

## August Storkman

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**Question:** I'd like to get your name and the correct spelling of it.

**Answer:** My name is August Storkman.

**Question:** Did you grow up here?

**Answer:** No, I'm sort of misplaced. I grew up in Idaho, so, southern Idaho and then after I got into the service eventually I ended up here at Fort Lewis. But I joined the Idaho national guard in about 1936. I was much too young to be in the army but played the trumpet and they had a national guard band in this little town next to us Caldwell, Idaho. So one of the fellows that was in that, his sister was my girl friend and so he said come on over so 3 or 4 of us used to drive the nine miles between Napa and Caldwell and go to drill. Well first of all we went to summer camp and that was we were supposed to go to summer camp and then they'd turn us loose for the rest of the year but we decided to stay in so nobody questioned our ages or anything else. We played music and so then.

**Question:** So when were you born?

**Answer:** 1920.

**Question:** So you were 16.

**Answer:** 16. Then we got into the start of World War II and they began to activate some of these units and we were activated on April 1 of 1941 and we was a field artillery unit. We went from our home and we went to Cheyenne, Fort Warren. And then when December 7<sup>th</sup> came along they shipped us out real fast. When I say out here, from Cheyenne to Fort Lewis and we didn't realize, nobody knew we were the coastal defense of the United States, us with our 160 howitzers that could shoot six miles. We were supposed to protect from those battle ships that could've come in. Anyhow, it was interesting. I stayed with the band for awhile but then it got a little bit too much. I shouldn't say much about that but being with all those guys I wasn't interested.

**Question:** Are you saying the band had too much fun?

**Answer:** On the side there was too much going on I wasn't too excited about. From that time they had changed us from the field artillery regiment, the old fashioned set up, they changed to individual battalions and when they did that they had no more head quarters that required a band or was authorized a band so then we went to some engineer unit for awhile, a matter of a few months, and then we were shipped down to Camp Adair in Oregon, to form a new division. And we started a 70<sup>th</sup> infantry division with a new unit and there was an armored Calvary unit right next door to us so that was a good way to get out of the band and got into this armored Calvary. And by then I got to be a section sergeant, scout section, and they came around one Sunday when everyone was off resting and said we need you and you to go to OCS. I said is it Calvary, and they said, no it's infantry. But I decided what the heck so I did, went to infantry OCS at Fort Benning and after I got done with that why I was shipped to Texas, I can't say the name of the

**Question:** Fort Benning?

**Answer:** No that is Georgia.

**Question:** I'm trying to think now.

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**Answer:** I don't think it shows here either, anyhow therefore about two months and I got shipped over seas.

**Question:** How old were you when you got shipped overseas?

**Answer:** By this time, got to stop and think, 24, I think.

**Question:** Well, you're an old man.

**Answer:** Compared to a lot of them. Oh nuts, I was in hopes I could tell from this. Oh in November 1944 I got out of OCS from Fort Benning and then I was on Mineral Wells, Texas, what was the post over there, and I went overseas and it was the end of '44, start of '45. So actually I didn't get into a lot of combat because I was banged around from different units here in the states.

**Question:** Where did they ship you to overseas?

**Answer:** I ended up in Europe. I stopped at Glasgow, got on a train, got off the train in South Hampton onto a little coastal freighter and we unloaded on these great big floats they put in at La Havre and started walking. Anyhow they were hurting for officers and boy we got shoved right along. I don't think it was 4 or 5 days from the time I put my foot down in Le Havre than I was sticking my feet down in a hole to get in. I always laughed at Willy and Joe cartoons. There is one where the two of them are there and one of them says I can't get no lower Willy me buttons are in the way.

**Question:** You understood that?

**Answer:** Amen.

**Question:** So when you because coming in the war had been going for awhile now because a lot of the kids in the beginning didn't have the faintest idea what they were getting into.

