

Are we ready?

[INAUDIBLE]

OK.

You want to get some of my background first, you say?

Yeah. What I'm going to do-- today is September 29, 1989.

Right.

And I'm Judy Weightman, here with Captain Billy Taylor of the 522-- long ago, the 522 Field Artillery Battalion. And we're here at the Outrigger West in Honolulu, Hawaii.

So we're just going to start off a little bit talking about your background and your address. I need your address, Capt. Taylor, and your telephone number, date of birth, and a little bit of your background. OK? So whenever you feel fine, just go ahead and start.

OK. Well, I was born in October the 15th, 1912, in Oklahoma, in the central part of Oklahoma, actually on where my granddad had homesteaded in 1889. I was born on his-- part of the section that he had homesteaded. And of course, statehood wasn't until-- that was Indian Territory up till until 1907, of course.

Well, and my background was from a farm community. We lived on a farm until I was about 13-- 12, 13. And we moved up to Kansas and then back to Oklahoma. And I went to high school in Oklahoma City, where we are now, right close.

Where do you live now?

We live at Moore now, at--

Moore, Oklahoma?

--yeah-- at 1523 Hollow Oak, Moore, Oklahoma. And it's located-- it's kind of a suburb of Oklahoma City. it's in the greater medium area of Oklahoma City. And it's located about-- it's between Oklahoma City property proper and Norman, where the university is.

And is that where you went to school?

That's where I went to school and university. I commenced there in '32, during the Depression. And of course, it was a lot cheaper, but it was a lot harder too because we didn't have any money, [LAUGHS] back then, during the Depression.

Did you know you wanted to go to the university, when you were in high school, or--

Yes. Yeah, I studied for it in high school. And I took the science and mathematics in high school, where I could get in fairly well, because I had in mind to be an engineer. Actually I was planning on being a geological engineer. But when I got down there in '32 and started my first years, I got interested in the petroleum end of it. So my Bachelor of Science degree is actually in petroleum engineering.

And I got out in '36. But in the meantime, when I started to school down there, I took up a military-- ROTC. And I'd taken four years of military ROTC. And it was horse-drawn artillery.

You had horses, there?

Yeah, we had horses. And that's one reason I got into it, because I liked to ride horses. [LAUGHS] And so we-- when we trained at Fort Sill, had a brigade made up of horse-drawn artillery.

And I got my commission-- I received my commission in '35, as a second lieutenant. And when I got out of school, in '36, jobs were hard to find. And the government had offered me a job with the CC camps. They had--

What was the CC?

That's the civilian Corps, where they were putting men to work that were out of jobs. They had to build parks and--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

The Conservation Corps.

--the Conservation Corps is what it was. Civil Conservation Corps. And they assigned me to one in Oregon. But before they assigned it to me, before they could send me, I had a chance to get a job in the oil field with an oil company. So I tried to get out of my assignment to the Corps, to the service, and eventually I was able to. But I had a difficult time [LAUGHS] getting released from my orders.

But anyway, after I got released from orders, in '37, I went to the Gulf Coast as petroleum-engineer trainee. And and I was stationed in Louisiana.

Were you married, at that time?

I was married when, after-- about a year after I went-- we got married in '38. While I was down there, we got married. I came back to Oklahoma. And of course, Opal is from Oklahoma.

Opal is--

She's from a town-- Bristow, Oklahoma. It's between Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

And Opal is your wife.

Yes. Of 51 and 1/2 years.

You've been married for 51--

Yeah, we got married February the 1st, 1938.

Wow.

We had our wedding anniversary, February the 1st in '88. And daughter and the boys gave us a celebration on our anniversary.

So what happened after 1938, then?

Well, 1938, we got transferred to a different location then, on the coast, over south of Houston, to an oil. Field and then in 1940, when the war broke out-- or, rumors of war-- I decided that, since I had a commission, I'd go ahead and go in. So in about March of '41, well, I signed up and went into service.

And I was assigned to the Eighth Corps headquarters. It was a good assignment, because I went in early. And it was at Brownwood, Texas. And it was made up of higher-ranked officers, but there were a few of us that were lower-rank lieutenants in the unit.

