

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Roger Neighborgall

May 2, 2014

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PREFACE

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Transcribed by Carilyn Cipolla, National Court Reporters Association.

ROGER NEIGHBORGALL

May 2, 2014

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Roger Neighborgall. Did I pronounce that correct?

Answer: That's correct

Q: Okay. Taking place on May 2, 2014.

A: That's correct.

Q: In Falls Church, Virginia.

A: Yes.

Q: And we're going to be talking today, Mr. Neighborgall, about your experiences in World War II. And --

A: Except I'm not 'Mr. Neighborgal'; I'm Roger.

Q: Okay. We're going to be talking with you, Roger, thank you -- about World War II -- your experiences there -- what you saw, and much much more -- what comes from that. But we're going to start at the beginning. And we want to get a sense of who you were as the war began and how old you were and things like that. So very first question is, "When were you born? Where were you born? And what was your name at birth?"

A: Okay. I was born in Garrett, Indiana on September 13, 1923.

Q: Gary, Indiana?

A: Garrett -- G-A double R, E, double T.

Q: J-A double R?

A: E, double T.

Q: Got it. Garrett. Were --

A: Garrett, Indiana is a suburb of Fort Wayne.

Q: I see. And were you born into a large family or a small one?

A: No, one sister who was two years older than me.

Q: What was her name?

A: Betty Jane. And my mother's name was Jane.

Q: And your father's?

A: Homer.

Q: And how did your father support the family? I assume it was your father.

A: He worked as a lumber inspector for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Garrett, Indiana was a -- being an old railroad town, it was 150 miles from Chicago on the B&O, and everybody in Garrett either worked for the B&O or did something to support the people who worked for the B&O -- like the grocery store.

Q: I got it.

A: A drugstore.

Q: Uh-huh. Do you have any earliest memories from either your home or your family or the town itself?

A: Yes, I have lots of them. As a matter of fact, I continue in touch with one of my classmates.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: From grade school and from high school.

A: Grade school and high school.

Q: Wow. So tell me a little bit about your family -- the family you were born into -- about your father, what kind of a person he was, your mother, and some of the values they tried to -- let's say, share with the kids and so on.

A: Okay. First of all we were very poor family. We lived in a 2-bedroom house, little frame house. I think we sold it for \$2,000 or something when we left. Maybe \$3,000. But that didn't bother me, because none of my friends had any money. It was the Depression was on in this country.

Q: Yeah, as you were growing up.

A: As I was growing up, I grew up in depression.

Q: Did your father still have his job during the Depression?

A: No, he worked wherever he could. But the B & O laid off almost everybody except for the train crews.

Q: Mm-hmm. And did your mother have to work or try to?

A: My mother was a nurse volunteer, and she volunteered at the Catholic hospital as a nurse's assistant but not for money.

Q: How large was Garrett, Indiana?

A: Say again?

Q: How large was --

A: 5,000.

Q: Did you pretty much know most of the people there -- or did your family?

A: Well, yeah -- that's good and bad, because everybody also knew me. [laughing]

Q: [laughing]

A: If I did something wrong, my mother knew about it before I got home.

Q: Oh, that's a very effective network.

A: [laughing]

Q: Were your parents religious at all?

A: My mother was very religious. My father -- medium.

Q: Can I ask which religion?

A: Yes. My mother was a -- we grew up in a Presbyterian church. My mother was raised as a Catholic and changed to Protestant for my father. Then, after they were married for some period of time, she went back to the Catholic church and my sister went back with her.

Q: And yourself?

A: I became a Catholic during the war.

Q: Did you? I see.

A: In Germany.

Q: And -- but, before the war, did you go to church? Did you go to services?

A: Yes, we went to church every Sunday.

Q: So what's the difference between going to church and becoming a Catholic during the war? Going to church as a kid, and then --

A: I guess I don't really know. During the war I was convinced I wasn't going to live through it, and I decided I wanted to be buried as a Catholic. That was kind of the way it went.

Q: I see. Were there many religions in Garrett, Indiana?

A: Garrett was a very religious town. There were at least a dozen churches, maybe 15.

Q: Most of them were Protestant, or most of them were Catholic?

A: No, no, no -- there was only one Catholic; the rest of them were all Protestant.

Q: I see.

A: But the Methodists, the Baptists -- they were all over the place. All my friends went to church.

Q: Okay. Regardless of which church, they all went to a church.

A: Yeah.

Q: Were there any Jewish people?

A: Very few, but some.

Q: Did your paths ever cross with anybody who was Jewish as you were growing up?

A: Well, the -- the local men's haberdashery was run by a Stern family, and I knew them very well. But they didn't have any children.

Q: It was a husband and wife?

A: It was husband and wife.

Q: How is it that you got to know them?

A: I was very involved in athletics, and they were supporters of my work -- of my --

Q: Activities?

A: -- accomplishments in athletics.

Q: Did you ever have a part-time job as you were a teenager?

A: Yes. As a matter of fact, I had a paper route of 75 customers, which I had from the fourth grade on. In about the fourth grade, my father said to me, "I would like for you to be the first Neighborgall to graduate from college, but you have to understand I don't have a penny to give you; you have to do it on your own."

Q: Did you want that?

A: And so, I immediately decided that the way I was going to get through college, which I did, was athlete scholarships.

Q: Ah -- I see.

A: And that was what's -- that was my father instigated it when he said, "I want you to be a college graduate, but you have to understand I don't have any money to give you."

Q: And is that what you meant by support from the Stern family is that they contributed in some way?

A: No, not financially. They contributed by being active lookers in the audience.

Q: So they'd go to your games.

A: Yeah, they'd go to games.

Q: I see. Did -- what was high school like in the 30's?

A: High school -- my class -- I think they are like 78 in my high school graduating class. I grew up, from the first grade to the seventh grade in about 60, and then the country schools came to high school, which served as a county high school as well as a city high school.

Q: So it enlarged -- the classes got bigger?

A: Enlarged -- 17 or 18 came in from the country.

Q: Was there an immigrant population in your town? Did you know any kids in the class who were from, let's say, Europe -- or European refugees?

A: [laughing] About half of them were immigrants. They're mostly from Ita -- Italy.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: You have to understand, in a town of 5,000 where we're a railroad, that includes workers on the railroad that laid the ties, laid the track and so on so forth.

Q: You know some towns -- because I'm not familiar with the Midwest -- some towns can be very homogenous, and some are not. And that's the sense I'm trying to get is, "How much were there -- how much influence was there? How much knowledge was there? How much interaction was there with people who either would have been Jewish, people who would have been from Europe, people who were different from, let's say, a midwestern American?"

A: Well, that's very interesting. Because when some new family moved in, the first question you ask them, "Can you play football or baseball or basketball?" [laughing].

Q: Those were the important questions?

A: Yeah, you do that, everything else is fine.

Q: [laughing] Those are not bad criteria actually.

A: Yeah.

Q: But -- okay. So I'll go about it this way. I'm trying to ask, "In school, were current events talked about?"

A: Current events were talked about, but only in Europe, not Japan.

Q: Okay. So in other words, you heard what was going on in Europe?

A: We heard what was going on, but we truthfully didn't believe it.

Q: Okay. So this was in the 30's --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- when Hitler comes to power?

A: Yeah.

Q: People in your town knew about that.

A: I said "I was told about it, but I didn't believe it."

Q: And what was it that you didn't believe?

A: That there was a Hitler who was killing people and so on.

Q: At that time in the 30's, it would have been like political people -- it would have been people who were opponents ideologically from his regime.

A: Well, Hitler's speeches were on the radio.

Q: You mean you heard them in the original German?

A: Yes.

Q: Wow. And were they translated then?

A: No, except my mother could speak a little Dutch, a little German and so on. And my friends -- some of my friends. And my minister, whose name was Reverend Joe Jordan, he could speak German fluently. And he had been in World War I. So he pretty much kept us up to speed. He said -- again, I repeat -- I did not believe that this was actually happening.

Q: Yeah, okay. Okay.

A: And you have to understand that I was raised in an isolationist atmosphere.

