A Veterans Oral History

Heritage Education Commission
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Merle McMorrow
Narrator

Stephanie Manesis
Interviewer

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Fargo, ND

SM: It is January 11, 2012. This is an interview with Mr. Merle McMorrow in Fargo, North Dakota. The interviewer is Stephanie Manesis. Mr. McMorrow, can you please tell me a little bit about where you were born and your family?

MM: I was born in Hankinson, North Dakota, which is about 70 miles southwest of here. And I lived there for two years and then my parents moved to Breckenridge, Minnesota, which is 50 miles south of here. My dad got a job with the Great Northern Railroad in 1925, and I stayed in Breckenridge all through high school; left after that and never went back home again. I went in the service, and then came home from service, went to college and got married and so forth.

SM: What did your father do for the Great Northern Railroad?

MM: He was a laborer. At that time, all these steam engines were still in use, and they required coal; so at the Great Northern roundhouse, he unloaded carloads of coal.

SM: What date and year were you born?

MM: April 22, 1923.

SM: Nineteen-twenty-three, so you graduated from high school in 1941?

MM: You know your math, don't you?

SM: I try pretty hard. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MM: I had seven, altogether. One died at birth – about two months old. The other one was four years old. And I still have two sisters and one brother living.

SM: There were eight of you in the family; and two of your siblings passed away at a young age?

MM: Yes.

SM: Where did you fall in the line-up, in terms of what number child?

MM: I was the oldest.

SM: Tell me about what happened after you graduated from high school in Breckenridge?

MM: I worked with the Wilkin County Highway Department that summer; and then in the fall, I came out of the local theater down there in Breckenridge, and went over to shoot a game of pool. Everybody was gathered around the radio and I asked what happened. They said the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor. That was December 7th, about 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, I was listening to the radio. And I said, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" And they said, "It's out in the Hawaiian Islands." Well, I thought, "Why are we so concerned about that? That's so far away, it'll never bother us."

But as we discussed it and in the next week or two, I decided to enlist in the service; and I was told at the draft board that they have so many men at age 21 and 20, they're going to have draft them before I could get in. So I went down to Glenwood, Minnesota, and took a sheet metal course with the NYA, National Youth Administration; and I was through with that in April, so I went out to Bremerton, Washington.

It's the government shipyard, called the Puget Sound Navy Yard. And I worked on ships that were coming back from Pearl Harbor for repair. Those that could travel under their own power came in and were first in line for repair, because they had crews for those ships. As soon as completion of repair, they could go back out to sea; rather than building new ships, and then training a crew. So I worked there until December.

Got a little homesick and also was concerned that the Marines at the front gate of the Navy yard – you had to go through security to get into the yard – I always got strange looks from them, like maybe you're 4F or unfit for military duty or using the shipyard as an excuse to get deferment.

So I decided to go home and enlist in the Air Corps. I went down to Minneapolis on December 8, 1942, and he said they needed a draft release from my draft board out in Bremerton, Washington. So I wrote for that. Nowadays you just send a fax and get it back the same day; but I didn't get the release back until December 24th, the afternoon of Christmas Eve. And I stayed home over Christmas and went back to Minneapolis with this release. And they said, "Sorry, we closed all the enlistments on December 15th at midnight."

So then, I went back home and I volunteered for the paratroops and went through Fort Snelling in Minnesota. I was sent to Camp Toccoa, Georgia, about the middle of March. They were coming up with a new airborne division. It was something new at that time. The 101st Airborne had been formed. The 82nd Airborne had been formed. Now they were going to form the 17th Airborne Division. So we went through basic training during the summer. September 8th we went down to Fort Benning, Georgia, to be sent through four weeks of jump training; and we completed that near the end of September, came back to Camp Mackall, North Carolina, for some additional training, night-time jumps and field operations. We were completed with that by the first of the year '44.

So we were sent to Tennessee for maneuvers and at that time the entire division was there … the 17th. But at that same time in Italy, January 22nd, the invasion near Anzio took place. The 82nd Airborne had jumped in North Africa and then came into Sicily, and were coming up the boot of Italy. And Churchill decided invading further north from the lower part of Italy, he could trap the Germans in a pocket there. Well, this Anzio invasion came off on January 22nd. Anzio is about 35 miles southeast of Rome.

And the general that was in charge of the invasion, got inland about 12 miles, and then stopped and he was going to wait for replacements. Well, during that same period, the Germans had reserve troops around Rome, and they sent the reserve troops down to the Anzio area, and that invasion sort of become a stalemate. They were 12 miles in and probably 20 miles wide; and both sides started losing a lot of men. So the U.S. military was looking for replacements to replace the men that were lost. And at that time, they pulled all the paratroopers out of the 17th Airborne, which were still in Tennessee, and brought us back to Camp Mackall and formed the 517th Combat Team with this group. The combat team consisted of three battalions of infantry, a battalion of artillery, and a company of engineers.

So the middle of May, we left for Italy. And a week before we arrived at Anzio, the Americans had broken out of the stalemate and headed for Rome. So instead of going to Anzio, we landed in Naples on May 30, 1944. And the

Americans had captured Rome by June 5, 1944, a day before the invasion in Normandy on June 6th. The battle in Italy no longer got priority on supplies and other things. And we spent three weeks north of Rome.

The Germans were retreating up to, I guess, they called it the Gustav Line. It was a line for further resistance that the Germans were going to use as a means to stop any advancing, further north in Italy. So after three weeks of fighting in Italy, we left Naples and had gone up to Civitavecchia, which is north of Rome, and then went inland from there. We were there for three weeks; and in that three weeks, I think we had 17 killed and a number of wounded. But the 442nd came in to relieve us. That's the Japanese-American Nisei Combat Team. And we were pulled back to Frascati, which was about 15 miles southeast of Rome; and we were scheduled to jump into southern France.

Initially, we were supposed to jump in southern France at the same time the combat teams and the divisions from England jumped into Normandy, and – in an attempt to trap the Germans. But there weren't enough planes or ships to pull off both invasions, simultaneously. So we went into southern France on August 15 of '44, and there were three divisions that came in – considered the Seventh Army. Three divisions came in, to the shores around Saint-Tropez and north of . . .

SM: Of Nice or . . .

MM: Nice, yes, north of Nice; and we jumped inland a ways at Saint – the name skips me right now, but

SM: Saint Biarritz; no, not Saint Biarritz. It wasn't Marseilles?

MM: Well, yes, we were near Marseilles but Saint-Tropez and a number of those cities along the Seine. No, I can't think of it right now. But, anyway, it was about 18 miles back from the coast.

And our purpose of the jump was to prevent any reinforcements coming down to oppose the three divisions coming in by landing craft at the shore, and the Germans had that area pretty well protected. The Nice airport had all kinds of block, blockhouses that were used for opposing any incoming forces; and they also had a long, about a 3,000-foot wall, built along the beach to prevent easy access, you know. And then the three divisions went up the Rhone Valley to attempt to trap Germans that the Normandy people were pushing back. From that time on, our objective was to prevent any Germans coming over the Maritime Alps from Italy to attack the flank of the three divisions going up the Rhone Valley. So that was pretty well concluded

by November – end of November of '44. And we were pulled back to Nice, at that time, and sent up to Mourmelon-le-Grand. The British and the American 101st and the American 82nd Airborne Division were just coming back from Market Garden invasion up in Holland and that area. And you've probably heard A Bridge Too Far the book and movie?

Well, the Americans were supposed to capture one bridge, the 101st and the 82nd would capture another bridge and the British were supposed to capture the bridge up to the north. They failed to capture theirs, but had we gotten those three bridges, we could have gotten across the Rhine and into Germany. So they were going to attack from the north and tie up with the troops coming from Normandy. But they – British didn't capture their bridge so there had been a book written called A Bridge Too Far and it's a movie also, by the same name. So that was a failure and . . .

SM: Now where was this bridge exactly?

MM: It was up in Holland.

SM: Okay.

