got married right

Interviewer: So we're back to the Russians.

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: When did the war when did you guys find out the war ended?

Fitzgerald: When we met the Russians. We could hear their artillery in that distance. Funny thing here's an incident I believe I didn't mention this had a boy in wasn't in my platoon he was in I don't know I was in the 3rd platoon he was in the 1st or 2nd platoon. Moriar P Smith he was from Winston Salem North Carolina. His daddy was the Buick and Cadillac dealer in Winston Salem. Moriar was 37 years old you got discharged at 38 he was getting close enough to 38 to put in his papers he put in his papers for discharge on longevity I believe that's what we called it. Every time the mail clerk would oh it made our company commander so mad about chow and mail now he rode those guys he rode them hard he rode the mess sargent and the mail clerk hard. They weren't too feely with their ability and determination to make the trip up to front to deliver mail and hot chow. Well we were dug in on this levy after we cross after we failed to make first contact with the Russians the old man said we better get back and got dug in on the other side of that levy like we were told to. So we went back dug in on our side of the levy and we were getting globs of artillery mortar mostly mortar and hand grenades from the other side of the levy at night. Well we dug in and for some reason or another Moriar was dug in next to me I don't know if I was on the tail of my squad or on the beginning of my squad but the next squad took over to my left. And Moriar P was dug in in that fox hole and we were oh 15, 20 foot apart pretty close. Well the word come down that the mail clerk had caught up with us with mail. Well every so often every other man we'd say go get your mail and get back then we'll go. And we never did all leave together so it come time for me and Moriar to go get our mail and he jumped up out of his fox hole and we had blankets they had got blankets up to us we had blankets in our fox hole. And I went by Moriar and hollered for him to come on let's go we're getting mail. Josh the papers caught up with Moriar at that mail call his papers to report back to so and so and be discharged. And while he was out of his hole when I went back by his hole he didn't even go back to get his personal things of course he had his weapon and had everything else strapped on him. Maybe his blanket or something else he had in the hole. He didn't go back and get it but while he was out of that hole going to mail call a German laved a hand grenade over and it hit in his hole and shredded that blanket blowed everything in there out. And ole Moriar was on his way home.

Interviewer: Lucky man

Fitzgerald: Yes sir yes dir

Interviewer: There's a lot of ironies in war and in combat.

Fitzgerald: Oh coincidence unbelievably you wouldn't believe some of the things if you told some of the incidents you would declare had to be divine intervention to ever happen like they happened. Just like

Interviewer: Did you feel I don't want to get into something but did you ever feel guided?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh well as I said you had to there was divine whether there was or not I don't know but you had to believe there was divine intervention in cases where guys would come so close. Maybe a 9 millimeter would catch a guy at a glance and blow and completely circle his head between his helmet liner and his steel pot he'd come up holding his ears blinking his eyes. Incidents unbelievable couldn't happen again and wouldn't happen again.

Interviewer: Let's talk about when how did everybody react you know when victory of Europe?

Fitzgerald: I remember well we were billeted we took over some houses after we met the Russians. Now did we go we didn't go ahead and cross the river well we went we sneaked across the river and traded with the Russians. And I do need to say this at first I wouldn't say it I didn't trust the Russians then and I don't trust them now. They were arrogant they were uneducated they were almost uncivilized. Had their women with them big ole robust women you just observed from general appearance that you didn't trust them. It was written all over them you just didn't trust them. Now all of us felt that way all the ones that I know of and come in contact with and that might be a bad thing to say because their supposed to be half way ally of ours now.

Interviewer: Well this is your interview.

Fitzgerald: Well I didn't trust them then and I don't trust them now. We called them Rooskies and I think they felt the same way about us I think they did.

Interviewer: Well that's kind of like that was like a marriage of convenience so to speak.

Fitzgerald: Well they were just as happy to see us as we was them because we knew the end was close. And to answer your question I don't think we realized really it sunk in on us until the announcement of Roosevelt's death. And I think all of us were so set back because Roosevelt didn't live to see the ending of what he was the leader and the leadership he gave the country. And I think all of us felt grief because he didn't he didn't live to see the conclusion of he had lived through or what he had guided us through. And that was a big big disappointment to us.

Interviewer: So that kind of did that kind of overshadow the victory over Europe?

