

Juls Zvoncheck

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Question: First thing I'd like to do is just to get your name, first and last name and the correct spelling so I have it on videotape and I can set my audio levels. So if you could do that it would be great.

Answer: You want it now?

Question: Yes please.

Answer: Juls Zvoncheck.

Question: And the spelling.

Answer: J-U-L-S Z-V-O-N-C-H-E-C-K.

Question: Great, thank you very much.

Question: Now, so what was your involvement in World War II? He says with a chuckle.

Answer: My involvement, I was in it. Ah, I volunteered out of high school. And ah, it is a funny thing. I didn't plan on joining the Army. I thought it would be a way to go to school. But three of my friends, my cousin and two friends asked me to go down to the recruiting office and help them join the Army, help them decide which. And I said, "Well of course you have to join the Signal Corp where you'll learn a trade." So I went down with them and before you knew it I signed up with them. And that's how I joined the service.

Question: And how old were you?

Answer: Eighteen.

Question: Eighteen. Just a kid.

Answer: Very much a kid. Um coming from a small coal mining uncultured community you were very young for eighteen years. And it was one of the ways to get out of the coal mining are

Answer: It was depression years of course. Um, there had to be a way to get out and that was it in my, and the other boy's cases, too.

Question: So where was that?

Answer: That was in Pennsylvani

Answer:

Question: Pennsylvani

Answer:

Answer: In the hard coal region of northeastern Pennsylvani

Answer: Ah it was an area ah, where the immigrants from central Europe settled and in my hometown there were a lot of Slavic people, Hungarian people, Poles. And ah, I was one of them.

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Question: So you lived not only a very tight community but probably, it sounds like you said, you weren't very worldly at this point, at 18-years-old.

Answer: Right. Very much so, very much so. Ah, very restricted. From a very personal standpoint, my mother passed away when I was three and my father remarried and my step-mother turned out to be one of those very terrible, mean mothers, step-mothers and it made for a tough life. And ah, but I persevered but to give you an idea, I was the youngest of four and there were two years between each of us. My oldest brother was the valedictorian of his class in high school and ah, he died two weeks after graduation from malnutrition. Life was tough. And ah, my next brother who was two years younger was also a brilliant student and he quit school after his sophomore year because my step-mother and father wouldn't even give him a quarter to buy the scholastic magazine or whatever at school and he was so embarrassed he just quit. My sister graduated from grammar school, or elementary school, and was immediately sent to New York City to work as a domestic. So I was left alone and I wanted to leave but my brother, thank God, he insisted that I stay and graduate from high school and that's how I managed. So it was a, it was a tough life, it wasn't a happy life.

Question: Would you say tough times, tough family in a tough neighborhood. I mean the coal...

Answer: Well actually they well, when you say tough neighborhood, no the people were wonderful, great, great people.

Question: I mean, by tough I mean hard work.

Answer: Oh yes, oh yes. I mean, you spent the summers picking coal. Ah, you'd go down to these slate banks where the coal would be taken out of the ground up into the breakers and then it would be sorted, coal from rock and slate and as they dumped that slate onto these, which became mountains, well there's always some coal amongst it, and this is where we would go down into that area and pick out the coal and crack it into burning size, put it in burlap bags and carry it on up the hill. And you did this from when you could walk virtually. And it wasn't unusual for my brother and me to, we used to call pick coal, pick 15 to 20 tons of it every summer to last the winter and split wood for the winter. But life was like that.

Question: So when you picked the coal you were picking it to bring it home or to take it...

Answer: To bring it home. To bring it home for the winter.

Question: Wow.

Answer: Yeah, 'cause it was depression, I mean we couldn't afford it.

Answer: And ah, so that was the background although, ah, I had an athletic background, I played a lot of ball. Well kids in small towns always play ball year round, I mean that shouldn't even be a factor. Ah, church was a factor. Music was. And the eastern right churches they had the ah, liturgical music of Russia, liturgical music which was beautiful and as poor as the churches were, the parishes were they always had a professional choir director and in my hometown um, choirs were excellent. I mean they were just great but after the boys and girls reached 18 they left town so the choir was never older than 18 except for three people. We had one base singer, one tenor, who were the nucleus so to speak and one lady. But it was an ongoing generational thing but it was a great, great experience. Ah and it's something that today, even today I enjoy. I have some tapes and what have you.

