

___ a member of B Battery, 81st anti-aircraft anti-tank battalion, 101st Airborne Division World War II. This interview is being conducted during the 101st Airborne Division Reunion in San Antonio, Texas, the 10th of August 2001. The interview is being conducted by Scott Schoener and John O' Brien. Sir, if you could please start off and tell us a little bit about how you came into the Army.

Mr. Gueymard: I was a reserve officer and graduated from Louisiana State University with 2nd Lieutenant. When the war broke out they immediately called up all of the officer reserves and that is how I got into the Army.

How did you wind up joining the airborne and specifically the 101st?

Mr. Gueymard: I was originally assigned to the 82nd Infantry Division. We trained at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, and got in very good condition. In fact, after about five or six months they thought that they might send us overseas because the war in North Africa was going on then. All of a sudden for some reason I do not know, they decided to form two Airborne Divisions so they took the 82nd Division and split it up half and half became the 81st and half and half became the 82nd. They added parachute regiments and other artillery units and so forth and ended up with two Airborne Divisions, starting out with one.

Were you given any kind of choice as far as joining this new airborne outfit or was it just assumed that you would move over to it?

Mr. Gueymard: There were a number of privates and what not that dropped out and went into other units. On the Officer Corp, I suppose we might have had the same privilege but I don't know any officers that I was associated with that dropped out. We all stayed in. Privates and Corporals and what not, they could drop out of the division and go to some other unit. But we lost very, very few people.

Can you describe for us a little bit of the process of forming a brand new division from the ground up?

Mr. Gueymard: Well we were already trained as soldiers. We had all the Non-commissioned officers and the officers all the way up to the senior people. So it was no real problem at all. We were very fortunate in the 101st and the 82nd. Originally when we were formed, Omar Bradley was our Division Commander. After the division was split up, Omar Bradley stayed with the 101st and Maxwell Taylor took over the 82nd. At that time "Nuts" McAuliffe was the artillery commander. So at one time in our division we had Omar Bradley, Maxwell Taylor and "Nuts" McAuliffe were officers who all became senior officers of the United States Army.

How did you do the transition from the regular infantry division to an Airborne Division as far as doing the new tactics that you would need to go in by air?

Mr. Gueymard: I don't think there was a great transformation. We eliminated the weaklings that couldn't go through the heavy training, whether it was running or calisthenics or long marches and double time marches and all of those sorts of things. The weaklings eventually sort of dropped out for some reason or another. All those that were strongest stayed in and became the division for mainly troops.

Anti-tank warfare was something new. Did you have any doctrine or guidance on how your battery would be employed against German armor?

Mr. Gueymard: I don't think we had very many instructions in that order. We started out in our training with the old American 37-mm guns which was completely inadequate for warfare against a lot of the German tanks. Then we got the 57-mm anti-tank guns and when we went overseas we got the British six pounders, which was the 57-mm gun. It was designed where they shortened the carriage to the point where you could get it into the glider. You could push it into the glider and anchor it down there. So we ended up and fought the _____ with the 57-mm gun which was a very good gun with a muzzle velocity of about 3,000. We could knock out all of the German tanks, particularly if you hit it on the side. The big, big German tanks, the monster that it was, you couldn't knock it out from the front. You had to hit it from the side. It had about 8 inches of armor on the front. But there were very, very few of those tanks. The primary German tank that was there was the Mark V and Mark IV's.

The first 57-mm that you had, did it fit in the glider?

Mr. Gueymard: No, it was too wide. It was about a foot to wide. The British already altered their 57 guns to the six pounders which were about a foot narrower than what we had.

When did you get the British Six Pounders?

Mr. Gueymard: In England.

So during the Tennessee maneuvers how did you go about doing your training with the division? Was your insertion simulated?

Mr. Gueymard: In Tennessee we were assigned to different regiments. Really, intentionally maneuvers we were part of the old 82nd at that time. At that time we were an infantry company. I'm a little bit confused about the time when we really went to be anti-tank.