Fitzgerald: Kind of until the hoopla reached home and oh link up with the Russians the American forces has linked up and then I saw Eisenhower's plane that brought him up to the little red school house where they met officially met the Russians and. Let me say this we were in Russian zone we were in the Russian zone when we met them and the war ended. Stalin told Truman get out in no uncertain terms get out now. And I'm I guess I'm hurt because we knuckled under Russians demands. Josh I saw on the way back to our lines to our zone I saw tons and tons of clothing tires gasoline you name it supplies that supply line kept coming. Several days after the war was over the supplies that were in the line kept

coming. They couldn't get them out of the Russian zone and they had engineers with bulldozers digging holes burying tires gasoline, food, clothing well you can imagine the supply line the channels that were full of supplies supplying the front. They dug holes and covered up buried stuff. That's when I met my brother.

Interviewer: Yeh tell me about that, that's something we didn't cover yet. Your oldest brother?

Fitzgerald: Yeh my oldest brother. He felt home when I was 16 years old barely 16. He had bought a new 41 Chevrolet club coupe was making payments on it. My brother just older than me had bought a 41 Plymouth coupe making payments on it. Well daddy promised those two boys he said don't worry about your cars they was worried about because they were paying \$21 a month when they went in the service and they couldn't make car payments. Car payments was about \$21 a month I guess or 25 and they had their cars I don't how much they liked paying on them I should remember but I don't. And daddy told them said boys don't worry about your cars said me and Leon your younger brother we will find someway to pay for those cars so don't worry about them. And we did daddy and I both managed to scrounge enough and we made those car payments I don't know how but we made those car until I left. And I guess they was about paid for when I left home it was a couple of years after my older brother left. So we was at a town called Rodenberg Germany and it was in the Russian zone. I knew from letters from home and my brother knew from letters from home that we were pretty close together. He was in the 107th Ozark division infantry and I was in the 69th. And we knew the identification was on the bumper of every vehicle every vehicle had the unit number on the vehicle so we were getting back out of Russian zone like ole Stalin told Truman to get us out of there. And boy the road was clogged you can't imagine the civilians that were leaving the Russian zone to get to the American zone. They had five room house furnishings on a bicycle. Of course that's stretching it a little bit but you can imagine people moving just picking up and moving their belonging as much of their belongings. Two wheel carts pulled by a cow old trucks running on wood, wood burning trucks. Smoke coming out of them more than a locomotive and we were trying to move military mixed in with civilians and you can imagine what kind of mess it was. But it was just a scuffle so finally at dark one day the old man said this is enough of this we are gonna stop here we're going to get a nights rest we're going to get the mess sargent up here we are going to have some hot chow maybe a change of clothes. This was in Rodenberg Germany well he said told Tidwell said Tidwell you send a squad of men out on the road set a road block out here see that there's no funny things going on out there coming into town. He said Fitz get your squad and head out. So I got my squad and we headed out and set up a road block and it wasn't quite dark yet. And I kept seeing a truck every once in a while with 102nd on the bumper and my brother was a First Sargent. And in a few minutes I saw this jeep with his company identified on the bumper the 102nd division company so and so I forget which company he was in. And I looked a little closer and here sat my brother up there with a little ole carbeam on his shoulder of course we made fun of those guys that carried those little M1cargos you couldn't hit your truck with one of those out there. But now you take that M1 that thing would bark every time you called on it and that thing was accurate. So I said that can't be and the closer it got the more I knew that was my brother the more I recognized it was John. And he pulled up to the road block and I stopped him and here's a PFC pulling down on a first sargent and he looked at me and I looked at him he didn't recognize I recognized him but he didn't recognize me. And I told him I said stop and he

looked at me sort of hard and his jeep was barley rolling towards me and I said him I said stop. And he told his driver to stop and his driver stopped I said get out of the jeep and he said now wait just a minute here this things going to fire up and he was fixing to tare me up this little ole PFC with a gun on him. And I made him get out I finally convinced him to get out of the jeep and I saw the gleam in his eyes when he got out of the jeep oh he was mad. And he looked at me and I saw the little bit of recognition in his eye and finally in ten seconds he realized who it was and we had a he managed to visit with me all night. And (handing the interviewer a photo)

Interviewer: First Sargent PFC

Fitzgerald: In Rodenberg Germany

Interviewer: That's hilarious. Boy you guys look young there (holding the picture up for the camera)

Fitzgerald: I had had my 19th birthday by then.

Interviewer: You don't see to many First Sargents that young anymore. How old was he by this point?

Fitzgerald: I was 19 and he was 24 I'd guess yeh he was 24.

Interviewer: So when did the point system start coming in?

Fitzgerald: I was the 69th division was sent back to tent city

Interviewer: Back in Normandy?