But when Pearl Harbor hit, we were riding around in civilian clothes, there, by the camp, when Pearl Harbor hit. And they quarantined us on what I call "the Hill." At our camp, they quarantined us.

Why did they do that?

Well, because they were going to send us over. And they were going to send us to the Pacific, after Pearl Harbor. But they decided that some of us lower-ranking officers were too low-ranking [LAUGHS] to be in the corps headquarters, so they told us we could go to any unit we wanted to in a combat unit.

So I chose to go back to Fort Sill, to school troops. So I thought maybe I might not [LAUGHS] have to go very soon, by going back there. But I wasn't back there for just any time. They sent me back to go where I'd been in Brownwood, at Camp Bowie. It was a camp for the 36th Division, the Texas Division, and other troops.

And I was assigned to a 155 howitzer unit. I had been commissioned in the larger guns than the 155 hows, but-- and I became a captain of a battery there at-- I was assigned to the 142nd, to an Arkansas National Guard unit. And I had a battery, a firing battery.

But then, when they decided to form this combat team, the Hawaiian-- Japanese-American Hawaiian team, they selected two officers from each army. And myself and another man there were assigned to go to Camp Shelby, under secret orders. We-- all we had--

The wife and I, Opal and I and our boy-- we had a son that was around-- see, he was around five, wasn't he. He was five years old. And so we took off from-- in Texas to Camp Shelby in Mississippi. And when we got down there, I went out to the camp, and it was just piney woods. And there wasn't any one there, just a few people around that I reported in to. And they told me what the situation was, that we were getting-- going to get this unit.

Did when you were in Texas that-- or before you arrived at Camp Shelby, did you know that they were Japanese-Americans?

No, I didn't know any-- I didn't even know what I was going to. I didn't know they were Japanese-Americans, and I didn't know what type of unit I would be in or anything. And I didn't know anything about it, till I got there.

And the first ones we received, after I got there, was a few of the boys from the mainland, from California and Illinois-- just a few of the men. And then we waited for the main group from Honolulu-- from Hawaii.

What did you think about being in charge of these Japanese-Americans?

Well, it was different. It was a different experience from having the battery of other type of-- Caucasian soldiers. But it was interesting, and I enjoyed it.

What did you first think when you were in charge of--

Well, I don't know. I just enjoyed the idea of doing something like that with them.

Had you ever met any Japanese-Americans, before?

No, I hadn't. No, I hadn't met any. And when we were first formed, when the boys first showed up, we had a showdown inspection. And I recall--

And one of the men in the unit, when I was here in '72 recalled that he didn't know what I called him when I made the inspection. And they all was hard to fit. The uniforms was hard to fit and the shoes and everything. And as I went down the line, inspecting them, I asked one of them--

He had on the tight pants. And I said, what kind of uniform you call that? And he said "a zoot suit!"

[LAUGHING]

And I don't recall who that was, but they reminded me that, later, that I asked them about having a zoot suit on.

[LAUGHS]

But after we got organized there, we were there a year to the day before we left in April of '44. And during that training, we had one big maneuver in Louisiana. And well, when they first got there, they had to build their own latrines and their own buildings and everything, because there wasn't anything there. It was just piney woods. So we had to start from scratch, building up, and picked out our own training areas and everything.

What did you think of the men and the way they worked during that year?

Well, it was tremendous. They were really an ambitious bunch. Of course, they were young boys and volunteers, and they were really out to show that they could do the job.

See, I was about 11 years older than the good majority of them. There was a few of the older ones that they had, like Pete Sakamoto, a good friend of mine, was in the [INAUDIBLE] direction. He was a good friend, here. He passed away here about a year or two ago.

He was older than I. But the majority of the men were just between 18 and 19 years old, from the islands. And they were all volunteers, and they were really loyal and wanted to show that they could do the job. It was really a very interesting situation.

So at the end of that year of training, which was pretty fast training-- we had to go through a whole lot of training within that year, because there's a lot to take up from your basic on through. And they really hadn't had the basic training that other soldiers had had, because they just straight come to our camp. So we had to combine the basic training and the other training along with it at the same time. But they performed well, I mean-- and even better in combat.

