

Robert W. Meyer

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Question: Name and the correct spelling so I can have it on tape. I you could do that, that would be great.

Answer: My name is Robert Meyer. R-o-b-e-r-t M-e-y-e-r, but everybody calls me Bob.

Question: Everybody calls you Bob.

Answer: Robert is just official.

Question: My dad goes by Skip, but his name is really Phillip Henry, and he didn't even know until he was 13 that that wasn't his real name! In fact, there's people that only know him by Skip, they were at a party for Phillip Henry and they asked my dad what he was doing there. He said Well, the party is for me, so... So you grew up in Tumwater, then?

Answer: Yup. We moved into Tumwater there when I was 6 years old and I was there until after the war.

Question: So what, uh, I ask some questions that some people consider rude, so forgive me. What year were you born?

Answer: In '24.

Question: In '24, and you went into which branch? You went into Army Air Corps?

Answer: Well, this is a long story, too. Uh, I wanted to fly awfully bad. Always did, all my life, and I saw WWII as a opportunity, literally, because it was going to be easier to get into the aviation cadet, and, but my mother and dad, they didn't want me really to go into the service early, so I knew I had to wait until I was 18 and I could do it on my own. Well, when I turned 18 was in the fall of '42, and at that time, the government stopped all enlistments, and so I had to wait until they drafted me. And when they drafted me they stuck me in the Army Specialized Training Program. And when I went through the Reception Center there at Ft. Lewis and I asked, what's that? And he said Well, it's a good deal. They're going to send you to college. And I said, I want to fly. Can't you put me in the Air Force? Oh, no, no, he says. This is such a good deal, he says, I wish I could get in it myself, and so they wouldn't listen to me. And it was, they had a quota of 40 men to put together to send to this ASTP program, but there was a catch. They sent us to infantry basic training first, so I had to go through 13 weeks of infantry basic and then they sent me to the University of Alabama to go to school in basic engineering courses. And when I got into that, why I decided I that by then, I was a pretty naive young kid. And I was beginning to get a little suspicious now of the Army, and so I put in an application for the cadets again and got transferred, but they made me wait until the end of that school term. So at the first of 1944, they sent me to Miami Beach for classification and all this and got in the Air Corps and they sent me on up to Cochran Field in Georgia to wait for pre-flight class to open. And while we were there, the Army shut down ASTP and sent everybody back to their branch of the service and then I thought, Oh, I got out of there just in time. Then they said that the Air Force was going to accept no more transfers to the cadet system. I thought Whew. In there just in time. And the about a week later they sent us a notice that we were all

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being sent back to where we came from, and that for me was the infantry. I felt like I'd been a shanghaied sailor, so I ended up then back in the infantry.

Question: You learned very quickly how the service works, then.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Never expect, never assume, never...

Answer: Yeah. You can't take anything for granted and be cautious.

Question: Where did you ship from to go overseas then?

Answer: uh, I was in at Camp Rucker, Alabama, in the 66th Infantry Division, and after about the summer there of 1944 in September, they sent us, they just emptied the ranks of the division and sent us all overseas as individual replacements. And so then we went through what they called the repot depot system. We went up to Fort Mead, Maryland, then up to Camp Miles Standish in Boston, shipped out of Boston, went to England, and finally from England out to France up cross France into Belgium, all through repot depots and we were just like so many stocks of ammunition or whatever supplies and finally issued to a division. And at that point, I was, lost all my buddies, 'cause they went down the old alphabetical list, you know, and so then I ended up in the 28th division in the Hurtgen Forest, I didn't know a sole.

Question: And you're what, 19, 20 by now?

Answer: I was 20 at the time.

Question: 20 years old, so still pretty young. Had you ever been out of the country prior to that?

Answer: I grew up right here in Tumwater, and as far east as I'd ever been is to Yakima and Ellensburg, once. And as far as to Kelso, once. And so I was just, it was a big adventure. From right here, from Fort Lewis I went to Camp Wheeler, Georgia, and I didn't know we were going to infantry at the time, but I was kind of tickled. I thought, boy, I'm going to get to see the whole country the first time around. Little did I realize 'cause it was in May when they drafted me and sent me down there, and you know how the weather is here, of course. And I got down there in June in Georgia. I never knew how bad a climate could be! It was just, you could hardly stand it. We never had any cold water, no air conditioning or anything in those barracks down there. Oh, I thought I'd die from the heat.

Question: I didn't even think about that, 'cause going down south I assume, I mean, Olympia still is, the Olympia and Tumwater area still is a very Caucasian area. Were you introduced to, at the time Negro... African Americans Was there a segregated population down there in the South when you got there?

Answer: Oh, yes, very much so. The, 'course the Army was not segregated. We were all the same there, but when you went to town on pass, well then, oh, yes, blacks were, well, it was colored then, colored to the rear of the bus, and I remember one, this little ice cream parlor used to go to, well, they had a little side window over in the alley that served the blacks. They couldn't come into the main

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part of the store, and in the theaters, the blacks were up in what was referred to in those days as "Nigger Heaven", They had to sit up in the balcony. Yeah, they were very much segregated.

Question: But on post they weren't.

Answer: No.

Question: So in the barracks and everything?