**Answer:** Right.

**Question:** Did you know where you were headed?

**Answer:** Well, I was on active duty before the war ever started. It was army even though we were in the band, what the heck, we would, it was a pretty strenuous thing. We played our instruments, the band rehearsed a lot, we were a dance band and playing for all kinds of USO things. We played in South Tacoma USO and Fort Lewis of course, and we traveled with some of the USO shows. And we would get up and play revelry, march up and down the battery or company streets and play the old fashioned way. And then we would go back and get our bunks made up like everybody else although we were up and marching up and down while these other guys were waking up.

**Question:** So you played trumpet?

**Answer:** Uh huh.

**Question:** Do you remember a song. What were some of the big songs?

**Answer:** At the USO?

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**Question:** At the USO Club.

**Answer:** All the Benny Goodman, Arty Shaw stuff. All those, we had a book that was 6 to 8 inches thick some of them were done by hand and then there were some done, we had friends in good places. This one fellow would do 2-3 sides for some of the gals singers, I can't say which ones now, but he'd do 2-3 sides for them and then would get a hand written copy, say try this out because I think I know what it's going to sound like but I'd like to know so we'd play it, and we even had a real crude recording machine and we could record some of it for him.

Anyhow it was interesting but there were like I said too many other things going on. But well, got over seas and got into all kinds of stuff and just as the war was over we had, did they tell us then, we crossed the Inn River into Austria in the little town of Braunau Which was Hitler's birthplace. And I always thought that was kind of funny, we got across the river and there was a fellow, an Austrian, baking bread, and he hauled out bread and handed us as we were going along, handed us some hot black bread. Oh gosh it was good, but a couple days after that, got a message that I was to take a platoon. I was platoon leader up to this point, take my platoon and some other people would go with us. We would go into the mountains in Austria to a salt mine and secure the salt mine. Because the story we got was the Hungarian Crown Jewels were stashed there, or hidden. So it was kind of interesting the intrigue that went along with all this but we got up and discovered the German's had set things up to blow up the mine in case they lost the war, they were going to blow everything, but the Austrians that worked around there weren't about to let that happen because these salt mines had supported their families for generation after generation. You know 2-300 years. So they let one bomb go off which closed the tunnel and they'd sit back and they knew very well that no one could get in and steal any of the stuff. Well, we were there for I want to say two days and we got another little message that one of the German Nazi's later tried in Nuremberg this Ernest Kaltenbrunner was his name. He was hiding in the mountains above us. We got word and took off. I always remember this, it was 11 o'clock we were underway and the war was officially over as of midnight. So anyhow we went up and caught the fellow and we had no idea what sort of fellow he was, but we caught him and took him down and he got hauled away. They brought in some armored cars and gosh knows what else to this little village that was at the end of the road and they came and got him and oh about, we stayed there for 3 or 4 days but that night that we came back with Kaltenbrunner, I took one squad, a squad from my platoon, and I went along and a company commander along with 2 to 3 Austrian, free Austrian people. They didn't want to get into a fight or anything, but they wanted to see that everybody got picked up. Anyhow we came back down that night and the Austrians were free Austrians I say, were having a party. They had people all around they were having a big "wing" that night. And the fellow that was our executive officer had too many beers and he got obnoxious and said that son of a bitch is a Nazi, I'm going to kill him, and we were trying to haul him away. After all this was a, we were "invited" and we knew as soon as the Austrians got their act together they'd be under their own government too, anyway, they raised cane about this guy. We got our fellow out and oh what was it, about three days later we moved out. I skipped this village or little town we went to was Altaussee, it was the end of the road in those days and that was it. When you got to the center of Altaussee, there's just a little a little town square, maybe room enough to turn a jeep around there, but most of the town was beyond and a beautiful little lake right there. Well anyhow, where was I going to go? I went back after about two weeks, I went to a school and then I came back and we had been moved out, so I went back to Altaussee just cause I was interested. And they the fellow that was the town major at that point, an American officer that came in to take over the administration until it got straightened out, he said would you be interested to know that the day after you folks moved out the counter intelligence people or some of those government people came in and picked up this fellow that everybody was getting so hostile about. Oh and this fellow a big tall fellow and wore the knickers and the socks and all that and a kind of a

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tweed coat sort of thing and he was teaching everybody how to do the Lambeth Walk. That was an old style dance step, anyhow he was teaching it and he spoke real good English, but a lot of people spoke English there, anyhow this guy said they came picked him up and hauled him away. He was Lord Haw Haw. Now I don't know what was the woman that broadcast for the Japanese?