MM: And I'm trying to think of the town but, anyway, they didn't capture – the British didn't capture their bridge, so that meant the operation was a failure, so to speak. And the 101st was brought back to Mourmelon and Reims area, and the 82nd brought there, too. We came up to Mourmelon because the 17th Airborne, in the meantime, had completed their training. They were in England and they were going to come over to Belgium, and we were supposed to join them again.

We thought we would be there for the winter, get resupplied, get replacements for the men that were lost, and just get new clothing and everything else we needed. The talk was that the war will be over by Christmas. In fact, I think Eisenhower had a bet with Montgomery, the British general, that one said it would be over by Christmas and the other one said it wouldn't.

But on December 15th – 16th, the Germans attacked through Belgium and in the Ardennes, which is where they attacked in 1940; and the only replacements or surplus troops that Eisenhower had was the 82nd and the 101st Airborne. So he sent the two divisions into Belgium, not knowing which one was going to go where. The 101st went to, as they got closer to where the action was, Eisenhower sent the 101st into Bastogne; because there were seven roads that led in and out, and winter conditions were such that the only

way that the German tanks could travel was on these roads. And if we could hold Bastogne, we could prevent the Germans moving any further west.

They were trying to get to Antwerp because that's where all the American supplies were, at that time – gasoline and food and everything else. So their objective was to get to Antwerp and Liège. And if we could hold them long enough, they wouldn't make it; because they had a limited supply of fuel for their tanks and they had counted on capturing some of our supply depots that had fuel there and that would permit them to go on to complete their objective. Well, the longer we could keep them from moving, the more fuel they burned of what they had. And it wasn't long. And the [unclear] River, I think, is about where they ran out of fuel for some of the tanks and had to abandon them.

But that battle lasted until about the end of January … the 25th, I think for us, and there were 19,000 Americans killed and 81,000 wounded, I guess. So, we got surrounded in Bastogne for three, four days and Patton came up from the south to open it up. The weather was so bad that our planes could not fly. And finally on the 26th of December, the sky cleared like it is today and sun was shining. And the cargo planes brought in food and ammunition. We were very low on ammunition and we didn't have any food for two days or so. So they dropped food to us and ammunition and wool socks and what we called "mud packs" because our boots were freezing. A lot people were getting frozen feet or "trench foot" they called it, where the foot freezes and just cracks open on the bottom. And then, as soon as that sky was clear like that, they started attacking German tanks and so forth, too, and had a field day just knocking out German equipment.

Our medical team had been captured. They didn't know we were surrounded and they were coming into Bastogne. The German patrol captured all the doctors and nurses, and so forth, that were coming up with supplies. On the 26th, when they brought in supplies by parachute, they also came in with gliders and military – I mean medical people were also on the gliders – the nurses and doctors and medical supplies. So on the 25th, we were relieved and sent down to Alsace-Lorraine.

SM: Was this the 25th of December or January?

MM: January 25th.

SM: Okay.

MM: Of 40 . . .

SM: Five?

MM: Five.

SM: Okay.

MM: And the day before was a terrible North Dakota blizzard, but we were happy to get out of there. We thought we were going back to, maybe Mourmelon, or even back somewhere down south. But we were sent to Alsace-Lorraine and spent 'til March 15th, we were brought back to Mourmelon and received a presidential citation. From there on April 1st, which was an Easter Sunday I remember, and it was also the time that Okinawa was invaded in the Pacific, but April 1st we were sent to Dusseldorf, right on the Rhine River. And we moved into German houses, nice and warm and clean and it was ideal. We stayed there from April 1st to April 22nd, which was my birthday, and I had a picture taken on the Rhine River. I thought I was getting pretty old by that time … 22 years old.

From there we headed south and the rumor was that the Germans were going to make a one-last-stand in the "Redoubt" they called it, a forested area down in Bavaria. And as we headed south, we got as far as Munich; and we heard that the Germans had surrendered. So we spent a couple of days there processing Germans coming out of the mountains; and the old men and children, they were told to go to Munich to get discharged. And the SS and the Nazi storm troopers, they were kept and taken into prison camps somewhere. And we got down to – into Bavaria and Hitler's Eagle's Nest was down there, and everybody got put up in chalets in the mountains.

And it was a wonderful six weeks we spent down there hunting deer and fishing in the mountain streams. If the fish weren't biting, we threw a hand grenade in the river and that would stun the trout, and they'd come floating to the top. Then we'd flip a coin to see who would go out into that icy water to retrieve the fish. But we stayed there until the first part of July and then came back to Épinal, France.

And they were breaking up the 101st Airborne Division, and those with 85 points were sent home for discharge. Those with military time in Europe had an option of either being sent to Japan, or if they had enough points they could be sent home, or they could stay in Germany on occupation duty. And to earn points you had to get so many points for decoration, so many if you were married, so many if you had a number of children, so many for months of service, so many for months of service overseas. And you added all that up and if you got to 85, then you could go home for discharge.

For those that decided, even though they didn't have enough points, they were willing to go to Japan; they got halfway home and the atomic bomb was dropped. And the war was over and those on the high seas went on home and were discharged. But I, along with a number of others, went to Berlin on occupation duty. And we were there from the first part of July until December 3rd, when we left for home; and got to New York around the middle of the month and were processed through Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. And then went over to a camp in Wisconsin for discharge. I got home Christmas morning 1945.

SM: That must have been a nice gift for you and your family?

MM: Well, I came home, I expected to see all kinds of people at the depot, you know, the well-wishers and the people, happy because you were home. Well, I got on the train in St. Paul, Minnesota, Christmas Eve. I was the only one on the train. And the train whistled through these towns, I could see the farmhouses with Christmas decorations, Christmas trees. I got to Breckenridge and the trainmaster threw my duffle bag out on the top of the platform there, the brick platform at the depot. The train whistled a couple of times and was gone, so I picked up my bag and headed home.

There was a light snow falling; and I got home just as my dad was leaving for work, about 5 o'clock in the morning. And I laid across the bed and wondered if I'd made the right decision, because it seemed like all my friends were gone now. We had been together for three years and had a close relationship. And then, suddenly, I come home and everybody's a stranger and they're not too concerned about what happened.

And later in the day I ran into a lady that said, "Now that the war is over, maybe we can get butter again." And another lady said, "Well, hopefully, now that the war is over, we can get silk stockings." That was all it meant to them was butter and silk stockings. I went back to my job out in the shipyard and, where I'd been before I went into the service, because they guaranteed you a job when you got back, and your old job for that matter. Well, a fellow I'd worked with, he said, "It's too bad the war ended as soon as it did, if it lasted another six months, I could have had my house paid for." So to him, it meant bonus checks and overtime and so forth. So I was disillusioned for a while. It took a year to get over that. Those dumb civilians that had no concern for anything but their butter, stockings and overtime pay. So I guess I spent about six months out there. My high school girlfriend was out there. Then we . . .

SM: In Washington?

MM: Yes, Bremerton, Washington. Then we went down to Los Angeles and were married. Came back to Breckenridge in July of '45 and registered at the University of Minnesota. But they said they couldn't take any students until spring, because they had 38,000 and had room for no more. I wasn't going to wait. I decided if I wait that long, I'd probably get involved in some work somewhere then never get to school, so I registered at NDSU (North Dakota State University). **And they said, "Sure, we'll start November – or October 1st."**

Polio was pretty prevalent at that time and they thought it was due to crowds gathering in the heat of the summer, so they delayed school that year until October 1st. I went through the summers, finished in three years and went out to Bismarck, North Dakota, worked for Department of the Interior.

SM: So you started school at NDSU in October of 1946?

MM: Right.

SM: And you got married when?

MM: June 12, 1946.

SM: In California?

MM: At Los Angeles.

SM: And what was your high school girlfriend doing out in Washington? Was she waiting for you or . . .

MM: No, she was at Bremerton. She worked in the department at the shipyard that supplied food for the shipyard cafeterias. She had come home for Christmas. So I saw her at Christmastime. But she only had so much time at home. And she had to go back to Bremerton, I think, a few days after Christmas. I told her I'd be out later and I went out on January 13th.

SM: Did she initially go out with you before you enlisted?

MM: No, she was still in school. She was a sophomore when I graduated.

SM: So she went to Bremerton when you were already in the military overseas?

MM: Right.

