

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: And I know there's millions of people that went into the service but I ah, I had the experience of being the first number drawn in the Selective Service in 1940.

Question: Let me do one thing first, if I could just have you give me your name first and last and the correct spelling and I can set my audio levels while you're doing that.

Answer: My name is Henry W. Mooseker, M-O-O-S-E-K-E-R.

Question: And you go by Hank?

Answer: And I go by Hank or Moose, either one.

Question: Or Moose?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Did they start calling you that in the service?

Answer: Yes, no, they started calling me that in grammar school.

Question: Oh, is that right?

Answer: Yeah

Question: So, you started to tell me, um you kind of have an interesting piece...

Answer: Entre' into World War II, yeah.

Question: Tell me how you got into World War II?

Answer: Well, I graduated college as a chemical engineer in 1940, June, and I had the world by the ass because I had a good job and my job was a process control engineer in the pulp and paper industry. And the ah, in September, first week of September they had the Selective Service drawing. And I, that Saturday afternoon I was sleeping in my room and my cohorts (it was a rooming house) came and jocularly told me that my number had been picked -- the first one out of the hat. I thought they were kidding, but they weren't (laughs). So I got into the Army, and it was a small town of Tyrone, Pennsylvania and they ah decided, the Elks decided -- I was a member of the Elks at the time -- decided that we need a party for this man. And my friend said, "We'll get you so drunk that you'll never pass the exam." And they literally did that. In fact, my landlady the next morning said to me, "You know, I don't mind you guys coming in late, but moving trunks around at night is not the thing to do." She didn't know they had carried me up stairs. So, came 7 or 8 o'clock and I went to the bus and got on it and I was still pretty well snockered and I went into the examining room and saw all the different doctors. They first undress you and they had stations and there must have been twenty stations. Finally I got to the last one and the guy shook my hand, I'm wondering what the hell he's shaking my hands for, he says, "Now you're a member of the Army!" (laughs)

Answer: So, I went back home and this little town realized that I was the first soldier to leave this town, so they decided to have a feast and they had another one (laughs) and they celebrated my departure and ah, yeah, went into the service at Fort Belvoir in a heavy vehicles maintenance company and I wasn't there very long. I got to be a corporal real quick because I could type (laughs). And the next thing I knew why, my commanding officer sent me to Officer's Training School. And I was in Southern Virginia at OCS and I was there for two

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

months and I was looking forward to getting my officer's bar and I get a letter from the Secretary of War. The Secretary of War writes to me and says, "Dear so and so, We need you more out of the Army than we need you in the Army, so if you take this letter to your commanding officer, he'll give you an honorable discharge. So I thought -- I was very armored of my girlfriend and I wanted to get married in a hurry and she was willing, so I accept, I went, took it to the commanding officer and he looked at it and said, "You don't mind if I make sure this, you know, is real?" Two days later he comes and says, "It's real -- here's your discharge. You come down here and I got it." So I went down there and thought, well this is goodbye to the Army. So I promptly, a month or so later, I got married and nine months later we had a baby (laughs) and, I thought I had the world by the, I had good, a fairly good job I thought. And um, since they wanted me out of the Army I thought this is good. But what I didn't realize was that early, very early in 1944 I got a letter, you know that says report to active duty. I thought, what the hell are they talking about? But then I realized I had been discharged to the reserves so they still had a string on me.

Answer: So I reported to Indian Town Gap, by the way I had to bundle up my family and send 'em to New York where my parents lived. Do something with my furniture which wasn't very much and ah, report to Indian Town Gap. When I got there I reported to the sergeant and I said the last time I was in there they were training me to be a logistics officer. And although it was mentally challenging it was boring as all hell (laughs). And he said, I said "I'm going in the Army this time I want to be somewhere's the action is." He says, "Have no fear we just got the place for you." I said "What's that?" He says "The infantry." (laughs) So I went, took basic training again and found myself in the, as a replacement in the 87th division, in ah, at Metz, France, this is like very early December of 1945. And um, General Patton, I'd been stopped there because he didn't have enough gas but he was using infantry to try to break through the Germans. And the Saar was a vicious, vicious battle, it went on and on and on. And the ah, yeah the first ah, experience I re-, you know, you have a trip across France, you go to the replacement depot, and it's cold, there's snow on the ground. And um, they finally put you in a truck and take you up to the, what they call the below the military crest of the hill 'cause the Germans can't see the trucks there. So you get out and then you walk to the front. So I walked to the front and I got there and I saw these unusually looking characters in these holes in the ground and I said ah, yeah, sergeant said "Who are you?" Gave me his name and what not. He says "You're lucky." I said "Why." He said "Somebody already dug your hole." I said "Where is he." He says "He ain't here anymore." (laughs)

Answer: So I got in the hole and ah, and about 10 minutes later I hear a shot and I went, what the hell is going on? And the guy in the hole next to me shot himself in the foot so he could get out. It was bitterly cold and the ah, they had been shelled mercilessly and they had suffered quite a few casualties. And as a replacement I became, as it was standard procedure, the replacement always took the place of the first point. Which in an infantry squad is there's two men out front trying to find out where the hell the Germans are. And then the squad leader. And then after him the BAR man with his assistant. And then the rest of the squad and then back of that is usually the assistant squad leader making sure everybody's moving up. And ah, I got appointed first point right out of the crack (laughs), so we said we're going to take the next town, and we did, we did take the next town which was Niederglabach, which was just over the German border in the Saar. And um, there wasn't much resistance there really, the Germans had just, it was down, they wanted high plateau. We were there for a day or two, no, and we got an order to sit tight.