Fitzgerald: No no this was the third repo depot you know what I'm talking about repo depot it was a replacement depot. If was at Marburg Germany and I was trucked back to the 69th was trucked back to tent city at Marburg Germany. And there was a lieutenant in the AGs office AG adjutant general

Interviewer: Yeh

Fitzgerald: Okay there was a lieutenant in the adjutant general's office in the 3rd repo depot from Centerville Tennessee and I was from Columbia Tennessee. Lieutenant Cory and he saw my records as he went he saw some kind of record. Our form 20s got lost and I didn't and I wrote St. Louis and I couldn't prove to you through army regulations that I was in the army because my form 20 was lost in the Battle of the Bulge. I told you that they put 40 men in a box car along with their form 20s and an ammunition box never seen them again after we left that train we never seen. Anyway what was I telling you about?

Interviewer: Points

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh we were sent back to this repo depot fixing to be deployed to the Pacific the unit was fixin was being processed and redeployed to the Pacific. Lieutenant Corey who was at the AGs office saw my record saw I was from Columbia Tennessee and he was from Centerville. Sent a jeep after me here come this jeep driving down through he had a reasonable identification to where I was somebody give it to him. So he come down through there yelling Fitzgerald PCF Fitzgerald and of course I heard him and I

hollered. And he said get in the jeep said there's an AG officer that wants you at headquarters. And I thought what in the world have I done I just knew I was fixin to be court marshaled for something. And got back and reported to Lieutenant Corey. And he said how would you like to be assigned to the 3rd repo depot and I said it would be fine with me. And he said well I can get you assigned and he did he got me assigned and moved me into Marburg Germany which hadn't been touched maybe a little small arm fire it was intact. Had a theatre we had a NCO club and he promoted me first thing right off.

Interviewer: So how long so you left your squad?

Fitzgerald: Yeh how long

Interviewer: How long after he told you did you leave your squad did you have some time?

Fitzgerald: Right then right then.

Interviewer: You didn't have a chance to say goodbye?

Fitzgerald: Didn't go back to the unit.

Interviewer: Did you just say see you later fellows?

Fitzgerald: Well of course there was some a few saw me get into the jeep and they didn't know what happened to me. They was like me they thought lord what's Fitzgerald fixin to get court marshaled or something. But by correspondence we finally got back together corresponding and I was stationed in Marburg. And you asked about points system combat offered you so many points at that time it took 110 points to come home. And I had like 94 I think and I would have give anything for that Purple Heart because that would have boosted me up 5 more points. And I had to serve time I had to serve time. I wasn't to tell you something that this I think has stood out with me as much as it ranks up there. We were pulling duty sometime between the time we moved out of the Russian zone into the American zone. We got stuck with keeping peace until the German government took over and we were called not MPs but GPs the government police I believe that's what we were called. And I pulled about I don't know a couple of weeks of duty in that position and we were on the edge of Berlin the outskirts. I never did get down to where to the big gate at Berlin but in the out skirts of Berlin. And Josh every morning we our detail would go out and we'd set up question and answer periods. The civilians were asking about water and they were asking about food and asking about everything that they had been denied due to the bombing. And also in this suburb where we were must have been an older part of Berlin there wasn't a building standing. There was a few walls standing but almost as far as the eye could see there wasn't a building standing. Every morning we were on they would truck us out in 6 bys to our duty station we'd pass this one certain place and there was an old lady there she must have 75 maybe 80 years old dressed in the German dress black long skirt, black stocking, black shoes, black bonnet everything was black. And the first day we saw here we didn't know what she was doing didn't know what she was doing in there. We thought looking for articles or something maybe that was her home. The next day there was a little stack of brick that had been brushed clean and stacked up just as neat as you could stack a brick the next day that stack grew. That old lady took it on herself to start building

Germany back. She was cleaning brick one at a time and by the time I don't know maybe a couple of week's maybe if it was a couple of weeks. She had a pretty dog gone good stack of clean brushed clean bricks that she was picking up at of the rubble and cleaning and staking. And I would love to know I would love to know how long that one lady kept showing up at that place and cleaning those bricks. But to a 19 year old to see that that was one of the most impressive things I saw. She had lived through WWI she had lived through WWII but she was cleaning bricks to start building Germany back. One of the most impressive things I saw about the German people.

Interviewer: That's amazing.

Fitzgerald: It is that was amazing it made an impression on a 19 year old that I'll never forget.

Interviewer: Like you said the Germans are not all bad

Fitzgerald: No no

Interviewer: It's not all Nazis there hard workers.