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Question: So in the midst of all of this, the depression and the coal, there's this beautiful, angelic choir.

Answer: Yeah, yeah. You found pleasurable things. Ah, for a small town, for example, we had this choir which was um, part of our lives. Ah and the side is that in the bass section there was six Zvoncheck, all my family were bass.. basso profundos, even as young people they could sing bass. And ah, so that kind of gave you an idea of the relationships. But then the town, in the town, the fire department put on an annual minstrel show and our choir members were always invited to be part of the chorus or an octet or a quartet and so you went to rehearsals for two or three months at night, you know. And there were so many little things that went on in this life that were pleasurable and it made things tolerable. Home life was something else. Home life was just awful. Ah I barely went home. I went home to sleep and that was about it. After my parents would be asleep I'd come home. And ah...

Question: So joining the Army was a, was an out?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: What, what era? Was this after Pearl Harbor, before?

Answer: Oh no, it was 1940.

Question: Oh.

Answer: Yeah, and I graduated in 1939. I went to the CCC Camps which they had at the time, Civilian Conservation Corp, for six months. And ah I did that for six months, when I came out there was still nothing for me to do. I thought I would be able to go to one of the local colleges but it wasn't to be. Ah, I was thwarted in just about everything I wanted to do, personally. Ah, I had an English teacher in high school who had took an interest in me. I was very shy by the way. I was a very shy kid. But I could always write and express myself and this teacher took an interest in me. She made sure I was on the debating team. I did oratory, I did the readings, and I did them well 'cause, you know, the talent was there, you know, the personality wasn't. Like an actor, an actor can do things and, on stage but you can't do them personally. And ah, she said to me one day, we had composition writing on Fridays and ah, say it's a 500 word composition I would do it in five minutes you know, it just came natural to me. Ah, and one day she took me out in the hallway and she said, "What do you want to be when you, you know, grow up?" And I told her I wanted to be a journalist or a radio announcer or something. And ah, a couple of weeks later she said ah, her brother is a station manager at a local radio station and he would love to have me come down on weekends and, and learn the trade so to speak. And it would cost about \$3.00 for me to go, it was about 25 miles away, you know for meals and overnight, and ah, but I couldn't get the \$3.00. And ah, but that's give you an idea of small town living where opportunities ah, might be there and they're not there, you know. So I just naturally joined the Army. I mean there was no, had no qualm about it when they did it. Ah it was a decision I made right at that moment. I never regretted it.

Answer: So we joined the signal company down in Fort Benning and the very first weekend we were there, we didn't have uniforms yet or not, ah, and we were walking around the reservation and a car pulled up near the lake and an officer stepped out, two officers stepped out -- a lieutenant, a second lieutenant and a major -- and the major approached us and he asked us where we were from, the usual thing, um, he said, "Do any of you type?" Well each of us typed, that's another angle about depression, and he said, "Ok," he said,

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"what company are you with?" I said, "Fort Signal." He said ah, "I'll have your company commander arrange for you to come over and have a test." Going back a little bit about typing and shorthand, in high school for some reason I didn't have a choice but they put me in a commercial course which was typing, shorthand, bookkeeping and business law and that crap, you know. But I became very good at it. I was, I accepted the challenges you know. And ah, so we tried out for the steno jobs, clerical jobs and I got it. And I got in what is called the G3, the operations department, and I reported there and ah, I did you know, what you had to do, typing etceteras

Answer: And when they had their first field test, the field ah, ah, I had to write the field order so I typed it up and I handed it over to the officers and ah, I amazed them. I altered, I had changed what the field manual said about field orders. This is true. I mean the Army was doing it for 50 years maybe 100 years, got fresh mind comes in and what was clear to me, I did it and it altered the field manual 101. So ah, it was sort of thing that was to happen to me right along. I did things well and in the process, ah, there was a need for court reporters. You know, there were court martials and what have you, depositions had to be taken, and I got involved with the master sergeant and he could read my shorthand notes and I could read his, which was unusual. I mean, this just doesn't happen. And as a result he and I did some court reporting on our own time you know. And in the process the commanding general needed some work done and I was sent over to his office and apparently I did well because I was...