Answer: Well, in the post, in the barracks we had no blacks. Yeah, there were no blacks on post at all except maybe as some civilian maintenance workers of some sort, but ...

Question: But what an education, 'cause again, kids of the day don't realize. I mean today you get a kid by 16 they have a car and they can drive wherever they want to do, go places. Now here you are, 19, 20 years old, you're starting to see the world. Now they send you over to Europe. And like you said, you were a piece of meat, a piece of equipment. Hey, you need one more, here's one more. You need two more, here's two more.

Answer: That's exactly what we were! We were just handled like so much material.

Question: Did you, before you went to Europe, can you remember what your concept was of war, what was going on over there?

Answer: Yeah. Uh, but I didn't want any part of it... being a ground soldier, foot soldier.

Question: So you had a good idea, then. 'cause nowadays, you know, you turn on the news and we can watch, you know, Desert Storm, when it happened on TV, where there you had the newsreels and some of the papers, and

Answer: Right, yeah. Well, we had newsreels back then too, because I had been able to see what was happening. Well, matter of fact, like the Bataan Death March and all that. That was already being reported before I even went in the Army. And I remember that was one of the things that really struck me when, after I was captured and they were marching us into Germany, and it was freezing and we were starving and I was thinking. I remembered how, reading about the Bataan Death March. I couldn't imagine what that was like, and here I am in one.

Question: Wow! So you went, where you finally got handed out or whatever, Hurtgen Forest, which is around where the, it's where the Bulge was, or is it separate?

Answer: It was just north of the Bulge area, and it was just before the Bulge, and anybody who was in the Hurtgen Forest and the Bulge will tell you that the Hurtgen Forest was the worst, but it was so much smaller. It only involved one division at a time, whereas the Bulge entailed many divisions and was in a much larger area. But the Hurtgen was a disaster and conditions were more miserable.

Question: It was a slaughter?.

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Answer: It was a slaughter. Exactly what it was. It was pure stupidity on the part of our leaders. And they made the same damn mistake time after time, but they sent about 3 or 4 divisions in there, one at a time, and got them all slaughtered.

Question: Why, I mean, was it because of the terrain, or what happened?

Answer: It was the terrain, and they were going a whole entire, wrong direction, and was a case of the high-ups not even visiting the ground to see what they were up against.

Question: So when they say, forest, I mean I know forest from here. Give me some idea of what, where you were, what was it like.

Answer: Well, when I joined the division, and I came into the Hurtgen Forest in Company B of the 112th Regiment, and they'd hauled us up there as close as they could in trucks, and we got out and we marched on in, and it would be patches of heavy, like fir trees, just like we have here, and open fields here and there. And when I arrived at the company, they were dug-in in a heavy fir forest and they were in dugouts covered over with logs and muddy, and with snow and slush and raining and snowing and it was just miserable weather. If you can think of the worst winter weather you ever saw around here and go and just live in the woods with nothing. And that's the way it was. And when I joined the Company B, they had just escaped from the vicinity of the Town of Schmidt, and they had been slaughtered up there, and out of the company, which is around 180 men, there was only 30 men left, and it took 150 of us replacements to rebuild the company, so that'll give you some idea of what went on up there. And the men were just, the men who were left were, well, they were shell-shocked or what have you, but they were just numb from it. And it was very, very depressing, coming in there to see what we had gotten into.

Question: 'cause the men coming back gave you a very real picture of what it could do to you.

Answer: Oh, yes, and even in this area where we were there were still German bodies laying around in the slush and the snow and wrecked equipment everywhere, and it was just a horrendous. Well, they called it aptly, the Green Hell of the Hurtgen

Question: Was it a lot of rifle-to-rifle combat or were you getting mortar or...

Answer: It was artillery and rifle, machine gun, tanks, and it was not tank country. That was the worst of it. You...tanks would slither off the road and get stuck and it was just, it was just inappropriate for what they were trying to do.

Question: And I assume, was it a dense?

Answer: Dense forest, yeah.

Question: So it's not the type of place where you could look out and see, like a big field, where you could see everybody.

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Answer: No, no. As a matter of fact, when I returned back there several years ago to try to see if I could see anything familiar, I couldn't find anything familiar because I couldn't relate to anything. We weren't around any village, or. I knew that the towns they were after were close, like the Town of Schmidt and Vossenack, but, uh, out where we had nothing for a reference to where we were.

Question: What theoretically was the goal, the objective of what you were doing?

Answer: I don't think anybody knew. That was one of the problems. In reading the history since then, just beyond Schmidt and over there was the Roer River and there were dams on that river, and as it turned out, whoever controlled those dams controlled everything north of there, because that was where the English and the first army were going to expect to break through to the Rhine across the flat country there to the north, but whoever controlled those dams could flood that whole area. And so the Germans defended it very strongly, and they also were getting ready for the Battle of the Bulge, back in that area, and they didn't want that discovered. So the Germans just put up a tremendous resistance, and even after the war was over when they interviewed many German officers on the aspects of the Hurtgen Forest, they couldn't understand why the Americans were doing what they were doing there.

Question: And they just kept feeding people and the Germans just kept.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: What was your biggest fear in that type of situation?