SM: Let's step back a little bit. This has been really helpful. Tell me more about when – the three or four days when you were isolated. That was in January of '45 in Bastogne, right?

MM: Yes, but it wasn't January.

SM: Or was it December?

MM: Yes, it was around Christmas time. See December 26th the skies cleared, and that's when we got food and ammunition and fighter planes were coming in to strafe tanks and other German equipment. So we were surrounded from about December 23rd to December 26th. And Patton came up from the south with the 4th Armored Division and opened up that area.

I also saw the four men that came – German, under a white flag – that were going to demand our surrender. It was a major, a captain and two enlisted men. And they came down this road waving a white flag and, of course, everything stopped as far as any fighting. We thought they were coming to surrender but he came to ask for our surrender, since we were surrounded.

So our captain of the 327th Infantry Regiment, kept the two enlisted men and the lieutenant there at his headquarters and took the captain of the German group over to see our general, because this German captain said he had an ultimatum asking for our surrender. So our captain took the German to – into Bastogne. See we were surrounded around the outside, probably a mile from downtown. And he took this German into Bastogne, where our general's headquarters were, and he gave the ultimatum to our general. And the general looked at it. It gave us 24 hours – no, 2 hours to surrender. And the general was talking with his staff and he said, "Well, what kind of a reply should we give him." Well, the one aide – his aide said, "Well, why don't you just give him what you'd said when you got the ultimatum." He looked at it and he said, "Nuts." Well, that's when the aide said, "Give him that as a reply."

So the general wrote to the German commander, "Nuts, from the American commander." And took it back to the German officer and he read the thing; and he says, "Nuts, nuts, I don't know what that means." And the lieutenant of the 327th Regiment said, "That's the same as 'go to hell.'" So the German said, "Well, a lot of Americans will die because of this." And the four of them took off down the road again under the white flag. And two hours later they started artillery firing again.

But I still have the message that the general sent Christmas Eve thanking us for the gallant effort and so forth. A typical general response to troops and

also thanking us for a Christmas present given to the Americans back home on Christmas Eve. And that was about the worst part.

We were getting food after that. We started getting mail again. The open part of the encirclement that Patton opened up, trucks would come in with food and mail, and take German prisoners and wounded out, back to American hospitals and field hospitals in the area.

SM: How many men were there? Was it all Americans that were surrounded, correct? There were no British troops or anything, is that right? How many Americans approximately were surrounded?

MM: About 10,000, there were the couple anti-tank battalions that had come back from retreating when the German breakthrough came; and then they stopped at Bastogne and became a part of the defense of the Bastogne area. So there were scattered remnants but 10,000, 101st Airborne Division troops.

SM: How big of an area was it approximately, do you think?

MM: Five miles across, because artillery on our side could fire over to the other side on any invasion. Every morning the Germans would try to attack from a different point; and had they attacked from three or four at one time, they could have broken through, I think. But the minute they attacked from one side, all the surplus troops on the other side of the encirclement would come over there to help with the defense. And that continued, oh, three or four days that way.

But I remember Christmas Eve, we could hear – it was cold and clear, about 10 below, and the – no wind, and you could hear the Germans singing *Silent Night, Holy Night* in German, of course. We thought the next day is going to be fine. If they're celebrating tonight and singing Christmas carols and maybe had some liquor stashed away somewhere, that everything will be fine tomorrow. But at seven o'clock the next morning, they attacked in our area of the encirclement; and well, we knocked out 16 tanks that morning, I remember. But we were sure that everything would be peaceful all through Christmas Day.

But I was in an artillery unit and the 327th Infantry was out in front of us and they just dropped down in their foxholes and let the tanks come through. And then we started knocking out the tanks. And they were knocking out the infantry that was following behind the tanks. So this went on until about 7:00, until maybe 8:30. And then the Germans started pulling back again. They realized they were not going to break through.

SM: Until 8:30 in the morning or at night?

MM: Yes.

SM: Eight-thirty in the morning?

MM: Yes, only an hour-and-a-half or so and the advancing tanks were knocked out, and most of the infantry. And you could tell they'd been drinking, too. They were yelling and everything as they'd come over the hill. I don't know if it was liquor or doped up somehow, but – and the ones we captured – the one I talked to was 15 years old, and he said, "Why are you putting up such an intense battle?" He could speak English. He said, "You're surrounded." I said, "Well, you're the one that's captured, not us." So they were using old men, some of them 60, and they were using young kids – 14, 15, 16 years old. They were scraping the bottom of the barrel by the time they started the Battle of the Bulge.

SM: So it was about five miles across, was it about five miles in the other direction as well?

MM: Yes, it was a circle.

SM: You guys knew you were surrounded; very quickly, you knew that?

MM: Yes, in fact, they came with those four men and told us we were surrounded. But you could tell, they could attack from any side, and all we were trying to do was keep them from using that railroad, or that highway hub, with all the roads in and out, because then they would have been able to move forward. We were told to hold at all costs.

And 82nd Airborne was north of us at St. Vith. They were also attacking anybody that was trying to come around Bastogne. It a tough battle because everybody was in summer clothes yet and had these leather boots on that were cold as could be. And so the ones I felt sorry for – I came from Minnesota and I knew how to take care of myself in cold weather, even wrapping burlap or anything around your feet and keeping circulation going. But these guys from Florida and California and Texas, they really suffered and even today those few that are alive will say, "I've never been so cold in my life." I got a call from a guy in Macon, Georgia, over Christmas. And he still – at Christmas time he says, "All I remember is cold on Christmas Day." And "I sit as close to the fire today as I can." So they suffered more than anybody, because they didn't know how to handle cold weather.

We dug some pretty deep holes, and put canvas over the holes and then logs over that, four of us had a hole that was about, oh, 10 feet square or so. By putting the tarp over that, then putting logs, then another tarp, and dirt that we dug out of the hole over the tarp, we could have a candle on each end of that and it kept fairly warm. It's amazing what a candle will heat up that's enclosed in something. So we stayed warm but there always had to be somebody out on guard duty. Usually two to a regular foxhole – while one slept or dozed off, the other one stayed awake. But that was still cold out there, every two hours you could come back to this enclosed dugout we had and warm up.

SM: So you'd rotate, you'd have one or two men outside of the foxhole and then two men in the foxhole?

MM: Two men in the foxhole and two men in the enclosure that was being kept warm, and then every two hours they would come out and the other two go back in the hole.

SM: The foxhole was about how deep?

MM: About four feet, you couldn't stand up in it. But you crawled in and you could sit or lay. It was nice and warm in there, probably 60 degrees.

SM: So now, the part where you had the canvas and then the logs on top and then the canvas, was considered to be the foxhole, or that was the enclosure, right?

MM: That was the place where we, yes, we used to warm up the foxhole was just big enough for two men to get down in.

SM: And to watch for enemy fire?

MM: Yes, one would try to sleep a little bit, if they could. The other one would watch and then take turns, probably a half an hour at a time. After you had two hours, you'd go back to the large enclosed area and two other ones would come out.

SM: So the large enclosed area was 60 degrees about?

MM: I can't tell you exactly. But it was warm enough so you didn't have to have gloves on or anything. These two candles threw off a lot of heat.

SM: During that five-day period, approximately – this was like the 20 – Patton broke through on the 27th, did you say?

MM: Twenty-sixth.

SM: Twenty-sixth and you got there on the 22nd.

MM: No, we left Mourmelon on the 18th.

SM: On the 18th, so between the 18th and the 26th, did you have the same enclosure?

MM: No.

SM: Or were you always moving within that circle?

MM: No, I was in an artillery unit and we stayed in one place – had our gun there. There were four guns to a battery, so there were three other guns besides ours. But all we had to do was make certain that if tanks came, we could fire on them. And the infantry pretty well stayed in the same place, too. They had a certain segment of that encirclement that was the responsibility of so many men. And they would dig their foxholes and stay there. These men would be moved only if there was an attempted breakthrough somewhere. And they may send extra men over there, but they would only be there until the breakthrough was prevented from happening or the Germans would pull back on their own; then the men would go back to their permanent position that they had.

SM: The infantrymen would?