Answer: Now I was in the G3 section for quite a while, for about maybe a year, but I wanted to get into the intelligence section and I was going home on furlough one fall and I said to the G2 who was a colonel, lieutenant colonel, I said, "When I come back I want to get into your division, to your department." And sure enough when I got back from furlough, I got into intelligence. So I worked there. Now while I was there I did very well, I'm not doing this boastfully I mean it's just I had a job, I did it, I did it fairly well. And in the process I used to write the intelligence reports and submit them to Corp headquarters and you know, right up the line. And one of the intelligence officers at the, at Camp Gordan, Georgia, came over and asked if they would transfer me to the intelligence section of the post. They had an opening there for an officer, I was a master sergeant by the way. I made master in two years, less than two years. And ah, again, being immature, this was a handicap of mine when I went in, the officer from the post was talking to the lieutenant colonel in the G2 and, and asked if I would want to go, and my lieutenant colonel said, "You don't want to go Juls, you want to go where the fighting is." So he appealed to my whatever you want to call it, manliness, and I didn't accept it and yet I would have been made an officer on the spot. So I missed one opportunity there. I have no regrets about it but sometimes I think about it because my career was, I would call it a little exciting. See I went in the service I had no ah, ties, I had no family ties. I mean, I just, I could go and not feel that I'm disappointing people or something, you know. I could go and ah, as a result I was very independent in what I was doing. So, you know, time goes on, we had the maneuvers, we did a lot of things, then it was time to go overseas. You know, the trainings we had here in the States we went to Camp Gordon Johnson for example for amphibious training, you know and what have you and eventually we wound up back in New Jersey to go overseas.

Answer: And ah, again I had no qualms about going. Here I am a 20-year-old, you know, 21-years-old, no worries in the world so to speak, or being stupid whatever it is. It's really immaturity is what it is. And ah, I can recall us going to embark on the ship and we had a lot of older men in my outfit. That's with the divisional headquarters, and they had more mature people there because their duties were required professional, you know, quality. And I can remember, it was on New Years Eve, we embarked in Staten Island, we embarked about ten o'clock at night and I'm leaving my little contingent, you know, of headquarters people and they're so sad and all that. And ah, I'm trying to get the rhythm of the march and sing you

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know and that sort of stuff, I mean, this is the way I was, I had no worries about what was going on. If I'm going over to war, I'm going to war, it didn't matter. But these are recollections that I have that are vivid in my mind. And ah, course it took us about, it took a good two weeks to go over there and on board ship I used to enjoy going to the prow of the ship and I was sort of an observer. In fact, after a while the Navy men said as long as you're out there we'll make you an observer and I enjoyed it, the ocean and the movement and all that sort of thing.

Answer: And then in England of course, we started to prepare for the invasion and I was part of the team. And ah, we spent, we got there in January and of course, until June so it was about six months, that preparations were in order. And you were vowed to secrecy. You knew what was going on and it was, it was quite an exciting experience. And we'd take plans into London to ETO Headquarters and come back and ah, if we needed information about shoreline or things on shore, overnight they would radio the spies in Europe and they'd get the information back. It was just story book stuff, it was just story book stuff and you're living this and ah, I thrilled to it, it was just great.

Question: Did you have any idea what a piece of history this was you were in or was just this exciting...

Answer: Well yeah, I began to naturally. With the invasion you just couldn't escape it. I mean, you knew this had to be historic. Ah...

Question: So who, so you're, because you're in intelligence right? So you know a lot more than a lot of people know.

Answer: Well that's right. We called it the ah, unit which was biggoted. I never knew the word biggoted would be used but we were sworn to secrecy, we were bigots you know. And ah, so we knew exactly what was going on. We didn't know dates of course, that was something that never occurred. But in the planning and in the preliminary work it was unbelievable, it really was unbelievable and ah, and with it you know, you still had a normal life over there.