Answer: Well, I knew I couldn't survive it. And right away you start dreaming of the million-dollar wound. You hope that maybe you can get a leg wound or something that you could survive and live with but be good enough to send you home. And that was the only thing that I could see that could save me to get out of there alive. 'Cause the other aspects were either get killed or captured, and you didn't have a ghost of a chance you thought of living through it.

Question: Did you try to check that part out of your mind, be killed or captured.

Answer: Yeah. Well at that age and you're young, it's going to happen to you, but it won't happen to me. That's the attitude you take. You see it happen to the guy next to you, but that's him, not me, and you just don't think you're going to die when you're young.

Question: Did it have a smell? I mean, when you think back, is there a smell to war where you were?

Answer: Definitely. There was a lot of smells. And, as a matter of fact, that was the thing that surprised me, that when you were getting around near where Germans were, you could smell them. They smelled different than we do. Whether it was the way they lived or the, 'course they had a lot of horses and that sort of thing, too, to give them a different smell. But when you got into a village where they had just been there recently you could smell Germans.

Question: I'll bet that's true, because you go to different cultures, different foods we eat, different. I never thought about that aspect.

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Answer: Yeah. Their diet is a little different and everything else, you know. 'cause animals, you know, they can detect the difference very easily. People don't normally, but in this situation we could, because sanitary conditions, like ourselves. We were pretty dirty and pretty strong smelling, I think, too, but so were they because the way we had to live.

Question: That's the thing. A lot of people when you read history books, young kids don't realize it wasn't like, you know where you could just stop, go home, 8 – 5, go get a shower every night.

Answer: Yeah. Get a shower every night.

Question: I've heard some people. I don't know about how long you were, but I heard one guy, I forget he was about 3 months without a change.

Answer: Oh, yeah. I was.

Question: Wet, cold, nasty. How long were you there before you were captured?

Answer: ok, in the Hurtgen Forest, we were only about 4 days when the Army finally decided that the 28th division was in no condition to carry on, so they pulled us out of the Hurtgen and they sent us down south into Luxembourg. And.. which was then what they called the ghost front, or the phony war, where the Germans were on one side of their boundary and we were on the other side and we just looked at each other. And conducted patrols, and this sort of thing, but nobody was aggressively attacking. And they figured that we could get rest and recuperated and retrained to work together, because we were all new. We were like a new division. We were old division only in name, because all the men were replaced, and so we were down there when the Battle of the Bulge began, so we were kind of out of the frying pan into the fire. And three days after the Bulge had begun, why I was captured.

Question: How and where was that, I mean what happened?

Answer: At first, you see, I was in the 112th Regiment, and they sent us down, I was up in the very north end of Luxembourg, just into Germany, and I was there for about 3 weeks when, for some reason or other, it was day after Thanksgiving, when I was in our little dugout with our machine gun, and they had a little sound powered phone line to the company headquarters, and they said When you come for breakfast, bring your gear. I took what I had, got down there, they put me on a truck and sent me further south into Luxembourg, and put me in the 109th Regiment, Company A of the 109th. So then I was with them about 3 weeks, and we'd been along the Our River and we'd conducted patrols and this sort of thing and harassment fire on the Germans, and then we were pulled back to into the Town of Diekirch which was about 3 miles from the Our River on the front line, and we were in regimental reserve and we'd spent. About every week they would rotate and give each and the two battalions would be on line and one battalion then would get to come back and sent reverse, and they did this, and our time was just about up, and we were expecting to go back in about a day or two, when we woke up that one morning and we were living in a house there in Diekirch and we woke up to explosions real early in the morning, and we were kind of half woke up and, What on earth was that? There hasn't been anything going on around here for week. And

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somebody a little more awake than the rest of us, you know, Hey, that's incoming! And sure enough, you know, so we all got up and we were up in the attic of this building, so we all got up and went down to the basement, and we all wondered what was going on. About daylight came and the artillery quit and we meandered around and kind of wondering what was going on. Nobody knew anything, and finally breakfast was late that morning. We finally said, Breakfast was ready, and they got fed us, and then about noon, they told us that a strong German patrol had crossed the river and they had lost contact with our "E" Company, which was up north in a little village of Feulen and they were going to send "A" company up through the little village of Longsdorf to try to relieve "A" Company, and the "B" Company was going to go through another route through this little village of Tandell also converging on Feulen Neither one of us made it.