Answer: And then the next order we got was to report back, back to the, I can't remember the name of the town, but there we were to board our ah, trucks that we were going to the Battle of the Bulge. And ah, I, if you have seen the, the George C. Patton, General Patton, excuse me George C. Scott's portrayal of ah, Patton, you know he ah, he

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

stands up and says he'll move his Army in 125 miles in three days. Eisenhower says that's impossible. He says, I'll do it. And many people have wondered how he did it. What he did, was to take every vehicle in the Army, whether it had wheels or had treads or anything, it would run, he would load it with infantrymen and soldiers, even artillery caissons were loaded, so that this, well group would advance about 25 miles, stop and all the men would get off and start marching toward Belgium. These vehicles would turn around and they'd all reload and this hop, skipping and jumping would go on until we got to ah, to Belgium. We got to Libramont in ah, in less than three days, yeah. And ah the food wasn't all that great (laughs). And the ah, I can remember trying to sleep on the truck, you know 25 miles on a truck was wonderful, and ah I woke up and this muzzle, this M1, was looking right at my, and I poked the guy and I said "God damn it get that piece out of my snoot." He said "Aw shut up it isn't loaded see," so he bent over and he pulled the trigger and the round went right up through the canvas (laughs).

Question: Did ah, as an infantryman did you have to carry um, everything that was yours?

Answer: Everything that was ours we had to carry yeah. But we didn't carry much in to the battle. Generally in a battle ah, you knew you were going into a battle because they would dole out the bandoleers of ammunition and usually you got five bandoleers of ammunition, you also had an ammunition belt across which also carried your canteen, your entrenching tool, your bayonet ah, oh and the first aid pack, most of us tried to get two because, you know they were important. And ah, in the beginning they was light packs which was where your entrenching tool and your raincoat fit in there, but that got to be too much of a hindrance and that was thrown aside and you carried your entrenching tool on your, on your belt. In the mid winter you were given um, your OD, old great coat, and a helmet and a wool liner which was ah, yeah, you were glad to get 'em. And the um, but it got so bitterly cold in the Battle of the Bulge that ah, all of that didn't help much because you.. got frostbitten toes uh, many of men got trench foot which was ah, the toes would start to turn blue and then black. And ah, the um, medic was the sole judge of whether or not you were evacuable or not. In other words he'd look at your feet and if they were bad enough he'd evacuate you, and if they weren't bad enough you stayed there. But he ah, this went on for a while and then we got the order that trench foot was no longer evacuable. It meant that men that could hardly walk still had to fight. And they ah, it's almost like men working on.. walking on stumps because their feet are frozen. You know they're yeah, and they're still, ah yeah.

Question: Wow.

Question: Did, did um, one person I had talked to and I hadn't thought about this at all, but um, your uniform, you know, I think I get up in the morning and put on clean clothes, well how...

Answer: I didn't change underwear for six weeks. And it was ah, you know, in order to try to prevent getting trench foot I, we had usually had two or three pairs of socks. And if you were in your foxhole you would take off your wet socks and put them inside, against your belly, against the naked skin so that they would dry and you'd put the dry pair on your feet. And this would go on maybe once or twice a day. Um there were occasions where you had to ford small streams, and our footwear was totally inadequate for those winter conditions. Uh, we finally got what they called ah, packs, you know, was good for snow and sleet and stuff like that but ah, until that time we just had to leather boots, that was it. The Germans weren't much better off. They had leather boots with hob nails on 'em.

Answer: And ah, I can still remember the first prisoner I took. We got to the Our River, we had some fierce battles in between ok, and ah on the, from the 23rd of December to the

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

7th of January was pretty much continual battle, with replacements coming in to take the place of the guys that were hit or trench foot or we also had some fevers because in that type of atmosphere there was lots of pneumonia, that kind of stuff. And the ah, it got.. it got so that you didn't even want to remember the guys names because they were coming and going so fast. And the ah, the worst battle we went through that I remember was the, what they called the Battle of (The height de tel-lay Phonetic), which was a, a height, the Germans had gone towards Antwerp and Bastogne was here, and we were coming up this way trying to free Bastogne. But the Germans knew that all our troops over here had, they had this supply line so they defended that, well ferociously. And they um, at the Battle of(tell-lay Phonetic) we had, there were tanks literally in front of us and both sides of us, German tanks. And they ah, beat the hell out of us, you know. Out of 900 men, and a battalion of infantry is usually about a thousand then when it's fully strength, when we left the Saar we still didn't have the replacements that we needed so there was about 900, of that 900 that went into the Battle of the Bulge, on January the 7th we were sent back for what they for what they call R&R and ah, there were 160 men left of the 900.

Question: Wow.