MM: The infantrymen, yes.

SM: What kind of guns did the infantrymen have?

MM: The M1 and the officers, I think, carried the 30-caliber carbine and that's what we had, too. But infantry had the Turan, which was a very good rifle.

SM: And what was the 30-caliber carbine? Tell me more about that, please?

MM: Well, a 50-caliber is about a half-an-inch. Thirty-caliber is 3/10ths of an inch. The diameter for the shell and it has less power but most of the fighter planes all had 50-calibers in them. And the jeeps had 50-calibers mounted.

You couldn't carry a 50-caliber very easily. It's a fairly large gun and with a lot of kick to it. But the 30-caliber carbine was fairly small and it had a folding stock that you, instead of having the long stock that you put up to your shoulder. On the jump, it was folded; and then you had it laying it

across your chest. Then as soon as you got on the ground, you opened it up. It was a metal-type framework that made up the stock for the rifle. It wasn't a very accurate rifle. Anything over 75 yards, you were lucky if you could hit something. The infantry rifle was only good up to a half-mile.

SM: So the M1 was pretty good up to a half a mile but for the 30 carbine, it would be about 75 yards?

MM: Seventy-five to a hundred ... that's about it, the length of a football field.

SM: But as the artillery unit, what were you carrying for the artillery unit? What were you using?

MM: What was I using?

SM: Yes.

MM: We all had carbines. I would aim the guns so I had an aiming circle, too. And all that is the result of my surveying during the summer with Wilkin County Highway, the first year out of high school. The Army thought I had some experience in surveying; and when you lay the guns, you need some surveying experience so the guns are all pointing in the same direction, so when you fire, all rounds land in about the same area. So that little bit of surveying that summer probably saved my life because rather than going into the infantry, they put me in the artillery.

SM: And how many rounds would come out of one of these guns? How fast?

MM: Well, you could fire probably five rounds in a minute. You had to take the old empty cartridge out and put a new one in. And normally, there were four powder bags in the shell and, depending on the range that you were going to fire, you either took out two powder bags or you determined you needed three powder bags. So once you determined the distance to the target and how much powder you needed, there was always someone on the gun crew that's taking the shell out of the cartridge and taking out the number of powder bags that it was determined had to be in there to send the projectile as far as it was needed to be sent.

SM: And so the projectile could go how far?

MM: We had what was a 75 mm – that's about a three-inch-diameter shell. And that had a range of around 9,000 yards, which 1,700 yards is a mile. It would be probably around five miles that this gun would shoot.

SM: And so, as an artilleryman, you would have a group of you that would be behind a projectile, is that correct?

MM: Yes, it was called a "gun crew." It was the guy that was out on the aiming, and a fellow that would handle the shells, someone who would handle what they call the trail, so you could move the gun – the back end of the gun one way or the other. The gun sits in a small pit and the back end of the gun has got an edge on it that digs into this pit so that there's no recoil. The gun may jump up in front and come back down in the same location.

So in order to ensure accuracy, you had to keep this gun as stationary as possible. So the trail or the back end of the gun, was down in the soil, probably a foot or foot-and-a-half, to prevent it from rolling backwards or from jumping out of position.

SM: They could go, if it's 9,000 yards, they could go about five miles, is that correct?

MM: Yes.

SM: So your primary targets were for armored tanks?

MM: Well, no, infantry, too, if you saw some activity. We had one man that was a forward observer with the infantry. He'd go up there and then, by radio or telephone, would call back to the gun crew. First he would fire a shell that had smoke in it. So you'd fire one shell and then the forward observer would look and see where that shell landed in relation to the target. The target might be way over here.

So when he sees that smoke shell, he calls back to the gun crew, "200 yards right, 100 over." So over here, he's expecting to bring the next shell down a hundred yards and 400 or 300 yards over this way. They fire one more shell. If it lands somewhere near the target, that the forward observer has observed, he may say, "Fire for effect." And then you'll fire. If he says four rounds for effect or six rounds for effect, then you fire as fast as you can because he's on the target. And you don't want the target to move away.

Very seldom it takes more than five or six rounds to complete what they call a firing mission. Because you've either knocked out the target or the target has moved away so quickly, you had to come up with a new set of aiming to register on the next target.

SM: So the forward man, the infantryman would go and have one or two shells shot that was just smoke, is what you're saying?

MM: The infantryman has an artilleryman up there. H thinks he knows where the target is. It may be a building somewhere where there were five, six men in there and he tells them. Then the artilleryman does the adjusting.

Fires the first round and fires as close as he thinks he can get to the target, even though he's just firing – a smoke shell won't do much, other than provide a lot of smoke. There's no shrapnel. And he tries to figure out exactly where he thinks this target is, whether it's 800 yards ahead and an estimate of maybe 20 degrees. So he tries his best to get as close to that target as he can with that first shell he asks for – that's smoke. Once he gets that smoke shell, then he can adjust and what he'd actually do is probably adjust too far to the right. If this was 200 yards to the left, he will say, "Right 400 yards." He wants to be 200 yards on the other side. Then he knows that if he cuts it in half, he's right on the target. So he will do that – another smoke shell to the right and then fire high explosive for on target.

SM: So an infantryman goes up front to kind of scope it out, and then the artilleryman goes and does the smoke, the smoke shell, the first one, and the second one, correct?

MM: Yes.

SM: And that's so that you guys preserve artillery, so you're not wasting artillery? Is that why and to help you aim better, the two combined reasons?

MM: Well before you fire on the target with 5, 6, 7 rounds, you want to be pretty accurate, pretty certain you're right in the area where the shells are going to land on target. And once they start landing on target, the infantryman determines from what he saw, or how many rounds it would take to knock it off.

If it was a tank that went behind a building, they may fire 6, 7, 8 rounds and if they can see the tankman running out of there, they may fire some more to try to knock the tankman out, too.

SM: Is the primary purpose for the smoke rounds that were shot is so you are not wasting artillery, is that both for an aiming perspective and so you're not wasting artillery?

MM: Well, I guess the primary reason is to determine where you're firing in relation to where the target is. You don't want to start firing wildly until you know you're somewhere in the vicinity of the target and then you start firing this high explosive. There were various types of smoke shells. There's HE, they call it, high explosives and AP, armor piercing. You'd fire an armor-

piercing shell at a tank so that it would penetrate the metal in the tank and attempt to get the tankers inside or set the tank on fire or whatever. So there were different types of artillery shells, along with the smoke shell we were talking about.

So the artilleryman determines whether you should use armor-piercing or whether you should use high explosive. There's also another type of shell. It will explode at a different depth or height from the ground. It may explode 60 feet off the ground or 30 feet, whatever you have it set for; or a hundred feet off the ground. And you want to use that when there's infantry. Say the field is full of infantry and this shell will explode 60 feet off the ground and the shrapnel will spread and cover a large area and, actually, for the purpose of getting infantry.

Once they determined how many set bags of powder they needed to reach that distance, then one guy will start taking all these shells apart. You just pull the shell out of the cartridge and he would make sure there were only three bags in each shell that they're going to use. Then there are two men – there's about a seven-man crew.

One was an aimer, two were trail men, probably two working on bringing ammunition to the gunman, another one checking the bags. Everybody had a different job and they were interchangeable. The fellow that counted the bags in the shell might be on the trail the next firing mission.

SM: So the trail men are the men that go forward, the artillerymen and the infantryman?

MM: No, they're the ones that move the back end of the gun.

SM: That moves the back end of the gun?

MM: Yes.

SM: So the infantryman that goes forward and the artilleryman that goes forward to do the smoke shells, they have, in many ways, one of the most dangerous jobs, right, because they're putting themselves at risk?

MM: Yes, the Germans would love to get the observers because they're the ones that are bringing the artillery down on them. And if they can knock them out, then the firing would probably cease.

Yes and another means of observing had the L5 cub plane that would fly back and forth in the front and they would observe where the smoke shell was and they could see the target probably from up above. Then the pilot would have an artilleryman riding with him. One time a cub plane ran into one of our shells, we were firing at the enemy. They're in front of us and going back and forth to observe the target that's being fired on. So they get down there so far, they turn around and come back again.