But by the time you were in England, you were...

Mr. Gueymard: We were definitely an anti-tank company by then. The battalion was half anti-tank and half anti-aircraft.

Did you get a chance in England to glider in your weapons?

Mr. Gueymard: No, but we had a number of mock-up trainings where we would go and go all through the procedure that we were going to take and we actually got off. So we had a lot of pretty good training in England; very hard training.

When your battery deployed to Europe on the Normandy invasion how were you organized?

Mr. Gueymard: Well at that time we had eight guns and two platoons. We were assigned in Normandy to work with the 501. Initially we weren't assigned to any regiment; everybody was so badly scattered on the landings. Then after a certain number of days we were assigned to the 501 and along the line outside of Carentan which was the peripheral that we had created. The Germans attacked a number of times but never with enough force to make a penetration.

Your two platoons were with the 501st?

Mr. Gueymard: Yes. We had both platoons with the 501.

Did you feel confident working with the staff of the 501?

Mr. Gueymard: Oh sure, we had no problems at all. Everybody worked together beautifully.

How much of your time was spent doing anti-tank operations versus functions as regular infantry men?

Mr. Gueymard: Well at all times we were equivalent to regular infantrymen. We had all the same guns that they carried in the infantry company and platoon and in addition with the 57-mm. We had two types of ammunition, one was the assault penetrating type of ammunition and the other was the assault artillery type ammunition that exploded upon contact. In Normandy we were fortunate in that it wasn't really a lot of anti-tank warfare. The Germans were pretty slow at making their initial attacks on us because we were so badly scattered. The Germans really didn't know where to attack because the 101st and the 82nd Airborne Division had been dropped and disbursed all over that part of the Normandy Peninsula. The Germans were confused as to where the main force was. So it gave us a very good opportunity to get organized and get all together because we had been dropped in such a disbursed manner. It all turned out we are very, very lucky in that regard. The Germans didn't commit their reserves for quite a while because of their own confusion.

Your battery went in guns by glider, did all your soldiers go in by glider or did you have anybody that parachuted in?

Mr. Gueymard: No, not in my battery. We all went in the gliders with either the jeeps or the guns. It equaled about 5,000 lbs, literally. That is what each glider carried. My

particular battery with eight guns took 22 gliders to put us into Normandy. That included the headquarters from each platoon, the headquarters for the battery and the eight guns which took 16 gliders alone. We were very fortunate in landing having no real casualties on the landing, even though we landed in very disbursed order. Some of the guns may have been a mile or more away from the landing zone. By the time D-Day was over, we were all together as one unit.

Any differences between the Normandy operation and the Holland operation?

Mr. Gueymard: As far as my particular unit and I think as far as many units, in the Holland operation you were more or less dropped and landed where you were supposed to land. I think we weren't in such a disbursed fashion. The result is you could act as a unit very quickly. We landed on the zones that we were supposed to land on which meant that we could be directed from there very quickly as to where to go. In the Holland operation, the initial phases of it was very satisfactory.

Were you supporting the 506th?

Mr. Gueymard: The 506th in Holland. All the way through Holland we were the 506th. Colonel Sink was the commander and they called it the 5-0 Sink.

Was there any difference working with the staff of the 506th versus the 501st?