Maybe you want to tell us about going over to Europe and--

Yeah. At the end of that year, when we left, we left from Norfolk, Virginia, on in convoy of hundreds ships-- Liberty ships. And we were 28 days on the water, going to the Mediterranean. And a lot of the boys got seasick, and some of them I've met, some of the officers got-- I recall one officer. His lips would swell up, and he couldn't eat or anything, for several days-- for most of the whole trip. But it didn't bother me.

But it was pretty rough on those Liberty ships. They were small, and the men were pretty crowded-- fairly well crowded on them. For 28 days. It was quite a ways.

And we had the minesweepers and the different supporting groomers around the ships, on the way over. And we landed at Brindisi, Italy. And they didn't have a way to move us to Naples, our staging area, Naples [INAUDIBLE], except by boxcars, so they put us in what we called the 48-- 40-and-8 boxcars, like they had during the war, World War I, where they had 40 men and 8 mules. [LAUGHS] I don't know what-- some men remember that night, but it was quite crowded in these boxcars.

And we traveled from the toe of Italy clear up to Naples in these boxcars. And then we had a staging area there, at the University of Naples. And after our staging area, we were called on to go into combat. But we moved from there up to--

Now, this was the 442nd combat team plus the 100th Infantry, who had already been over there. They joined us as one of the battalions of our unit.

They joined who?

They joined our combat team, as one of our battalions. When we left at Camp Shelby, left the States, well, we left behind our third battalion. That is the combat team--

What is the name of your--

--that is the combat team, the combat team. I'm talking about the regimental combat team. They left behind their third battalion, and they picked up the 100th Infantry-- which had been over there and been under severe combat, before, at Anzio and some of the other places. So-- And they had had a lot of casualties, and a lot of them were recruits from our outfit and from other replacements from Hawaii.

And what was the name of the unit-- your unit?

The 44-- well, the 442nd combat team, but we were the 522nd field artillery. We were the closest-supporting artillery to the combat team. And when we went into-- we went through Rome, Italy, in blackout. And we went into combat right above Rome, at a little town that seems to me like it was Talihina, something like that.

And we've been told and trained-- this is a little story. When we were trained, we were told to never pick a buildings or anything for headquarters or for facilities. We were told just to dig in. So when we first went into combat, the first night, when the Colonel Harrison, told me to dig in our quarters. And it was just in rock.

So we had to get some dynamite. And we dynamited. [LAUGHS] We tried to dynamite in, to get cover. And it was almost impossibility.

So I told him I was going to have to get out and find better quarters from then on. So, from then on, I was the S-2 and the reconnaissance officer. And I selected the positions and also selected where we would be quartered for our headquarters.

This was your first combat experience.

Yes.

Mm. How did you know what to do?

Well, I just studied it, beforehand. And I'd had quite a bit of experience in the recon part of it and the surveying part of it. I had studied surveying and that type of work in school-- and engineering. So I was pretty well. And I actually taught some of that, and I taught the boys that, when we were in camp before we went over.

And was anything ever said about this group of men that were all Japanese-Americans? Any of the other officers talk about them-- before they started into combat-- your men?

No. Our officers didn't. Our officers, as I say, were selected, a couple from each army. And most of them were Southern boys, Southern officers, from Southern units. And they were fairly well acquainted with what was going to happen, and they made good officers, the ones we had.

Of course, we started out with just about 15 officers. Our staff and our battery commanders was our main-- we had about four on the staff. And then we had the four battery commanders-- the three firing battery commanders and the one service battery commander. We had four of those.

And then they had junior officers that came to our unit. And there was about two or three of them with each battery.

And they were all very accepting of working-- having all the--

Yes, they were.

--Japanese-American men that--

They were, or they didn't show any outside of it. Now, in some cases, they probably resented a little bit. I imagine they did. But they didn't show too much of it.

Did they never talk to you about it?

No. No, I never did.

You were over all of these men. You were the captain.