Answer: We were in Devon in England, southern England which was lovely, lovely place near a town called Tiverton, and the tent that I occupied with three other GI's was on a path between the headquarters which was a big farm house and the town. And a little boy and his sister, a little boy Billy would come by and children are, he was about six or seven, I would give him chocolate or something you know and he would come by every evening and it's as if I had to say goodnight to him. And I'm building this up 'cause there's a story to it, and then it developed that we would have his mother do our laundry and we would buy eggs from her. You know eggs were a commodity that you can't imagine if you didn't have, and ah, so Billy did this for I think about five or six months and ah, 50 years later, 52, 53 years later I saw in a fourth division, I was in the fourth division, infantry division, there was a notation of a Britisher looking for three or four GI's who occupied his home while we were there. And I said, "My God that's Tiverton." So I wrote him a letter and sure enough he found this Billy, Billy was still living in the same place. His name was Billy Jones (laughs), so Billy Jones telephoned me. He remembered immediately who I was and ah, ah when this man said, "Do you know somebody named Juls?" he said, "Yes, Juls Zvoncheck, fourth division." And ah so we had a long, long, well he wrote first and then we had a long conversation on the telephone. Ah, so life in England wasn't bad, in fact it was rather enjoyable. Ah, as typical Americans we played a lot of football and whatever and we occupied ourselves and we had a good outfit.

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Answer: And then as the war went on, I mean the time went on, it came time for, for the invasion. And ah, we embarked, I always get confused whether it was Dartmouth or Portsmouth, whichever, but it was on along that coast. And ah, I was to drive a Jeep off the LCT and ah, so we were on the English Channel for about a week. The weather was bad you know, and ah, you could see the ships were gathered and all that. It's an amusing thing about being on the English Channel for a week. One day I was telling my wife about this, fairly recently by the way, I had mentioned it before but, I said how we were on the English Channel for about a week in this small ship, you know, bobbing. And ah, she said, "Well I didn't know that. I thought you got on the boat at England and you went across the channel and landed in France." I said, "It wasn't that simple." I said ah, "A lot happened between English and the French coasts." Ah, so came time for D-Day, and I might be missing things that I'm not saying here but I'm just letting it flow ah, things that I remember. On the night of June 5th, the night before ah, we didn't sleep much, you know it was cramped and all that sort of thing and I can recall during the night and then midnight, little after midnight these young voices, boys, I mean boys not men's voices, boy's voices, and ah they were getting ready to embark and they were the demolitions experts going in to knock out the demolition in the waters and all that sort of thing. And you listen to them as if they're going to play football, the enthusiasm that, you know, and you felt it, I mean you knew something, something is really happening. And ah, after a while they were gone. So we knew something, that was it.

Answer: That was how, then of course at five o'clock in the morning the barrage started. The battleships, the you name it, they had everything there, the bombers and what have you. It's difficult to describe, even from your own little sector, after all as big as war is, you have no perspective how big a war is, all you know is your little area, you know, you knew 50 yards here maybe 50 yards there and that's it. You don't know what's going on. And of course then the infantry men started going in. And ah, the barrage continued on and on and on and on and on and time stood still. You know, it's ah, like I title my work, "A Life in Limbo," and it's timeless. Um, so then I went in on the sixth wave and the ramp went down and I was the first vehicle off the ship and the Naval officer is in the back is yelling, "Go, go!" I says, "But they're shooting up there!" And you could see the shells landing along the beach. I mean, it's almost um, ah, and he's, "Just go. By the time you get there ah, they'll stop shooting." Well you know, young men, stupid young men ah, you just went. And I went into the water and the Jeep sputtered for just a split second, but chugged then went through. Now whether the shelling stopped I don't know. All I remember is I drove through that break in the demolitions.. uh area, you know, and went across that beach through the seawall on which they had broken through, you know, and I went in that quarter of a mile where I was supposed to rendezvous with people following me. And ah, that was my initiation. Do you to ask me what was going on to the left or right? I can't tell you. I mean, I could, I, in retrospect I think I remember seeing this there and this there but I couldn't vouch that I saw it.