Answer: They have, I can't describe how low the morale of the troops was at that point. And ah, a guy came in he said, he mounted a hill and he had a public address system up there, he walked through all our troops and he said ah, "I'm the, I'm your new battalion commander," and he said "my name is Colonel Cobb, and I want you, I want you to call me Colonel," and he says "I'm going to give the best I know how, and I expect you to do the same." And then he said ah, you know most of the officers and noncoms deliberately covered their emblems of rank because the Germans were good at picking off the ones that were... so ah, he got on this hill with the public address system and he said "My name is Colonel Cobb and I wear a star on my helmet" and he said "I got eagles on my shoulders" and he says ah "I want to know.. the Germans that I'm coming." (laughs) And he was the ah, you can't imagine the courage of this man. And one of the things he, after the war he told us, he said, I asked him why were you, our battalion commander was relieved, he took over, I said "why did were you, was he relieved?" He said "Well, he had too many casualties and he didn't take many objectives." And ah, we wondered well what the hell is this guy gonna do. One of the first things he did, instead of attacking at dawn we went in at two o'clock in the morning. The Germans couldn't see us, we couldn't see the Germans but we sure beat the hell out of 'em (laughs). And in, I guess, it's also the time of day that most soldiers are as tired as possible and he knew that. So we took all our objectives and our casualties were much, much less.

Question: Wow.

Answer: And then we ah, yeah from there we ah, I guess at one point we relieved the Airborne, the 17th Airborne at (Bourg-roy-land Phonetic), and we fought and went through St. Vith. We finally got to the German border, Losheim, it's called Losheim Graben, it's a small agrarian town on the corner of the border of Belgium and Germany in the Ardennes, the last of what they call the, ah, I can't remember what the Germans call it now, but anyhow it's ah, again the German border and there's the beginning of the Siegfried line, the dragon teeth, they're all along. And we're ah, I could speak German. My parents were born in Holland but my mother had gone to school in German and growing up 'til she was 14 in Germany so she was very fluent in German and had friends that was a sponsor for a German family that came over and lived with our house. So the first language I learned was Dutch the second language was German and the third language was English (laughs). So knowing German and as soon as the powers that be knew that I knew German I had the outpost duty and the, it wasn't all that bad ah, because I can remember one night on, the Germans call it the Pfalz we call the Palatinate which is a stretch of ah, of ah German territory inside of the border that goes down

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

into the Moselle and Rhine and is sort of ah, and ah, I was at outpost duty in 100 yards in front of the company out in the hole and ah, all of a sudden, you're supposed to call in every hour and they're supposed to call you and see whether you're, you're still awake or not. And ah, the phone rings, and I pick up the phone and this guy starts talking to me in German so I answer him in German. And my company commander gets on the line and he said "What in the hell, God damn it what the hell is going on!" (laughs) I said "There's a couple Germans on the line." He says "You're full of shit." I says "No I'm not" (laughs). And uh, I.. shut up and the German said to me "We know exactly where you are" and I said to the German "That's good I'll be waiting for you." (laughs) And I never saw 'em that night but I never slept a wink that night. 'Cause I could, yeah, I could follow the wire just like they could you know (laughs).

Question: So they had captured one of the...

Answer: All they did was, no, clip into the line. You know, that's it.

Question: Wow.

Answer: And they ah, yeah. Then we ah, the 8th armor preceded us. We got a break through the Siegfried line that was pure luck really, but for a good week I was at outpost in front of the Siegfried line and the, our artillery, we had, we had much more artillery than the Germans had and ah, I suppose the Germans considered wasteful because we just (laughs), and the ah, watching the pillboxes on the Siegfried line, they would, the artillery would mark the target with a phosphorus shell and then I'd just watch it all day long, they'd pound the (laughs), all day long, you know just pound the hell out of it. Well anyhow we got through the Siegfried line and then the Germans had used that as sort of a stop gap but then they had retreated to the Rhine and the Moselle, that was natural barriers. And the 8th armor went down the Palatinate or the Pfalz as the Germans called it, and ah, we ah, got to the Moselle, the tanks are in town. Their motors are off and everything's quiet. We got there at about ten o'clock at night and we figured well they put us in buildings, you know German buildings, this is great. Two o'clock in the morning up out of bed (laughs), they got the boats down in the river and we cross the Moselle and we fight there. This is where the colonel gets a distinguished service cross because he personally, captures about 14 Germans by himself (laughs). He was a, he was a dead, he was very quick with his ah carbine, he could shoot and hit what he was shooting at in a matter of seconds. But anyhow we crossed the Moselle and there, yeah, we had drunken engineers that paddled the boat across you know.

Answer: We got, and they had fish traps in the Moselle. Are you familiar with fish traps? they are venturi-type brick walls inside the river, just below the level, increase the velocity at that point and they put, that's where they try to catch the fish, with nets. And we hit one of these places, pitch dark, two o'clock in the morning, and the god damn boat starts to go around (laughs) in an eddy. And these drunken engineers, I thought Jesus, these bastards are gonna hear us on the other side. So I finally get on the other side, and I, we take off and I find a German in his foxhole fast asleep. And I thought, oh you bastard I could've killed you right now (laughs). And I didn't, so I took his rifle, rapped him on the head and said get out, raus te mit. So he gets up, and of course he doesn't want to get shot and all, he's coming out and all that shit, and he says, I said "Turn around." So he turns around. The Germans always had a mess kit on their back, long tapered thing, was well insulated, and I was hungry as hell (laughs), so I took this from him and he had wurst and potatoes and some I don't know, saurer kraut or something in there, and I ate the whole damn business (laughs). He was my first prisoner, he got to be a hungry one.

Answer: Joined the troops and yeah, it was further to my right there was quite a bit of action. That's where the colonel was, that's where he took 21 or 15 or 16 German prisoners.