As we left town to go out, why, the Germans started shelling us again. And while we were, during that, I saw one whole Luxembourg family get hit, and I took cover in the front of their house, and when I heard the family hollering back there, sounded like they were hollering for help, and when the shelling quit I went back to see what was wrong and there was a man hanging onto his arm and a lady who was carrying a little child and the leg was cut and the woman had a pierce in her breast. The old.. looked like a grandmother had her bloody hand, and this little 11-year-old girl wide-eyed looking around. I tried to help the bind up his arm. It was completely severed. There was nothing but a little bit of cloth and skin holding it on. I wanted to just cut it off and bandage the stump, but I couldn't speak his language and I wasn't going to pull out a knife and do that, so I just tied it up as fast as I could, and about that time they hollered. Leave those civilians alone. Get out. We're moving out. And so I'd run back up on the road, and we went on up a ways and we met 3 of our tanks and we started up the road toward Longsdorf and we encountered one house there and the tank fired at it. And a couple of women come running out of it. I thought, ohh, that's a tragic mistake. I hope nobody got hurt. The next house we did the same thing, the tank fired again at the house and blew the end out of it. This time we had about 25 Germans come out of it, and I thought Oh, we've caught the whole patrol. That looked like, and I thought it was all over, and, but when we got that all cleaned up and took care of those guys and sent them back and we went on up the road a little ways further and by then it was getting very late in the afternoon. It was dark. And just as we entered some woods, it just got pitch black, and I was walking alongside of the lead tank holding my machine gun, and all of a sudden I heard a whoosh, bam, you know and front end of that tank and all the front of me just lit up like the 4th of July. There'd been some Germans in a little ravine that came down through a culvert under the road there and down the hillside, and they had fired a bazooka and it hit the front of the tank, but it hit where all the armor was and it didn't hurt it any. If I'd of been just a foot further forward or so, it would, all that shrapnel that blew out the sides would have got me. And the tank commander up there, he'd returned fire with a 50 caliber right away and everything got quiet. I thought. Oh they must have killed those 'cause there's no sound from them. It was so dark you couldn't see. And the old tank commander said, Well, that's it, we're not going any further tonight. And so they decided that one platoon of the three rifle platoons along here, one platoon would go down below the road and spread out, one platoon would stay with the tank and one platoon would go up on the hillside. And so there was two machine guns in the company and so one of them was going to go with a group down below the hill and so I with mine was going to go up on a hillside. And then we spent the night not doing, nothing happened. Then the next morning, why there was a lot of activity then, and then the Germans began shelling us with mortars and screaming meemies and artillery, and they pounded us all day as we tried to work our way along that hillside, and by nightfall, we'd got up almost

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through the woods and, but there was a thicker patch of woods just ahead of us and we stopped. It was getting too dark, you couldn't see anything again, so they stopped again. We sat there for the night, and somewhere after in the dark, we heard our tank start up and moving back down the road, and somebody passed word along up through the ranks that the tanks were going to go back for more ammunition and more fuel. And they'd be back in the morning with some help. Well, it stayed pretty quiet through the night, and sometime before morning when it was still dark, just like inside of an old boot. You couldn't see anything, and we could hear the tanks again. Thought uh, huh, there they are, they're coming back. And in those woods, the sound is reverberated all through the trees and you couldn't tell directions from where it was coming from. So we assume, you know, it was ours, because we figured there was no way the Germans could get armor across the road, I mean, across the river, the Our river, and we thought so it had to be our tanks. We never even THOUGHT it was, and it sounded like the tanks came up alongside where they were before they left, but then it sounded like they went back behind us a little ways again. Well, finally when daylight began to filter through the trees we could begin to see a little bit and look around. There were German troops everywhere running through there. It got kind of hot and heavy, and so somebody decided we'd better move back and get a little support from our tanks. So I told the other guy, ok, take off. I'll hold with the gun here, I've got a little bit of ammunition left. I'll hold them, you guys get going. Well, they all took off and started running back, and then just a little bit there, well, one guy, he could see the tanks down the road and he let out a Oh, Boy! And started running down toward them, and about that time somebody further up on the hill hollered up at him. Those are German tanks! Well, he never heard the warning. And then somebody says it's just every man for himself, and everybody started running back 'cause nobody seemed to be in charge. I didn't know it at the time, but all of our officers and some of our noncoms had been killed the day before in all that artillery barrage. They'd all congregated down in this little ravine, which was temporary company command post and the shell had hit right there and got them all. And so when they all started running then I couldn't keep up carrying the machine gun, and I didn't have any ammunition for it anymore. I finally did catch up to the other gunner and he had the tripod, and I says, I can't keep up with you guys carrying this. Somebody's going to have to help me. He says, Throw it away. I already threw away the tripod. Well, I was more afraid of being court-martialed for abandoning a weapon in combat than I was of the Germans. I still never dream that I was going to run afoul of them. And so he took off then and here I was kind of out here all by myself and the Germans closing in from the rear. And so finally when I crossed this little ravine, there was this tree there with its roots hanging out exposed. I thought, by golly, I'll just shove this machine gun up in there, hide it up under those roots, and when this is all over, I'll come back and I can get it. And so then when I finally caught up to the rest of the guys, and they were all crawling and hunkered down in a brushy area, and I said, What's the holdup? And the guy said, There's more Germans back here! And I looked around and I thought, if I could get up over the top of this hill, I'd get down the other road on the other side somewhere and get away from this. So I took off and went up there and got to the edge of the woods and started out and there was an open field on the top of this ridge. And just as I stepped out of the woods, there, boy I got shot at by some German with a machine gun, and I had to dive back inside the woods and went back to where the other guys were and I says, If you guys don't start just shooting and running, we're all dead. About that time, I looked down through the brush at the road and I could see the German tank swinging his big gun up our way. I said, if he fires that, we're done. And there was a German closing in on me with a assault rifle, firing at every sound I'd made, and so I figured, We're

