

## James Patton

Interviewer: First if I could get your full name, the unit you served with and your job in the unit, rank, how long you served.

My name is James H Patton, Jr. Good name, associated with a great famous general. I was in the 501 parachute regiment all through WWII. I enlisted out of college. I went to basic training, then to non-commission officer school, then on to parachute school, and then to demolition school and finally on to the 501 parachute regiment where I remained for the rest of the war.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to enlist?

Well it needed, it seemed like we needed to save the world for democracy, I guess. It was a very popular move. I think there were about 100 male students left my college the same time I did to enlist in the service.

Interviewer: Ah, during your enlistment, how did the attack on Pearl Harbor affect your feelings about the United States involvement in WWII?

Well, I...it angered me of course, a sneak attack such as that. When I was in prep school, we had an Admiral S.S. Robinson who was the commander of the Admiral \_\_\_\_\_ Naval Academy and he was trying to convince the Navy that our danger was in Tokyo all along and when it happened, I thought that good old S. S. Robinson knew what he was talking about.

Interviewer: Hmmm. Did you have any type of civilian job before you enlisted?

No, I worked between semesters in school. I worked on the railroad between my junior and senior year of high school and my...between my senior year and prep school. But then I went to...then I worked the 3<sup>rd</sup> year too, Sinclair Ball Point, or something like that. Then off to college. No more jobs until the military.

Interviewer: So how was your job chosen in the Army?

How did I get in the 501?

Interviewer: No, how did you get actual occupation. You said you went to demolition school

Yes, I was just selected when I went parachute school. They selected, I want you to go to communications, I want you to go to demolition school. I got to the 501 because I met Colonel Johnson. Better known as jumpy Johnson, who as the commander of the 501. I met him at parachute school, and like several others, he pointed me out. I was suppose to stay in the Parachute school and work "C stage" to replace Lt. Chapel who was leaving and after I was interviewed for that job, I was called back to Personnel and told you are going to report to the 501, Colonel Johnson has pointed you out. (chuckle)

Interviewer: Where did you take Basic Training?

Camp Croft, South Carolina

Interviewer: What was that like?

Oh...was too bad for me. I ran off a football field into the Army so I was in good shape. So I didn't have any problems with Basic Training. Then I had a leg up on most people because I had been to a Military Prep school, I knew how to drill and hold arms and all those good things.

Interviewer: Hummm, what type, if any, of extreme training such as 25 mile road marches, extremely long runs, did you participate in.

Oh, of course, when you were at 501 was in GA, followed the 506 there. There was a famous mountain call "kerhee" we all ran up and down. Not daily but 2 or 3 times a week let's say. And every morning we ran and had calisthenics. I think the people in 101<sup>st</sup> can identify with that, they are still doing it today. They don't have a Mount Kerhee but they are still running every morning.

Interviewer: Now did you volunteer for parachute training?

Yes, when I enlisted I volunteered.

Interviewer: Why did you do that?

Seemed like the thing to do. Seemed like it was interesting. I really like to fly. I couldn't get into the Air Force at that time. Can't fly one, I'll jump out of it.

Interviewer: How well do you feel all your training prepared you to participate in combat?

Well, it's ah, I don't think anybody, yes you can be trained, yes I think it was great. It's hard to pin it down. You learn so much more when you get in combat. You really get your training when you get fired at in anger. But then, ah, I was well prepared. I knew my demolition work, I knew my tactics that I'd learned through all of Officer's Candidate school and through all the maneuvers and training with the 501. We had fine officers. When I went to have a reunion I might say, several years ago now. There were were 6 general officers at that reunion that were all in the 501 during WWII.

Interviewer: How long did you actually train for going into combat?

You train all the time from the time you got in the Army till Feb 1941 when we jumped in Normandy in 1944. It was nothing but. As an officer in the Army you are either teaching or learning. All the time. In those days, I might add, I don't know about the modern Army.

Interviewer: What were your impression of the other soldiers in your unit?

They were terrific. You get in a real tight situation and you can say to yourself, "all these guys around me at least jump out of an airplane, so they've got some fortitude" But you can trust your buddy always.

Interviewer: What were your impression of the leaders?

Great. In our regiment they couldn't have been better.

Interviewer: How did you travel overseas?

We went on Liberty ship from Boston across the North Atlantic.

Interviewer: What were the conditions?

They were terrible. In Liberty ship in North Atlantic in January is some kind of a trip. And I remember very well because I didn't suffer from motion sickness. So I was duty officer almost every day. Spent a lot of time down with the men because other people were too sick to do it.

Interviewer: What were you thinking as you traveled and you knew you were getting ready to go into a combat situation? What was going through your head?

Just never thought much about it. You are so involved in the training you are doing at the time that you don't think ahead. I begun to think about we were going into combat when we were in the plane and the flaps started to come down. I said, this is it.