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

And um, then we regrouped and then we were going to take Rheins. And we, the Germans were excellent in establishing road blocks and strong points to prevent you from going further and it was their standard procedure, they always left one or two men or three men behind with plenty of ammunition and machine gun and, that was you know, had the field of fires all set. And we ran into this and we outflanked them and we finally got the, and some Germans gave up but many of them just, just stayed there until they were dead, you know. Especially the SS, and these were SS troops. And they were, yeah, so. But it was dark then, and we were supposed to take the town of Rhens which is right on the Rhine River, it overlooks the Rhine. And ah, the colonel said we're going to stop here tonight, it was dark by this time, and his superior said you gotta move in and take Rhens. He, and I heard him talk on the phone, he said, "If you want to take these, we hadn't slept for a day and a half," he said "if you want to take these tired soldiers" he says "they're not able to fight anymore" he says "just send somebody else (laughs) 'cause I ain't gonna do it." (laughs) And they, we stayed there that night and the next morning we took the town, we took Rhens. And it was a pretty good fire fight. We lost some men. We lost two men that night with friendly fire. And he was the squad leader and I had become the assistant squad leader so now I'm squad leader.

Answer: And I ah, we take Rhens and my squad takes a bottling works, which is rather unusual because they were, it was a spring there, they were bottling that, but they were also making some kind of a pop, it was almost like Coca Col

Answer: And they had beet sugar and what not and ah, but what I was surprised of is what there was, Russian women had been imprisoned there and they had to run this factory, had to do the work and what not. And they were let out on Fridays and Saturdays to clean the ah, head man's house and then they'd come back. And anyhow, I busted in there and this German woman.. this Russian woman looked at me and she the first thing she says is can you speak German, oh, no, can you speak Russian, I says "Hell no." (laughs) "Can you speak German?" I said "yeah" so I spoke German to her. She looked at me, she says "You need a shave!" And I had a three day growth (laughs). And ah, she said "Sit down here, I'll give you a shave." So I put my rifle down over here I thought, Jesus this is nice (laughs), put my rifle down, sat down. And she lathered me all up and soon she comes out with a great big straight razor. I thought holy shit, it'll cut my throat (laughs). So she shaved me and did it deftly, she was... And then I said "Well you must know where everything here is in this town." And she said "Oh yeah we know because we gotta clean these important people's houses." So I said "We need some good stuff to eat and wine." So she got us a demijohn of Moselle wine (laughs). So ah, we were, we sat in that position, but like usual if there's any women involved they take the soldiers right away quick (laughs).

Answer: So we were there, they were gone and we were getting ready to cross the Rhine. We sat there for about, five or six days and then we did cross the Rhine and it was one hell of a battle I'll tell you it was, yeah. I lost, hm?

Question: What was that like I mean, from your viewpoint, going into battle what's happening with you as you go in? What do you, what's your job? What do you see?

Answer: What do you feel? Each day as an infantryman you see men wounded, some of them horribly wounded, you see some that are just, they got the million dollar wound, you know, the ones with the calf and it's just ah, and you're always praying that if you get hit, you get a million dollar wound. It's standard procedure you know. It's ah, and the other thing is that each day you think maybe this is gonna be my last. And ah, it's ah, you get a rough idea of the kind of resistance you're gonna get by the amount of bandoleers they give you. And ah, yeah I can remember on one occasion they gave us nine bandoleers. Now a bandoleers, has it 10 clips of eight rounds a piece. And ah, that was one of the other things our commander told

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

us he said one of the reasons, the units weren't expending their ammunition like they should be, and he drummed it into us that we had to shoot as all hell and that's what we did. We just laid down fire you couldn't believe and it was the ah, that's the way you win wars really. And I think Powell today has said "If you're gonna do it, do it with ultimate force because it's the only way to go."

Answer: And ah, we crossed.. that night, you know you know the Germans are on the other side and C company preceded us. Order of battle was each infantry battalion has four companies, A, B, C, and D, D is the weapon company, the heavy weapons. These three are riflemen, each of those companies, or, yeah companies have weapons platoon, but the heavy weapons, which are the 88 millimeter mortars and the heavy machine guns, they're in D company. Well C company preceded us across the Rhine and as soon as the boats hit the water these 20 millimeter ah, German, they were really anti aircraft guns, were shooting these boats up you can't believe. And ah, there was no thought of not getting in the boat even though you saw the boats get blown to hell on the way across. And ah, I guess when I talked to Colonel Cobb he said the one thing that struck me was that everybody had a look of determination on them, they were gonna do this no matter what. And they did. They got to the other side and luckily our boat was not hit. And I lost one man in the brush someplace. And I ah, came to