Q: That's what I wanted to get at too.

A: Yeah. The answer is that "We did not believe in being involved in other people's wars." Let Hitler do what he's going to do in Europe and so on so forth, but we're not going to be involved.

Q: That was a widespread feeling in the town?

A: That was very widespread.

Q: Was it something that you took for granted as the right way to be?

A: Yes.

Q: Did that change for you at any point?

A: Pearl Harbor when I was a freshman in college.

Q: What college did you go into?

A: It's funny, because I went to Indiana University on a full scholarship. But then my father was transferred from Garrett to Buchanan, West Virginia. So I transferred to University of West Virginia, and my sister did too.

Q: And she was going to college as well?

A: She was a sophomore in college.

Q: What?

A: She was a first semester junior when I was a first semester freshman at Indiana.

Q: That's pretty -- that's quite an accomplishment for a poor family.

A: That's very unusual. In my high school class, I think either two or maybe three went to school --

Q: -- beyond --

A: -- went to college. In fact, one of them went to nurse's school. Somebody else went to college. There's only three of us that went to college. The point being is that you could walk down to B & O Railroad and get a job instantaneously. There was really no advantage of going to college -- financially.

Q: Well, by the time you finished. Because, when you started, it was still a depression. When did jobs come up again?

A: Well, the answer is that the B & O -- the B & O did not do much hiring during the Depression, but there were jobs for kids, which paid, you know, \$3.00 or \$4.00 an hour. Now, it was way below -- what was the minimum wage then?

Q: Yeah, it probably would have been way less than \$3 or \$4.

A: Yeah.

Q: So it couldn't support a family, but it could employ a kid.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you're saying there wasn't that much incentive to going on to college because there was this choice.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Still --

A: And, in addition to that, a fair number of kids' family lived on a farm. Indiana -- northern Indiana is a big farm area.

Q: So they were needed at home?

A: They were needed at home, and they made their -- all had money. The farm kids all were financially stable, because they -- what they did was, they would bring in a pig or a cow and get credit for it at the grocery store for a long period of time. So those kids could take me and go into these grocery stores and always get a candy bar on a trade-type thing.

Q: And did they?

A: Yeah, they sure did.

Q: Did you feel the difference between yourself being from a not so well-to-do family and the other kids or not so much?

A: There was zero feeling -- zero feeling as far as wealth was concerned.

Q: As far as what?

A: Wealth -- money was concerned. No one had much money.

Q: Okay. But I go back to it. It still is quite unusual and quite impressive that the two children in one family that is not so well-to-do end up going to college.

A: Yeah?

Q: What do you attribute that to?

A: My grandfather paid for my sister.

Q: I see. So education was something that was valued not only by your father but by his father.

A: Yeah. No -- by my mother's father.

Q: Uh-huh -- by your mother's father.

A: Yeah.

Q: I see.

Q: And, when you were a freshman at -- was it in Indiana or West Virginia when Pearl Harbor happened?

A: I was in Indiana University. It was the idea that I was going to stay there for four years and graduate --

Q: I see.

A: -- on an athlete's scholarship.

Q: And you transferred to West Virginia at what point?

A: At the end of my freshman year.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: So do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor happened?

A: Yes, I do remember where I was. I was -- I was with a group of friends, and we -- not a single soul had any idea where Pearl Harbor was located.

Q: How did you hear about it? How did you hear about the fact that Pearl Harbor is attacked?

A: It was hard to believe, because the Japanese capability was absolutely unknown.

Q: So was it through the radio? Was it through newspapers? Was it word of mouth?

A: It was radio.

Q: Radio. It must have been quite a shock.

A: But then what happened, of course, was that -- that meant that the boys in school, a lot of them immediately volunteered for the service. I stayed for another year before I volunteered.

Q: And, when you volunteered, you were already in West Virginia; is this correct?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Did you want to volunteer right away?

A: Oh, yes. I was in ROTC, and I had my choice of staying for two more years and being a lieutenant or going right now and just make my way in in the military.

Q: And so, if you were in ROTC and you delayed at least that one year, did that make a difference?

A: It made a difference in my ability as enlisted personnel in the army, because I knew an awful lot. I was already educated militarily.

Q: So in that year -- the one year that you were attending school -- what were you studying in addition to ROTC?

A: My plan was to be a doctor. I was in pre-med.

Q: Wow -- wow. And why did you finally then sign up after only one year rather than two?

A: I just felt that I should participate. Most of my friends were in the process of going to the military or being in the military. It just seemed like the thing to do.

Q: Did you talk about it at home with your family?

A: My dad was dead-set against it.

Q: Why?

A: Yeah. He did not want me -- he had been in World War I. He did not want me to get involved World War II.

Q: And you were how old when you signed up?

A: Nineteen.

Q: Yeah.

A: Maybe 18.

Q: Yeah. Well, it's kind of understandable your dad wouldn't want you to go to war, you know?

A: Yeah.

Q: So, when you did sign up, what happened? How were you directed, or how did you choose one thing over another?

A: I was sent to Fort Hayes, Ohio.

Q: Okay.

A: And I remember the first night -- we were in a huge gymnasium-type thing. It was several hundred bunks around and with the snow and so on so forth. I didn't sleep the first night. I remember that very well.

Q: I assume that changed in the subsequent nights.

A: Oh yeah -- I only stayed there for four days.

Q: And what was that place? Was that sort of like --

A: It was a -- it was a place where people got into the military.

Q: So it was sort of like a transfer place -- you joined, and from there they send you out to other places?

A: Yes. To get your shots, your understanding of your responsibilities insofar as life and death and so on so forth. Your NSLI -- National Life Insurance company position. It just got you oriented into the army, and then they sent you some place.

Q: Let me go back a little bit -- I want to go back to your father being dead-set against it. Did he eventually cave, or did you say "I'm going to do it anyway."? What kind of terms did you part on?

A: [pause] Not very good terms. Not very good terms. But I immediately signed up to send money home to my family.

Q: Mm-hmm. From your pay?

A: From my pay.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: In other words, I sign up -- my family would depend upon me. Yeah.

Q: Okay. And -- okay. Did things change then? You know, did it kind of like, before you were shipped overseas you had --

A: I wasn't shipped overseas from Fort Hayes.

Q: Okay. Then tell me what happened.

A: Okay? I was sent to Camp Croft, South Carolina. And I was there for two or three weeks. I have a very high IQ. And the army had something called ASTP -- Army Specialized Training Program, which was to take the brightest people in the army and make engineering officers out of them.

Q: Engineering officers -- okay.

A: Yes. So the answer is -- is that I was just called up and said, "You're being shipped out." And I was going to go to Mississippi State College for engineering.

Q: Wow -- okay.

A: And I did that for one year. And then the army decided they didn't need engineering officers. So they just canceled the program.

Q: But you had then a second year of college under your belt.

A: Yeah.

Q: Could you use it eventually?

A: Not in the military.

Q: So, after they canceled, then what happened?

A: I got sent to camp. I got sent to Camp Sheldon, Mississippi. In Camp Sheldon, Mississippi, I volunteered for the rangers.

Q: And tell me, what were the rangers? How are they different -- or how do they fit into the military, not being a military person at all?

A: Okay. There was a sign on the bulletin board --

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: -- and it said, "We're seeking volunteers for a classified organization where loss of life is very high." And that's -- as a young soldier, that sounds very interesting to me.

Q: Not frightening at all?

A: There was a sign that was on --

Q: Okay. I'm going to read this out. This is from a presentation that you have given in the past and will give again on leadership. It's called "Leadership from a foxhole and passing the baton of freedom."

A: Yes.

Q: And it is one that you'll be speaking at the Elks Lodge in Fairfax, Virginia on May 4, 2014. And it's one of the slides there. And for the rangers, what the sign said -- "Volunteers wanted for a special classified mission. The risk of loss of life will be high. The ideal candidate will be unmarried and under 25 years of age and no physical disabilities whatsoever. Expert training in small arms and bayoneting is a requirement. Special skills such as demolition, radio operation, rubber boat handling, and parachuting

is valuable. Those interested give your name to the first sergeant." So of this, what are those -- what are the various features -- the various, you know, points that they mention that caught your attention and you said, "Gee, I'm interested in that."?