Interviewer: Where did you stay once you got overseas?

Well we went to a place they called, near Newberry England, and the headquarters and the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of our regiment stayed in that camp near Newberry. Then the others were off at another place. I forgot the name of that place, the other 2 battalions were close by. But we did nothing but train there. We were in the field there and did nothing but train there every day.

Interviewer: Now where were you staying? In tents?

We had a tent. Two officers shared a tent each. The enlisted men were in squad tents, I think they call them.

Interviewer: What kind of training went on once overseas?

Pretty much what was in the States. Maneuvers, I being the demolition officer, my platoon was very often the enemy on our maneuvers. We furnished explosions and so forth to make it realistic. It was quite challenging. But we had good training, good officers and good training.

Interviewer: What was your first combat experience?

Over Normandy jumping out of an airplane.

Interviewer: How did you feel?

I felt, I had one man shot in the airplane and my airplane got shot down, it was burning when I got out of it. It crashed not too far down the way. I saw it later on. Pilot, co-pilot and navigator still there.

Interviewer: How was your equipment during combat?

Well I lost mine in the jump, I must of tumbled out of the airplane because I lost my "mused" bag which had all my socks, underwear and even a carton of cigarettes, and canteen. But I had a sub-machine

gun that I carried and machine gun on my leg, so I saved those and my first defensive action turned out to be a bull. I thought it was kinda funny later that my first defensive action going into combat was defending myself against a bull. But he was a friendly bull and I didn't have any problems with him.

**Interviewer:** How did your unit react in combat?

Well, it was, in Normandy it would be difficult to say because we were so scattered that we weren't a unit. We were just groups of people that we picked up. And it was, ah, my perception was it was small group of Americans fighting small groups of Germans all over Normandy. In areas that I was in, that's the way it appeared to be.

**Interviewer:** How did your attitude change – before you were in training and now you are actually on the ground in combat?

I don't really know. I think I took it a lot more seriously than I did before. Being shot at in anger is a wakeup call.

**Interviewer:** What was that like being shot at and realizing that you are going to shot someone or at least shot at them?

I don't know how to explain that. I was never very happy about having to shoot people but it has to be done. Somebody's going to shoot you if you don't shoot them. And you have little choice.

**Interviewer:** How well were you supplied during combat? If at all

Well there was only one place that ah I was in a position where I thought we were running low. It was in Bastogne. But we never did run out. We always had something. And of course my name sake came to our rescue and we were re-supplied. We did run a little bit low. Other than that I thought we were well supplied every place we were. In Holland we were well supplied. In Normandy we were well supplied.

**Interviewer:** While you were there how did you deal with personal hygiene? Taking showers, shaving?

Well you shave and any time you get a chance you got you took a shower or bathed. Sometimes there was a period of time between chances. But you did the best you could with that sort of thing.

**Interviewer:** What about the weather conditions?

In Bastogne it was miserable, simply because it was cold. Back in my hometown that same weather would have been delightful but in Bastogne living in a hole in the ground some part of the time, it was reasonably miserably.

**Interviewer:** How did you deal with that? Trying to keep warm and keep from frost bite.

Well you didn't keep from frost bite. I think everyone that was there had a little bit of frost bite. But you get close to a fire as best you can. You always keep a pair of socks wrapped around your body inside your shirt to keep that one warm pair. When you get wet and damp you take those out and put those off and them next to your body and put the dry ones on.

Interviewer: What about dealing with illnesses or wounds?

Well, I ah, was pretty lucky. I didn't have to tend any of my wounds. But I certainly seen a lot of them that I tried to tend to till a medic got there. Anybody who's been in a combat situation has had to deal with that. And it's kind of a sad situation in many cases. Sometimes you don't really like to talk about.

Interviewer: How did your unit deal with losses?

(pause in response)

Interviewer: As far as support, moral support.

I, ah, I only know about my own unit. You regretted when you lost people but, losses are expected and you have to cope with them and go on.

Interviewer: How long did you actually serve in combat?

Well, let's see, Normandy lasted, what, a month. Time escapes me. You don't watch a clock when you are doing that sort of thing. We were about a month in Holland, maybe 6 – 8 weeks in Bastogne. Actually my company lost more people after Bastogne, than we loss in Bastogne. When we started to attack. In my particular company we lost more men after Bastogne than in Bastogne. The fighting wasn't over for 101<sup>st</sup> when we left Bastogne is what I'm trying to say.

Interviewer: Did you yourself, lose any friends?

Oh my yes. I lost my best friend and tent mate.

Interviewer: How did you deal with that?

(pause) – still dealing with that.

Interviewer: Did you get much free time during the war?

I got to London a few times and to Paris twice. Got down on the Riviera – was on the Riviera on V-E day. We get some time off. I enjoyed it. We did.

Interviewer: How were you able to keep in touch with loved ones?