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going to have to surrender I guess, just temporarily, to save our soul and we'll be rescued right quick. They can't get away with this! And so I stood up and yelled Comrade! That's what they always yelled at us when they wanted to surrender. And all I got back was a burst of fire. And I don't know how he missed me, but he was shooting at the sound of me, and I felt the bullets go by my face. They were that close, and I was thinking, well there not going to honor our surrender. They're just going to wipe us out. I was thinking if they're a patrol, they probably can't handle prisoners, and they'll just do away with us. Well, that made me more mad than scared, I think. And I'd just started cursing like a young soldier can curse, and I ended up with Stop your umpty ump shooting. We've got our hands up! And he understood hands up, and he yelled back. Hands up Ja, and I yelled back, Ja. And then he says, Kommen Sie here, and I said, Well, that sounded like Come here to me, and so I had my pistol out and I took the magazine out and threw them both in different directions in the brush, unbuckled my pistol belt, slipped out of my pack. I didn't want him to get any indication that I was still armed in any way. And I walked out through the brush with my hands over my head, and here was a real well seasoned old German trooper. He had a bandage on his head so big he couldn't hardly get his helmet on it, and I thought Oh, my gosh. He's not going to have any sympathy toward me. The other guys followed me out and they made us lay face down in the mud and I thought they were going to execute us right there. And that's how I got captured.

Question: What goes through your head at that point. I mean, movies have created those whole allusion of what war is, but here you are, this fairly young gentleman, faced with I would assume at this point, they always say when we're young we don't fear of losing our life, but it sounds like you must have had to deal with that aspect at that point.

Answer: I was fearing it then. Yes, and your mind. You know, you think a computer runs fast. But under stress like that, your mind can work like lightening speed. You can think of thousands of things quickly. And everything was going through my mind. Just everything.

Question: Did you know, 'cause you kept getting moved around and re-stationed. The guys that got captured with you, did you know them at all or were they just more soldiers?

Answer: Nope. Just more soldiers. Yeah. They were all ...the only thing we had in common that we were in the same boat, you know.

Question: So did they show you humanity when they did capture you, or...

Answer: Well, it was kind of indifference, I think, with their combat troops. Um, they made us lay face down there in the mud and I was just sure then that they were going to still execute us, and I thought I heard one pistol shot and I thought, If I hear one more, I'm just going to get up and run 'cause I...they're going to have to shoot me moving. I'm not going to lay here and just be slaughtered like cattle or something, and fortunately there wasn't another shot. 'cause if there had been, it would have been suicide for me. But I was absolutely convinced that I was going to die, and I thought of thousands of things. First, you know, I was kind of self-pity for myself, and then I began to think, well, I've had a good life so far. I had good parents, and I became more concerned then with the.. how it was going to affect them. And it was then about that time, 'cause then I was saying prayers. I was not

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a religious kid. My mother always made me go to church, but I never liked it. Didn't want to. But I was saying my prayers then. Like they say, there was no atheists in foxholes, and believe me, that's the only thing you had left to live for or hope for was a faith. And while I was concerned then with like saying my good-byes and worrying about how my folks would react to all this, and whether they would ever know what happened to me, suddenly now I felt a presence in me that was like the dearest friend you knew came and put your arm around you. A real comforting feeling came all over me, and I heard a very clear voice in my.... inside me. It was the most perfect voice I had ever heard in my life. The diction was absolutely perfect. Was clear, and it said Do not be afraid. And there was never a thought went through my mind as to who said that or why or what or anything. I didn't have to. It was like I understood. I don't know who said what that was or that was a guardian angel or what it was, but I'm sure it was some divine intervention of some sort. And it turned out, that voice was right, 'cause I never, I got through the whole thing without being harmed or hurt in any real way.

Question: Do you remember was the voice internal or did it have the feeling that it was...

Answer: It was like it was right inside of me. And like I say, I'm sure that many a psychologists or anybody will come up with a thousand explanations and I won't believe a single one of them because they didn't hear it. I heard it, but I....It's a story I don't tell to very many people because I don't feel that most people would accept it or understand it.

Question: I understand it, I mean not to the extreme that you tell me, having not been in that situation, but I understand that from some other experiences that I've had hiking and... Have you ever heard any other people that were in the same situation? Have you ever heard someone tell a story that was similar that you just, when you look at them you both knew, I understand what you're saying, or...

Answer: Yes, I've had other people tell me they understood, that they had been in situations where they, but I've never heard anybody say that they heard the same thing that I did or felt the same thing that I did, but it was...I can still remember that and there's been nothing like it ever in my life before or since.

Question: So did that, because you said you knew the voice. Did that change the rest of the war for you?

Answer: Yes. Uh, after that I was never really terrified again. I was concerned and worried and this sort of thing, but I was never really afraid anymore. Um, right after this happened, I still thought I was going to die. I was still convinced I was going to die, but it didn't bother me anymore. It was like I'm going to a better place. As a matter of fact, I was almost, I almost felt a little pity for the damn German, because he was still going to be there in that mud and I'm going to leave, and he's going to give me the ticket out of here, and the only thing that I was wondering about was, What would be the transition from life to death? How, will it hurt? How long will I have to hurt before it's over, but that was the only thing...the way I thought about it.

Question: You said a real interesting thing that I haven't heard anybody say before, which I agree with. You talked about how fast your mind can think and how many things your mind can think of in a situation like that.