Fitzgerald: And craftsmen you talk about craftsmen. I made friends in Marburg while I was serving time in Corey promoted me to T3 in head of the section and we were reassigning fresh recruits coming from the states to MGs MGs Military Government instead of MPs that's what it was. MGs was the American Military Government and we were reassigning guys coming from the states at this repo depot. And as a result I stayed in Marburg for however long enough it took me to get enough points. See I believe you got two points a month I believe that's the way it went. And of course they had lowered it every so often they would lower the amount of points it would take to come home. I think I came home on 105 points I believe that's right. And I served the time there at that repo depot. And met some great people of course we furnished ole c-rations we were getting hot chow we had a mess hall set up there at Marburg and we were getting good chow. And most of the time for some reason they were still issued k-rations and c-rations if you wanted to go by and pick them up. And we'd go by and pick up k-rations and c-rations and give them to the German people that was good to us that was friendly to us. I met a man that was a glass blower and he made me a spinning wheel out of glass that functioned it was a functioning spinning wheel. And I tried my best to get it home I packed it but it didn't make it it was crushed when it got to my wife it was all to pieces. But Josh those gunsmiths I saw some of the most beautiful weapons shot guns and riffles you ever seen. And I tried to there'd be one that a guy would shoot from one shoulder and he'd hit an eye out on the other side and it would be offset. And it would be a 22 under a double barrel shot gun. Oh you name it they had some of the most beautiful weaponry and they were craftsmen they. I wanted to say this too the propaganda had us believing that all people were Nazis and of course we knew that the German people weren't allowed to go to church. They weren't allowed to gather to go to church or any other Lions Club or whatever they had similar to that. They weren't allowed to congregate they have some of the most beautiful architecture you have ever seen in their churches. Intricate and the Europeans were big on I guess its Greek architect antiquated. And some of the carvings and some of the works around those churches over there they are some of the most beautiful things setting empty. But as soon as we took over the MGs told people it was alright to

go to church and they did they filled the churches full. Their German Christians but they had to be underground they couldn't be public with their Christianity or their beliefs or their faith.

Interviewer: So how many months did you stay over there until you came home?

Fitzgerald: Well let's see I had 94 points and I come home with 95. And you got two points a month what's that six months? Right at six months. The war was over in July in May of no it was longer than that I'm mixed up in my points. The war was over May the 5th I believe in 45 and I had to stay I believe I came home in January or February so that made me right at ten months I stayed in.

Interviewer: What about when you heard the A bomb dropped. How did that make you feel?

Fitzgerald: Mixed feelings as I had already explained to you I felt more intensively against the Japanese maybe then I did the Germans because they had they tried to kill my brother. And I was happy that they did that and ended the war then I felt for all those civilians that were that were massacred in that. But I have to believe in Truman making the decision to do that because it saved no telling how many American GIs.

Interviewer: Plus he had a hard act to follow you know it's not easy to be a president after Roosevelt.

Fitzgerald: Exactly exactly he had a tough act to follow. And McArthur that was a big deal then.

Interviewer: That was actually kind of funny I thought. I want to ask you about when you came home what your marriage was like. And then what the reunion was like.

Fitzgerald: Well I came home on the Al Hamburg Victory ship small ship and as I had mentioned before we had to go through all of this stuff to get back into port and get back. And they scared us to death about what all we had to do to get back in be accepted back in. And we were accepted got back on a train again.

Interviewer: Did you kiss the ground when

Fitzgerald: No they were moving us keep going keep going they had somebody at every interval. And there was a bunch of us and I'm sure they had to keep pushing us to get us through. And Camp Kimmer's not right anyway I can't remember the port we came back into. We were greeted there was people there and I don't know why they were still greeting us coming back because the newness had worn off the war had been over for eight or ten months. And but there were people there that was meeting troop ships as we came back. And the first day we were issued a clean uniform we were allowed to shower they had leister bag showers with

Interviewer: Like poncho curtains or something?

Fitzgerald: Yeh curtains and we were issued throwed our old uniforms away. We were issued brand new spanking clean uniforms we they had a service for sewing on severance patches longevity OC stripes and we called them old fogies stripes three year stripes. And that didn't take long it was all set up like an assembly line and you were processed of course as I mentioned my form 20 was lost. And if a guy had a

form 20 he was he had his form 20 in his hand going through the process. Of course I didn't have a form 20 but then they started there and made us form 20s so somebody must have got the word to them how they were lost and I don't know about that I don't know what the details are about that. But and we were processed out and I went to that's a blank from where I from the port where we landed coming home. I can't remember I don't remember where the next port I remember getting on a train in St. Louis I believe I guess I got to St. Louis on a train. I'll have to do some work that's blank.

Interviewer: What about what about when you came home when you walked through the door?

Fitzgerald: Okay when my wife met me at the train station in Nashville in Nashville.