A: I thought I could do demolition, the radio operation, rubber boat handling, and -- with no problem. Remember, I was 19.

Q: Yeah, and you weren't scared about the loss of life?

A: No, never --

Q: Because 19-year-olds never die.

A: No, you don't think about it. But you give your name to the first sergeant.

Q: Okay. And you did.

A: And I did. And the first sergeant said, "I don't have the slightest idea what this is all about. Go to battalion." I go to battalion, and I talk to the sergeant major, "What is this all about?" "I don't have the slightest idea. Go to regimen." So I walk to regimen, and they didn't have the slightest idea. They sent me to division headquarters, and the first time I heard the word "Ranger."

Q: Uh-huh. So even then it was just volunteers without even the word "Rangers?"

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. So, when you get to division headquarters, this is all in Sheldon, Mississippi?

A: No, no, no -- this is -- where am I? Where am I? Yeah, I guess maybe this was still at Camp Shelby -- yeah, it was. It's Camp Sheldon, Mississippi.

Q: Okay. And so you get to the division headquarters there. And this is the first time you hear "Rangers." And does anybody give you an explanation?

A: They not only gave you an explanation, there were physical and mental tests involved.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: So for two weeks I did much road marching and took tests for mental stability and so on.

Q: Do you remember anything about those tests?

A: Yes, I remember it very well. And the answer is that there was maybe 100 guys to start out with, and it kept getting smaller and smaller and smaller. And so, for the final tests, there were ten of us left.

Q: What kind of mental tests? What did you have to do?

A: They asked -- it was an interview-type thing.

Q: Okay.

A: And one of the things was, "Are you -- is death a problem?"

Q: Is death a problem?

A: Yeah. Not for a 19-year-old.

Q: Any other kinds of questions to kind of gauge mental stability? That you remember.

A: No. I remember they -- they asked a lot of questions. In fact, you're asking here about growing up and so on. "Why do you want to be in the rangers?" That sort of thing.

Q: It was kind of hard to answer why you want to be in the rangers if you don't know what the rangers are.

A: Well, by this time I had a very thorough understanding that they were going to hit the beaches on D-Day. They were going to lead raids all through Europe.

Q: So that kind of explanation had been given.

A: Yes. And now, you get down to there's ten of us left, and there was the final test.

Q: Okay. What's the final test?

A: We lined up, and I had to be first. And there was a tent about the size of this room.

Q: Mm-hmm. And the room is about -- oh, about 8 x 8. Oh no -- 8 x 12?

A: 10 x 20-type thing. 8 x 18.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I hear "Neighborgall, come in." So I walk in this room, and it's fairly dark. Not very well lit. And behind a desk in front of me is the meanest-looking guy I ever saw in my life who's a ranger. My first ranger I've seen. He says, "Neighborgall, sit down." "Yes, sir." "Neighborgall, we don't trust anyone. Put your hands on the table." I did. He pulled a knife out and stuck it right in between my hands. I was petrified, but I never lost eye contact with him. He says, "Neighborgall, congratulations -- you're in."

Q: No kidding.

A: Yes.

Q: So that was the final test -- "Would you flinch?"

A: Now, I thought, "I wonder what the rest of these people are going to do?" So I stayed outside while the next guy went in.

Q: Okay.

A: I heard a knife go on the table. Shhwww -- out the door. He wanted nothing to do with the rangers.

Q: Wow.

A: Of the ten people, three or four of us passed.

Q: Wow.

A: It was that selective.

Q: Wow. So, by this point, you kind of get a sense of the purpose of what this group is --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and they have done whatever tests they need to do to see whether or not you've got what it takes --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and what happens then?

A: I get sent to a ranger outfit.

Q: What is a ranger outfit, and what did you do there?

A: Yeah. It was new.

Q: That's the dog keepers come by.

A: Yeah. The answer is that I'm now a member of the fifth rangers battalion.

Q: Okay. How large was this battalion?

A: Please. No, no -- no, no...

Q: The dog is getting tangled in the wires. I'm just saying that for the interview purpose.

A: A ranger battalion is 5 or 600.

Q: Okay. And what kind of further training was there?

A: The further training was in England with the British commandos.

Q: So when did you go over to England? Do you remember the dates -- approximate?

A: D-Day --

Q: Was '44.

A: -- was '44. So I was in England February or March of '48 [sic].

Q: Of '44 -- so the same year.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you had signed up in 1942?

A: Yes.

Q: So we're talking between the time you ship over to Europe and the time you signed up it was about a year and a half --

A: -- yes, of training --

Q: Of training.

A: -- and most of it was British commandos.

Q: In England. (phone ringing).

A: In England. That's my phone. My wife will take it.

Q: Okay. Hang on just a second. I'm going to -- okay. We can go forward. So where did you get sent to in England -- what part of the U.K.?

A: We landed at Birmingham. And I don't know where we were -- we were part-time in Scotland.

Q: Tell me -- before you -- before you got sent over, did you have an opportunity to say good-bye to your family?

A: Yes.

Q: Had you told them that the rangers had this loss of life -- higher expectancy?

A: They -- the answer is "no."

Q: Yeah. Yeah. Had your father reconciled by the time you left for England?

A: Yeah. But my father also got ill and died. So my father was not there anymore. It was just my mother.

Q: Oh, I see. So you lost him while you were in, you know, right after you enlisted?

A: Yeah.

Q: It must have been hard for your mother.

A: It was very difficult. But because of -- I was in the army, and of course, they gave me the opportunity to go to his funeral.

Q: I don't know what to say. I just can't imagine -- it must have been really hard -- for everybody -- for you, for your mom, for your sister. So, when you get over to the U.K., you land in Birmingham, and then do you get transferred to Scotland?

A: No, the answer -- we were -- part of the training was in Scotland.

Q: What kind of training was in Scotland?

A: Landing on beaches and climbing hills. Climbing.

Q: Okay. Now, forgive my knowledge here -- or lack of knowledge -- I thought D-Day was supposed to be a secret operation and that nobody knows about it. Was that not true?

A: No one knows the date.

Q: But everybody knew there was going to be something.

A: There was going to be a breach of the -- of France some place.

Q: Okay. So it was widely known that there is going to be an assault on the fortifications.

A: Yeah. But, on the other hand, we were already fighting in Africa. We were already fighting in Sicily.

Q: Okay.

A: And we were on the mainland of Italy. So that was the -- Roosevelt, as it turned out wanted to go immediately into D-Day -- to go into France -- but Churchill talked him out of it and decided to go through Sicily in Italy.

Q: And this is while you're already in the U.K. and you're training?

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: The beaches that you trained on in Scotland, did they have the same height and depth? I mean, were they similar to those cliffs in Normandy?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Were they harder to climb?

A: Again, I'm a teenager.

Q: Of course, you can do it.

A: Yeah.

Q: You can do it. And then what happened? How long were you -- how long were you training in the U.K.? And what other kinds of activities were you being --

A: Well, the biggest challenge was the pubs. [laughing]. But you have to understand England, there were very few men there. They were almost all gone. So there were lots of girls around --

Q: Socializing.

A: -- socializing. And there were -- the answer is the pubs, the American soldier was by far the best customer they had ever had.

Q: So there was a great social life.

A: It was very great social life. "Social" insofar as you can work all day and drink beer at night if you wanted to. It wasn't mandatory.

Q: But did you?

A: But it wasn't exactly social. I mean, you'd have a few beers with your buddies.

Q: Okay. Did you meet any British girls?

A: I -- we had a dance every Saturday night at the place where we were, and the British girls came chaperoned. And whenever -- I don't know, 11:30 or something like that, they all went home. And, if you were dancing with somebody, you couldn't hold them close to you; you had to hold them out here. If you got too close, a monitor would go along and separate you.

Q: Boy. Boy, I guess there was a great deal care taken there wouldn't be too much fraternization.

A: Yes, that's true.