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Answer: Yeah. See I had no concept of time right here. 'cause this all happened probably faster than I thought it did. Because I thought of so many things during this time.

Question: Where did they end up taking you then?

Answer: Well, they finally, when they come along and they finally poked his gun in the side of me and rolled me over and told me to get up, I was almost disappointed, 'cause I thought I was going to leave, and so then he searched me, and he was all really just looking for food. I had a D-bar box in my shirt, in my pocket of my field jacket, full of 45 ammunition, and the German, he pulled that out. He was hoping he was going to get chocolate, and when he saw it was cartridges, he just flung it away, cursed, and. They finally marched us down off of the hill down toward the road and on the way down, there was, the woods was then just full of real young German soldiers. Very young, and one of them yelled out, Strawberry shortcake! Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania! I don't know what he was trying to say, but I thought, well, you son of a gun, you aren't going to get any strawberry shortcake. But anyway they marched us down onto the road and lined us up with the ditch behind us, and there was an SS officer there, and if you're familiar with Germans you know the German language is pretty guttural. It sounds like they're arguing, even when they're talking to each other. Well, there was some argument going on, and I didn't understand a word of German, but I got the impression that the SS officers wanted to kill us right there. A matter of fact, one of them climbed up on the tank, got behind the machine gun, and I thought He's going to do it. But again, I was not really that much scared now. And, but the Germans regular soldiers kept walking up and down the road in front of us and come by. One of them come up and knocked my helmet off, and one of them looked through my shirt pockets, and they found, which I have over there in the other building, a little Army bible, New Testament, and a picture with a girlfriend of mine, my soldier pay book, and a spoon that I used to eat C-rations with, was out of my mess kit. I'd bent the handle over so it would fit in my pocket. And he pulled that out. Wasn't anything he wanted, just threw it in the mud at my feet. And while I was, they were still there, I caught the eye of another German soldier walking by looking us over and I started stomping my foot down there by those things. I wanted those back, and so he come by and he looked down to see what I was doing, and he stopped and picked them all up. He looked, saw the girl's picture and he smiled and stuck them all back in my pocket. Well, finally the regular soldiers just turned around and marched us off, and the old SS officer was still up there hollering behind the machine gun, but they started to march us down the road, up the road. We got out of the woods in the open, our own artillery finally came through, and they started shelling that road, too late too far back and it hit several of us there. The kid standing right next to me, we were actually touching each other we were that close, and we both dove for the ground and when it was over why, he couldn't get up. I said What's the matter? He says I was hit. I says How could you be? I was so close to him I just couldn't contemplate that he got hit. But he's got hit in the leg before we ever hit the ground, so I helped him up and he leaned on me and then there were three good legs, why, they marched us on up the road into the village of Longsdorf and there was a barn there as you first entered the village, and the Germans had used, were using is for an aide station, and as we came up there, why they directed me, pointed into the barns, 'cause they could see I was carrying this kid, and as I went into that barn, I had the most gosh-awful feeling. I can't explain it, 'cause here in the hay laying down there was all these wounded soldiers, Germans, which of course had been done by us, and

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here I was the arch-enemy, but they, I walked in there. They pointed to an empty spot on the hay, and told me, indicated to lay him down there, and so I did and I just said, So long, good luck, you know, and walked back out to the other guys. We went back there I don't know how many times and I've gone up there and that barn is still there, looks just the same exactly. I still have that queasy feeling, looking inside that door of that barn.

Question: Is there, because at that point now you're person to person. I mean there's the Germans and there's the Americans, and you've been captured at this point. Does war stop at that point, or is it still.

Answer: No. It still goes on. You're still defiant, um, and they're still the enemy, and how you're at their mercy. And that is a traumatic feeling that's hard to explain. I mean, here's somebody you were killing, trying to kill, just hours before that, or minutes before that, and now you're at their mercy. And it's a feeling that there's no explanation for it. I don't know how you ever could duplicate it.

Question: And you don't speak their language on top of it.

Answer: No. That was the worst of it. That made things 10 times worse. If you could only knew what they were talking about it would have helped, or if you could express yourself to them it would help, but you couldn't.

Question: 'cause it seems like war has all sorts of different aspects to it. If I were on a Navy ship and I were two miles off the coast shelling. There's not a connection between and where that's going and people, but you're there face-to-face, at first you're through the woods, but now you're face-to-face with them. It's human all of a sudden, versus, but I guess like you said, it does still stay non-enemy, enemy.

Answer: Yeah. You still look at them like they were an evil force.

Question: As you've been talking, you've been talking about going days and nights and all that. How much sleep do you think you got in that time?

Answer: Not very much, and we didn't. See this was the third day. We hadn't even eaten. All I'd had for eating those days prior to getting captured was those chocolate D bars that we carried. That's all I had to eat, and sleep. I spent two nights up there just sittin' on an ammo can, and those nights were long. This was December, and at a high latitude, it got dark before 4:00 in the afternoon, and it didn't get light until almost 9:00. So they were long nights, and yet you didn't sleep. You kind of...I don't know, you kind of, you're half asleep. You kind of lose consciousness a little bit, but you're aware of anything around you. If something moves, you're aware of it, but you're not really asleep. But you do kind of withdraw into yourself as a subconscious or some sort. I don't know what you would explain that 'cause it's not sleep.

