

*Tape three, side one:*

MG: ...with William McCool. This is October 2002. Mr. McCool, how long, how much later did you remain in Germany?

WM: I remained in Germany until June, and then, of 1946. From Gallsbach, Austria I went to Bremerhaven, Germany, that's a seaport in the northern part of Germany, boarded a ship, a troop ship it was, and came back to the United States by way of New York City. When we came into New York City, from there we went to Camp Kilmer. In Camp Kilmer we were processed and given different shots and medical attention and all. Which I failed to do was--during the service because of the extensive firing and bombing and artillery, I lost my hearing, not totally but partially. Which I failed to do because of the anxiety on my part to want to get home and see everybody and even my future wife, I failed to go to this one particular time at the hospital there and report all this. I learned since then that now I have to wear two hearing aids but regardless of that I was glad to get back to Camp Kilmer. From Camp Kilmer, after they processed us there we went down to Camp, Fort Dix and that's where we were discharged.

MG: When were you discharged?

WM: I was discharged in June; the exact date was June the 10th of 1940--yeah, June 10th of 1946.

MG: What was your rank?

WM: Sergeant, sergeant which I made in crossing the Rhine. After I came back to my outfit after my brief three days, two nights of prisoner I, our sergeant had been wounded and they asked me if I would take it because of my scouting position, which I did, I used that for the rest of my service in Germany, as well as coming home.

MG: And then you came home from Fort Dix?

WM: Yes.

MG: To Rockledge?

WM: Rockledge, Pennsylvania.

MG: You mentioned that your future wife, when did you meet your future wife?

WM: I met my future wife before I went in the service. As I said I worked for a corner Unity and Frankford store but also my grandfather was an executive for John Wanamaker's and he had arranged that I could work Wednesday nights and Saturdays. And I worked in the clothing, men's clothing division, who incidentally gave me one beautiful going away party when I went into the service. But in view of that, the fact that I worked those two days, there was a service desk that handled returns and things like that and there was a woman there by the name of Elsie Banger and Elsie was my wife's cousin, excuse me, aunt. One day my future wife came in and she saw me and we got talking and we made a date. Then she was still a senior in high school, but still I made that date and then it took off from there.

MG: So when did you get married?

WM: We got married in 1948, and that was on November the 25th which happened to be Thanksgiving Day because of the business that my father-in-law was in was a meat business in the corner store and that was the day they were closed, so we got married that day.

MG: What is your wife's name?

WM: Margaret Banger, affectionately known as Nikki.

MG: Did you go back to school?

WM: Yes, we, what it was there, they had a courses that they sent to us by way of mail through the high school, or you could go up there and get them, and I took those and then that's the way we retained our high school education, me and seven other fellows.

MG: And did, what type of work did you do after you...?

WM: When I came out of the service I was actually full time at Wanamaker's. I became an assistant buyer. I did go to New York occasionally, and we were, with the buyer who happened to be Ann Movey but we, that was my job and I went with her, then I found that circumstances in terms of wages, that I would, my next door neighbor that I would go into working for the Kaiser Metal Division in Bristol, Pennsylvania which I did. I enjoyed that work, it was into the accounting division, I was learning things when suddenly it became out of business, and being out of work I decided, I had to find something, so I went down to, through my father-in-law and got me a job with Phelan's Meat Company and I worked there for a short time because then I found a job that I walked--I was walking on Chestnut Street and I saw a William Penn Shop, they had a big sign out, "We Are Hiring". So I thought what do I have to lose, so I went in there and filed an application and was hired for the supermarket business of Penn Food Company. I spent 27 years of it, with them 17 as a manager, and then after that went bankrupt, I went into the bank, I would say bank business, but I maintained a courier service between the Corporate Trust Security Clearance and New York City. Then from there I retired.

MG: How long ago?

WM: You lose track of time here. I, I've been out of there now since--well I'm 76, I was 62 years old when I left there.

MG: What do you do now?