Answer: . a raised, it was really a railroad track that had an embankment, and ah, it was pitch black, it was two or three o'clock in the morning by now, and the tracers, the German machine gun bullets were just coming over the top of that embankment. And if you see a tracer, that's one bullet but there's five in between that you don't see ok. But these tracers are coming and you know there's this deadly fire going. And they have the ah, what they call, they've sighted in so they know where they're shooting. And ah, I spread the squad, by this time I'm squad leader, so I spread the squad across the, and I wonder what the hell are we gonna do now. Pretty soon I hear a voice in the background says "You bastards better get up over that railroad embankment and get that machine gun or I'm gonna start shooting you myself!" And I thought well you son of a bitch. So I turned around, I have my piece ready, too. And I hear this quiet voice in the background, "Captain Robinson, give me your piece, you're under arrest." He said "Now you go back to the bank on the river and you get across no matter how you are, how you can, but you're under arrest, report to headquarters." He had to back without weapons and what not. And then the colonel talked to me, and he said "Sergeant," he said "you know what you have to do." I said "yes." He said "Go do it." And that was it. And then we went along the bank, we went right, 'cause you never go to direct fire, you go around 'em. So we went around, we got this, it was almost like a ravine, and we crawled up that high side of the ravine, half way up there was a 20 millimeter gun in placement, German, and it was shooting like crazy. So we hot lobbed grenades down, shot down, and then they started shooting back and we got the hell out of there. (laughs)

Answer: That time a guy comes, I see this fellow with a machine gun and he, well you've heard of Rambo well this, he must've been the first one, because he had, he had a strap over his shoulder and he had his machine gun like this, and he had the you know, the ah, cartridge belt, he's got it slung over this shoulder. And he says to me, he said, I said "Who are you?" He says "I'm from C company." I said "Where's your squad?" He says, "I don't know where the hell they are." (laughs) He says "Do you mind if I join you?" I said "Hell no!" (laughs) This is real good. So we went up the hill. And his, you couldn't imagine the accuracy of his fire it was absolutely unbelievable. We killed three Germans on the way up and I can remember one of 'em shot my point.. dead. And his buddy he, right after that, he jumped out of the hole and said "Cameraden" you know, and his buddy, he wouldn't.. wouldn't take that, he killed him at this point. Anyhow, we killed a few, one or two more Germans, and we took their holes at the top of the hill. And this, trouble the ah, they had a machine gun hole which is a double hole

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

with a space in the middle for the machine gun, so I put the BAR man there, which is a man and his assistant and the only trouble is it's was facing the wrong way but that didn't bother us. We spread the squad out and then we suffered ah, four very serious counter attacks, by ah, well we didn't realize was that not too far from this particular high point in the Rhine there was a, not an OCS, but a cadre of training noncoms for the German army. These are pretty elite troops and I can remember after we had taken the heights we figured we had it made, boy I told the boys to get it, get it safe as possible. I see this German coming towards me in green field uniform. And I thought he's gonna surrender, he's about oh, I'd say 150 yards away from me in the brush and I can see 'em. So I'm thinking he's just walking at us. I thought, that son of a, he must gonna surrender, you know. All of a sudden he raises his arm like this, and he says in German, I can't remember the number but so many meters, so many clicks left and I knew goddamn well what that meant. And I said "Boys get down!" And then the mortars start coming in. He was the ah, you know, we were counter attacked four times that night, and there were ah, one, two, three men, two men killed in my squad, one earlier had been killed on the way up.

Answer: And ah, we, our own planes, tried to strafe the attacking plane, ah Germans, and got so close to us, that their strafing fire was literally hitting our, our front line. And I can remember seeing a tree, about oh four and a half inches in diameter, literally being cut off by these 50 millimeter machine guns that ah. And then I can remember one brave son of a bitch, you know they have these recognition panels that would tell the Air Force where the hell we were, and he ran out in the field and threw it out there (laughs), while all this was going on. And ah, then it stopped. And then the artillery started coming in. The Germans didn't give up they just kept coming. And it was ah, yeah. So we, after the battle was over we finally got tanks across, you know, be that as it may. We ah, yeah, I went back to the aid station to see if the one guy was still living and he wasn't so ah, he ah. And during this battle there's two Air Corps men without weapons and how they got there I don't know. And walking along and ah, the colonel remembers asking them "Who are you guys?" And they says "We're from the Air Force." You know they (laughs), and they didn't have, they had ah pistols or something, and he said well, and they were picking up rifles wiping the brains and the blood off of 'em. And he said "Where you going?" And he said, "We're gonna fight." (laughs) And so they joined us and they were in the line with us and um, yeah. Anyhow our unit got a presidential citation for the action we took and we resisted and so on.

Answer: And I can remember the colonel getting everybody together and addressing the troops. And he let out, he read all the list the men that had been killed in the action. And then he ah, he said "Each one of you know" he said "almost all of you did what you were supposed to do, and some of you didn't." And he said "All of you who did know that you did it and all of you who didn't know it, too." And then we ah, regrouped and then we went across Germany lot of tanks pretty much. And the...

Question: Is it chaos?

Answer: In battle it's total chaos.

Question: I mean, how do you know, 'cause you talk about going in at two o'clock in the morning, I assume it's not like bright out.

Answer: No the darker the better, yeah.

Question: How do you know who you're shooting, it's not your guy, you've got people bringing artillery in from somewhere...

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: How do you know who's where, or do you?

Answer: Well yeah (laughs). There's an interesting thing that.. in a fire fight, you can tell whether the bullets are coming at you or not. When they go by your face they make a snap like that. And the louder of that snap, the closer the bullet is to you. And ah, you go by that, you're right, you make yourself as, you know, the only reason I'm here is I was faster at hitting the ground than anybody I know. And I also could find cover, I was always looking for cover. Whether it was a stone a tree it didn't make any difference what, but this is what you do, yeah. In the ah, the idea is to throw as much fire back as they're throwing at you if not more.