Mr. Gueymard: No, not at all. It was no problem working with any of them. We were very, very effective in Holland. We knocked out more tanks in Holland than we did anywhere else in the war. The fighting was very heavy for both the 101st and the 82nd. As you know, in the Holland invasion the proposal was that the Airborne Division would drop the 101st, 82nd, British Airborne on the highway all the up to Arnhem. The British were down on the Belgium border. The idea was to run two armies, the British Second Army and the ____ First Army up one highway, go past Arnhem, off flank the Siegfried line and go all the way to Berlin. Rommel planned that operation and Bradley I know let him plan it. The result was that you can't run two armies up one highway. As you know Holland is a land of canals and rivers. Many canals crossed the highway and rivers as well. All the Germans had to do was knock out a bridge and you stopped two armies, cold. What the Germans would do, they would either knock out a bridge or they would take a couple of tanks and a couple of infantry companies and they would cut through the highway. Then you had to clean them out. That might take a half a day or a day to again clean the highway out where you could continue your movement of the troops. So as a result, they were very, very slow in getting up North. Really, we only got up as far as the area between the Rhine and the Ruhr River. We all ended up in that area between the Rhine and the Ruhr. The British First Airborne had dropped across the Rhine River at Arnhem. We never got to them. The British Airborne Division was dropped across the Rhine but it was 6-8 miles to the West of where the bridge was. As a result, that division took a terrible beating. I think that 10,000 went in as I recall and 1,000 came out. They were the finest division of the British Army; beautiful troops. We had exchanged troops

with them during the training so we knew. That was really a disaster for the British Army.

With your battery in Holland working with the 506th did you have pretty much static positions that you fought from or were your guns mobile?

Mr. Gueymard: No, they were all static; you took a static position. As the infantry advanced, you advanced by jumps. If the infantry advanced 500 yards or so well you would then advance with them. You always kept some guns in reserve in case of a breakthrough. In case the advanced collapsed and the enemy broke through. You always had to have a few guns at the back of the front lines.

Did your battery work directly under the guidance of the regimental commander or were you tasked out to battalions to work with battalions?

Mr. Gueymard: Well you really worked under the regimental commander but you were mixed in between the infantry companies and the battalions. You were very much working with the companies and battalions. You were on the front lines with them. That was the way we operated on the front line.

As the commander of that unit, how did you control your unit?

Mr. Gueymard: It wasn't a lot of control once you got them disbursed on the regimental front. You had two platoons so the platoons were more in command of the four guns for each platoon. They were pretty close to the front. The company commander or battery commander was a little further back. The battery commander wasn't very effective really; the effective area was the front line with the platoon commander at that point. We were back with the regimental headquarters always. The company commander was with the regimental headquarters. The platoon commanders are with the battalion headquarters. They were that much closer to the action.

Would you're activity during combat focus primarily on keeping your unit resupplied with ammunition?

Mr. Gueymard: That's true and keeping the moral up and visiting with them and giving them support every way possible.

Were you on the island with the 506th also when you moved up to the island?

Mr. Gueymard: You mean between the Rhine and the Ruhr?

Yes.

Mr. Gueymard: Yes we spent all of our time up there. We were in a little town called ____ where the heaviest fighting was and the Germans tried to break through there. We

were on the front line of ____ with our 8 guns. No, we had 4 guns at ____ a little to the west at _____.

Is that where you encountered the most German armor?

Mr. Gueymard: The most German armor was encountered there at ____ and later on in Veckel which was a little further down on the highway. We had a lot of action at Veckel. We knocked out a total of 14 tanks and I think over half of them were in Holland. The heaviest fighting was in Holland for our units.

The division came back and was in theater reserve and then the call for the reaction to the Bulge occurred. Can you describe what your unit was doing?