**Question:** Tokyo Rose?

**Answer:** This was similar to the Germans. He was an Englishman that was doing the same thing as Tokyo Rose. We could have saved some trouble if we'd let Chuck have his way. Anyhow.

**Question:** Now that you mention it I remember one of the other vets mentioning Lord Ha on the airwaves. I think it was a flier we talked to and Lord Ha Haw was telling them where they were going to go.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Did you ever end up going into the salt mines, or whatever happened to the salt mines.

**Answer:** The salt mines were not opened up for awhile. They formed, the US government formed these archives and I think I've got a yeah, some of that stuff that he is photographing. It was a special commission or group that took care of all the art treasures the German's had looted all over, even some of their own people. The Jewish people that had anything at all, it wasn't just money, but all their paintings and all kinds of artifacts and the German's figured well they'd want to save these things so they started putting things away in the salt mines. The reason they did that was the salt mines humidity was very stable and it was fairly low so they moved all this stuff there. Well later in the war the German's decided if we can't have it nobody is going to have it so they started hauling all kinds of demolitions in sticking them in the. I don't know if there were 3 or 4 salt mines that had been worked like that, anyhow, the Austrians when they realized they were wiring all these bombs up, they had aircraft bombs, in fact there is a picture I think I have it there when they first took some of the stuff out of the salt mine, there is like a two ton block buster aerial bomb, they had some of those in there. They were going to blow the whole works up but the Austrians decided we'll take care of that, they just wired the outermost bombs, like 500 pound bombs, and it was enough to blow the tunnel shut. But once the tunnel is shut how are you going to, without cleaning up and of course it takes awhile to clean that stuff out, so anyhow they had successfully done what we were supposed to do. Like I say we were told they were the Hungarian Crown Jewels well eventually and paintings and stuff and billions of dollars of stuff they have reaped. And that is what this commission started to do to, first of all gather all of these things together painting and statuary and whatever and catalog it and try to decide who it had belonged to before the German's started taking it. Anyhow there is another thing going on right about now. I had a phone call right after yours from a lady in London BBC and they are wanting to talk to any of the US personnel that would have been by the salt mine in Austria right at the end of the war. And so far I'm the only one that they have been able to find. There were two fellows on the commission that were there that helped catalog and they were there early on.

**Question:** It is still an ongoing process, some of this artwork?

**Answer:** They pretty much have it straightened out. They have disbanded the commission anyhow it is a far cry from fighting the war.

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**Question:** From one extreme to the other. You were wounded is that right. Where did you get wounded?

**Answer:** It was more of a Band-Aid thing. Back near Kassel and I should have been hiding in a foxhole instead of standing up. I made it as far as the battalion aid station and got patched up and went back but that is.

**Question:** That's more wounded than I've ever been. Some of the conditions you were in, cause when you got there it was still pretty active.

**Answer:** Oh yea yea it was hot and heavy up until the day after we crossed the Inn River at Braunau It was hectic but no real shooting match going on.

**Question:** What did you mostly face, you weren't facing aerial attacks you were soldier to soldier warfare?

**Answer:** Yea, ground pounding.

**Question:** Yeah.

**Answer:** We didn't get much aerial things going on because by that time the German Luftwaffe was pretty well knocked down. Well we had a few things. I remember one night we were in a convoy and all of a sudden the most horrendous, this loud noise, not in back but side ways cause we was sitting in back of a 6 x 6 or a truck and this thing went along, it was the first jet that we had heard about jet planes but this was the first jet plane. It was at night too which was kind of scary.

**Question:** I imagine a big flame?

**Answer:** No, no, it went by, of course you couldn't see it coming, it was after it went by and by that time you didn't even look because he was gone.

**Question:** So were you constantly on the move?

**Answer:** Once in a while we'd stop for a day. But when we stopped for a day we'd dig a hole and maybe wait for the armor to get ahead of us. We worked a lot with the armored divisions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> armored and the 4<sup>th</sup> armored and the 10<sup>th</sup> armored some.