Answer: And ah, my first ah, exposure to heroism came with the truck behind me. A big six by six they called, you know, ammunition carrier. And the GI pulls up behind me and he, and you laugh about things, you say, "What the hell happened to you?" you know, you don't realize this is war. He said, "I don't know." But a shell hit him, hit the truck and just blew off the radiator and all that. But he managed to bring that truck in and I thought that guy's a real hero. And he was, I mean you just can't take it away from him. And ah, and there we were maybe a quarter of a mile inland because it took a couple of days to get a mile inland, you know, the marshes and everything there made it difficult. And on landing, we did not land on the exact spot we had planned. We landed a little farther west than north, you know, on the ah, Cherbourg Peninsula and so we were going through marshlands and that sort of thing. And the first night we knew the Germans would bomb that road intersection. It was the only intersection that existed in our territory. So we dug in, in the buddy system, two of us, into a foxhole, and ah, we dug kind of deep to be honest with you and the, the days were very long

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in Europe at that time, you know, eleven o'clock was still dusk. So the planes came in, I'd say about one, one-thirty and you could hear the bombs thudding in the ground and you just wondered, you know. I never worried, I'll be honest with you, I never was afraid but I was aware of what was going on and that sort of thing. The poor guy that I shared the foxhole with, he was so afraid, he confessed so many things to me that I didn't believe a man would say that to another man, a stranger, but hey, this is war. So we didn't get hit. But the next morning at daylight, the last bomb landed on the other side of the hedgerow about 20 feet from us. And that was the story of my life, I was lucky. I was really lucky.

Answer: And ah, you know and so it went. Ah, I drove a Jeep on a country road and the guy behind me would run over a mine, you know. I don't know what it was but ah, my entire career was that way. And ah, life is short. We lived in the woods, we lived, we didn't live, go ever go into any town. Our headquarters, I was with the Forward Echelon of division headquarters so we were just at the line of combat, we were just behind the line of combat. So we lived in the woods for 199 days we lived in the woods and slept in the woods. Come rain, come winter, come whatever, and ah, it's amazing how you managed to, for example you made your own sleeping bag. We found ah, the ah cords from the parachutes, you know, that landed and the silk and we put it around our blankets and sewed it around and made a bed roll out of it. And sometimes you didn't put up a pup tent, you didn't have time to do those things and you'd wake up and sure there's six inches of snow on you, you know. And, but I'm not saying this is hardship, you know, you did it and you endured it and there was no problem with it. And that was true with all GI's, I'm not saying it was just me. I think there are always grippers but in the main ah, this happened and you couldn't avoid it, you endured it and you accepted it. Ah, so ah, so this went on and on and there's all these little incidents that happened, amusing incidents and Americans are funny, they always found something funny or amusing in even the most trying of circumstances. Um, every outfit had its own characters, you know. The city boys had, were different than the boys from the farm lands, from the boys from the small town and ah, it, these things manifest themselves. But it made for very pleasant and amusing relationships. Like a northerner, we had a southerner ah from South Carolina and he was part of our group that stayed together for almost four years, and we called him Rebski, you know, we gave him the Polish S-K-I thing and, and I was instrumental in that sort of thing but ah, you had that camaraderie that was ah, you couldn't manufacture it, it just developed. And that Rebski that I mentioned, the moment he stepped on the gang plank at Staten Island 'til he got into ah, England, he was seasick. The poor guy was so sick and we, you know, we tried to help him. We got him crackers, we got him tea and he just couldn't take it but, he was part of our team and, but he endured it, he made it.

Answer: So lot of things would happen you know. You're moving from one area to another area to another area, you move almost certainly every second day, sometimes every day for a while. And ah, while we were at the, in the Normandy area the experiences that I recall came the breakthrough at Saint Lo which was one of the epic ah, adventures I would say, of the war. And fourth division was the spearhead of the breakthrough so that was June 25th and that morning the airplanes started coming over. Literally thousands and thousands of airplanes. You will never see anything like that again. They were coming over and they were saturating the whole area to stun the Germans and let the Americans go through. And one of the ah, targets for the bombers was the smoke that was developed by the bombs that were dropped. Well what had happened is the ah, wind direction had changed and was going back and the bombs started coming closer and closer to our lines. And with it the soldiers started moving back, you know, and they were fearful. Ah, this is when I saw a general get on the hood of a Jeep and these GI's are around him, and he talked to them and he turned them around. I site that because ah, Ernie Pile was with us at the time, and I used to like to write, I mean I still like to write and I used to write descriptions home you know. So I said to my uncle, I says, "I want you to get the article written by Ernie Pile on June 25th, the