WM: Retired and love it.

MG: How many children do you have?

WM: Children, I have four children. I have two girls the oldest and two boys, Margaret, Patty-Patricia, William Jr. and Michael.

MG: Are they married?

WM: They're all married and except for Patty and Margie they went in the medical profession.

MG: What do your sons do?

WM: My one daughter is a housewife, still is, and my other daughter is a teacher of Special Education in Haverford Township school system.

MG: And your sons?

WM: My son William Jr. is a teacher down at the University of Penn in midwifery.

MG: How many grandchildren do you have?

WM: I have 11 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren.

MG: Remember everybody's name? [chuckle]

WM: Well, we'll start with Margie, that's Thomas, Chris, Matthew, and Elizabeth. With Patty it's Allison and Emily. With Bill, it's Benjamin, Lucas, and Shannon, and with Michael it's Kaisal and Alex. My great grandchildren are Alexis and Gregory.

MG: We don't want to leave anyone out. Now seriously let me ask you, when you came back and you married, did you share your experiences with anyone?

WM: No unfortunately, I say that unfortunately because it's better to do it, but I didn't do it and I didn't let it interfere with my personal life by way of threatening or being upset about what I did, and I just went on with my life and it was a great life as far as the family and all that, but there was a time there that I regret in this standpoint. My father was a First World War veteran and there were several times before I was married and even after I was married which was very cut short very much so by my father dying at the age of 51 years old. He was gassed during the First World War and it went through his body and he just didn't live that, but 51 years old is when he passed on, and I wish now in looking back on it as many times as he would say to me, "Would you want to talk about it son, you see 'cause I was in there and over there and you were and that's the way we communicated with our letters." In other words, I would just say in my letter as I said to him, "Dad, I'm near a certain town where you had the truck overturn on you." He knew then that I was on the border of France and Luxembourg. In other words there was different things that we communicated that way, but yes to answer the question I do regret that I didn't talk about it, but then in later time as years went on my oldest granddaughter, Allison, in 7th grade at the Haverford Middle School, they were having a class where they were bringing in different grandfathers and fathers of Vietnam or Korea to speak on the history aspect of the program that they were given, and they asked me if I would, she asked me if I would speak. I was unprepared, I'm not a speaker, I never went to speech therapy or anything like that, but I put my notes together and gave them what I thought was the right way to present it, and it's been going over now into my 5th year.

MG: How did they receive it?

WM: Tremendously received it in the standpoint that I was thanked by the teachers themselves in lovely notes as well as in person, and above all things that thrilled me was the fact that all these here children whether it was 60, or if it was 50, or if it was 70, and I still have the letters, taking up space in my apartment here, but they wrote to me and thanked me for speaking to their class and claimed that they learned a lot about the little nitty-gritty of things that's not in the history books.

MG: How did your grandchildren react to it, when you talk to them about it?

WM: My grandchildren acted very well. In other words, I say that in this standpoint, that after speaking while they were actually in the classes and many, well last four years the different classes I spoke to where they weren't involved, still it was, they in themselves ask me questions that they remembered I said, and they wanted a little more detail in respect to what I found or the circumstances or how I felt about the circumstances, but in a very constructive way. In other words, it was interesting to them and it was interesting that I could tell it to them.

MG: How about when you shared it with your wife and your children, how did they react?

WM: Actually my wife has never heard me talk. I talk around the house but she's never really been to any of the...

MG: Have you ever told her about your experiences?

WM: Oh yeah, different things that many times that we've been, especially when we went to the trip with the part of the family to Washington and we went to the Holocaust Museum and the other time was a lot of over the table gab that we talked about. Different things that the children reacted that I went with the classes to the Museum and I, one of the tour guide women. I'm trying to think of her name, forgive me, but she went with me and we went in to this one room and we did an answering question session, and I found that very rewarding because I was actually talking to the class I went with and my daughter went with me too, the one with Special Ed and but it was other schools that were asking questions.