Question: But I mean, does it take away tiredness?

Answer: Yes, because you're inactive. You set there and don't move, why...and you're young. You've got lots of vitality.

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Question: 'cause it seems like eventually that also would start to, um, I know I've done a 72-hour edit, well, eventually the mind starts playing tricks on you.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Now you're deprived of sleep, you're deprived of food, and we add fear and anxiety to that, so it must have been just an amazing challenge to the mind.

Answer: It was. About all I can say is it's a good thing you're young. You'd have to be young to be a good soldier.

Question: Do you think about things other than the war when you're in the war? To try to get your mind off, or are you so focused?

Answer: You're quite focused. Uh, on the here and now and the immediate. Right now is the...you live intensely, every moment. You don't have time to dwell on many things, really. Every, your attention is focused on something all the time. It's very intense living.

Question: Do you make associations with... I've heard people have different theories, I didn't make any friends because I knew I'd probably lose them, didn't want to know them, but yet you're here in this life and death situation. Are there, when you think back, are there people that you know names and faces, or is it surreal?

Answer: Not until sometime later, after we had left Longsdorf and they marched us along across the river, up through the other side, kept us overnight at a little farmhouse where they interrogated us, and then they kept us at Bétebuerg for a week, and there we were bombed heavily, and when we left there we were marching on into Germany, and I finally got acquainted with the fellow next to me. He was from my own company, but I hadn't known him. And then we developed almost immediately like a bond because we were both in the same boat. He was about 10 years older than I was and he kind of took me under his wing like a big brother. So, him I can remember, very good. But the others, nobody else.

Question: Do you remember his name?

Answer: Oh, yes. John Fredericks. I still, I finally, we finally met him. Found him here about what was it, 5, 6 years ago, and we've been in contact ever since.

Question: Do you remember what you talked about? You said you're in the same boat.

Answer: Yeah. We talked about the bitter cold, how hungry, and he was from Minnesota and so he was used to bitter cold, but he was cold, and we were being forced to pull an old farm wagon that was loaded with German's bedrolls and packs, and as we changed people pulling it, we walked back and walk back to the end of the line when we got relieved, it was in the dark at night and he stole a blanket off of that wagon. And he tore off a strip of it, 'cause we were worried about the cold, and he told me, Use this for a muffler, and I, Boy, that made a world of difference, cause I was freezing....I only had a field jacket. When we started out when the Battle of the Bulge began I didn't take my overcoat with me because I thought it was only going to be a quick thing. We were just going out for a little thing, and here I was

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with just a field jacket, and I was really freezing! And oh, that was so grateful, and he wrapped the rest of his blanket around under his coat and around himself, and I said, John, you're going to get us shot. He looked at me, Freeze to death, starve to death, shot? He says, what's the difference? I said, Yeah, you got a point there. Gettin' shot might be quicker.

Question: And it sounds like it was this trudging on, and you don't know where you're going.

Answer: Yeah. About the main thing I occupied my mind with every so often along the road would be a little stone with a kilometer marking on it. And I would be converting the kilometers to miles mathematically in my mind and wondering how many more, how many more. But you thought of all kinds of things. Uh, on that long march. I'm probably getting ahead of my story, but, uh, we were in Bétébuerg first before we started this long march into Germany, and also in this town of Wittlich in a penitentiary, but, and we were in Bétébuerg on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and on Christmas Eve, day, afternoon of Christmas Eve, our planes came over and just leveled the town with us in it. And we went through hell the rest of that day, being worked in the town, digging in rubble for people and fighting fires and all this sort of thing, and then the next day, Christmas Day, why they hit us again. And this time I was right IN the town, and I was working in a little wooden building on like KP or something, something to do with their Christmas dinner and I never even got started working before we heard the planes coming again, and I dove under this table, and we could hear the planes coming and I could hear the bombs dropping, and I could hear one coming that sounded just like you were in a subway station, like the train coming right to you on the platform? And it was getting louder and louder like the train was going to arrive, and I never heard it arrive. It was just like somebody switched your television channel. Bang. Just like that. The air was light.. and full of dust.. and I thought, What's wrong. I looked around and the building was gone. And here in this yard between the building I was in and another building, the entire yard was a big bomb crater, and it had come right to the very edge of the building I was in, and I never heard anything, I never saw anything, I never felt anything. It was just like some...like they had switched the channel.

Question: Was that because you were so close to it, or....

Answer: Yeah. I was so close that everything just apparently blew up and over and just took the building with it. I was astounded that we were still alive and had hearing. I don't know how, why. It's a wonder, 'cause there's many a case where guys were close to artillery shells and concussion literally made you bleed from your ears or your nose or something just from the con.... I can't explain it!. There again, maybe somebody was looking after me.

Question: Yeah, because it sounds like you could have been 5 feet one way or the other.

Answer: Yeah, when you think of the oddity of when that bomb fell out of that airplane, the slightest little hangup or could have made that go 5 feet over or anywhere on the ground, and here this thing couldn't be more precisely fit between the buildings without hitting direct hit on a...

Question: You definitely had to have been looked over and...