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breakthrough at Saint Lo. I want to see if he saw the same things I saw." And we saw two different things. You know, again, it's an individual thing. He missed the general's speech which I didn't but ah, course then came the breakthrough and ah, we just kept moving and moving and moving and moving and ah. When we were at Normandy also, you know, we, my outfit had to go up in the Cherbourg Peninsula to open the port and as they got there, they had these warehouses there of wine and champagne, and etcetera, etcetera, need I say more? Some of the trucks were unloaded of ammunition and loaded with champagne and wines that lasted for two months.

Answer: But ah, again that was life, that was the life of the war but, but there was a lot of bad, bad stuff. Excuse me for a second. I never cried until 50 years later.

Question: I think that's very common to the vets that I've talked to.

Answer: For 50 years nobody ever asked me anything except one question by my brother. And all he asked me he said, "Were you scared?" And I told him no which is true. I'm gonna go jump ahead a little bit here. When the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day was celebrated here a few years ago, I'm watching television and a farmer in Ohio, a coal miner in Pittsburgh, a steel worker in Pittsburgh and a business man in New York were being interviewed. No one had ever asked them what happened 50 years before. And as they explained or described their experience they cried and I could appreciate that. It's hard to accept young men dying and when you saw it you couldn't believe it. It didn't soak in until you were past it, days later, or you smelled the stench of rotting bodies. It's as if it didn't happen, you understand? You went on and, and ah, American soldiers were as bad, they were as vicious as German soldiers were. That's war. When you saw American bodies hanging on meat hooks and then later on you saw German bodies on meat hooks what can you say? War is hell. And there was so much of it, I don't mean the meat hooks part of it, but so much death. So much anguish that you couldn't absorb it. You really couldn't absorb it. First of all there was so much of it and you couldn't believe what you saw.

Answer: And then you know, you'd hear the stories of what happened in certain places but then there was always a pleasant one. For example I was with the ah, liberating forces in Paris and that's a complete opposite. This is delirium, this is ecstasy, this is people crazed with freedom, happiness. And ah, their swarming all over the city and yet the snipers are still shooting from the buildings. But they just ignored them, it wasn't that the snipers would be that effective, you know, they got rid of them very quickly. But I can recall standing in front of the Place de l'Opera with another GI and women would come up to us and kiss us and hug us and tear buttons off our uniforms and bring their children to be kissed by an American and what have you. And then they would bring out the champagne and wines that they had dug up from their backyards which they had hidden from the Germans for about five or six or seven years you know. Ah, it's, I wrote a description. I think I captured it fairly well but I don't have a copy of it. I sent a copy to a friend of mine in the Philippines. He said they reproduced 50,000 copies and ah, saying that's not a war, which that instant wasn't a war but it was that great, great, ah an experience. And we um, over-nighted in one of the parks, the Bois de Vincennes I remember, and we set up our pup tents and ah, which all seemed normal you know, until the following morning when we woke up you see all these girls coming out of these pup tents.

Answer: Ah, and then we went on, I mean that was what July 25th. We always stayed in contact with the Germans. For 199 days, from June until July, until December and ah, when I said we had these characters in my outfit, we had one young guy from Philadelphia, a little guy about five foot four, he chased women. He loved women. And ah, I've already experienced something in England but that was something else but ah, in some of these small

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towns as we were moving, we were moving fast, I mean it wasn't the case of coming in slowly, but we were moving through these towns. And ah, we would come upon a town in the city square or town square where they would have these women that would fraternize with the German soldiers. And of course they stripped them of their clothing and shaved their heads and chased them out of town, right? And we happened to come upon one of those towns and this was going on and the women went east and we were going in the easterly direction and then he said, "C'mon let's go around maybe we can catch those babes in the other end of town." He would've chased anything but ah, again that's one of the pleasant moments that ah, that we had.