This particular time and it doesn't happen very often, but it was a coincidence, and the shell we fired, he happened to be in the right place with the plane at the time the shell went past and hit the plane, instead of being sent on, and blew both the observer and the pilot to pieces along with the plane.

SM: That must have been hard to witness?

MM: Well yes. You witness a lot of things that are difficult to . . . Have you ever seen, *Saving Private Ryan*?

SM: Yes.

MM: You saw the first 25 minutes? That was pretty graphic. That was the outfit I was in, the 101st Airborne Division. And the purpose of *Saving Private Ryan*, his brother had been killed in the Pacific somewhere, so he was the only other member of his family, so they were going to bring him home. He wouldn't do anymore fighting or there wouldn't be any descendant from his family. The objective of this group was to find Private Ryan and send him home. Those kids over there grow up knowing all about World War II. And our kids . . .

SM: Don't know anything about it?

MM: Never know about or probably don't even care.

SM: Yes.

MM: Over there, they say we would be speaking German if it wasn't for you guys and they really, really thank us every year for what we did over there.

We have an American cemetery in Draguignan with about 800 of our guys there. It's just a small cemetery, but beautifully kept up. And let's see what other town is around there. If you hadn't asked me, I could tell you all of them.

SM: So it's in the northeast corner of France?

MM: No, it's down there along the Riviera and Saint-Tropez and between there and Nice.

SM: So on the coast?

MM: Yes, we jumped 15 miles in so that we could block the roads that the Germans would use trying to repulse the invading force coming from the sea, like landing craft.

SM: Which branch of the service were you in … the Army then as a paratrooper?

MM: It was U. S. Army Paratroops, it was called. I guess you'd just call us infantry artillery. We just had a different means of coming in, by parachute, rather than by truck or boat. Once we jumped that was the end. I mean, we probably never got to jump again, although some in the 101st, they got as many as three jumps. They started out in Africa. The 82nd Airborne jumped in Sicily, and then they jumped again in Holland, jumped in Normandy. And very few have four jumps, but the larger number had three jumps. Most paratroopers have one or two at the most.

SM: So you had just the one jump into France?

MM: Yes.

SM: How many jumps did you have before you came over to Europe?

MM: Twelve.

SM: Twelve practice jumps?

MM: Yes, some at night, some during the day.

SM: And so you came in LeMuy, right here?

MM: Yes.

SM: By Saint Raphael?

MM: And Draguignan should be there, too, somewhere.

SM: Yes, right up here, Draguignan. So you were jumping right into here; and how big was LeMuy?

MM: Oh, I suppose 5,000.

SM: And how long did you stay there before you moved up north?

MM: Well from there we moved into the Maritime Alps, and we ended up at Col de Braus, which was the high point in the Alps. We got as far as the Maginot Line. The French built that between World War I and World War II. And we stayed up in Col de Braus for – it was kind of a stalemate there for maybe two weeks. Then we moved down to the coast again and came back to Nice for our trip to Mourmelon the first part of November. [unclear] is the last town we liberated and that was the last place in France, I guess, that was liberated. That's down near the coast near Menton, close to Italy.

And they still welcome us with open arms every time we come over there. We've made about seven, eight trips back there. And my wife's gone along a couple of times; and they do everything they can to make our welcome pleasant and enjoyable. So we have a lot of friends over there.

The only people that don't like us, I think, are those from Paris. They won't even admit they speak English. All these French down on the southern part, they'd do anything they possibly can to make our trip enjoyable. Put us up, you know, so we don't have hotel expense, and have banquets and dances. When I come home I always have to join AA for a year or so. They don't know what water is over there.

SM: That must be awfully wonderful to have that meaningful connection.

MM: Yes, it's the same way in Belgium. They adopt some of our cemeteries and different people take care of putting flowers on Memorial Day or Fourth of July. They actually take pictures, you know, of the gravesites and send them to us. They're on our email. Once a week we have an email where everybody sees what's happening to everybody else. If there's a death in the family or if there's a marriage or something, it's on that email that everybody gets to read.

SM: And how many men were in your . . .

MM: Twenty-five-hundred – it's called a "combat team," and there were a number of those. The Japanese-Americans had a combat team, too. We have a

senator in Washington that was in that 442nd – Inouye, or something like that, Inouye – he was from Hawaii.

SM: So the 442nd was the Japanese-American?

MM: These guys volunteered. They came out of encampments that they were sent to. They were taken off the West Coast and sent inland because the government was afraid they were furnishing information to the Japanese government … which was totally untrue. But can you imagine having your family shipped inland to – similar to a concentration camp; and all your worldly goods taken from you out on the West Coast where you had built up a business; and then have your sons volunteer to join the military to fight against the armies that are fighting you.

These people had more awards, decorations and more injured, more killed than any other unit in the military. So they proved they were loyal. That was the whole thing. They thought they had to do the extra mile to prove that they were loyal Americans. I guess the government has finally compensated them by providing them with $30,000 per member for all those they moved in from the coast but the insult was already over with and money would not replace what they must have suffered . . . pain and questionable loyalty that we placed upon them.

SM: And the trauma that goes with that.

MM: Yes, we had a little funny incident after being in southern France. When things stabilized we got some three-day passes. And there was a rest camp down near Nice. We went to it and German prisoners were running the thing; cooking the meals and keeping the camp clean and all that. And they were good soldiers. They would march in step from their barracks to the mess hall where they were going to cook meals for us during the day. Where the Americans, you know, they'd shuffle along out of step and talking. They'd marched as though they were still under German command. The sergeant would be a German and he'd march them in perfect formation.

But, anyway, this one morning, there was a Japanese-American from the 442nd at the same camp, on leave; and we're going through the line for breakfast and I could see this German was puzzled with this Japanese fellow right ahead of me. And he could understand English, too. I said, "Oh, hadn't Hitler told you? Japan has surrendered and they're fighting with us now." He was puzzled as could be. He could see the guy was Japanese, all right, but he just couldn't understand how that could happen and nobody had ever told him about it. And we never did tell him either that they were American citizens.

SM: Now when would this be, what month would this have been in?

MM: Well, probably October of '44. They had relieved us in Italy; but then we brought a company of Japanese-Americans by glider into France as an anti-tank group. So they'd never ridden in a glider. They were loaded on gliders and brought to France and landed. And these gliders land about 90 miles an hour and they have no wheels, so you come down on bare ground and sometimes they'd just tumble. Other times there's enough friction that they'd keep the thing upright. I suppose the pilot navigates the tail so it holds it down, but many times they'll flip over when they hit the ground. So here were the Japanese-Americans that had never been in a glider, coming to France by glider. That must have been quite an experience.

SM: How many men would be on a glider, about?

MM: Well, if they weren't carrying anything else, you could get 13. If you have a jeep in there, then there'd only be 4 or 5 guys. Or if you have a gun, there could probably be seven guys. Just depends.

There's a certain load that you could carry and the glider people knew when they'd reached the maximum load capacity. The outside of the glider is just kind of a waxed canvas and the rest is framework inside – just electrical tubing. I had one glider ride and that's all I ever wanted.

That flapping of the canvas outside is always very disturbing. You wonder whether it's going to fly off. There were two pilots – a copilot and a pilot – that come in. And if you don't have that jeep securely tightened, there were cases where that would break loose, and then it would hit the two pilots and crush them against part of the glider. So that was terrible and the glider men didn't get extra pay to begin with. We got an extra $50 a month as hazardous duty pay.

SM: For paratroopers only?

MM: Yes, later on they changed that, but I think it was after the war. Glider men never, never got any extra pay and I think the gliders were much more dangerous than the parachute, because they could get shot down pretty easily. The planes were not that fast and maximum speed for a C47 was probably around 140 miles an hour and, when we jumped, they slowed down to 90 miles an hour so that the opening shock wouldn't be so severe – the parachute blossoms and the prop blast hits it. But if you had a ring on or watch, it would rip it right off your hand and fly off without any trouble, just from being snapped when the chute opens.

SM: Tell me when you first got into France, into Le Muy, when was the first time that you guys actually had combat. How long was it and where was it when you first had combat?