Interviewer: Did she think you had changed any?

Fitzgerald: Yes yes she of course she recognized me and I recognized her and she saw when I slung my barracks bag off of the train to step off I just pitched my barracks bag and it hit the ground and then she saw me she saw that barracks bag first then she saw me. And it was a it was a great great time and a great meeting but I can't tell you in detail I know we must have locked up with hugs. And I was proud to see her I missed my brother that had been in the Pacific. He was on his way home when I was on my way out he was back from the Pacific he was on medical leave from I don't know what kind of fever it was they had over there and other tropical diseases. And I was happy to see my wife of course and of course been married for one day and then a couple of years then being there it was strange I'm sure it was strange for her and it was strange for me.

Interviewer: Are ya'll still married today?

Fitzgerald: Oh yes 60 no what's this one coming up I better find out it's coming up in December. So it will be 61 or 2 years this December.

Interviewer: What about when you walked through your parent's house?

Fitzgerald: My mother and dad were both still living I need to say this off record I don't need to say this on record I'll say this later. And it's pertaining to something that happened back before coming home it's not involved in coming home. Mother and dad were still in good health I was the last boy to get home. Of course Bill had yet to go to Korea I was the last son to get home from WWII. My older brother had already made it home and Allen had already made it home. And there was a big time there was a big feed and neighbors and relatives and all. And my mother was an expert seamstress during the depression there was a Hoosierville that came to our town in Columbia and word got out that mother was an expert seamstress. And they asked her to come in for an interview. And this was during the depression and mother went in for the interview and they hired her and she was they hired her as a head seamstress or something for her experience. And she helped the family through the depression with what they were paying her 15 cents an hour something like that bug it was as big as wagon wheels then 15 cents in a days time but she was making a couple of dollars a day and that helped through the depression. And mother was still very physically strong she was a strong woman she wasn't a big woman

but she was strong. Daddy was still in good health and wasn't too long that was in 46 when did the Korean War break out 48, 49?

Interviewer: 50

Fitzgerald: 50 and it wasn't long until Bill had to pack up and go and mother and dad I know their discussion was well we got three over there and got them back are we going to get this baby he was the baby are we going to get him back home and did. Very fortunate we were a very fortunate family.

Interviewer: Well you've got about two minutes left of tape. I normally at the end kind of leave the table open for you to say whatever you want to say. The floor is yours.

Fitzgerald: Okay I'm very excited about America I love America. My son padded himself after me he put up 30 years in the military retired as a Colonel. He went to the state department to work for the state department. He is now in assignment in Afghanistan with the state department my grandson is with the 173rd rapid deployment airborne unit stationed in Italy. He jumped into Northern Iraq the only combat zone that was made in Iraq he served a year there my grandson. He came back to his unit came back to Vicenze Italy and he was married and his wife joined him there and they had a good life there in the military. And now he's been reassigned to Afghanistan he is with the 173rd as I mentioned there on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan they are disrupting this flow of insurgents that's coming out of Afghanistan into I mean coming out of Pakistan into Afghanistan. And they are making some headway their doing some good we don't hear about it, it don't make the news. But he's been in more fire fights in Afghanistan than he was in the whole year he was in Iraq. My grandson in law that married my sons daughter was in Afghanistan my son's unit replaced his unit when they were ready to rotate back home. Now this I think this is unique I was awarded the combat infantry men's badge my son led the 508th in Panama that went after Noriega and he was awarded the combat infantry badge. I presented him with my badge when he earned it. My grandson my son's son he earned the combat infantry men's badge in Iraq he presented the same combat infantry badge to my grandson. My grandson in law was awarded the combat infantry man badge in Afghanistan and when my grandson and my grandson in law met in Afghanistan during the exchange and the rotation my son presented my grandson in law with the same combat infantry mans badge. So it has been passed through four hands form my hand to my son to my grandson to my grandson in law the same combat infantry mans badge. I need to say this off no there might be some veterans out there WWII veterans I was eligible for Alabama presents or makes available to the veterans license tags for the Battle of the Bulge. I have no record in fact I have a letter here and you know about this form St. Louis saying that at a certain time records were burned and destroyed.

Interviewer: Right

Fitzgerald: Right and mine was there. Well I didn't think too much about applying for my Battle of the Bulge automobile tag until my children got after me pretty stout after I had open heart surgery bypass surgery. And my kids got after me and suggested strongly that I apply for my automobile tag. I went to the local veteran's office and I run into a guy that really really really had no interest in digging deep enough to find so I did on my own. And I found my old Platoon Sargent in Florida he was 87 years old still in fair health so I got a letter this guy at the(tape ended).