Q: Still, it's not the same thing as being on an army base and not being able to have any fun at all.

A: I agree. I agree.

Q: And for young kids away from home, you know, about to face something --

A: Now, there was one thing that I should have brought up about Camp Sheldon, Mississippi. The Nesei American 442nd combat team were also there. And so, we maneuvered against them constantly in the -- this is Florida rangers. So for example, Senator Danny Inouye.

Q: Oh, yes -- from Hawaii -- Daniel Inouye.

A: Yes, he was there as lieutenant.

Q: In this -- what did you call it again?

A: 442nd combat team.

Q: 442nd combat team.

A: And they went to Italy. And they were like a ranger battalion.

Q: I see.

A: And they did very good work in Italy.

Q: Did you talk amongst yourselves about what you might expect? Did you talk amongst yourselves about what you were thinking of going forward? Or is it you just, you know, paid attention to what you had to do and not much talk going on?

A: Not much talk going on about what was going to happen.

Q: Were you scared?

A: No, I didn't -- you remember I'm a 19-year-old kid.

Q: Yeah.

A: Either -- I graduate from high school, I was still 16. I went to college, but I just went to college -- I was 16, but my birthday is in September, so I was in college for one month before I was 17.

Q: Right. And then you went -- and then the following year at 18 is when you enlist.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And that's '42. So, during this time in the U.K., do you remember when it was that you got the order that, "Okay, we're leaving now."?

A: I don't. I don't remember.

Q: Do you remember being on the boats?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What were they like?

A: Prince Rupert. Prince Rupert was a British boat.

Q: Prince Rupert.

A: Prince Rupert was a British boat. You understand -- they went across the channel to within sight of the beach in a big boat, a fairly big boat.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Then they unloaded -- load you into small craft at the beaches.

Q: And you weren't yet -- let's say, if that was June '44 and you were born in 1923? You hadn't yet had your 21st birthday.

A: No, I (indecipherable).

Q: So you were 20 years old, and you hit the beach. And is there anything you want to tell me about that?

A: Not a thing. I don't want to talk about it.

Q: Okay. And the reason you don't want to talk about it?

A: It would keep me awake at night and so on if I got very heavily involved into it.

Q: Okay. I understand.

A: I -- after D-Day we joined -- my ranger battalion was assigned to Patton's third army. And that was before we had all the wonderful reconnaissance capability we have now and satellites and so on. When Patton wanted to know what was out there, [laughing] he sent the rangers to look and come back and tell him.

Q: So I'm going to just bridge this a bit and say you survived the assault on Normandy on D-Day. And only one last question before we go forward -- and that is, "Were you able to sleep at that time after -- after you knew you were safe, did you have any chance to recover?"

A: Yeah. No -- it didn't bother me.

Q: Didn't bother you. Okay. So when you -- what happened -- where did you get to? The assault's over. You survived. Where did you get to in France? Where did the rangers get to?

A: It's -- it's hard to describe. They went through a bunch of small towns.

Q: Okay.

A: No big towns.

Q: Near the beaches? Not so far?

A: Near the beaches.

Q: And then what were your tasks? What were your assignments?

A: We were a part of Patton's third army. And we were on individual missions. He would send us out there, attack the Germans, find out how strong they are, how many -- make a guess as to what the estimated numbers are concerned, and we did that continually.

Q: What kind of missions were you personally on; do you remember?

A: They were all -- they were all the same type of missions. The answer is that you would go a certain distance before you ran into drillmen shooting at you.

Q: So in other words -- (walkie talkie talking).

Q: Okay. So the missions were all similar, you're saying. But I'm trying to get a sense of, if I were on the ground -- or, if you were describing it to me in detail, what would you be experiencing? What would you be doing?

A: Firing at Germans. And, by the way, the casualty list was very high.

Q: From this?

A: Yeah. You would -- during missions like that, you'd expect 50% casualties.

Q: And you got them?

A: Yeah. 50% of us would be killed or wounded.

Q: So weren't you scared by this point?

A: What?

Q: Weren't you scared by this point?

A: I don't think "scared" --

Q: That's not the word, huh?

A: No, that's because we're highly-trained. See, you're highly-trained so you wouldn't be scared. If you were scared and someone told you, "See that guy up on top of the hill with a machine gun? Go kill him." You wouldn't do that unless you were highly-trained.

Q: All right. I guess what I'm trying to say is that, before you leave the U.K. -- before you leave England -- everything is theoretical. The minute you hit France, it stops being theoretical.

A: Theoretical and training are the same thing to me.

Q: Okay.

A: In other words, we were highly trained.

Q: Okay. So that -- so that that's what kicks in -- this almost-automatic response, "Okay. I know how to do this."

A: Yeah.

Q: Was there any change, though, in you -- that you sensed in you -- when you saw all those casualties?

A: No.

Q: Did you ever come -- did you ever capture anybody?

A: Oh, lots of captures.

Q: Any interaction with those that you captured?

A: I didn't speak German, but some of the rangers did. But there really wasn't any interaction.

Q: What did these people look like -- these German soldiers?

A: They looked just like us.

Q: Same age?

A: Same age. Blue-eyed like you are. [laughing]. Except they're mostly blond-haired.

Q: Yeah, not gray. [laughing]. When did your missions change -- or did they change? Did you ever go -- it sounds like you were in skirmishes rather than actual battles at that point.

A: Well, remember -- we were 500 people. And that -- and we were never -- and we never attacked as 500. We always attacked as 25 or 30 or 40. Sometimes just a couple. Before we went into Germany, we came out of France and went to Belgium.

Q: Okay.

A: And we went into Arlon, Belgium.

Q: Arlon.

A: A-R-L-O-N.

Q: Arlon.

A: Arlon, Belgium. And the second day we were there, while we were preparing to attack Germans, a delegation comes up to us and said, "We would like to play you a game of football."

Q: What kind of delegation?

A: Maybe four, five people.

Q: Were they local people?

A: Local people, Arlon people.

Q: Okay. So were these guys from Arlon young guys?

A: Yeah, "We'd like to play you a game of football."

Q: Okay.

A: We said, "Well, we don't have a football. We don't have any capability and so on so forth, but we'll do it." So it was like seven or eight days. So we practiced like crazy. And I was a quarterback. And we thought we were -- we got pretty good at being a football team.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: When we walk into Arlon, Belgium, we see the first soccer field we ever seen in our life. "What is this?"

Q: Different football. [laughing].

A: He says, "Well, look -- we're here. If you explain to us how you play this game, we'll still play."

Q: So you were at a disadvantage.

A: So they explained to us how you play soccer. The big thing is you can't use your hands. That was bad news to Americans.

Q: Yeah.

A: But we played. And they had about 20 goals. We didn't have any.

Q: Oh.

A: So finally we said, "Look, we're here. Let's play American football." And they said, "Okay. We don't know how you play American football. Well, tell us and we'll play."

Q: And did you?

A: They did not like blocking and tackling.

Q: [laughing].

A: Every time we got the ball, we scored a touchdown. So finally -- and, by the way, the stadium was jam-packed with people, and they were all screaming their heads off. And so, finally we said, "This has been a nice experience. Let's go to the bar and have a beer." And that's the way it ended.

Q: Well, it sounds like a wonderful thing to happen.

A: Yes, it was a wonderful thing to happen. And by the way, I've been back to Arlon since then. And the stadium's there. And this thing is still there.

Q: Oh, I see -- this is a sign. "The First of November 1944 Football Match." And it says "Match de Football avec black and white stocken le champion division 1942, '43, '44 versus selection American." And I can't speak French, but it's written -- there's something written in French -- I can't -- I don't know what it is -- but it is a sign announcing this football match.

A: Yes, and it's still there.

Q: That's really cool. So you were out of danger for a while, you were able to play for a while, and then what happens? To you.

A: To me.

Q: Mm-hmm -- to you.

A: The rangers -- ranger battalion -- they were eight or nine officers.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And all -- and I like all of them except one. And he was what we call "GI." "Yes, sir," "No, sir," "Yes, sir," "Yes, sir" -- you talk to him and you're always at attention and so on.