MM: About 10 minutes after getting out of the plane.

SM: Right there, you had combat. So you were surrounded by Germans at the time?

MM: Well, we weren't surrounded; but they were everywhere and they were confused, too, because we were scattered all over. See there were about 5,000 that jumped and there was a light cloud mist. We thought we were out over the water when we jumped and finally someone yelled, "It's a cloud." You could hear for a mile up there, just a normal tone of voice.

There's no reflection or anything. You can yell to someone, and he can hear you two miles away. Someone yelled, "It's a cloud." So we came down through that, but the pilots got scattered, too – the ones flying the planes. So the intent is to try to all come down close together – but once the pilots have no navigation and they get scattered. They're flying in V-form. You see it in there. There were 45 planes.

They start out one, then two, then three, then four, until you get up to nine across, and it's a big V. That's called a "serial." Then you have these serials about 100 yards apart; and before you fly to jump, you have what is called a "pathfinders."

They go in about a half an hour before you do and set up radio equipment so that the plane can follow a beam in and the pilot beams in on this radio that the pathfinders have set up and try to come in right on target. But if the first plane with the pathfinders doesn't hit the target then about all they can do is set up their radio, put they're going to bring the planes in someplace other than the target, too.

You tried to hit a target that was flat and the Germans loved to put up telephone poles in the middle of a flat area to break up the gliders coming in, knock the wings off, and ruin them. And they want to soak the field with gasoline where the paratroopers are going to land, so that the minute the jump starts taking place they can light that fuel on fire and you come down into the fire. So we got scattered quite widely; and it was good in a way because the Germans thought there were a lot more than there actually were. Because every place they went, there was somebody firing at them. And then there were 600 dummies dropped near Toulon.

That did nothing but when they hit, they started setting off things like firecrackers, so the Germans sent a bunch of people over there to try to capture them and they got there and there was nothing but big dummies that had parachutes hooked on them and they were dumped out of the plane. One planeload did land the guys in the ocean – Mediterranean – and we never heard from them again.

SM: So they all drowned or . . .

MM: Well, I suppose, because you carry about 100 pounds of extra equipment with you. When you jump that would take you right down to the bottom if you couldn't get off and if they dropped them, say 10 miles out at sea, there would be no way they could swim in.

Going into Sicily, the 82nd Airborne flew over some American ships. Somebody started firing at them, and the American ships knocked down 27 planeloads of American paratroopers. There were about 10 in each plane, so there were 270 went into the ocean there.

There were all kinds of mistakes that happen that people never hear about or read about. It just happens. Our Air Corps bombed one time – there was supposed to be a smoke line set up so that the planes would bomb ahead of that and what happened – the wind changed and blew it the other way and our American planes bombed our own troops and killed hundreds of them. And you never – that's just called "friendly fire," and you never hear about it again.

SM: Where was this when this happened?

MM: In France.

SM: Down by Le Muy or . . .

MM: No, no, I couldn't even tell you the location. I just read about it. There was a terrible incident in England, too. They just made it public recently. But the Americans were practicing before the invasion of Normandy, and they were off the coast of England with landing craft. And some German – like our PT-boats – got in amongst them and 800 and some got killed by Germans. This was just a practice run to come into the shore at England, so that the troops could experience landing on shore.

Christmas Eve of 1944, a ship left England going to France with 800 American soldiers, and a German submarine sunk it, and the boat with all

800 went down. And these things just happen, I guess. Nobody's really at fault. They take a chance and how many times would you expect a German submarine to be at the right location when the ship is going that 25 miles, or whatever it is, from England to France. They sunk it and everybody on the ship went down and it's sad because there's not only loss of life, but 800 trained soldiers ready to go into battle. They're gone in an instant and never did see the battle that they were trained to fight in.

SM: *Saving Private Ryan*, how did you feel that that was portrayed the first 25 minutes, how true was that to form?

MM: Well, see I think it was realistic on the Normandy invasion; because, if I remember correctly, around 10,000 killed on that invasion. So it had to be pretty good. The only thing about "Saving Ryan – Private Ryan," he never came in.

If he was with the 101st Airborne, he never came in by ship. He jumped back from the coast, and they provided the same protection the paratroops are intended to provide. Either prevent the troops from coming down to oppose the invasion, or knocking out guns in the rear that would be firing on invading forces.

I don't know if you saw *Band of Brothers*, that was about a six-hour thing. That was the 101st Airborne that I was in. In that case, it was "Easy Company." The whole story was about Easy Company. Major Winters, who died just less than a year ago, I guess; his objective was to knock out an artillery battery that was about eight miles back from the coast, that was firing on the troops coming in by landing craft. And that's realistic because they jumped back there. But *Saving Private Ryan* implied that he came in on the coast. That was not true. But otherwise it was fairly realistic.

The thing I didn't believe was that about 10 or 15 men were all walking together talking, and I think the purpose of that was to try to convey what the story was going to be about; what the purpose of the movie was to find Private Ryan. Where normally, you spread out a hundred yards or so between men, 50 yards, so that one shell doesn't come in and knock out 10-12 men. Probably get one or two but the rest would be all right. So otherwise it was fairly realistic.

SM: When you were in Belgium at the Battle of the Bastogne, is that how you say it?

MM: Well, over there they say, "Bas-to-nee." If it's here, it's "Bas-tone."

SM: When you said that medical personnel were taken by the Germans, what happened to them the first time around; the first set of medical personnel?

MM: Well, they were captured and put in a prison camp, a German prison camp somewhere, I suppose. We never saw them again. But that was only medical people from our outfit. Every unit has first-aid men, and a division will have a doctor. We had a major that was a surgeon and he was head of the 517th Medical Team.

But this captured group, they were part of the 101st Airborne Division, so that was the headquarters' battery of the division. Our major was in the headquarters' battery of the infantry – the three battalions of infantry.

It's pretty well-organized … the military. You got three squads that make up a platoon. You got three platoons that make up the company. Three companies make up a battalion. Three battalions will make up a regiment. Three regiments will make up a division with some added parts – motor pool and all that – but it's usually three of everything. And a squad probably will have 15 men and three times that for a platoon, around 40-45 men; a company, maybe 200 men. It's pretty consistent on how it's organized. Then you have attachments – medical and motor pools and other extra men for certain specific duties.

SM: Tell me about the engineers, what did the engineers do?

MM: Repair bridges, blow up bridges and blow up power plants, anything to do with construction. We had the road up to Col de Braus blown out by the Germans, because that road going up there is just back and forth until you get to the top and going around one curve, they blew out part of that bridge.

The engineers had to come in and rebuild that part of the road. Up until that time, there was only enough room for mules to carry supplies up. But once the engineers got the road rebuilt, you could take jeeps with trailers and things to go up. We had six killed at the Miami – the Nice. We have a plaque in front of the Nice Airport that has the six men that were killed removing mines at the airports. The Germans had the airport totally mined, and the Americans took all the mines out. But this truckload of mines blew up and killed six guys. The French allowed us to put a plaque at the entrance to the airport lobby with the names of these men that were killed removing mines.

SM: And they were part of the 101st.

MM: No, that's 517th. See the 517th remained all the way through the war, but I was put in the 101st just before the Battle of the Bulge. I was in the 463rd

Field Artillery. I started out in the 460th. When the 17th Airborne didn't get over here to France from England, the 463rd, Colonel Cooper, asked the 101st Division Commander, "The 17th is not here yet, could we go into Bastogne with the 101st?" And we went in with the 101st.

And then toward the end of the war, he wanted to put us back in the 17th and General Taylor said, "No, they've become a part of the 101st and the 101st would not like it if you removed the 463rd and put them back in the 17th Airborne, and the 463rd would rather stay in the 101st, rather than go back." So they transferred the whole outfit to the 101st and we remained with them until they broke the 101st up after being down in Berchtesgaden in Bavaria.

SM: So all 2,500 of your parachute corps team were part of the 101st?

MM: No.

SM: Only just the part . . .

MM: The 2,500 with the 517th. The 460th was part of the 517th. There were three battalion infantries. The 460th Battalion of Artillery had the engineers, the 596th. But while I was in the 460th, part of the 517th, I accidentally shot one of our men one night on patrol or not on patrol, but on outpost. He'd come in, didn't know the password.