Letters. The only way.

Interviewer: Did you have a family back home?

Yes, I had a wife and daughter.

Interviewer: How did that, how did being in the war effect your family life?

We didn't have any.

Interviewer: (chuckle) how did it affect your family? Your wife and daughter.

Well my wife finished school. She kept herself busy doing that. She lived with her parents and finished school at Oxford University in NY. And we correspondence. She told me how the baby was doing, how she was doing in school. I told her what I could about what I was doing. What I thought she should know about what I was doing.

Interviewer: Did you ever receive any medals or decorations for your time served?

I got a Bronze Star for picking up a fellow who was in an artillery barge that got hit. One of people. I went out and brought him in but it's, I don't know that I deserve the Bronze Star for that or not. A Bronze Star, lots of medals, I think any soldier can tell you that whether or not you get a decoration is dependent upon whether or not someone saw you do that wants to write it up. You do lots of things in combat, I feel like I ah, ah several times done things that were more hazard than picking up that boy up and getting him out of that ah artillery fire. But somebody saw me do that and wrote it up so I got a Bronze Star. I'm very happy to have it, I don't mean to belittle it, very tickled to have it.

Interviewer: What were your thoughts about the enemy soldiers, as far as how well they were equipped verses America, or how well they were trained?

Germans were very well trained and very well equipped. I think we, ah, they were so regimented, where our soldiers were more able to think on their feet and change the plans that needed changed. The German soldiers went ahead with whatever the orders were, whether it was a good idea, or turned out to be a good idea or not. I think we had a leg up on the German soldier on, in that respect. Other than that, they were good soldiers, most of them, well equipped and well trained. Good fighters.

Interviewer: Did you ever come, looking back on the war, did you ever come to respect to the average enemy soldier?

Certainly. Absolute. He was in the same position I was, just on the other side.

Interviewer: Did you have much contact with the local civilians?

Oh sure. Everywhere you go.

Interviewer: How did they react to American soldiers?

Usually, very happy to see us. Humm, some because we had cigarettes and chocolates. Some because, in Holland, we were liberator. And they appreciated that and appreciate it to this day.

Interviewer: Did you ever see any of the concentration camps?

No, no, I didn't. Fortunately, I didn't see any of those. I've talked to people who did and that's enough for me.

Interviewer: Hummm, looking back again, how do you think your unit made a difference in the war?

They helped to win, they did their share to win it. No doubt about 501, ah, ah, if my memory serves me was the highest decorated unit in the division. 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne was the only division, ever to get a Presidential citation as a whole division.

Interviewer: What have you taken away from your experience serving with the 101<sup>st</sup>?

(pause) so many things. That's hard to innumerate. (pause) Respect for other people, respect for authority. (pause)ah, that's one of those things that the area is so great that it's difficult.

Interviewer: How do you think your attitude as a whole has changed because of your time served in the Army?

Well I was so young when I got in the Army, I don't know what my attitude would have been. That's kind of a difficult questions because I don't know if my attitude changed or stayed the same. I didn't have a recognizable attitude when I got in the service that I can say was changed because I was in the service.

Interviewer: Did you continue to serve after the war?

I got out for a while after the war. Then I went back in and went to the 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne division. Stayed with the 82<sup>nd</sup> for 5 years. Actually I was with the 82<sup>nd</sup> longer than I was in the 101<sup>st</sup>. But I was never shot at in anger so the 101<sup>st</sup> is my first love.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to come back in?

Wow, that is, a little bit to do with my family and a little bit to do with my hometown. Just wasn't satisfied to stay there anymore. And one of the ways, ah, of moving on was to go back into the Service. I didn't have the Service out of my system and I needed to go back in for a while. And my family understood that. My wife, I don't mean my wife, I mean my mother and father. Of course my wife is all set to go back to the Army with me of course.

Interviewer: Do you have a favorite story that you share with your children, or if you have any grandchildren?

(pause) A favorite story. (pause) No I don't think I have a favorite story. It just depends.... when the subject comes up..... you don't talk about it too much. It's like, they ask you questions you don't like to answer. So you don't talk about it too much. I just can't think of a favorite story I have about the military. At least none come to mind at the moment.

Interviewer: You said you have a daughter. Did she serve?

No, I had a daughter and a son. My first wife passed away. I adopted 3 children and my present wife had children so I have 11. Quite a family.

Interviewer: Have any of them followed in your footsteps?

No, not any. They are all in business. No military types. Now my son lived in the Orient long enough that he became indoctrinated in Oriental ways and he married a Japanese girl. So that's probably one of

the effects that the service had on my family. He lived in the Philippines for 3 years and in Japan for 3 years, so, .....those years you are most affected.

Interviewer: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

No, I can't think of anything. I'm not the best interviewee I think. It's just, I can't think of a thing now. I think I've told you all, and I thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you.