MG: When you reflect back on all your experiences, how do you feel?

WM: I, I don't mean this to be in a political standpoint or in a standpoint of being veritably opposed to it by way of radio or television, but I am not for guns. I have a strong feeling on that because I know what they can do, I've seen what they've done, and I know what the future would be with a lot of these new weapons. I just don't see it. I, my reaction that way is strong, but the other factor is too that I find that in the standpoint of our elected officials which I have a lot of respect for a lot of them, and I am totally very much strongly because of what I've been through, a supporter of the men individually that are doing the job of what their government wants them to do. An example such as in Korea where my brother-in-law was in it, Vietnam when some of my nephews were in it...

MG: Were your children in the service?

WM: No, they were not because of the age category, but I found that I supported them for doing their job of what they have to do under the circumstances. But I feel very strong that a lot of the conflicts that we're facing today and knowing what nuclear can do and what other chemicals things can do to people, I feel strongly about diplomacy, and I fully am openly, even if people approach me which no one has done in all truth I'm saying this, that I support the living conditions and the unbelievable circumstances that the people are going through in the state of Israel. I just think that's terrible, I just think that's sad. I really mean that, not because of the people that's in my own friendship, my own cousin

married into a Jewish family and it just, it wasn't that that changed me or made me that way, but I just felt news-wise and what I've learned about it. It's sad, it really is sad, I'm strong about it, even in my faith I'm strong that, pray that G-d will put an end to this stuff.

MG: Do you think that your experience changed you or helped you in developing your values?

WM: Oh absolutely, even to this day of my age. I really mean it. When I go along the road or highway, when I'm driving and see these road rages. There was a time I used to think, "Oh, this guy ain't going to beat me," but I stopped being that way through the help of my wife, she changed me a lot. What they do, let them do if they want to ruin their life, although they don't, they ruin someone else's most of the time.

MG: Did you ever go back to France and Germany?

WM: Oh yes, in 1976. I don't know if I mentioned this to you on the tape before, but my son-in-law was stationed over there and I wanted to go over and see my grandson and we did, we spent a good portion of a month over there. I got time off at work and they were very nice about it, and we went and we had a good time there.

MG: How did you feel about going?

WM: There was a funny, there was a...

MG: Did you go to some of the...

WM: The funny experiences with each town was, that I found myself very much saying to my son-in-law, who is very well speaking in German, I definitely find that the-- I was saying to him, like for example, just a quick example here, in Lorsch I say, "Would you think that I was in that town and in that hill up there laying on my butt, you know, waiting for something to happen and then I'd get caught," you know, and stuff like that. We go back to places that they--I said, I can't believe this. Fulda, Germany, Fulda, Germany--there is not one home, and incidentally there was nothing but single homes. I have pictures in my books here of it, and that was flattened by our air bombing and all that because of the strong head that they made with the German armies in that town, in that area, and to go back and see it rebuilt, Coblenz rebuilt, Zwickau rebuilt, I mean from what I remembered. My son-in-law did a, very graciously I say this about him, but he took me back the whole trip from Mersch, Luxembourg, back to every stop, but then when we hit the East, that's when the state was, you know, divided.

MG: East Germany.

WM: We hit East Germany the guards wouldn't let us in there even though my son-in-law had ID for you know, Naval, and they said, no we could let you in but we couldn't let your father-in-law in. So what we did was geographically on a map we went to Hof, Germany and then we swung down into Austria, because Austria was part of my life too, you know in...

MG: What about Ohrdruf?

WM: Ohrdruf no, no, that was in East Germany. I would have liked to have gone back there, I really would.

MG: How do you...?

WM: Now we were four years ago we had a whole group that went back and, and it was quite a ceremony. I have a book here and pictures of what they did and where they went?

MG: Who? You said a whole group from?

WM: From the 89th Division.

MG: Ok, so that has be...

WM: But I was not able to go due to weddings and other things that were in my...