Well, once you shoot somebody in an outfit, the Army reassigns you. They court-martial you, first of all, so you can't be tried in civilian court again. And then give you a carton of cigarettes and transfer you out, in case this fellow that got killed has a good friend that might want to revenge his death. You're no longer part of that outfit. So I was transferred from the 460th to the 463rd, which was another battalion of artillery.

So when we got up to Mourmelon, I was the only one out of the 517th that was not with the 517th anymore. And the 460th didn't have a division to belong to. The 17th was coming over, but had not arrived. So the 463rd Artillery Battalion, Commander Cooper, asked General MacAuliffe if he could have his battalion moved into the 101st Airborne Division. And I knew none of these guys. I came in out of that. They had fought in Africa, Sicily, and Italy. And so I was totally new with them. And that's how I got in the 101st. The 517th men never did get into.

Later on, toward the end of the war, they were in Sissonne, France, S-i-o-i-s-s, I guess, just outside of Paris a ways. They were transferred into the 13th Airborne, who had never seen combat at all. The war had ended before they got into combat. So the 517th and the 13th Airborne did not get along very

well. Many of the men that had paperwork en route for awards that they would be given for activity that they'd performed, the 13th Airborne Command reduced those awards or took a lot of them away. Nobody knows why, but the 517th was not very close with the men of the 13th Airborne; because the 13th was trying to use the 517th as a part of their record of their wartime experience. And the 517th didn't become a part of the 13th Airborne until after the war was over. So the 13th really had no claim to combat duty other than through the 517th.

SM: You said it was the 101st Airborne – you didn't know any of the guys, correct?

MM: When I was transferred in there.

SM: So how did that feel, I would think that would be very unsettling?

MM: Yes, because I'm a complete stranger to them; and they have their own little clique that they'd grown up with from Africa through Sicily, Italy.

But one way I became adopted, I think, is because on outpost duty … you're out two hours and off four. Well say your duty starts at 10 at night. I'd go out there at probably quarter to 10, fifteen minutes before I was supposed to, and this guy would be relieved. Then I may, instead of coming in at 12 o'clock, I may come in at 12:20. So the fellow I'm supposed to send out on outpost has already had twenty minutes of his two-hour period used, and I think that did more to get me accepted with the group than anything else did. But you take more than your share of the time spent on outpost.

SM: So what month was it when you went to the 101st?

MM: Well, it would be December 15th.

SM: December 15th, so right before you were in Bastogne?

MM: Battle of the Bulge … we didn't go into the Bulge until the 18th, I think. We had come back to southern France, and the 101st and the 82nd had come from Holland and the Germans attacked. And Eisenhower thought it's just a small, isolated attack. Well, it took 2-3 days for them to realize this is a major attack the Germans are pulling. They have a million men advancing; and so then, the orders came from Eisenhower to have the two divisions moving within 12 hours.

We were notified in the morning. By eight that evening, we were headed to Bastogne and the 82nd Airborne was headed for St. Vith, and we were driving

all night long with headlights on so that we could make as much distance as we could, because whoever got to Bastogne first would have control of all those roads leading in and out. So, normally, you drive with a little slit on the front of the lights. The rest is all darkened out. But we got there just hours before the Germans got to Bastogne; and it was a good thing because that held them up from branching out through Bastogne and then roads going in all directions, seven roads. They would have continued with their tanks on those roads.

SM: How long did it take before you felt like you were accepted by the guys in the 101st Airborne?

MM: Probably two weeks.

SM: Can you tell me a little bit more about when you accidentally shot the other man?

MM: Well, it was during the night, and I had just come out of being asleep, I was sleepy, and I was off. I was ready to take a [unclear] **– see we were in a U-shape, and it's in the book. We were in one position and then across this valley were another group, an outpost. And I just didn't get any password and I yelled out. At least in – I don't know if I was still asleep or in a dream, but I yelled out our password and got no response. So I just fired. Then he started yelling, "Medic." And if you're hit or wounded, you yell, "Medic, medic," and there's always a first-aid man around to give you morphine or bandage up a wound or whatever. And I had heard later that morning, that he had died.**

So that's when the action was taken, a court-martial, found guilty and fined a dollar and given a carton of cigarettes, and then shipped to a replacement depot. That's where the replacements come. I sat in there and some guy from the 463rd came and picked me up. Didn't say anything to me all the way back to where the 463rd was. I could feel the unfriendliness right then; but then two-three weeks, things got pretty good. But I never got as close to those guys as I did to the 517th.

All my reunions over the last 50 years was reunions with the 517th, because I'd spent 15 months with them, training and going to jump school and going overseas and so that was my outfit, even though I was in the 463rd, and we still correspond today. We have a mini-reunion coming up in the middle of January. We have a national reunion coming up in Kansas City in July and a mini-reunion in Palm Springs in April. And some of them come in wheelchairs. Some come in walkers. Some don't come at all because they're in nursing homes and some of have died. Just the last week, there were a couple of guys died. So it isn't going to be long and we're all gone. And

many of the outfits have broken up. I know the 101st has broken up now. They said it serves no purpose to hold reunions anymore because there's nobody that can come. Those that can are not interested because none of their friends show up.

Years ago when we had 500-600 there, it was broken down to like the 460th had four batteries. Each battery had 100 men in it. So Battery C that I was in, maybe 35 guys would show up from that. We would have our own little reunion within the reunion. And the battalions of infantry, they had their own. The engineers would have their own. Now out of the 2,500, you're lucky if you get seven or eight that show up out of the 2,500. And, of course, of those seven you – if you're lucky, you know one of them. The other seven, they were in other battalions and you never did get to know them. But there really isn't much purpose in going to reunions anymore.

The second generation and third generation, they want to continue it. The sons and daughters and the grandsons continue holding these reunions and they show up. But I see no purpose in that. If their fathers and grandfathers aren't going to be there, they could just as well meet with families somewhere rather than meet with a bunch of strangers that they don't know.

SM: How many men out of the 2,500 are still alive?

MM: Nobody seems to know, but we have a booklet that goes out that serves 300 but that serves relatives and other people that have requested. It's called *The Thunderbolt.* I imagine there were probably 75 of the 2,500 that are still alive.

SM: How many of them got killed in action? So 247 men were killed and 1,576 were wounded.

MM: And 80% casualties, right.

SM: And out of the 10,000 that were at the Battle of Bastogne, how many of those made it out alive?

MM: Are still alive?

SM: No, after the battle, how many got killed during the battle?

MM: Well, it's in books. I really don't know, but I imagine at least 2,000.

SM: And how often on your team of seven men that were doing artillery, how often did you lose men on your team?

MM: There were two killed right on the jump out of our battery. That was out of the 100 men, and 5 out of the 100 got killed altogether. But two got killed within 20 minutes of the jump. They were going to rush a machine gun nest and they both carried Thompson 45 submachine guns. When they rushed the German machine gun, both of their guns jammed so they couldn't fire anything. And the Germans cut both of them down. But the others were killed over a period of time. One of them, out of the five, was the one I killed and then two others – one was a forward observer one time.

So we had five out our battery and oh, the information is in the book. Out of the whole 460th, which was a battalion, there weren't too many because the artillery is back aways. And if you're somewhere near a shell that lands, you could . . .

When I was in Bastogne, a German 88 shell came in and landed from here to that chair from me, but it was a dud. It plowed into the ground and it didn't explode. That would have killed me. The slave laborers the Germans hired, lot of times, would sabotage some of this equipment. Instead of putting powder in, they might put in something that looked powder, sand or sugar or something. There was many pieces of equipment that failed because the slave labor the Germans had working for them sabotaged something they were supposed to be making.

Another time I almost got killed, we were in Bastogne, we were surrounded. It was the 26th of December, a clear day and fighter planes were out. And a fighter plane comes over our position; and I'm waving, thinking that he's going to acknowledge by tipping his wings. They'll do that when they want to acknowledge they know who you are or something, just up and down with their wings. Well, I was waving to him and, all at once, I see these tracers coming out of his wings – 50-caliber shells. And they got three, I think, along each wing, 50 calibers. Well I'm standing here and they're going on each side of me. I'm in the dead spot where there's no 50-caliber gun. Had he been over a few feet one way or the other, I would have gotten one of those 50 calibers. So being in the right place at the right time.