Yes, I was over the-- I was over the battery when it started, and then I was on the staff while we were training, the rest of the time. And then, overseas, I was on the staff as the S-2 and the reconnaissance officer. And the survey personnel, like Don Samazu and those boys, were more or less under me directly, because they went on trips with me-- went on recons with me.

What did you do during the period of time in Italy, then?

Well, that's mainly what I'd done, was get out and look for positions for our batteries and also for headquarters for-- and got where I selected buildings with wine cellars or something like that, to get in, where we'd be more or less safe. But on several instances, we would be out-- the reconnaissance group and the survey boys would be out-- we would be out looking for positions, and the Germans--

[AUDIO OUT]

--try to just--

Stay here, and we rolling.

[INTERPOSING VOICES] let me a little bit before when the next one is going to be over, too, so--

[CROSS TALK] one-minute warning--

Yeah. OK? OK, so you were looking--

Well, in selecting positions and during that type of work, we were subject to fire from the-- we were going up the valley in Italy, along the coast, but it was in the valley, and the Germans were located above us. And they were zeroed in, what we call "zeroed in," on our positions and on locations on roads and everything like that, with their 88s, what they call-- the cannon was an 88 the Germans had-- very accurate.

And at times, just a few of us, if we were looking for a place, they would start firing on us. And we'd have to get into ditches or somewhere to take cover. Of course, we didn't pick those positions. We tried to get positions where they couldn't see us.

And then what would you do?

Well, then we'd go back and get the battery commanders and the rest of the men to come up and show them what we had selected for their place to move to.

And what would they do, when they--

They'd go back and get their unit, get their whole battery, and move it up there-- move their guns and everything up there in position to fire on the Germans.

So what were their duties, basically, with the field artillery battalion?

Well, our basic duties of the 522 battalion was the direct support of the infantry. And of course, we were behind the front lines, a certain distance-- maybe 1/2 a mile to 1 mile-- something like that-- but in close enough that we could give direct support to fire over them, to neutralize the enemy, where we could move-- where they could-- where we could move our positions. And we gave support for the infantry to keep them from being able to move themselves.

And then can you talk about a few of the battles that you can remember?

Yes, well, in Italy our campaign was, like I say, above Rome. We went from Rome on up towards-- and we were attached to the Fifth Army, under Gen. Clark. And the first units-- first division we were attached to-- I believe it was the 45th, the Oklahoma Division, or the 36th of Texas, but when we got closer up to Leghorn-- that's the Leaning Tower of Pisa, on the coast-- we were attached to the 34th Division, which was a regular division. And the other two I mentioned were National Guard units, but the 34th was a regular unit.

And so we supported right at Pisa and taking Leghorn, which was on the Arno River and the coast. And one thing I remember there-- when I moved in their guns there, there was 8-millimeter-- I mean, 8-inch-- there was 8-inch guns and big guns in front of our 105s. And it was just a plain ground for about 3 miles before we reached that, so we had to get out in the open to fight, to capture Leghorn-- which we did.

And about the time we had-- I got within about a mile of it, myself, out in front. But then we got orders to move along the Arno River over to Florence, Italy. So we finished up our campaign in Italy at Florence. And then we were pulled back to Naples, to go to southern France, to Marseille.

And then, when we got back to Naples, that's when I got sick and had to go in the hospital there at Naples.

What happened?

Well, I started bleeding. And I was more or less shell-shocked, I guess, of fatigue. And I started hemorrhaging and bleeding, so they put me in the hospital there.

And it was a large hospital there, by the university, and it was where Mussolini had fixed up for a world's fair. And it was enormous thing. It had swimming pools. And it was fixed it up nice for a convalescent hospital.

And I stayed in there about a month. And in the meantime, our unit had already moved to Marseille by boat. And they were staged outside of Marseille. And I had heard about where they were.

So when they released me from the hospital, well, they were going to send me to a replacement depot, and I didn't know what had happened there, so I just went out to the airport and hitchhiked a ride from Naples to Marseille. And then I sent word out to the unit that I was back. So they were glad to send me back.

What happened when you got back?

Well, we staged there for a little while, and then we left there for the Vosges Mountains, where we had the most worst fighting-- in the Vosges Mountains.