MG: Tell me about your regiment and what they have been doing?

WM: Now, the--our Division meets regimental-wise, which is very few of us anymore, every two years. We just had one this past September in Indianapolis, Indiana. I was unable to go, and respectively, and I'm not saying this critically, but my wife's health, I just--I would not want to go by myself, so anyway, we did not meet and I hope and if everything goes well to go to the next one. And why I say that so strongly is because it's in Washington, D.C. I would like to get to see that. When we go back there, not to prolong this conversation on it, we talk about things that were our past but we also talk a lot more about our current activities.

MG: What about the book that they published?

WM: The history book itself? That's, that's still available, it's, this was given to us by the historian part of the division, and it was made up, and we received it in--it was late 1947 that we received them. But it's the whole thing.

MG: Does that have testimonies of anyone at Ohrdruf?

WM: No, no, it's just the history of our movement, our battles, and what we encountered, but no, what you're referring to in regards to the stories, true stories out of the whole conflict, especially about Ohrdruf, a lot of it is being put in individually as well as the division of the officers onto the computer. As a matter of fact, when we're done here I'll show you two tapes that I have.

MG: Did, in all of your experiences in the service and everything that happened, did you ever experience any acts of antisemitism or discrimination in the service?

WM: In our units?

MG: Well, with any of your contacts in the service?

WM: No, no, well I'm not including Ohrdruf what we encountered there, but or even at displaced persons camp, we went in under, you know in Kirn, Germany, but no, no, within the division or within our social life, our trips to Switzerland, England, Ireland, France many times, no we never had what I would call that type of thing.

MG: How do you or the regiment with this history and books being published regard the experiences at Ohrdruf in relation with the whole total experience of the battles?

WM: That was number one in terms of, in memory on my part, and what effect it had on me in seeing that, that stands out, that stands out. I can't put anything else, not even my social life I could put above that. I mean it's as simple as that. It had a lot of effect on

all of us.

MG: I wonder...

WM: Especially when you were, like if you took like, for example, some other division that was your rear echelon, in other words, they would relieve you when you were on R&R. They saw it, and perhaps most of it was done by way of news people. In other words, I don't want to say that everybody in the whole wide Second World War saw these camps, no not everybody did, but there's a lot of people out there that saw each individual ones. I mean I never saw another one, but I saw that one and that was enough. And so it's basically, it's the number one item.

MG: Well I want to thank you for doing this.

WM: Well I hope I did something that will help you.

MG: I think it will help all of humanity to realize the history.

WM: And I do think it was a pleasure meeting you and getting to know you as far as the circumstances here, but you could actually, if you start looking through your books and if you look through your maps, you could say, "Oh wow," you know, something else to tell you, something else to tell you. Whether it would be silly or not. I mean people say to me, "You saw what?" Yeah, I saw a baby born. I didn't even watch my own children being born. [chuckle]

MG: Is there anything else you would like to add?

WM: The whole, I thoroughly enjoyed doing this, and I didn't find it tiring or anything like that, but I find that there is so many things that I realize that I kept that reflect back to what I just said, I mean I have maps here that, like when we hit this gas station I took this one here and I put it out and I just decided this is ridiculous, I want to be able to tell people this is where I was. I just took a pen and I marked everything I went through, every town, every nook and cranny. You know what I mean, things like that, you know. I showed the kids in school, these are old maps from Germany.

MG: Well, I want to thank you and I hope you continue your speaking to the schools.

WM: Yeah, I'll tell you, I'm due for one, I don't know if she said March or what, March or April.

MG: [unclear]

WM: That was in Washington Township.

MG: Oh.

WM: Turnersville.

MG: Yeah.

WM: Where my daughter lived, yeah.

MG: Ok.

WM: Yeah, Elizabeth's going in--she's in seventh grade now.

MG: Well thank you.

WM: I don't know why they--well thank you for having me. [Tape three, side one]

ended; interview ended.]