

Rough transcript of interview by the Surviving Generations of the Holocaust on July 14, 1995, at a reunion in Seattle 50 years after the liberation of Dachau

Trained in state of Oklahoma, 42nd Rainbow Division, in the year 1943-44, went overseas in November of 1944. It's an infantry division, and the 42nd Division originally was made up of the 48 states, the old original 48 states' National Guard. But they had replacements that came from ROTC centers to the division and we made up a division of the 42nd.

We went overseas in November as an infantry division, actually as a task force under Brigadier Gen. [Henning] Linden as the task force commander. Our artillery was not ready yet to go overseas, so we did not go over as a full division, we went over as a task force. Went overseas in November, went on the line Christmas Day, 1944. Basically my company was an infantry company, but our job was intelligence and reconnaissance. We were a regimental headquarters company on our platoon, 25 men total strength; we had a total of seven Jeeps, motorized Jeeps, and that was our company.

Reconnaissance actually is going in three to five miles in advance of the infantry, foot soldiers, to reconnoiter. We had to get collection, evaluation, interpretation and dissemination of military information. That's our job, was to secure information from the enemy, without being seen and without fighting the enemy. Basically that's our job.

Bet you had some scary moments.

Pretty much so, yeah, from time to time, yeah.

People you were close to in service.

I was 18 years old and I came from a fairly sheltered life and I was very innocent, I didn't know very much about anything. I was drawn to one individual, his name was Maurice Tyler, and he and I were inseparable. Once we went to [Camp] Gruber together, we became very good friends, almost like brothers. We went on leave together and we went overseas together. We were point scouts, what we call lead or point scouts. He was in one side of the Jeep, I was in the other side of the Jeep. What would happen, our Jeep would be point. We were on the very first Jeep in the squad. The Jeep would stop and the driver would back it across the road so it could go in either direction and we'd get out and we would go and reconnoiter kind of in tandem. I would go so far and stop, and he'd cover me from here with the rifle. He would go so far and stop—

We were just almost like brothers. You couldn't be any closer I don't think if you'd been blood kin. Other than that, the little group I was in was a close-knit group. Very much so.

Battle that sticks out in your mind.

I can't tell you; we had no battles, per se. We were south of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, and we were having to withdraw. During that particular time the Germans were giving us quite a bit trouble. That was in January of 1945, probably one of the coldest years they'd had in

that part of the country, Alsace-Lorraine, up in the French part of Germany. It was very cold, very disorganized period of time. Very, very, very traumatic time of my life. That's January.

We were so fragmented, we had no artillery support, we were up there, the Germans were counter-attacking, and we were young troops just going into the line. We were just not seasoned soldiers. We were just in disarray because we were overpowered. Most of our losses in the Rainbow Division occurred in the first two months of 1945, January and February. There was no outstanding battle that stands out because we didn't engage in any stationary battle; we were in a fluid situation, we were moving continuously. [*Recording goes dark for a couple of frames; returns to Hancock apologizing for something.*]

First time you pointed your rifle at a live target?

I'm going to tell you something then, not the first time I pointed it but the first time I took a human life.

The night we were ambushed, April 1, 1945, and the occasion on which my friend was killed by the Germans, the next day was the first time I was really deeply involved in taking a human life and that was the first German soldier that I killed. I remember that very very vividly. I had often thought, how would I feel, taking another person's life and what kind of remorse would I have? Let me tell you, I can't say it was a nonchalant thing, but it didn't bother me, it didn't worry me. I wasn't emotionally distraught because of that. I don't say I was full of anger; there was a deep loss in my life when I lost my friend, my buddy.

How did that happen?

We crossed the Rhine River on March 31, 1945; we were moving fast because the Germans were in retreat ... really were on the run. I was in this group of soldiers: We had 25 men, seven Jeeps; we had a platoon leader, he was lieutenant platoon leader, and we crossed the Rhine at a place called Worms. We went over a pontoon bridge, the best I remember, and we came into this train station and we lay down because we were exhausted. But in just a few minutes, our commander came by and said, *We've got to go. Let's go! Let's move!* When they did that we don't question, we go. When he says *Go!* we go. So we got in our Jeeps and went. It was black out, it was night.