Q: Okay.

A: And so, one time he comes and says, "Neighborgall, you and I are going on a 2-man mission." And I said, "Tell me about it." He said, "You and I are going behind German lines to get information and so on so forth." I said, "Why me? You and I don't even get along." He said, "You're the best man for the job."

Q: Did he tell you what the job was -- what kind of information?

A: Yeah. The answer is -- is that we were to go behind the German lines and reconnoiter -- the answer is "Find out what was there and so on so forth" -- because we didn't really know what was there.

Q: Okay.

A: And the way you do this -- you do it at night, and you hide during the day.

Q: Okay.

A: So about the third or fourth day early in the morning, a German patrol spots us and fires at us. And he's hit in the legs --

Q: This officer you don't like --

A: Yeah. And there were just two of us.

Q: What was his name?

A: I have to think about that for a moment.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: Something about Lefkowitz. But anyway, the point is that now suddenly I'm his best friend. I'm his life and death getting out of there. It was snow on the ground. So I took his jacket off and put it in and cut down two pine trees about this high --

Q: That would be about four or five feet.

A: Yeah, four or five feet. I mean, and I made a slab out of them which I can pull. So I pull him back three miles to the American line.

Q: Did he survive?

A: And he survived. (phone ringing).

Q: Were you able to -- hang on a minute. Did you find out the information you needed to find out before he was hit?

A: We found out that there were Germans back there, but we didn't complete the mission.

Q: Okay. And do you remember what part of the country you were in?

A: Yeah. We were in -- in Germany and not too far from the Belgium border. That's all I remember.

Q: Okay. Would it have been close to Aachen -- which is close to the Belgian border, a major German city?

A: Yeah, Aachen was already a battle. But we were not into it. Aachen was a -- Aachen was a huge battle. There were probably 1,000 Americans involved -- 800 or 1,000. And not small groups like us. It was a big division-type thing.

Q: But you weren't close to there.

A: No, no -- we were not near Aachen.

Q: At that -- I want to pause for a second and switch our topic just a little bit. The last time I asked you about world affairs is, you're in high school and you're hearing Hitler's speeches. As time progressed and as the years went on and now you've joined the army and you were in uniform -- I mean, you were in college and then you're in uniform and so

on -- did you continue hearing about what Hitler was doing even being in the U.K., being in England, or was the news mostly about the actual war -- battles here, battles there?

A: There was a newspaper called "The Stars and Stripes," which was a weekly, and it had some world news in it -- but not much about Japan.

Q: Not much about Japan.

A: No.

Q: Did you know by the time you got to Normandy that there was a special kind of treatment that Jews were getting across Europe? Did you know anything about the concentration camps, about civilians being persecuted?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I told you -- when I was in high school, there was a rumor kind of floating around of things like this were going on, but I never believed it, and it never got much authenticity.

Q: Was there a time when that changed? When you started to believe it?

A: I didn't believe it until after the war was over.

Q: Really?

A: I didn't really believe it, because we never got into concentration camps.

Q: So you were never at concentration camps while you were in service?

A: No. And the reason I wasn't is because the rangers were involved in it at the last -- when I was in monuments bend. In other words, I was pulled out of the rangers -- which reminds me -- my ranger battalion went into Auschwitz.

Q: They did?

A: Yeah.

Q: Your ranger battalion went into Auschwitz?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: But the answer is, "They weren't the first ones there."

Q: No, they weren't. They couldn't have been. It was the Russians who came before them.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Okay. Did you talk to the guys afterwards, after they went in; was this the first time they would have heard anything or seen anything?

A: Yes, I talked to them -- but not in much detail.

Q: Do you remember --

A: And when I said, "Auschwitz," it may not have been Auschwitz. Linz?

Q: Linz is in Austria. That was one of Hitler -- that was Hitler's home. His parents were buried there. And then --

A: Linz is where Hitler's parents were buried -- yeah.

Q: Correct. And then Mauthausen was a concentration camp in Austria. Could it have been that the rangers went to Mauthausen?

A: Yes. The answer is, "When I say 'Auschwitz', I know that's not correct."

Q: Okay. It's a major concentration camp.

A: Yeah, a major concentration camp.

Q: But you don't know which one.

A: No. I can't remember. I was told, but I can't remember.

Q: Okay. And, when people did say they had been there, what do you remember them telling you?

A: Well, they came up with facts and figures -- I mean, not "facts and figures," but they came up with descriptions which defied absolute logic. Even though people had seen it, it's really hard to accept unless you've seen it yourself.

Q: So it didn't really sink in with you.

A: Say again?

Q: It didn't sink in with you that much.

A: No, it did not.

Q: Was there a point when it did sink in with you?

A: Yeah, after the war was over and I started getting more information.

Q: Okay.

A: The average American did not have a realization of how bad it was. [pause]. I mean, it was -- it was still hard for people to accept that something like this could happen.

Q: Yep. It's, you know, what we're doing now is trying to reconstruct what it looked like then. That's not so easy to do, but it's part of trying to get an historical record through, you know, a medium like an oral history interview is to remember what you didn't know at the time. That's not so hard -- that's not so easy to do when you already know something.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Let's go back then to -- you know, you bring this officer back whom you were his now lifesaver. You dragged him back to your lines. You weren't able to finish your mission. What happened then?

A: Battle of the Bulge.

Q: And you were in it?

A: Yes.

Q: In what way? What was your experience of the battle?

A: The Battle of the Bulge was a complete surprise to the Americans -- to Eisenhower and so on so forth. On Christmas Day, I was -- in the morning I had been on a mission -- a reconnaissance mission -- and I came back, and I was laying down to sleep and someone came in -- I was in a house, in somebody's house, and all I remember is I pick up my rifle and ran to the window, because I thought they were telling me that we were being attacked right then.

Q: And what was the actual case?

A: The actual case was that -- there's the Battle of the Bulge.

Q: Okay. You're showing me a slide of the German attack based on the weather.

A: This was -- Eisenhower is here. And he put his line right across the Battle of the Bulge and divided the responsibility between Patton in the south and Montgomery in the north. So British troops here were under Patton. American troops up here were under Montgomery.

Q: Isn't that interesting. You know -- a switch, that British troops would be under an American general.

A: But that was only because he had to have some responsibility.

Q: Where were you on this map?

A: Down here. And we were -- the third army was attacking east. When Patton got the mission of this, he moved about 100,000 people from attacking east to attacking north. And the weather was bad.

Q: Okay.

A: It was snowing and so on so forth. And right there is Bastogne.

Q: That's right. I see Bastogne.

A: And we captured that.

Q: And you were part of the group that did?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And there's where I got into -- I rode a tank.

Q: Is that you on the tank?

A: That's not this one. It's a tank like that that I was on.

Q: Okay. And here we have a photo of -- of looking like we're going through forests and really heavy snow on the fir trees and heavy snow on the tank itself. It looks like blizzard weather conditions. Miserable, in other words. Miserable.

A: Yes. And someone said, "That couldn't have been very comfortable." And I said, "It's better than walking."

Q: Yeah.

A: Now, something unusual happened.

Q: What happened?

A: When the tank I was on got to where the Germans were firing at us --

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: -- we jumped off the tank. And I jumped off and put my weapon up to my -- to start firing. And I was with my friend Bill Pretty[?], and the first thing I noticed was my weapon had stuck to my cheek.

Q: [sucking in a breath of surprise].

A: So he said, "Keep firing, Roger, and I'll blow on it." So he blew on it, and the weapon came off my cheek.

Q: It was that cold.

A: It was that cold. Yeah.

Q: Wow. Wow.

A: Okay. Here we go.

Q: Okay. So here we are. This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Roger Neighborgall. And did I -- I say that correctly, yes?

A: Yeah.

Q: And we were talking about the Battle of the Bulge and how --

A: Yeah. And when the Battle of the Bulge was over, we lost 60% of our people.

Q: The Rangers?

A: The Rangers lost 60%.

Q: That's a huge loss.