**Question:** Now when you say dig a hole I know there are different types of foxholes were you digging a deep fox hole that you could stand in?

**Answer:** Dig something down below the ground.

**Question:** Was it so you could lie out flat?

**Answer:** Well, dig until you got tired or until you got a spot and if you were there very long and there was anything going on why you was always digging deeper.

**Question:** What was the terrain like, was it forest land or was it open fields or?

**Answer:** There was a little bit of everything. There was open field,. That was the thing that well. It's a tall tale of.. of an open field that our battalion leader wanted us to go on a

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skirmish line across. We started out with 94 men and there was a platoon sergeant of the other platoon and me and, we started out with 94 that morning and we got done we had 24. Both killed and wounded, so we stayed away from open fields as much as we could, go along Hedgerows and roads.

**Question:** How do you deal with that aspect of war, I mean 94 and all of a..?

**Answer:** Try to forget about it.

**Question:** Just keep looking at the future, is that?

**Answer:** Something better come along somewhere.

**Question:** Did you ever think your number was up?

**Answer:** Oh yeah. There were times.. there was one time I was, I was reaching for a ciga.. I smoked a lot then, I was reaching for a cigarette. The platoon sergeant reached over and he said you don't want that. Well why? You know you have opened two packages of cigarettes while we have been sitting here? I smoked both packages. Then I reached into the other pocket on the other side and I had a little different field jacket that I had stuff stacked in. I'd cut the bottom of the pocket out and I had the whole lining on the inside I'd carry quite a pack of stuff. I stuck my hand down inside right in my pocket. And that's where my compass in a canvas case and a bunch of K-Rations. I stuck my hand down in there and it was a mess, just a gob of and I couldn't see anything here on the outside but I started to clean it out. There had been 2 or 3 rounds gone through in between me, and it chewed up, well it chewed up the K-ration cans. That's when I stopped, and looked, and think. I think I looked at that as much as one of the fellows was.. kid that, had been drafted. He was from Catholic Priest in Nebraska, Father, he had orphaned kids, orphaned boys.

**Question:** I know who you are talking about.

**Answer:** This young fellow was a product of that. He was, I felt sorry for the poor kid. He should never have been drafted, but he was. He came over this one time about this same time and said lieutenant what happened here, I looked.. and there were two holes in his tin hat. You think about that for a minute, two holes. So then I looked and we had a pet name for the little knit caps they wear under their tin hat and there were two holes in that knit cap with some.. a little bit of hair stuck in there and I look and the only place it could have done that right kind of flat there like it just burned a hole through his hair down to the skin line.

**Question:** So when he was asking you he was serious he didn't know, because of shock do you think?

**Answer:** Well he knew something had happened, he was looking at his tin hat and some of it was shock and some of it was he was just it took a little longer to catch on.

**Question:** What goes through and maybe this is stuff you have gotten rid of from your memory banks, but to be in a situation like that where people are shooting at you, does the world slow down, speed up or disappear or?

**Answer:** Well, I think some of it, it disappears. Well, I forgot about a lot of that stuff, except my wife doesn't think so. One night I hadn't been home too long and in the middle of the night all of a sudden I woke up in the middle of the floor crawling under the bed somebody had car had gone by and backfired and my immediate reaction was to get out of

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here and I was out of bed under the bed. Later on it got to be halfway funny but not very and I think time helps quite a bit.

**Question:** You come from kind of a different generation from today and my understanding from the vets I talked to was the war got done they took off their uniforms and went out and played and that was it.

**Answer:** Well, why dwell on some of it. You've got a job to do and do it.. this sounds a little crazy but then we can have a beer and shoot the breeze and get on with our living.

**Question:** That's why we started this project driven by vets because they wanted their stories told in their own words. One of the arguments was well they just want to glorify war. No vets I've seen want to do that.