Question: But I mean, you talked about C company going in before you...

Answer: Yeah.

Question: The Germans are in there and now there's this hodge podge.

Answer: Yeah but, you know, an American is an American (laughs).

Question: Can you, if it's dark and...

Answer: Oh yeah but you always talk, you'd know.

Question: So there is enough communication that you, ok.

Answer: Oh yeah, communication.

Question: That's what I was wondering is how you, 'cause I just imagine it loud and...

Answer: Oh yeah, there's always communication in the squad. And you know you go through this whole liturgy of ah, night signals you know, and there's also day signals, you know, arm, this means (gestures) you come running here, circle at this point, there's all kinds of hand commands that you use in the daytime. And at night it's whispers really.

Question: What's it sound like? I've never thought about that, to be in the midst of all of that. Can you describe what?

Answer: Well it's sheer terror that's for sure. And it's ah, you know, you get to recognize certain aspects of ah, fire. For instance, um the most deadly weapon the Germans had was an 88 because its muzzle velocity was faster than sound. So you didn't know the shell was coming until it burst within you, within you, you know. And then you heard the report and you knew it was an 88. But all the other artillery you always heard a whir before it came in. So you, yeah, you made as much cover as you could. And you always had your entrenching tool and you always used it. It was more important than your rifle most of the time. That night on the Rhine I fired so many rounds through my M1 that when I looked down the barrel there was a groove around the air, what they called a gas port which is the mechanism that makes it automatic. So I just threw that rifle away and picked up another one 'cause there were always extra rifles around. But the chaos in battle is ah, yeah you don't know what, all you know is that direction is where you're supposed to go and it's ah. Yeah, I guess one of the most frightening things is the shriek or the scream of somebody wounded. 'Cause that's, that's very real. The medics are ah, they were outstanding. We had one called Kentuck and that's

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

the only, only, and if, that's what you would hear, if somebody got hit, you'd hear the scream and then you'd hear medic, you know. And then he would go where ever he was, where the person was hit and try to do something for them.

Answer: I can remember one fire fight, we got close enough there was a German laying next to me and he was severely wounded in his belly and ah, he was screaming and hollering it was awful really. So I called for the medic and he came and I said "Can you do something for this poor son of a bitch because..." He said "I'll take care of him." So he got the morphine out and he put him to bed. He could, no way the guy was gonna live that's for sure. So he put him to sleep peacefully. But the medics were ah, unbelievable really. They had no weapons, they had this big red cross here, on their helmets, on fours sides. And most of the time the Germans, you know, didn't shoot them but sometimes they did. And of course, artillery is ah, again there's nothing, in severe combat there's no, there's terror, but there's also ah, complete chaos. You know that that's the direction you have to go, and what you have to do but um, you're not quite sure whether Joe is there, or he isn't there, or whether he got hit, you know. Usually you know by who, when somebody got hit, you know, you know who it is.

Question: Do you ah, I don't know if this is a good analogy, I don't know, they talk about athletes, basketball players being able to slow the world down as they're playing basketball.

Answer: Oh, oh yeah.

Question: Is war the same?

Answer: It's yeah, I guess it is a little bit like that because you're ah, you don't have time to think. It's almost all reaction. And oh, one of the things that always troubled me when we got new replacements was that, they were always bewildered pretty much, and wanted to know. And the biggest mistake you can make as an infantryman is to try and get up and see what the hell's going on. You gotta crawl, you gotta, you know, you gotta stay as low as you can. But these new replacements they couldn't resist the temptation to go look up, that's a mistake, yeah.

Question: Did, how did you ah, it seems like, I mean this is so foreign to me, but it seems like you really have to find a different part of your mind...

Answer: Yes.

Question: ...to be able to separate from, these are real people that are dying around you and...

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Can you describe at all what your mind does?

Answer: Yes. You don't become too friendly with new people. You have your friends, sure, but the new ones ah, their names, and you assign 'em duties. You do your job but ah, you don't get too close, no. It's ah, and the fear, you know, the fear is absolutely stark it's ah, I can remember in the battle when we crossed the Rhine of making a vow to God, and you do those kind of things for sure.

Question: How old were you, when you went in?

Answer: Well (laughs), I was 24 when I was overseas.

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

Question: So you were an old man?

Answer: I was an old man in the squad, yeah.

Question: Wow, hah.

Answer: Most of 'em were 18, 19 you know. One of the unusual things about our division was the 87th didn't go into the line until early December of '45. But they experienced pretty heavy casualties. But the division was made up of mostly ASTP men which was the Army Special Training Program. And these were bright men who were assigned to colleges to learn either engineering, for the Engineering Corp or to become flyers or, and there were thousands of 'em. In this division was mostly, almost all the riflemen were ASTP men. They were bright they were smart and ah, yeah, I think that's why we were successful, because they were smart (laughs). They, they were trained, good soldiers but they also, you know, they had their smarts about 'em. Which is ah, you always need 'em always. You need, yeah.

Question: What was the areas that you were fighting in? What was the geography like? I mean, were you in cities or forests or...