Mr. Gueymard: We went back to France and we were north of Paris about 40 or 50 miles at one of those French army bases. We were doing some training and ____ people. We had come out of a lot of action and we had replacements and all that. All of a sudden the Bulge happened and we were immediately called up and moved instantly up toward Bastogne. We were moved up, not by air. We were moved up in 6 x 6 trucks. We stopped a few miles south of Bastogne and assembled there the night before. Everybody got rest for about 5 hours or so. Early that next morning about daybreak or maybe earlier we got in ____ marsh going up to the front where the enemy was. I was attached to the 501. I had my gun to disburse in the first battalion. We didn't know where the enemy was or where we were going to meet them. So we marched right on through Bastogne in the ____ marsh and we got out of Bastogne just past the outskirts on the northwest side at a little town of Foy the Germans spent the night there. But we got up earlier that morning than the Germans did. We moved through Bastogne and they were just arising, getting up and getting organized when we saw them beforehand. That was the beginning of the forming of the Bastogne defense. Immediately we spread out in both directions and each regiment came around and so forth until we were all in a circle. The Germans kept attacking. I recall that over the period of days that they attacked, I think it was seven different fronts. They would make an attack and be repulsed. Then they would move over to the right or left and make an attack again and be repulsed. They did that until they circled the whole perimeter. They never hit us twice at the same place. In my opinion it was very, very poor judgment of the Germans. If they would have hit us one place twice, they should have known it would weaken to where they could hit us there again. We were very fortunate in that regard that their attacks were seven different attacks rather than attacking in the same zone.

Would you say that the German armor that you faced in Holland was better than the German units you faced at Bastogne? Were you able to make any type of qualitative judgment about whether you were facing a better soldier at Bastogne or at Holland?

Mr. Gueymard: That is a pretty tough question to answer except that it seems to me that the Germans were tougher to us in Holland. Their attacks were pretty vicious. It was pretty much a different type of warfare really in that we were so concentrated at Bastogne and were more disbursed in Holland. It is pretty hard to say what the difference is at any

great extent. We were pretty effective all the way through in both operations. Both operations for us as an anti-tank battery, the action in Holland and Bastogne was much more serious than in Normandy. We got by in Normandy much easier than we did in either of the two operations.

When you were attached with the 501st at Bastogne do you recall attempts to integrate your anti-tank capability with engineer obstacles and infantry to make an anti-tank defense that would be called a coherent anti-tank defense?

Mr. Gueymard: Well we were under a regimental commander and we reported directly to battalions and regiments about where the guns were. I think that we were well coordinated with whatever the infantry were going to do. Of course in great extent the infantry was in defense rather than in attack. I think that we were part of the infantry in every regard there. We moved with them and if they went in an attack, we went in an attack with them. It was all very well coordinated as far as I was concerned.

Can you remember any meetings or discussions with forward observers and engineers and infantry commanders and yourself to design a particular engagement area where you would suspect tanks would be coming so that you would have a high degree of confidence so that when the anti-tank guns fired the artillery was going to be firing and there was an engineer obstacle so that you could work in unison or was that something that you were just inherently confident?

Mr. Gueymard: The way we operated, the battery commander with me was with the regimental headquarters. The platoon commanders were with the battalion headquarters. The individual batteries were attached to the different companies along the front lines. It was all very well coordinated in a sense that we through regiment knew what was going on and the platoon leaders through battalions knew exactly what was going on. So it was all very well coordinated in that regard. We were very, very much a part of the infantry regiment in every way.

In today's modern organization, many young captains find themselves with a separate unit attached to a higher headquarters. Based on your experience what would you tell a young anti-tank platoon leader or an anti-tank company commander about the skills that he needs to develop to work with the more senior officers on the regimental staff?

Mr. Gueymard: Well I don't know about telling them anything. We had always done that in training. As I said, I was with the regiment and platoon leaders were with the battalion. It was all very well coordinated. We were just all a part of each other. We were on the front line with the infantry and that's where we belonged. We didn't have enough guns to be in depth. So we were on the front line. You acted as infantry on the front line plus being with your guns as well. Sometimes of course you could use your guns as shooting high explosive shells against enemy positions and so forth.

In your success of Bastogne, how many tanks were you able to take out there?

Mr. Gueymard: Not as many as we did in Holland. At Bastogne there were tanks and carriers and so forth. I can't recall exactly the number of tanks we did at Bastogne but during our operations our 8 guns got 14 big tanks and we knocked out other carriers of all kinds and so forth. I think we probably knocked out more tanks in Holland than we did any other operation.