**Answer:** My.. not answer especially, but I'd ask a question do most of them really dwell on some of that stuff or do they dwell on all the funny stuff that happened? One time we were in a series of houses and we were kind of pinned in by German tanks and God knows what all. Anyhow out the side and the back of this gasthaus, it was like a tavern, there was all brick masonry work a little brick house that was a chicken house. And we were having things going on and pretty quick, here was \ this character it seems to me I got all kinds of characters, came wandering back and he said, do you want some chicken and dumplings? Go back we need your BAR out here. Oh okay, but I'll get you some. Well before that he got me the chicken and dumplings. We'd have.. that day we had firefight and things had calmed down and then somebody would see something to shoot at and we were back to dust and stuff flying around and then we'd calm down. Well in the middle of one of these things, one of the fellows in the platoon yelled at Brenson God Damn it Brenson you're burning the chicken. Next time why, here he came back and said, I got to go get another chicken, and right in the middle of one of these things we were having a bit of a firefight he ducked down, and out into the chicken pen and here he came with another chicken. Another time this same character, and he wasn't the only one that would do things like this but I remember him in particular. We had a pretty good scrap going.. nobody was killed or anything like that, but it was a firefight that lasted a little while and then we kind of took over and what German's were left surrendered. So we had a safe zone if you want to call it that. I came along and here is Brenson and he 's talking to this guy and giving him a cigarette and he was.. here's this German like this, here smoke. Holy smoke Brenson. He said he gave up, I don't have any argument with him.

**Question:** That's weird. It seems like there is a surreal aspect to war.

**Answer:** Uh huh.

**Question:** There is life that happens within war. There is still somehow you find something that is normal within all this. Is that?

**Answer:** Well, I don't know, I suppose you could say normal. Talk about ways things get back to normal and even in the best of times it never is going to be "normal" very often, it's normal for this time period of ten to fifteen minutes.

**Question:** Do you remember a conversation you had with guys, I mean if you were on a guard or a quiet time, what people talked about to pass time or to keep their mind away from the war or

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**Answer:** I think most of the things I remember was small talk. Give each other a bad time. For a good share of the time I was with this unit, there was a, the original company commander got trench foot and they sent him back and the next guy took over. And there were three of us in the company and the company commander, his exec and me. So whenever there was anything like platoon wise I was on that ticket. But we would get together and visit. I knew very little of these other two officers. The company commander had been with the FBI and I just noticed in some of the paperwork there were promotions from first lieutenant to captain and his name was on that and the same and in the second paragraph it was from second lieutenant to first lieutenant and my name was on that list. I knew that he had been in the FBI, he came from Rochester, someplace like that in New York. The other fellow was from Montana. He is the one we had a tough time with. By that time we had got another officer in so instead of just three of us there were four.

And that's when chuck got, got a little stupid. I remember one time we were going into Kassel and there was a high spot, a plateau, and we came down off that and the part of town we were working our way into was down below. And we were kind of holding until companies on either side of us caught up and I got came up to see what was going on and Martinez the company commander, said come on in and sit down we'll get another glass. What do you mean? Well, he's going to bring us a bottle of champagne? Huh? Well, there was a civilian living in this house. A lot of our action at this point was house to house to house. Once we got across the Rhine River we didn't have much digging like we had before. Well anyhow this great big guy, he was obviously the owner of the place, but he was being very precise and I don't want to say subservient, but that idea. You knew that he knew he was conquered. He put one 3 glasses and the 3 of us sat there and had 1 or 2 glasses of champagne out of that bottle then we went on our merry little way.

**Question:** Were you married or had a girl friend back home?

**Answer:** By that time I got married just before I went to OCS.

**Question:** High school sweetheart or?

**Answer:** No, I started in southwest Idaho near Boise and went on active duty with the Idaho National Guard and then after the war started we got to Fort Lewis and most of my time was spent around Fort Lewis. And eventually I found I had a shirt tail relative that lived in the Tacoma area and they took me in whenever I had a Saturday or Sunday. I would go into their place and eventually I met. They had a daughter, her very close friend they had gone to UPS, CPS in those days, and I met her that way and we got married the week before Barb and Bob, my cousins. Then.. anyhow I had no idea of going to OCS but this went on trying to remember I don't think we had been married more than six months before I went to OCS. It was tough on Bev because of course you never plan for all these things but she was pregnant when I went to OCS, just barely, we didn't realize she had the measles. They discovered pregnancies are drastically affected by measles or any of the measles group. They hadn't figured all this out yet when this happened, and the doctor that took care of her said I'm writing this up for the medical journal because they are finding out things about pregnancies and measles in Australia. Anyhow, she was gosh after I was overseas the baby lived for 12 days and I didn't find out anything at all until long after that. In fact there were a couple letters I got that had skipped ahead and this one letter I finally wrote back and said I missed something somewhere and of course that was a tough way for her to find out that I didn't know.