Answer: Um, we were the first troops through the Siegfried line. It was a historic moment. The only thing that happened though is ah, we had to move back you know. Ah, Patton had taken so much of the ah, gasoline and whatever with his tanks that it restricted the rest of the divisions to a degree. So we didn't get any reinforcements coming up even though the forward echelons went into Germany. So we were forced back but we didn't realize we went so far back as to go into Belgium. And we stayed in Belgium there for about two months I would say, you know. Because we had to wait for the war to catch up to us. It was one of those deals. And I can remember we set up our pup tents and we had nothing to do, that we dug the pup tents so deep that we could stand in them, you know, for want of something to do. Ah, so we stayed there until December when we were moved to the Luxembourg are

Answer: And this is in December, it was the 190th, 199th day of contact, and it was thought that the Luxembourg line was an inactive line and our outfit which was depleted by this time from 18 or 15,000 troops to like 10 or 11,000 and we had a 35 mile line to hold which is a lot of are

Answer: And um, I remember we were finally put into housing, into a building, a big building in Luxembourg City or outside of Luxembourg City, where we could take a bath and wear clean clothes and what have you. And I remember they were distributing sweaters that were knitted by American women. And it was fun because sometimes you'd pick out one sweater one sleeve was six inches longer than the other or something of that sort. Ah it was a fun thing but it was an acceptable thing and I recall that. Um I admit to a little vanity while I was in Luxembourg. One of the local photographers, ah, took our photos in a portrait and we took out of our barracks bags the one uniform that we had, wrinkled, you know we never wore it for six months, and we put it on and tried to get rid of the wrinkles and ah, he took pictures and ah, I really like the picture, it's in my book. And ah, that was the way it was, serene, quiet, you know, we had a break.

Answer: But then, the ah, Germans started the push, you know in ah, Bastogne and the Bulge. And everybody was on the line, they had to be. And ah, course the weather was bad, it was foggy, rainy, cold, what have you. But reinforcements came, a whole flock of 18-year-old kids, fresh recruits. They came in and fought like hell. And ah, I take my hat off to them. They just were great. Many were killed. They were recruits, they didn't know the little tricks of warfare. But apparently there were enough of them that they did the job. That's a memorable area in my mind, Bastogne and that are

Answer: It was very muddy, you know, from the rains. And the farms, the farmers there lived in one part of the building and the cattle in the next part of the building and then with this (inaudible) was the stench and then they had their wells in front of the building and all this is flowing in, you know. It was unbelievable. I have a sentimental ah, little experience. Early in the war when we were moving, you know, when the Germans were on the run, my outfit went through a town called Saint Vith in Belgium. One of the most beautiful, beautiful little towns you'd ever want to see. I fell in love with is. And after the Battle of the Bulge we

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went back that way and there was nothing left. The town was just wiped out, you know they were fighting the Battle of the Bulge. A little postscript is, I worked for a Dutch company and one of the young Dutchmen was asking me about where I was in Europe during the war and all that and he said he was in Saint Vith. So I teased him, I said, "You must have been one of the kids I would throw chocolates to." He said, "You probably did because I got chocolates." So it was a small world type of thing and, and ah what have you.

Answer: Um there was a lot of movement after that you know, 'cause the, there were no battle lines so to speak. Everything was fluid and we moved south towards Italy. And ah, I remember we were in a town called Tauberbischofsheim. Beautiful, beautiful you know, Alpine village and in the middle of the village was the canal. Clear water, I mean clear, beautiful, beautiful. And then there were some rifles bent and ah, we noticed some of the slave laborers were diving into the canal or whatever you want to call it, and pulling out these rifles. And we said, "What are you doing that for, the war's over." He said, "Yeah." I said, "That rifle's no good." He said, "Well we could cut it right here," and he said, "Tomorrow morning when Herman so and so comes out for wood, we'll use it one more time." But war was vicious, understand they, it, you cannot describe man's inhumanity to man. Why they do things, it's indescribable. We freed any number of slave labor camps. And ah, lot of Russians, Poles. And how quickly they enjoyed themselves. I remember the one, his girls slaughtered a young small pig and they invited us for dinner. They put it on a spit you know and all that sort of thing. And life became merry, they were free, you know. Times were still tough but they were free and they enjoyed it.