Answer: In the Battle of the Bulge, in the Saar it was generally a hilly country with wooded areas and little towns interspersed among these agrarian sort of places. In the Ardennes, and the reason they're the Ardennes are the pine trees. And there are farms there and ah, rolling country again, but ah. Little stone houses that housed these Belgians that were tilling these soils, these farms. And ah, they'd taken a tremendous battle, beating because the Germans went through there in 1940. They went, they went back through, and then they came back through in the Bulge and then we came back, so four times these poor bastards had us, you know. And I noted one thing about the civilians, that you know, they knew whoever had the gun was boss. It was so obvious it was you know. And who could blame 'em. They had their cellars of course and that's where they'd go into. And that's, that's another thing as infantrymen we got pretty good at scrounging. Because we didn't get enough to eat really. You knew, when you were moving all the time, sleeping very little ah, we got, incidentally they gave us a carton of cigarettes every week. They were free and ah, we used 'em all up because we thought it would help us keep warm I guess I don't know.

Answer: But anyhow they ah, we'd take a little town or something and we'd, first thing we'd do is go through the houses and look for something to eat. And these houses always had a can of fat, okay. And little else. You could go in the root cellar and find, I can remember finding brussel sprouts and ah, carrots and that kind of stuff, and potatoes. And I'd take this grease and put it in my ah, mess kit, put it over my candle in my foxhole, heat it up, try to fry the potatoes, sliced potatoes, and put the brussel sprouts in them and eat it. Because K rations are, you know they're supposed to be ah, sufficient but they're not believe me, you just never get enough to eat. And I gotta tell you a little funny story. I ah, we all had talisman, we had good luck, you know the Catholics wore their, their charm, but mine was a peculiar one. I figured that as long as I didn't run out of toilet paper I wouldn't get hit (laughs). And you can't imagine how difficult it is to find toilet paper in the, in Belgium or Saar or where ever (laughs). And when I found it I would hoard it and we already had taken everything out of our gas masks and we'd stuff whatever we could carry in our gas masks. That was, we didn't carry packs anymore, all we had was a rifle, this gas mask was full of our personal things like a toothbrush which we used very seldom (laughs), and we had, they issued condoms to us you know (laughs). And you wonder what the hell... They were very useful. We used 'em to keep our matches dry. We'd, you know, tie a knot in it and it couldn't get wet (laughs). We used 'em to put on the end of our rifle to keep the snow and the ice

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

wouldn't go in there, because that was dangerous when that happened. So ah, yeah that was the good uses of the condoms. That's the only way I used one (laughs).

Question: So did you get the condoms with your K rations or how did they give you...

Answer: Yeah, yeah. They came with your cigarettes and your ah...

Question: So did someone think you had a lot of free time out there in the war? (laughs)

Answer: The Army's very concerned about getting sick, you know. That's one thing they don't want to have happen to you.

Question: Now did you ever have any of that, I heard people talking about camouflage toilet paper.

Answer: Oh yeah, that yeah.

Question: That the ink didn't stay on it very well.

Answer: That's true, that's true (laughs).

Question: I heard you had people called the green asses.

Answer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Answer: Yeah, on our drive through Germany. You hear commanding officers talk about being pinched out, well we had so many forces in Germany that they would go, they'd all go forward at one time. And some of 'em would join ahead of you so you were pinched out, you know. And ah, we were on the extreme left flank of Patton's 3rd Army, going across Germany. And the ah, a recon outfit from the first Army beat us into Buchenwald by a day, ok. But we went into Buchenwald, and it, you couldn't believe it, it's absolutely unbelievable what they had done to people. The ah, whoever was living was a skeleton the ah, they're sleeping quarters were literally shelves that were about so far apart that went from the ground up to the ceiling and it was about this high. And they would, they had two feet, they were just shoved in there. It was a pile of cadavers, naked cadavers on one side, the furnaces were still hot, they hadn't that time to put them in there yet and I still have some pictures of the furnace. And they had the steel bars that they'd put this trundle on and the corpse and they shoved it in then turned on the gas burn up the, yeah. And anyhow, you couldn't believe, oh that's the other thing they did first. They got all the people from the town which was about four miles away. They said they didn't know it was there, bullshit. And they had these people come into the ah, camp, to pick up the cadavers, and bury them and clean up the place. And our command was don't give these inmates any food because, and the first day or so they did, and it literally killed them because they're stomach wouldn't accept the food that they were given. But then the medics took over again and they started feeding them in their veins and ah yeah, they saved a hell of a lot of people.

Answer: And then we went on across Germany, and I can remember the um, we were I guess is Thuringerwald which is a forest and there's a road through it, and my squad was sent to make sure there was no, no um Germans on the left side of the road, it was all wooded. Because they could sit there with a panzer Faust and the tank would come up, and they'd just blow the tank tread off or hit the tank. And the ah, we were cleaning the woods, we came to this, about 100 yards of open country and I said I guess we gotta cross this because there's more woods down the road and I looked and I said ok guys we're going to cross this and we're

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

gonna cross it as fast as we can and when we get to the other side we're gonna get down and the... And we run across that and I looked on both sides and every guy was you know, nobody stopped, nobody said, maybe we oughtn't do that, they did it (laughs). And I thought, my God these are Americans you know they're different. Anyhow we finally got to where a machine gun stopped us, ok. And this guy, another SS dumb son of a bitch, he ah, and they're shooting at us pretty good we're laying down a field of fire against 'em. Then pretty soon I hear this tank coming up the road and now it occurred to me that the reason they sent this through was so that the tank could come along, so he wouldn't get hit. And the tank came up to 'em and this machine gunner turns, this German machine gunner, turns his machine gun onto the tank and starts shooting at the tank. And the tank, you know, he puts a round into the, this is a road block, trees all over and the machine gun in the middle you know. And ah, he puts a round in and the dumb machine gunner he's gonna say well I'm still here, you didn't hit me, so he starts shooting again. The second round he just blows the whole goddamned thing apart (laughs). No more machine gun, no more machine gunner, nothing, he's all gone. We go back and I have ah, hurt a little bit on my calf, and I go back to the company and they look at me and say you better go to first aid camp. So I go to the first aid tent, the first aid station, and they wrapped me up and say, I walk out the door, and they say you just got a purple heart. I said what! (laughs) They said yeah. So I got a purple heart.