A: So we were training recruits back behind the lines. And we're walking down this country road, which is like three miles behind the front lines --

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: -- and this jeep comes right up and stops beside me, and there's Patton in the front seat. And he tells the guy in front of me. And I hear the whole conversation. He says, "Son, what outfit is this?" He says, "Sir, this is your shift regular time." He says, "I know that, but what the fuck are you doing back here?" He said, "The war's up that way." [laughing].

Q: [laughing]. Oh God.

A: And my friend in front of me said, "Sir, we're training recruits. We lost 60% of the people in the Battle of the Bulge, and we now are training recruits." And he said, "You can train people in the front line as well as you can train them back here."

Q: Oh my.

A: And so, they drove off. That was my conversation with Patton. And that night we got sent back to the front line to do our training there.

Q: So he issued an order. It wasn't like he was in a bad mood and drove by.

A: No.

Q: No? He got your back there, huh?

A: [laughing].

Q: So what was it like training at the front lines?

A: Well, the front lines -- the front lines were -- it wasn't like a line -- solid line of people. It was people here, there, and so on so forth. So the answer is that, "We kept training, and we kept -- we did missions as we normally do."

Q: Okay. At this point -- remind me again, the Battle of the Bulge was fought in what time? It was the Christmas of '44.

A: Yes.

Q: And how long did it last?

A: Lasted about ten days.

Q: Okay. So you were in early January '45.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you're training these recruits.

A: Yeah.

Q: And so we're talking January, early February.

A: Yeah -- yeah, yeah.

Q: What happens to you then? How do things progress for you?

A: Well, the ranger -- my rangers are completely -- we're still at war.

Q: Correct.

A: So we get missions from Patton.

Q: Okay. And that's the same kind of reconnaissance missions?

A: Yeah, same kind of reconnaissance missions that we had.

Q: Okay.

A: Recon mission is you go some place -- say, you find out the Germans are there, then you fight.

Q: Easy, huh? Or easily said.

A: Yeah.

Q: At what point does the Monuments Men come into the picture? Kind of try and bring us up to that.

A: In April.

Q: Oh, so you have an entire winter that you're still --

A: Fighting.

Q: -- still fighting. Okay. All right. So in April, which is just a month and a half before the war ends --

A: -- yeah, but we didn't know it.

Q: -- of course you didn't know. Where were you at that time?

A: [pause] I think in Bavaria. Bavaria. Near Munich.

Q: Okay. So how were you pulled from what you were doing to join the Monuments Men? What happens?

A: I got a call to go see the colonel. And I said to myself, "What have I done wrong to deserve -- to deserve personal treatment?" So I was going to him, and I said, "Sir, Neighborgall reporting as requested." He said, "Go get everything you own, including a bag of explosives." I said, "Yes, sir." So I went back an hour to get organized, and I come back. And I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "See that guy in the jeep over there?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Go there and report to him." So I go report to him, and he says, "Get in, Neighborgall."

Q: And who's the person you report to?

A: He was a colonel in the intelligence corps. And at this point in time I never heard the word "Monuments Men."

Q: Do you remember his name -- the colonel in the intelligence corps?

A: No.

Q: Okay. So you hadn't heard of the Monuments Men -- or you hadn't heard of the effort?

A: No, I had not heard of Monuments Men. I didn't know that there was such a -- someone who was interested in saving the arts.

Q: Okay.

A: So I said to him, you know, "Here I am, what do you want me to do?" He said, "Well, in the Bavarian area, there are several banks that we think have Jewish -- stolen Jewish

property in them. What we're going to do is, we're going to go up and ask for the people to open the vaults so we can inspect them. But we think they're going to give us 100 reasons why they can't open the vault. 'It's time sensitive, that no one knows the conversation', so on so forth." Then I'm going to say, "Neighborgall, blow open the door." So I had experience blowing open till* lock doors where you put an explosive on the handle. When it goes off, the handle goes flying and the door comes open. If you do that on a vault, nothing happens. You're in a learning curve.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: So I tried several things. And finally --

Q: So -- okay.

A: If this were -- if this were a door, a bank door -- here's the handle --

Q: Right.

A: -- I put explosives all the way around like so.

Q: So in other words, you put explosives around the frame of the door.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And this was -- when you got -- was this as a practice, or was this when you got to the bank?

A: Oh, I'm in a bank.

Q: So in other words, what he was saying came happen -- happened. He went to the bank. People said, "We can't open it." And so on so forth. And he says --

A: "Neighborgall, blow it."

Q: So you surround it with explosives.

A: As I said, that was the end of the learning curve.

Q: Okay.

A: I tried several things first.

Q: Ah...

A: I tried to first of all -- the second thing I tried was on the hinges. If I blow the hinges, would the door open? The answer is, "nothing happened."

Q: So one fail, another fail, and this was the final effort, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: What happened?

A: The door flies off. Door just goes -- falls over.

Q: And what was inside?

A: Everything you could possibly imagine in gold.

Q: Gold bars?

A: Gold bars. Gold -- [pause].

Q: We're looking at, again, a presentation which you're going to be giving.

A: [pause]. Well, it's not in here, but it is some place.

Q: Okay. We can pause a little bit. Was that -- wait, hang on -- was this flag in there?

A: We'll see that.

Q: But was this in the bank vault, or is that just something else?

A: No, I got that in a separate mission later.

Q: Okay. This is a Nazi flag that you have.

A: On the other hand -- let me go on.

Q: Sure. Go on.

A: We're at this bank in Bavaria. That's yours.

Q: Oh, thank you. Mm-hmm.

A: And I'm there the two or three days. All of -- the colonel, the driver, myself were there by ourselves the first night. Then other people came. And then I heard the word "Monuments Men" mentioned for the first time.

Q: When you say that you were there the first night, did that mean you stayed in the bank to make sure it did not get looted?

A: Yes, we did.

Q: So you slept there.

A: Yes.

Q: And what kind of German officials were you meeting that weren't going to open the bank vault?

A: The head of the bank. The people -- bank employees. In Germany, the head of the bank lives in the same building as the bank. It is an apartment involved with the bank -- with the vault.

Q: I see. Do you remember the name of this particular bank and where it was located?

A: No, I can't remember. He said it was on the Danube River.

Q: It was on the Danube River some place in Bavaria.

A: Yeah.

Q: And, when you went in, you say you saw everything in there. So you saw gold bars. Were there photo? I mean, not photos -- were there portraits? Was there art? Were there sculptures?

A: There was all of those -- all of that.

Q: How large was it -- this bank vault?

A: Very large. It was probably three times the size of this room.

Q: Okay. And again we said this room is about --

A: 8 x 18.

Q: 8 x 18.

A: So about 30 x 40. It was big.

Q: And the gold bars -- was there any way of knowing who this stuff belonged to?

A: Our job was to open the vault.

Q: Okay.

A: Other Monuments Men inventoried everything. We did not do that.

Q: Okay.

A: And their goal was to find out who it belonged to.

Q: Okay. So I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit -- you say you stayed there a couple of days. The first night it was just three of you -- you, the colonel, and the driver.

A: Yeah.

Q: The second day someone else came by?

A: Other Monuments Men came by.

Q: That's when you first heard of "Monuments Men?"

A: Yes. And they joked with me saying, "We're all volunteers here -- the first draftees." The first person drafted.

Q: Does this mean you were then permanently reassigned to them?

A: No, I stayed with them for [pause] -- three weeks maybe.

Q: So for three weeks in April 1945 you were going around with them.

A: Yeah. We went to half a dozen banks.

Q: Okay. That was going to be my next question, "How many of these places did you open up?"

A: [pause]. By the way, there is a bio.

Q: Oh, thank you -- thank you very much.

A: And here's a picture for you of my silver star.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: And in order to make sense out of that, you need to [pause] -- you need the front and the back.

Q: Okay.

A: This is the bank. This is the back.

Q: Okay.

A: And there's the silver star right there.

Q: Here?

A: Yeah.

Q: I'll take a look later. I mean, I'll take a look right now, but we'll continue.

A: And you got a copy of that.

Q: I do. Thank you so much.

A: And over here you'll see my name.