Answer: And these are memories, there are also memories of ah, when we would eat, you know, in the field and ah, we would put the uneaten stuff into a garbage can and when you saw some of these men, these slave laborers come out and ladle up what you threw in the garbage and want to eat it or ate it, you realized how terrible it was. We had to almost fight with them not to take it, that we would feed them the leftovers but this is what you watched, you know, you saw and it just unbelievable. Ah, on the lighter note about eating we were ashore couple of months, maybe into September, and we got our first fresh meat, we were gonna have hamburgers that night for dinner. So we were anticipating you know, and there are only like 40 guys in my outfit. So when it came time for dinner there must've been 250. You know, GI's are all over the place, you don't know they're there, but they smelled it and they came and it was, it really was funny. And ah, apparently, like ah, a miracle, they had enough meat for everybody, you know, everybody ate. Ah, little things like that happened.

Answer: Speaking of September, now we had left behind two-thirds of our company in the rear echelon and ah, in fact we left them in England, you know, and they came ashore some couple months later. So as we went into Belgium I told you then I'd come back, we thought we had time and we learned that our rear echelon was in Spa, Belgium. And ah, we grabbed a Jeep, three or four of us and went back there and it's hard to believe, I get sentimental now... That men would be so sentimental towards other men. How they greeted us, you're alive, you know, and you think nothing of it, I mean you're there, you know. But when you, when you have that experience, you know, coming your way you say to yourself I'm not that important, you know, I'm not that well liked or whatever but they showed such genuine, genuine affection that I never forgot it. And then of course, they took us to the bath and we got the mud bath and everything you want to know about it and all. So it was delightful, delightful experience ah, with them. And ah, we didn't see them again. We never got together again 'cause we were always ahead of them and ah, unfortunately you know, it just never happened.

Answer: Another name, I'll drop another name, Ernest Hemingway, I got to know him. And ah, he used to hang around our headquarters. And he talked, we talked sports, we talked

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this, I didn't say we became buddy-buddies or anything. I wasn't the only one, there were three or four others. But he liked to play catch and we would play catch for an hour at a time and all that sort of thing. And I remember when the um, when I mentioned to the family or whoever that I knew, had met him and got to know him a little bit and they said, "Ah, you're just saying that." And I said, "No, I used to play catch with him." So they did his life on a television show and wouldn't you believe it, they had a scene of him throwing baseballs. I said, "There you are. That was me." (laughs) So ah, little pleasantries like that come forth and ah, they're memories, they're wonderful memories.

Question: That's why war seems so, there's kind of a surreal aspect of it, because I mean the two extremes that you talked about, about ah, seeing these young kids knowing that they're going to lose their lives and then going into Paris and, I mean, you're on every end of the spectrum, just instantly.

Answer: Yeah. Um and he was interesting because he would disappear for a week or two at a time. He went with the Free French Forces, you know. I figured he's writing a book, you know, like he did in Spain, ah, he was on a mission of his own. And ah, he was quite a guy.

Answer: And ah, the war ended while we were down near Tauberbischofsheim, we were a couple of miles from the Brenner Pass I think it is, or whatever, we didn't quite get close enough to it. And ah, the war was over and I was a high point man. You know, you received five points for I guess every year, for every campaign, for landing, and what have you. So I had a lot of points and I was one of the first to be picked to go back home. And we were in a certain town, I forget the name of it, I should remember it. I keep saying it's Rothenburg but it's not Rothenburg. Rothenburg was the walls city that ah, but anyway we were in this town and I was told that I'd be going home. And here again I get sentimental because these men that I had been with for like three or four years, and they were older than me, I was a kid, and I was the master sergeant, I was their leader. But I had the respect and I wasn't the type to abuse anybody, you know. If we had something to do I told them what had to be done, they cooperated, we did things. So when the time came that I was to go home they made appointments to talk to me, you know, individually. And here again I get sentimental.