It was just a long drive. We came through a little town that was burning. The whole town was on fire. We wondered how did that happen? was it artillery that caused it? We never did know. We

were riding down the road, seven Jeeps single file, one right after the other. Normally we were in the first Jeep, that was our job. For some reason I'll never know, we were in the seventh Jeep. The man here with me now on this trip, Bill, the sergeant, the Jeep driver and Tyler, the boy who was killed, and myself were in the seventh Jeep.

All of a sudden, almost like the Fourth of July, the sky lit up, tremendous amount of noise, like artillery coming in, Panzerfausts, grenades, machine guns. And what had happened, we had gotten into a low period in the road, it went down into a ravine like, and the Germans had zeroed in with machine gun emplacements, crossfire on high ground and they just cut us to pieces. They

hit us all of a sudden, just like that [*snaps fingers*]. They killed four guys in just a few minutes and they wounded and captured eight more guys. We lost half of our guys that one night. Place called Wolkenrad[?], Germany.

My friend and I were in the Jeep together, and this is what happened. The sergeant said, Let's get out of here and go back and get some help. We knew we couldn't do anything, because they were cut off in the pocket, so we went back — I don't know how many miles we traveled — we went back and got some help and came back a few hours later, as soon as we could get the help. We came back at that particular period of time; Tyler and I were just talking, we were excited of course, we were wondering what happened to our guys, you know. We brought back some rifle company help and trucks. We went back up there and Tyler and the sergeant — normally, Tyler and I would have gotten out together but the sergeant got out and said, *Hancock, you get on the machine gun*. We had a 30-caliber machine gun mounted next to the driver in the Jeep. And that machine gun's job was to cover anyone who got out of the Jeep. So I got on the machine gun and Tyler and the sergeant got out together and went up a ditch, a little ravine, like. And what happened then, I just sat there and all of a sudden I heard some fire over in the distance, and I started shooting. I couldn't see anybody but I could see it was coming from the distance and I heard more firing from the distance and thought they were shooting back at us.

What had happened was Tyler —and this was the commendation he got, he got this medal [Purple Heart] recently, after 50 years — what happened was he saw the enemy and he got up and exposed himself, trying to get them to fire on him so that we could see them shooting. Tyler was a very unusual person; he never professed any religious belief, was a very outgoing devil-may-care person, showed no fear. He exposed himself to fire; lived a miraculous life. One sniper bullet went through his chest and he was fatally wounded. The platoon sergeant put his arms around his waist and tried to put him back down the ditch and the last words he said was, *Oh my God, I'll never make it*.

I didn't know he was dead. To me he was just like a brother. And the next few minutes of course we knew then. We were so deadened with shock and all that it really didn't dawn on me the impact, that he was gone. And he is gone. And he's still gone. It hurts me, it still hurts me to this day he's gone. I can't come to one of these things — I can talk to my fellow soldiers pretty good but I can't talk to other people much about it. I'm emotional when it comes to them because there has to be love for one another and I loved him and he loved me. He's buried in France. Never brought his body home; he only had one sister survive; I don't know where she is now. Tyler gave his all. He's my friend and my buddy. And I'll never see him again.

Is there glory in war?

There's gory in war. Gory. There's some glory in war; Patton thought there was glory in war. Some of the commanders think there's glory in war. Sherman said it well back in the Civil War: "War is hell." There's nothing glamorous to me about war. There's a certain fascination about it. But there's not much glamour.

I'll never forget. That's why I come to these things, is to kind of get back, get kind of close again to the fellowship we had at one time. We probably won't ever have that closeness again. Each person has their own life. But I come for that reason, and to honor him. I loved him. I loved other guys, too, but he was my special.

I didn't want to talk to you. I really didn't.