Q: It's quite beautiful. Very distinguished. I see it. I see it. It says, "For gallantry in action, Roger Neighborgall." So did the subsequent places that you went to with the Monuments Men, did they have other kinds of items in those vaults?

A: Well, let me go on to the second and third night.

Q: Yeah, sure. Tell me.

A: Okay. At lunchtime, I'm kind of fed up with the whole thing. I want to get off by myself. So I get a sandwich and glasses of something to drink to go down by the Danube River. And there's a dock in front of me in the river. And much to my shock a German fast patrol boat -- German navy -- comes up and docks right in front of me.

Q: But I thought this would have been conquered territory.

A: Well, the answer is, "They thought I was a German in American uniform."

Q: Really?

A: Yes, that's what they thought. And one of the crew of four speaks English.

Q: Okay.

A: They jump off. I have the machine gun, and I quickly take them prisoner. My decision is, "What do I do?"

Q: Right.

A: The answer is, "I can kill them right then, and that would have been legal." But, if I take them prisoner, then you can't do anything with them. So some reason or other, I came up with the following logic, "Give me the buttons off your uniform, give me your flag, and get the hell out of here." They thought that was a good deal.

Q: [laughing].

A: [laughing]. So that's the German -- that's the flag.

Q: So this is how you came to have the flag, and that was on their boat?

A: It was on German fast patrol -- a river destroyer.

Q: A river destroyer. Oh my -- and so, you have the flag from that. And you have their buttons.

A: And I have their buttons. I made it into cuff links, and I have them. And I'll show them to you.

Q: Okay. Okay. So, while the vaults had gold and art, you had these kinds of souvenirs.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And that was the second day?

A: Yeah. It was the second day.

Q: About how many Monuments Men did you meet?

A: Maybe a dozen.

Q: Okay. And then I go back to my other question, "When you got to the bank vaults of the other banks in the area when you were, you know, driving around with them, was there any more different kind of materials in those vaults or more of the same -- gold?"

A: That was the inventory of the first bank.

Q: Okay. I'm going to read this out. This is a single Bavarian bank in April 1945. And you had 23 -- why don't you read it out. What was inventoried there?

A: This -- this was by memory.

Q: Got it.

A: There were Treasury gold bars. Twelve bags of American \$20 gold pieces. Eighteen bags of other coins -- gold coins. Twenty-five bags of German Reich marks. Persian rugs, artwork, and furniture. It was all there. But my job was not to inventory it; there were other people assigned to do that.

Q: Okay. And then the other banks it was similar stuff.

A: Similar stuff.

Q: Okay. And did you get resistance in the other banks, or did anybody at those other banks say, "Okay. We'll open it right up."?

A: No. Out of the five or six banks, we blew open three doors. [coughing]. Excuse me. And they opened the rest up. [pouring a drink for interviewer].

Q: Okay. No, enough for me -- thank you. I'm done. I'm done. I take it you must have seen the movie "Monuments Men."

A: I must have seen -- ?

Q: -- the movie "Monuments Men."

A: Yes.

Q: What do you think of it -- having been a Monuments Man yourself?

A: I also have the book, Monuments Men.

Q: That's right. And read the book. So --

A: Have you seen the book?

Q: I have the book too. I haven't finished reading it.

A: Okay. There's the answer, "It's hard to read." It takes you all day to read -- months to read it all. There's a lot of information there.

Q: Mm-hmm. But what about the film? Because most people will have seen the film. How accurate was the film compared --

A: The film was accurate, but I didn't -- the film allowed me to put together some of the things I had seen which I didn't really understand.

Q: I see. So it put things in context for you.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: Okay. And yet, you had heard of the Monuments Men when you were on the mission, so you knew the two were alike. I mean, you knew they were all part of the same effort.

A: Yeah, I knew -- but I didn't quite know [pause]. They were part of MFAA -- Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives organization.

Q: Right.

A: And it was founded in June 1943 as a joint USA and Great Britain organization. And it was in the civil affairs branch of the allied military government -- I forgot my territory. And it was justified United States by the Roberts Commission. And I looked all that up.

Q: So was it that -- how come your tenure with them ended? How come you were only there with them for three weeks and not longer?

A: I can't remember, but they took me back there. They took me back to the rangers.

Q: They maybe didn't need explosive experts anymore.

A: I think that they thought that they -- well, the war was winding down, and I think they thought they were not going to have to blow open any more bank vaults.

Q: But I want to clear one thing, just to make sure I got it right -- in all the bank vaults that you did blow up in all the places that you visited, this was already territory that was occupied by the Allied forces; correct? It was conquered territory.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Okay. Did they take --

A: But recently.

Q: I understand.

A: When they got involved in immediate -- as soon as they could.

Q: Got it. So it's newly-conquered, and they -- and they get to it right away before anything can happen.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Did they take you back to the same place where you were stationed before?

A: Rangers had moved in the meantime.

Q: And where did you go then?

A: It was still in Bavaria, but the rangers had moved.

Q: Did you see any military action after finishing?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: There was military action until Germans surrendered.

Q: Okay.

A: In fact, there was some military action after the Germans surrendered, because some of the Germans didn't get the word.

Q: So what kind of events were you involved with after -- after --

A: It was the same thing -- it was armed reconnaissance.

Q: Armed reconnaissance -- okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: And where were you when the war ended?

A: Where was I when the war ended? In Markgraffin, [Markt Schwaben?] Germany.

Q: Markgraffin?

A: Which is near Munich.

Q: Did you hear of da'hal [?] when you were there?

A: Again, the answer to that is "yes, but the details were not very great."

Q: Okay. So you're outside of Munich when the war ends, and how does your work change? What do you -- what happens to you?

A: I'm put in the army of occupation.

Q: What did that mean?

A: Right after the Germans surrendered, then there's an army of occupation.

Q: Okay.

A: And the goal is to get as many people to Japan as possible. And the ranger responsibility was to come back home and then go to Japan and do the same thing to the Japanese -- D-Day. But it didn't happen because the atomic bomb and the Japanese surrendered.

Q: I see. So between May and August 1945, are you still in Germany?

A: Yes.

Q: And what were you specifically doing?

A: As I said, army of occupation.

Q: But your role in it. What was your role in the army of occupation?

A: Well, I was in charge of the guard one night, and a woman comes up with tears in her eyes and says, "My opal, my opal, my opal." Well, I went to high school with a couple of girls named Opal. Opal Ellenjer. And they were German. So I'm assuming someone grabbed her daughter, and she's scared to death. But she grabbed my hand, and she drags me around and so on so forth. Opal is her car. So [laughing] someone --

Q: Stolen her car.

A: -- someone had taken her car and put it into a parking lot. The Germans were not initially allowed to have automobiles.

Q: I see. So they -- okay. So she wanted her car back.

A: She wanted her car back -- "my Opal, my Opal, my Opal."

Q: Did she get it back?

A: Yeah, I gave it to her. I said, "I think the keys are still in it."

Q: So you had guard duty; that was amongst the things that you had to do. Was that --

A: Well, the answer is that "We're occupying Germany."

Q: Yes. But as I said, this is -- what is it that you were doing as part of that effort?

A: Well, the answer is that, "We had no idea whether the Germans -- what the German civilians were going to be doing."

Q: Okay.

A: And didn't know whether they were going to be belligerent, whether they were going to try to kill us, or what they were going to try to do.

Q: Were you patrolling the streets, for example?

A: Yes.

Q: Like a policemen.

A: Like a policemen.

Q: Okay. Okay. And how were they actually?

A: Actually, they were most gracious. The first day he wanted back was their opera opened. [laughing].

Q: They wanted their opera.

A: They wanted their opera opened.

Q: Okay. And were you in the same place, you know, during these months?

A: Yes.

Q: In this -- can you tell me the town again -- Mark something?

A: Mark M-A-R-K graffin G-R-A-F-F-I-N [sic].

Q: Markgraffin outside Munich.

A: Yeah. It was outside Munich.

Q: And it's a small town or something?

A: Yeah. Small town. They just have -- that's where the Raiders had headquarters.