SM: The airplanes that would fly low, you said, over like at the Battle of Bastogne, they were doing surveillance, what did you call those airplanes?

MM: Oh, the L5 cubs.

SM: The cubs, how low did they fly?

MM: Oh, it just depends how well they could see but they were always 3 to 4 or 500 feet above the ground. Enough so they could – if the target was over further, they'd probably fly a little higher. But they wanted to stay between the target and the artillery that's firing on the target; because the closer they get to the target area, the more that they get ground fire that firing up at them, too – rifle and even anti-aircraft. They were a pretty small target; but they were so slow that they were an easy target with somebody with a rifle firing at them. Five hundred feet off the ground isn't too high; and 1,000 feet sometime, there was no set limit. It was determined by how well they could see the target.

SM: Did you guys know that Patton was coming on the 26th? Did you know that he was bringing men up to help out?

MM: Well, not the average soldier. I suppose the officers – the general, by radio, was probably told Patton is heading up from the south. He was over in Alsace-Lorraine. He turned the 3rd Army around, and he sent the 4th Armored Division up toward Bastogne. He was, I think, a hundred and some miles away. But I got a picture in the book, too. Men walking across the hills toward Bastogne, and he lost a lot of men. I think something like 1,000 men walking toward Bastogne and this 4th Armored had a bunch of tanks.

SM: As you mentioned, I'm sure that friendly fire was very common where people get accidentally shot by their own men. How have you come to terms with this, have you ever made peace with this?

MM: Well, I guess it was difficult to start with. As time went on, I saw that accidents do happen, like the 27 planeloads shot down and the bombing of our own troops; and even in recent wars, there's been friendly fire. In Desert Storm, one of the football players had played in the National League got killed by friendly fire. So I guess I finally accepted it as one of the terrible things that happened that you accept but never get over, and know that it will happen again in the future. Now they have the drones that nobody is in. So if they get shot down, it's a loss of equipment but not loss of life.

SM: Tell me a little bit about Dusseldorf, if you could. Thanks for sharing that with me, by the way. When you got to Dusseldorf, you said that you guys took over and stayed in some German homes? Were the civilians in the homes, and you were sharing the homes with them, or where were the civilians?

MM: We gave them 10 minutes to get out. And I think most of the fellows were considerate of what was in there. But I know the four of us that had this big hole that we kept heated with candles, we roomed together in a place in Bad Reichenhall. I have a picture in the book, and we had the upstairs. The

downstairs was a café and that café became a mess hall for a lot of the other troops. But we lived upstairs … had two big beds, had a balcony all the way around the chalet, and a German boy worked for us. He was 12 years old; spoke perfect English.

We came into the area on about the middle of May or so. The war ended on the 7th of May and we continued south. We came in there and he comes running over, and he said, "Where are you fellows coming from?" I told him. And he wanted to work for us. And we said, "What would you do?" He said, "I'll keep your boots polished and I'll keep a fire hot in the hot-water tank." The hot-water tanks over there – if you're going to take a shower or a bath – you build a fire underneath it, put wood in there, and it heats the water up, and then you use it. Well he said he'd do that and it wasn't long and we'd send him.

His mother lived in a house near there and he lived with her. His father had been killed in Italy. He was a major and so we gave him bread and other things to take home. You couldn't be any more helpful than to give them food, because Germans were starving. And we gave him food and, at the end of the month, we'd give him what change we had left.

Well, I heard afterwards – I corresponded with him for many years and he came over here in 1989 to visit me. And we shipped over food after the war in care packages, and food that we collected ourselves. I'd just been married, so it was difficult. I didn't have that much money myself, and he always remembered that. And then he came over and visited me; and he married and had a number of children and then he divorced and he remarried again. But we finally quit corresponding in about, I suppose 1990, or something like that.

He was a good friend. I mean, after we left there, he went to work for the Air Corps, who took over that area. And I kind of lost track of what happened to him until later on when he finally wrote to me and I caught up with what he'd been doing. He was very good in English. And he knew how to take care of himself. Even at 12 years old, he worked for different outfits and had enough money to go to school and I don't know if he ever went to college.

And from there we went on to Berlin on occupation duty, and lived in an SS barracks there. The only thing left in Berlin that resembles the war is a church that they didn't bother repairing and they left it just as it was at the end of the war. It still sits as a symbol at the center of Berlin.

But here, again, the little kids – we had a mess hall; and the GIs would take a little extra food. The mothers and their kids would stand off to the side.

This compound was a SS barracks and training center before the war ended. And the mothers would stand on the outside of the area with their little kids. Each little kid had a pail. And to start with, when we were through, we would leave the mess hall and go back to our barracks. And the kids would come running into those garbage cans where everybody threw their food and coffee, and everything. And these little kids would reach in there and grab bread and squeeze the coffee out of it and put in their pails and anything that looked edible, they would take back to their mothers.

It got to the point where we didn't blame these little kids anymore for what happened, we would bring out oranges or an apple or bread with meat on it for a sandwich, and give it to the kids before throwing it away. Actually put it in their pail, because they'd come running over as soon as we came out of the mess hall. But everybody sort of adopted one or two of these little kids, and provided them with food. Because you couldn't blame them for what had happened. At first everybody was pretty angry about – let them suffer and let them starve if you want to, but they soon got over that.

SM: When they saw how destitute they were?

MM: Yes and I suppose most of these mothers had lost their husbands in the war.

SM: What was the town of Berlin like?

MM: It was just a pile of bricks in the middle. They'd cleaned off the streets and piled them in the middle of each block. So here would be one square block with the street able to be traveled but in the center, a huge pile of rubble. And the Germans immediately went cleaning the mortar off of bricks and was started to rebuild which, I guess, put everybody to work.

SM: Now you left Berlin in December of '45, is that what you said?

MM: Yes, Van Norden was a very rich kid from New York. His dad owned shipping all over the world and I used to kid him when we were in the foxhole together. That's when you open up and you talk and you talk, just to stay awake, if nothing else, and to have something to do.

Well, he was telling me one time in 1939, he dated Brenda Frazier, who was debutante of the year. Back in those days, that was the big thing, where *Life* magazine carried a big layout on it. Well here's this guy from New York, 7 West 52nd Street, dated Brenda Frazier, debutante of the year for the whole United States. And I said, "Well, you do that, you're not just a coal miner or anything." And I kidded him so much, he finally said, "If you don't say

anything to the other fellows, I'll tell you about it," and, "I'll tell you about my life."

And his dad was ultra-rich. The kids went to private school. The chauffeur drove them down to school every morning. But the kids got him to stop a block from the school; and they would get out and walk to school and the chauffeur would follow along slowly on the street to make sure they got into the building.

They took a world cruise one time. The chauffeur went along, the doctor and two nursemaids, or whatever they're called. And it took them a whole year to get around the world.

But I've gone to see him a couple of times. He married a woman that worked at Tiffany's in New York. But while we were still in France, or in Bavaria, in this café and chalet that the four of us were in, he met a German girl. And there was non-fraternization going on then. You couldn't talk to the Germans, or do anything with them. But he fell in love with the German girl and found out that her dad was in shipping – that her dad and his dad knew each other. Well he said, "I'm going to go home. I'll get a diamond and I'll be back and we're going to get married."

He got home and he started fishing in Alaska and hunting in British Columbia, fishing in South America and really enjoying himself. Well three years went by and he remembered he hadn't gone back. So he got a diamond and went back there and he found her, but she had married a major in the Army, and they were living in Switzerland at the time.

SM: A German major or American major?

MM: American major … and Norden died on October 2nd, and I was supposed to do the eulogy for him but my wife and I were in Col de Braus in France, at the time I got notice that he died. I couldn't get back here at that time. But I wrote it up and then sent it and they had the son give the eulogy at the funeral.

SM: Thank you very much, Mr. McMorrow, for your time today.