What happened--

That's where the-- well, the 36th Division was in position, and they were fighting the Germans. The Germans had put up a stand along the Vosges Mountains, one of their stands, before they got to the Rhine at that part of the sector. And one of the regiments of the 36th got cut off-- one of the battalions-- and they called it the Lost Battalion. And they assigned us to rescue that Lost Battalion. And that was around Bruyeres, France.

And we lost a lot of men. We had to come on out of the woods and go down to the little town of Bruyeres. And then I went back on up into the mountains and wooded area. And the Germans, when we flushed them out of Bruyeres, they moved up there into the mountains and surrounded this battalion of the Texas Division-- of the 36th.

So our job was to take Bruyeres and also get to the Lost Battalion. And that was quite an undertaking. It took us about, oh, two or three weeks. That was in the wintertime it was in October of '44.

And I was one of the first ones in Bruyeres, to pick our position. And of course, I was looking for a safe place there in the town. And I don't know whether we put this on tape or not, but I'd run on to a--

When I found this place, it was a brothel. It was a madam's. [LAUGHS] And the women there was in this madam's care in there. So we run them all out-- run them all out on the street.

And of course, they had been with the Germans, you know? So the town people caught them and shaved all their hair off. And you could see them women stick their heads out of buildings, and they didn't have any hair. They'd been shaved-- their hair off.

So they were collaborating with the Germans.

They had been collaborating with the Germans. And the people of Bruyeres knew that, so they took that way of getting back at them.

But we did get in some hard-- our battalion was called on to fire over our own troops and not hit the Lost Battalion, because the Germans had them surrounded, and we had to select positions where we could fire over our own troops and not hit the Lost Battalion troops. And we had already-- we had them pretty well--

We had them located. We had the Lost Battalion well located on our maps. And we had fired in some candy and some food to them, with our shells. And the air corps had dropped some food to them. And of course, see, they were cut off for about three weeks or better.

On one occasion, one of our worst occasions, was, we were called on from the division, the 36th Division commander, General Dahlquist, to go up there and survey-- the 522 was called on to go up there and survey in the platoons, so we'd have accurate fire over them. And myself and some of the survey crew and, I believe, Don Samazu, I think, was with me. I'm not sure. One of the men was with me. And we went to the--

First, when we got up into the woods-- forest-- we saw a lot of casualties coming back out of there, of the 36th, that we were relieving-- the battalion we were relieving. And at this headquarters, while we were being briefed on where to go and where to find the platoons, this General Dahlquist came up there and was there while I was in the headquarters there. And he had his aide with him, and his name was Sinclair Lewis, Jr. He was Sinclair Lewis's son.

Wow!

He was his aide. And the general said, oh, there's no one out there. He says, your men are not pushing. He told the colonel-- he said, the men are not pushing enough. And the colonel said, we're pushing all we can.

And his general said, well, I'll go up there with you and see what we can do. So they left, about the same time we did, for the front, up there where the platoons were. And we'd done our job. We was able to survey men using maps and alidade.

And when we came back to the regimental headquarters, which was in the combat zone-- well, while we were up there, we went through mines, and also we were subject to cannon fire and mortar fire, a lot of mortar. Them mortars come in, and they hit those trees, and they burst, and the shell fragments hit you.

And there was one right in front of me. One of our own infantrymen from the 442nd got cut clear from neck to neck.



But he was right in front of me. And it was pretty rough fighting, about that time.

We eventually rescued them, about two days later, after that-- the last of October. But when we got back to our regimental headquarters, the general was back there, and he was shaking and had blood all over him. And he had lost that-- Sinclair Lewis's son had got killed. His aide had got shot. He got killed while he was up there.

And that general, he left there, and he never did come back. [LAUGHS] He never did show back up with our regiment, while we were there.

Geez.

But of course, he commended us on being the ones that rescued that battalion. And we got a lot of commendations and awards from that battle, that campaign there in the Vosges Mountains.

And from the Vosges Mountains, we had lost a lot of men. Some of them was from frostbitten feet-- the ones that wasn't casualties. They couldn't stand that cold weather very good, and a lot of them went to the hospital with frostbitten feet. So we were in low well, we were low ebb of personnel.