Q: And so, you were patrolling the streets -- you had guard duty.

A: We were not only patrolling the streets; we were patrolling the country.

Q: So did that mean 'on foot' or did that mean 'by jeep' or did that mean 'both'?

A: Oh, no -- by jeep.

Q: By jeep -- okay. Did you have prisoners that you were guarding as well?

A: No, the prison situation was gone -- solved.

Q: Okay. And was there anything eventful in these couple of months?

A: No.

Q: No. Were you just waiting to go home?

A: Waiting to go to Japan.

Q: And what happened [pause] -- to you?

A: Well, we had -- we moved people out of their houses, so we were all inside.

Q: Okay.

A: But we didn't have any -- there were very few problems.

Q: Okay. So the anticipated problems never appeared.

A: Never really happened.

Q: Okay. When did you get orders to go back to the States?

A: To go back where?

Q: To the United States.

A: Well, I was born in May. I went back to the United States in either November or December.

Q: Half a year later.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you go home to your mother and sister?

A: I went home to my -- as I said, my father was deceased. My sister had married -- married a guy in med school.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And I was planning on going back to University of West Virginia. But I was contacted by Duke University.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And they offered me a full scholarship --

Q: Wow.

A: -- to go to Purdue. So, instead of going to back to University of West Virginia, I went to Purdue and graduated.

Q: Well, did you still go to pre-med, or did you change?

A: No, I changed now to economics and engineering. My degree is in economics and engineering.

Q: Okay. And so, you graduated Duke, and then how did your life -- your career and your life go forward?

A: I was highly recruited, and I went with a company called ACF Industries, which basic product was railroad cars.

Q: Oh, isn't that funny -- you grow --

A: But the thing they want me to do was get -- was be an interface with the government, on government-type contracts. So I stayed there for ten years and had planned to spend the rest of my life there. And we got a huge contract from the New York Central Railroad -- New York Central Railroad -- and we had a big party in the Waldorff Astoria. The day before I was told that I was going to be the youngest vice president in the company. And so, that sounded wonderful. And we go to Waldorff Astoria, and the president and the chairman and the senior officers, including my boss, from American [?] foundry, and their counterparts from New York Central, were in the receiving line.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And my boss, for reasons never known, goosed -- goosed the president's wife of the New York Central in the receiving line. Now, she giggled, so he goosed her again.

Q: [breathing in] Oh!

A: Can you believe that? The next day the president of American Foundry got a message from the head of the New York Central, "And once that son of a bitch is off the payroll at the end of the day, I want to cancel my order." And that was the biggest order that had ever been let in for railroad cars.

Q: That was a dumb move; wasn't it?

A: Oh, stupid! It was stupid.

Q: So what did it mean for you?

A: Well, the answer was, "I was on his team."

Q: So did that mean you got let go too?

A: I wasn't let go, but I knew that -- immediately that my teamster was in doubt, because someone else was going to come in who I didn't know and I didn't fill and so forth.

Q: Right. Right.

A: So his two deputies -- I was one of them -- moved on.

Q: Before we go to that, you left -- you left the United States as a ranger, as a 19-year-old, okay? And you come back as a 21-, 22-year-old -- something like that?

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you change in those years? Or did you change in those years?

A: My first answer was, "I didn't change at all." I mean, I had experienced death. But, when I went to Duke, you know, the men that were there who had -- competed -- who had not qualified to be in the military, but most of the classmates -- the men were ex-military just like me.

Q: Okay. So there wasn't -- you know, when we hear now about people coming back from Iraq, or even it was just Vietnam War -- they came back and had real problems readjusting and had real problems; that wasn't something that you experienced.

A: No, I didn't have any problems readjusting. I went immediately into it. I wasn't looking for employment. I immediately had job opportunities. And I sure really feel for these guys -- particularly the wounded warriors. And I might add that there's all kinds of money missions circulating around these things. I get a runner every month asking me for money.

Q: Yeah. [pause] Did you go back to Europe?

A: In my American -- in my American economy ten years, I went to Spain once. They had a fast cargo passenger train which we ran copies of.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: We wanted to make in this country. But then later [pause] -- I now was with another company, and they gave me international responsibilities. So I started traveling all over the world.

Q: What was the company?

A: Diagnostic Retrieval Systems -- DRS.

Q: DR -- ?

A: Diagnostic Retrieval Systems.

Q: Okay. And you note in your biography that you served as vice president of several companies and president of one firm for a total of 60 years. What was the firm where you were the president?

A: What was the name of the company? I had like 1200 employees. What was the name of the company? I'll have to come up with it. I can't think of the name right offhand.

Q: That's okay. And kind of like my -- not quite "last question" but close to last question is, you did go to Auschwitz. We're almost done. You did go to Auschwitz in 2012; is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: And was this the first time you were in a concentration camp?

A: Yeah.

Q: I assume that by this time --

A: This was our eastern Europe trip. My wife and I did a lot of traveling. We went to China. We went to Japan. And we went to every place.

Q: So I see that in this eastern European trip, which was in 2011, you were in Berlin, in Prague, in Vienna, in Budapest, in Warsaw, and in Krakow where Auschwitz is close by.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Was this the first and only concentration camp that you have been in?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. I see the Berlin --

A: This is Berlin stadium.

Q: Yeah. Let's go to the Auschwitz ones. Right here. I see that in your slide you have -- this is the aerial view of the camp and then some facts from -- and where it's located. Some facts about the -- about the camp. And what kind of impressions can you share with us about your trip to Auschwitz?

A: Well, when you're -- looks like.

Q: Of course, when you enter, there's a photograph here, which has a couple of buildings that are very old-fashioned. And it has a sign by the door "Arbeit macht frei," which means "Work will set you free."

A: The reason that Auschwitz was in such a good shape was, it was a former army post, and the buildings were -- the buildings were built to last.

Q: Yeah. I see those things -- the ladies and children's latrine, yeah? Those were photographs from Europe. The barracks for the prisoners. Large ones.

A: I took all these pictures.

Q: You took all these pictures.

A: This is unbelievable --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- to be in there.

Q: This was the interior of the gas chamber.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then you took a picture -- or I see here of the cyanide pellet chute, that is where it came through, and the crematorium furnace. You took pictures of those things. Okay.

A: I would let you borrow this if you send it back.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much. We'll talk about it at the end. But, for right now, I think we're winding up. And I'd like to ask -- [laughing] -- one final question. And that is -- and this is sort of like a wrap-up.

A: Let me ask you a question first.

Q: Sure. Go ahead.

A: Being a mother of a 19-year-old --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- that sounds like a wonderful experience.

Q: It is. It is a wonderful experience. It is, you know --

A: I congratulate you.

Q: Thank you. Thank you. What would you want someone like my 19-year-old daughter to understand about your experiences?

A: I'm torn between not getting her mostly upset and not worrying about it, to where she really ought to understand what happened. [pause] The point being is I'm quite comfortable "If she's not going to experience anything like this, so why burden her?"

Q: Did you ever kill anybody?

A: I refuse to answer that. I shot people.

Q: Did that weigh on your soul?

A: In the rangers -- on mission.

Q: Yes, that's what I meant.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did that weigh on you?

A: You were set up that you either shot somebody or they shot you.

Q: But that's a price that we ask people to pay -- to defend us.

A: Yeah.

Q: Well, one of the reasons we conduct such interviews is so that, when people who are young -- like 19 -- if they do choose to find out about what happened and about what someone's experiences were, they have the possibility of doing so. They can choose themselves to learn.

A: Yeah?

Q: Yeah. Without having it force-fed. So, for that, I'm very grateful that you shared with all of us today.

A: We thank the Holocaust Museum -- and by the way, we were initial members when it was formed, but I don't think anyone sends me a bill anymore. I don't know whether I belong or not.

Q: Well, I can talk to our development people [laughing].

A: [laughing].

Q: So I'm going to say at this point that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview.

A: Well, thank you for coming.

Q: From -- with Mr. Roger Neighborgall on May 2, 2014. Thank you very much.

Conclusion of Interview