Answer: So we went on into Czechoslovakia

Answer: Finally. Klingenthal was the headquarters of our battalion which was on the border and there was a little town in Czechoslovakia and somehow I got told that, to take my squad down to see if there was anything in that town. So I took the squad down, and I suppose there was nine, ten houses, as many barns, it was a small, agrarian kind of a dorp, and ah, we went from house to house and we found all the women, we found middle aged women, we found nice pretty women, young women, we found old men, that's all we found. We couldn't find any German soldiers anywheres you know. So we went back and called back to the headquarters said there's nobody, no Germans here. But they were afraid that there were Germans around and evidently there were, but we didn't know that. They, I got the order, they said now you take your squad and you go back on the hill in your foxholes, and get in your foxholes and don't go out at night. And ah we had seen these pretty girls in town and ah, Widden, I don't know whether I should say this or not but he was always chasing tail, all right? And ah, I made sure all the men were in their holes and it was about midnight and I said "Now you've heard the orders, you stay in your holes tonight and don't go out of the holes." And we figured the war's over, this is like May 6th, the war ends on May 8th. And we know the damn thing's almost over, you know. I don't know how many thousands of Germans had quit, you know, we captured and what not. So two-thirty in the morning I hear this burp gun go off and I think, oh shit. I knew exactly what happened. And I looked, checked the holes, and this guy's gone. So I, we have a telephone, we call back and tell them what happened, they said "Well at dawn you go down there and see what's happening." So at dawn we go down and there he is and he's shot up with a burp gun which is a Schmeisser hand machine pistol, and he's deader than a mackerel. And ah, I called back and tell 'em what I found and then the ah, I get an order, they said "Go back to your foxholes and a runner will come up to you with orders. So I ah, go back to the foxholes and we were there and pretty soon the runner comes up, two runners come up, and they were all loaded with phosphorus grenades, and he hands each of us two of 'em. By now we've got about 10 men in the squad so this is about 20 phosphorus grenades. And the order is go into town and burn it down. And I'm a little, you know this bothers me but after all one of my guys is dead there, and these bastards got to learn a lesson. So we go down and we chase all the women and children out of their houses and throw the phosphorus grenades into the houses. It's amazing how those things, how a house goes up in flames. And we burned it down, house down. My BAR man, Merle Coke, at that time was, he's a, was a farmer I guess, he ah, they supposed to have the

Henry Mooseker

Tape 1 of 2

cattle out of the barn but he hears this whinny and he goes into the barn and it's burning, and he gets this horse out and the damn horse, damn near kills him going out through the barn. Anyhow, he's all right so that's ah. Yeah war is absolutely dirty business. No question about it. And then ah, two days later the war was over.

Answer: But before that time I'm again on outpost duty, and I'm still over the border in Czechoslovakia and I get this command that a German command car will be coming by you and you are not to take their weapons. And I thought what the hell is going on here. And ah, I said "Why?" He said well they're coming in to surrender and we don't want, you know they're running away from the Russians and Patton wanted as many German troops surrendering than he could possibly get. So this command car comes up, you see it in the movies but I didn't believe it, there's these German general with his staff and his command car and he salutes me (laughs). And I thought you bastard, I'm not gonna salute you (laughs), I said go that way, so they went that way and about an hour later they came. And then the next morning this whole division surrendered to us. And they um, I can still see them marching down this road, it's a dirt road, and they're in rout step and they're pretty beat up, you know. Not a hell of a lot of them left in the division because it ain't, there ain't that many men. And they're, and I, as they approach our line I hear this German command to go from rout step to ah, parade march. And they all... you know, brace and ah, shoulder their weapons properly and they go for a ways and the command come out, sing, and they all started singing a German marching song. And as they pass me I thought you sons of bitches are never gonna give up are y

Answer: And it was ah, but they were giving up. And one of the strange things was that Patton ordered these soldiers, German soldiers, into camps and told them all to keep their weapons. And the reason he felt that sooner or later we were going to fight the Russians. And he was ready, in fact the last order that I can remember, general order, you never see one of those ok, but we saw one and it said the next troops you see will be, their vehicles will be distinguished by a red star, these will be Russian troops, they are not to go any further, period. That's one of the reasons he got, ah cashiered, not cashiered but he was set aside. And one of the reasons is he said well these bastards know what the hell they're doing (laughs). He put, he actually put some German officers in charge of the displaced ah displaced persons, camps. And there were people all over Europe just running every which way. Most of 'em were starving and these camps were some place they could get food so they were just trying to get in there as fast as they could. And somebody had to establish order in these camps and, he literally picked German officers to do that. Because it was a, you know these people were full of lice, they were ah starving really. And ah, yeah.