So they sent us to southern France and the Maritime Alps, down close to the Italian border, close to Nice and Monaco, over down there on the southern front of France. And so we fought there, up in the mountains. And in the valley down there at Nice and Monte Carlo, it would be summertime. And up in the mountains where we were, the snow would be hip-deep. And the boys--

It was really cold, up there. And-- but the fighting wasn't really that bad of fighting, because the Germans were in the valley on the Italian side and we were on the France side. And we used a tunnel that they'd built, during World War I, through this mountain. And we used it for our observation. We'd go through it.

And that tunnel had compartments all along the sides of it-- concrete-- where they'd use for ammunition. Of course, we didn't use it for ammunition purposes, because we had ours outside.

Who had been in there?

The World War I soldiers, from World War I. And at the other end of the tunnel, they had slits in the steel where you could look out and see down on the Italian side where the Germans were. And that's what we used to observe. And if we'd see personnel moving down there, well, we'd fire on them.

And that was the results of that. And then we were relieved by a French unit, down there. And that's when our unit split up. And the 442nd regiment infantry, they went back to Italy. They were called back to Italy, to Gen. Clark, the Fifth Army. And they took a 522 field artillery and sent us north, up into France and Germany, to make the push into Germany with our artillery. And that's when we separated. And--

Who were attached to then?

Well, before the Rhine crossing at Worms, we were more or less with a group-- artillery group. And we were separate groups. And we actually was that way, more or less, all the way, even after we-- well, when we crossed the Rhine in March, at Worms, before we crossed the Rhine we done a lot of firing on the east bank of the Rhine and around Heidelberg and all through there, because the Germans were putting up their last force, because they knew when they lost that there would be no stopping us from then on.

So we had done a lot of firing there. And we crossed at Worms on a Bailey bridge at night. And Gen. Patton was to our north-- the Second Armored. And they had crossed the Rhine ahead of us. That sector up to the north was in the Second Armored Division and the Second Armored Army. They crossed before we did.

But when we crossed, we took Mannheim with quite a bit of fighting and then around Heidelberg. I got into the edge of

Heidelberg, at the bridge, and they were firing quite a bit. And so I never did-- [LAUGHS] I never did get right into Heidelberg. We bypassed it and went on. And we went in a southeasterly direction, towards Augsburg and towards Munich.

Who were attached to then?

Well, we was more or less attached to the 101st Airborne Division. But they were moving so fast, and everything was so flushable, that we were more or less on our own. And during that time, we were really actually-- we were assigned, more or less, a sector, but we were more or less on our own. And we even came up on--

One time, we even come up on some German soldiers. My group, my recon group, we captured six German soldiers. And after we had captured them, our battalion decided to stay pretty close together, on the perimeter of-- of when we set up.

Do you remember what point you captured the German soldiers--

It was after we'd left-- it was after we had left Heidelberg and on the way-- probably about halfway, several kilometers or miles from-- before we got to Augsburg.

What happened, actually?

Well, after that, well, we just sent those on back to the prison-- to stockade. There was six people we had captured.

Where did you find them?

We found them outside of our area. They were more or less stragglers that had been left behind or lost or something, or they just hadn't moved away fast enough. And we just come up on them.

Were there any Germans left in the towns, when you got there?

No. I think, this little village that we occupied, there wasn't any. But several of the villages that we occupied, there was Germans-- people living in the villages. And we had to, a lot of time, move them out. And of course, that was a bad situation. The women would be crying, and they'd take-- you know, have to leave their place-- their homes-- because we had to have a place to stay. And so we would take over the places.

You had mentioned that you had come across a compound?

Yes. During that time when we were more or less on our own, we came up on one compound that I had run into on recon and looking around. It was a compound where the Germans had trained 16-year-old young boys, and they had these-- they were using these .22 Mauser rifles for training purposes. And when we found it, the equipment was still there. The Mausers and a lot of the small arms were still in this compound. And of course, we took a good bit of those. And then we notified the higher headquarters that we had found it.

Where were the people?

[INTERPOSING VOICES] stop.

OK.