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Answer: Yeah. Well, there was another kid over on the other side, on the building on the other side of the crater, and I was standing there still kind of stunned wondering what to do, and I heard this GI holler for help. He said, Somebody please help me. And so I ran around the crater and went over there and he was trapped in the wreckage of the building he was in. There was a big beam that fell down on his foot and it just scraped his shoe and his flesh and everything right off his foot, and all he had was this bony thing sticking out for toes, and I got him out, freed him from it, and he was moaning. He says. How am I ever going to go home to my wife looking like this? I says, Don't worry. She'll be so glad to see you get home she won't care whether you have a foot or not. I said, Let's get out of here before the next raid comes in. And so again, I helped a guy with 3 legs and we started out of town. We could see another flight of bombers coming over, and we could hear the bombs coming in, and so I thought, Well, lightening won't strike twice in the same place. We dove down in another big bomb crater, and sure enough, it was safe down there, and when that flight got over, we got out of town before the next ones came. And you know how they are over there in villages, they stop right at one place in this farm field and so we went out across this farm field to a farm house and there was a German ambulance there picking up people, and so we hobbled up to it. We stood there while they were loading wounded civilians, and then they got everybody in, they turned to him and pointed, and I helped him in and away he went. I don't know where he went. Never saw him again either. And about that time, I thought. Everybody disappeared and I was just standing here. Everybody ignored me. I thought I can head west, but then I realized how cold it was and I was still, and hungry, and I thought, I can't survive out in the open, and get back. I had seen all the advancing German army as they had led us into this place. I knew what I had to go back through. I thought, I'll never make it. So I thought I better go back into town and see if, I remember seeing this guy's coat that we'd left hanging in the wreckage, so I went back and found his mackinaw, put it on, over the top of my field jacket, and there were some cookies in this building that I had been in, and I went looking through the wreckage and found some of those. Put a few in my pocket and thought, Now I'm going to just start heading west. And I didn't even get out of town before some German soldier caught me. But then after that, that night, they marched us, and that's when my friend stole the blanket, and they took us to the town of Wittlich which had a penitentiary in it, and they put us all in that penitentiary up in the chapel, and it was by then now there must have been close to 800 the way I remember estimating in this chapel, and all they had was about 5, 5-gallon cans up by the door. That was our bathroom, and every pew and floor was covered. People were, the place was just full. I was up near the front leaning against the wall. I was sitting my back against the wall, and on the floor, and I realized there was a little panel door there, so I leaned forward and pulled the panel door open and looked in there and here was a box of candles for religious services. We pulled those candles out and I passed out candles and we all sat there and chewed candles until our jaw ached, trying to relieve the hunger.

Question: Chewed it like gum.

Answer: Yeah. And, 'cause they only fed us some watery some kind of soup about once a day and there wasn't enough to do anything. And at one time in there, too, I don't know why they took me out of there and put me in a cell, right in the penitentiary. I couldn't imagine why or for what. And after awhile they come and let me out again. It was always a mystery to me. Why and what happened there. I don't know.

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Question: And just you.

Answer: Just me, yeah. And it was a typical penitentiary. About 3 floors, just like rows of cages in there, and it was, it made you believe you're going to live a straight life if you ever get through this. You never going to be locked up in a place like that. But they finally took us out of there and they gave us, uh, one little can of meat and a little bit of bread to be divided between 3 men and that was our food for the next couple of weeks, and they marched us into Germany then from there, day and....well, they marched us all night long and then they'd leave us, spend the day in barn in some village, then they'd march through the night again. 'Cause otherwise, they figured, it was daylight, nothing could move in daylight in Europe 'cause our fighters would be after them. And even then, one moonlit night a spitfire spotted us and strafed us. And. But when we'd walk along here all night long, like I said I'd constantly be converting the mile..... the kilometers into miles, and wondering how much further, how much further, and of course, and the Germans would lie to us all the time. Of, just the next village, just the next village. On and on we'd go. And this is where your mind started thinking of everything you ever knew to occu...keep yourself going. Your mind was just constantly thinking of something. Well, I had remembered everything that people made you memorize when you're kids, and I even remember the 23rd Psalm about uh, Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Well, when I was a kid, this didn't make sense to me. I thought, what's this. What's the valley of death, the shadow, and everything and this must be about as close as I'm ever going to become to be walking in the shadow of death. But this is the way, your mind just kept, like running through over and over, everything you could think of.

Question: One foot in front of the next.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Do you remember what it sound...I mean, was it quiet, was everybody quiet and just in your own thought or was there conversations or sounds?

Answer: No, very little conversation. Everybody was just withdrawn into himself more or less and, we'd already said about everything we could think of, so you just trudged along.

Question: Nobody talked about escape, or...

Answer: No.

Question: You just...

Answer: It was just, you really felt beat because there was no good chance for escape, and it was so cold and you were so hungry, and to tell you how cold and hungry we were, that when we'd stop to urinate in the snow and you'd see that good heat going to waste, and it worried you that you were losing this much heat and nothing to replace it. You got this feeling that pretty soon you're going to urinate and you're going to die, 'cause you're going to lose your last bit of heat. That's how bad it was.

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Question: I mean, just hearing you talk about that I could feel the heat going through my body. So what you said, you. I've got to switch tape here. It just started beeping at me. You doing ok?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Need a break?