**Question:** That had to be tough on both sides. Another one of the tragedies of war.

**Answer:** Yeah.



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**Question:** Did I read while you were over there you liberated some of the camps?

**Answer:** A huh.

**Question:** Where did you end up with that?

**Answer:** Oh, this was in between Munich and over towards Austria, Salzburg, out in that area we opened up one camp that was. I can see this little old fellow that was a civilian that was working in like a factory two big furnaces and they had a metal tray they put bodies on and put in the furnace, well they had regular hours, I guess, I don't know. But that is what it seemed to me but after five o'clock whistle this little old guy was in there cleaning up except off to one side there were doors and the ceiling wasn't too high and you go into that other room and couldn't get in there very far didn't want to do much of that, here on the ceiling were like sprinkler heads and stacked up just like cordwood were, you could hardly say bodies because they were.. just bone and skin.

**Question:** Did you know what you were headed into before you got there?

**Answer:** Well, we didn't know there was a concentration camp like that. We knew there was, we could tell there was a prison and it wasn't quite a circle. But anyhow we came into it there were three main entrances where you open a big gate and let trucks into and that kind of thing. And then there were prisoners and it wasn't in a circle, but that idea the second level there were prisoners with the uniform, the stripes and all the kind of business and they were not real sad looking but you go into the next space and there would be space in between and each one of these you went through, it got worse and worse. There were places where.. the worst was in the middle, clear inside. You could tell those people were not long for here. And of course I was standing there obviously fed.. cigarettes.. whatever and these people could hardly cry but they were wanting something to eat. And about that time we got word don't give them anything to eat because they will eat themselves to death, faster than they will by withholding it. So then we went out and we were by a lake and they started around with a boat and everybody that lived on the lake that was a quick way to get food and we started picking up food that we could, we could give them some of ours, not much, but right away they had medics in there and anyhow it was tough to refuse those people anything.

**Question:** Was it could you see a change in them seeing that I imagine they are not looking at you oh you're fed and we are not, but looking and saying oh you are our freedom.

**Answer:** Not, there was no big excitement. There was more excitement when we opened up prisoner of war camps. These were concentration camps, so what are.. they.. so what are you going to do to us.

**Question:** They didn't see it as a freedom thing at that point?

**Answer:** No, no.

**Question:** Was that more difficult than the battlefield or can you compare the two?

**Answer:** Well it's a little difficult to compare, yeah it was harder. There's not much you can do, sit there and watch. If you're shooting back at somebody why there is some activity.

**Question:** Have you ever gone back?

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**Answer:** Bev and I went back in '83 and we just went to Altaussee, the salt mine. I have no interest in going any place else. The places I would have liked to see I would have to have somebody, I'm not that venturesome but I would have somebody along that could talk a little bit. I'd like to go back into Czechoslovakia. There were places there that were interesting and in Austria well I got to see some of those. A few years ago a group from, I sing in barbershop, anyway a group of us got together and went to Europe. We went to England, and then into Germany and there was involved but we got in contact with this young lady but the gal, wife of one of the barber-shoppers was a teacher and she had done things with this gal with high school kids from Seattle, so we went to this gal's home, her father, her brother, her finance at that time, all belonged to a singing group in a little village, a half way decent sized village, Grieskirchen And they had this they sang they had a real great group so they decided maybe we can sing some of your songs, you can sing some of ours, we'll put on a show, well we tried to learn their songs and it just didn't work out the barbershop thing in the time we had so they decided well you put on your part and we'll put on our part. They listened to us rehearse and it was (unfinished conversation before tape continued)