(Switched Tapes)

This is a continuation of the interview with Mr. Gueymard, tape number 2. Sir, I wanted to ask you at Bastogne and in particular there were some self-propelled anti-tank units from the 10th Armored Division deploying back through that ended up staying with the 101st. Was there any contact between the leaders of those units and you or were they strictly on your division control.

Mr. Gueymard: I think that the contact with the elements of the 10th Armored and it was a part of a regiment I think but it wasn't a lot of _____. They became under the command of our command and I'm not sure where they were positioned. I think a good number of them were in reserve in the center of the town so that if there was a breakthrough they could be used somewhere else? They had lost a lot of their equipment and backing up. I don't know that they were tremendously effective other than being a substantial reserve to the division.

Are there any other incidents at Bastogne that stick out in your memory?

Mr. Gueymard: I suppose one that sticks out most is that the Germans you know; our anti-aircraft was limited and our battalions anti-aircraft was all on the front lines and they weren't shooting at our planes. One night you could hear the Germans coming with one airplane and roam around and drop one bomb at a time. One night we heard them roaming around up there and you could hear a bomb coming down. You could hear them screeching on the way down. All of a sudden there was a terrible crash with no explosion. The next morning in daylight we went looking around and my cp was in this Old Catholic seminary in the basement up by the ground floor. We went to the furnace room which was just a room or two away from me and here was a 500 lb. German bomb that had landed in a coal bin and it split open just like you would cut a watermelon open and all of the powder had spread out over the coal. So the coal was green. That bomb didn't go off as many of the German bombs did go off. If it had gone off the 501 headquarters and me and many others would have been blown to bits. But we were just purely lucky there that that dud was a wonderful happening.

What was it like having the resupply problems for ammunition in Bastogne? How did you manage your guns?

Mr. Gueymard: From my standpoint we had very little problems because we didn't do that much shooting with our guns. We were in the defense. The big problem with ammunition would have been with the artillery and with ammunition for the rifles or the machine guns. They did come in with a drop it seems to me it was Christmas Day. It was a day that we had a drop of ammunition and some supplies of K-rations and so forth.

There may have been other days that we got drops of supplies and so forth. I think the only ___ shortage we had was probably food. In my case, we didn't use enough ammunition where we became short.

During Bastogne, what role did your battalion commander play in supervising his battalion?

Mr. Gueymard: They were in command of a battalion and they were the first group behind the front line. You had your company commander as somewhat behind the front line and then you had battalion commander. They were very much in command of their battalions. Their reserve was very limited that each of them had because as you know we were short-handed and there was very limited reserve. Fortunately the Germans never had one major breakthrough because I think our overall reserve for the whole division was very limited. But the battalion commanders were very affected because they were the nearest people to the front line.

How did you communicate with your battalion commander, by radio or by wire or by personal visit?

Mr. Gueymard: I think we had radio for our own to communicate for ourselves and I think we could communicate with the division. But most communication was by, in my case I would be probably with regimental headquarters and by platoons they might have been with battalion headquarters. So we were very much in communication with the leaders. There were no problems along those lines at all.

Putting aside Bastogne and flying to Germany in Berchtesgaden, any memories or stories from that era?

Mr. Gueymard: From Bastogne on to Berchtesgaden or for after Bastogne? Nothing of any great significance. After Bastogne I think we went down to France for a while and refitted them on a defensive position with some of the units. There was no action to any great extent with our units that we found. We went on down to the southern end of the line in the French area there before you got into Switzerland. We stayed on that position for awhile and there was very little action there. A couple of times the Germans made a little attack and they were immediately repulsed. The Germans were so depleted by then that when we finally left the French border and headed into Germany it was all a rat race. The Germans were retreating or surrendering. You had very, very little action. We got all the way to Berchtesgaden and my particular unit we ended up in Berchtesgaden. That was our headquarters for awhile. The Germans were whipped and the fighting was a very limited amount. Of course in Berchtesgaden there was a little bit of fighting in the mountains. It was a very mountainous country. After Berchtesgaden we moved on down a little further south closer to the Yugoslavian border. We took defensive position down there and so forth. The Germans surrendered of course. You were classified by the number that you had and you got so many points for this and so many points for that and the ones with the most points started back home first. You were given points for the different actions and the different wars and the different theaters and so forth. Fortunately

I had a pretty high number of points so I started back pretty early. They had their different places where they assembled and eventually when enough troops arrived and there were ships close enough they brought you or sent you by train on down to M _____ which was one of the big departure points. You boarded a ship and there were an awful lot of people on one ship. The officers did pretty well but the enlisted men were very, very crowded. So you came on back and as I recall you landed in Brooklyn. Then we all took trains going back to different parts of the country. We all went back to San Antonio which was our disbursal point. We were given a two week holiday and I went home to Louisiana. While I was there the bombs were dropped on Japan. When we got back after our two week holiday everybody started going home and was dismissed. I was dismissed in a few weeks and went home.

Do you recall your feelings when you left your unit and the guys you had been with for a rather intense and emotional period?

Mr. Gueymard: We all had a little gathering of the unit and made little emotional talks. The officers went around and shook hands with all of the front line groups and so forth. It was all very pleasant but it was all quite emotional. It was probably the most emotional time of the war when me in particular as a company commander was leaving my company that I had had for such a long, long period of time. It was a very sentimental time. As I said having had more points than others I left before the others.

Any last thoughts on serving with the 101st?

Mr. Gueymard: Well nothing other than it was the highlight of my career during the war serving with this magnificent division and with the beautiful people that were in my unit plus the ones that we worked with all through the 101st. I have had the privilege of knowing some of the people that were there like Ridgeway and Bradley in the early times and then knowing "Nuts" McAuliffe. I know him fairly well. He was a wonderful person. He was a soldiers General; everybody liked him. I remember when he left the 101st he was a Brigadier General so to make him a Major General they had to send him to a division. So he left the unit and went to one of the higher number divisions and took command there. I happened to have seen him when he left and shook hands with him. He was proud to be going to a new division but he sure regretted leaving the 101st. He was a beautiful man.

There is a lot of background to this question that I am going to ask you here since you knew the man. There were some authors in the early 1970's that suggested in print that General McAuliffe used an epithet other than "Nuts", something more colorful than that. From our research we are convinced that he said "Nuts" and that he was the type of man who wouldn't use any type of profanity and that his language and deportment were always exemplary even in the most difficult of circumstances. If someone suggested to you that he used off color language, what would be your response to that?

Mr. Gueymard: Well I would think that he didn't. If he did use off color language it was just momentarily. He was a very, very appropriate man. You know how the "Nuts" got back to the Germans?

Was it Colonel Harper to...

Mr. Gueymard: No, the "Nuts" got back this way. We were surrounded so the Germans sent a young boy in with a white flag and _____ it to the line of I believe it was the 327th. He came on in to the headquarters and delivered the ultimatum to McAuliffe. McAuliffe looked at it and made the explanation "Aw Nuts!" As I understand it there was a Colonel there with him who was his next man in command and they discussed what to say back the Germans. The Colonel said, "Well why don't you say what you first said which was the word "Nuts!" So they delivered that to the German young boy and when our young boy gave it to him at the perimeter he wanted to know what the word "Nuts" meant. So they had to tell the Germans that the word "Nuts" meant "Go to Hell!" So that is what the German runner took back to his command. That is the way that happened. I thought that was very, very colorful.

Is there anything that we didn't ask you that you would like to add?

Mr. Gueymard: I don't think so other than this is a wonderful occasion here for this convention as well as all the conventions I have been to. Fortunately I have seen several of my associates and people that were in my unit here today. It's been a very gratifying day or two. It has been my pleasure to give this interview.

Thank you very much!