

MORTON WAITZMAN
VETERANS HISTORY INTERVIEW
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Transcriber: Stephanie McKinnell

NOTE: Place names and proper nouns not completely checked for spellings.

Interviewer: Doctor, you're from Chicago?

Morton Waitzman: Right, yes, Chicago, Illinois.

Int: ... drafted or did you enlist in the army?

MW: I did both actually. I found out I was about to be drafted, and I was a hurry so I went down to the draft board and I said go ahead and take me now, which they did.

Int: Where did you go for induction?

MW: I went for induction to actually Camp Grant, IL, and then went from there for training to Camp Crowder, Missouri.

Int: You went through basic training at Camp Crowder?

MW: Correct.

Int: Was it infantry basic or...?

MW: It was really a communications and infantry basic. Basic training I think in those days was about the same every place. You'd have six weeks of intensive basic infantry training and then you went into specialty training and _____ combat communications training. _____ well from Camp Crowder, I was given a few options. I was told if I wanted to go, this was maybe July or August of 1943, I was, I first went into service of January 1943, January 2, and I was given the option after a while to go to St. Louis to go to officer training school, officers candidate school in engineering. I didn't want to be an engineer so I was given the option of electing out of that and finish my training at Camp Crowder and _____

Int: ... communications?

MW: Communications and combat infantry.

Int: _____ communications, after your training, what did you do in communications?

MW: Well, I was trained eventually to become what's called a 7/7/7 fixed station radio operator. I was a, using Morse code, high speed Morse code, fixed station rates of speed which require that I type the coded message and be able to send and receive five unrelated letter groups of message and receive the same thing. And it involved also some knowledge of French, at that time I had some knowledge of French. I was training, being in touch possibly with somebody in the French language. So my fixed station radio operation was at the highest level of Morse code training.

Int: In retrospect, do you remember any of your instructors?

MW: No, I don't remember names, I really don't. I remember a gentleman who was to become my commanding officer in England, but he's one of the few that I do remember. But I didn't stay with him because I went on to the 29th infantry.

Int: 29th infantry was blue and grey?

MW: Blue and gray, correct.

Int: Famous outfit. When did you join the 29th?

MW: Well, that's kind of a long story. I was in training in England. Actually I arrived in England in November of 1944 after almost a year of training in the states and was immediately, after zigzagging across the Atlantic ocean for 14 days, winding up in England and being stationed in a place called Kilminster, England where I continued the training at Kilminster for combat communications.

Int: At some point in time, you crossed the Channel to get over to _____?

MW: At some point in time, it was actually not on D-Day because there was some question about whether or not we would be paratrooped into the, before D-Day so we could join the French underground. I was fairly fluent in French and I knew the Morse code, and I was in touch with the French, FFI, Force Franois Interior and also intercepting German radio. And it

was decided as we got into our jump training some place in the midlands in England, I forget exactly where, that we would instead be stationed in London, England to continue that communication with the French underground and intercepting German radio. We did that in London. We got there about the same time the German V-1 bombs were launched into England, the pilotless bombs that were launched from Germany into London to do nothing but kill, destroy, and terrorize the population. I was there until slightly after June, slightly after D-Day because when they aborted our jumping before D-Day, we were instead held back for a short time in London before we, then we proceeded to get on the ships and board and land in Omaha Beach ourselves.

Int: You actually were trained to go behind the lines?

MW: Yes, yes.

Int: 'Course the invasion moved so rapidly that we lost the...

MW: Yeah, we didn't know when D-Day was going to be. And none of my close associates obviously knew, but when, the higher up people knew when it was going to be, they knew that we had to abort our mission and then come at a slightly delayed time.

Int: So you had a change of mission?

MW: Change of mission. But while in London, when we first got there, the very first of those V-1 bombs that were launched landed on the day that I arrived in London, so it was a very, a very noisy greeting for us when we got there.

Int: Do you remember the day specifically?

MW: I can only guess. It was about, the day's probably on the record, but about mid June, somewhere toward the mid-June, just after D-Day of 1944.

Int: _____ broke all the windows.

MW: Yeah, they were to be followed by the V-2 supersonic. The V-1's were the subsonic, V-1's, and then V-2's were supersonic pilotless bombs.

Int: They had a peculiar sound of the engine, it cut out.

MW: When they cut out, we were very familiar with that. They were the buzz bombs and you learned very rapidly if the buzzing stopped over your head, you were safe, because by the speed of sound they had to go somewhere beyond your line, or beyond your position. Well we weren't allowed to go into the shelters anyway. We had to hold into our positions and communications in these buildings where we were stationed. I have a picture of me there someplace, I don't know where.

Int: V-2 you had no warning.

MW: V-2, there was no warning in either case, but that was a lot faster. I remember the pictures in Hyde park just a few days after they landed, of a British Spitfire chasing one of these V-1 bombs and getting them away from the population and shooting many of them down. Too many landed unfortunately.

Int: The fighter pilots tried to get behind these buzz bombs and shoot them down, but they would have to fly through the explosion, then that could be fatal.

MW: Right.

Int: What they would do, you know, they would get gyro-stabilized and they would fly alongside and simply tip the wing, in which case the buzz bomb would crash.

MW: I never saw that, yes, I could see why.

Int: I was a north of London in those days, and we were in buzz-bomb alley, I remember well. And the first V-2 that came over, we had no idea what it was, but it left a big hole in the ground. We thought it was a plane crash. Well, and you were in London for a period of time?

MW: Yes, for a short period of time, right.

Int: When did you cross the Channel?

MW: These dates are a little bit blurry to me. It was some time shortly after D-Day that we got on our mission to board the ships going across the Channel and landing at Omaha Beach, the same beach that the 29th infantry had landed on, and particularly the 115th Infantry regiment and the Big Red One and so many other American units. And we climbed down the rope ladders of these ships and out to the LCI, the infantry landing craft, and landed on the beaches at Omaha Beach and eventually joined the 29th Infantry.

Int: What was your job at that time?

MW: Well, that's a good question. Because my job getting off that ship was the biggest job I had to do in terms of surviving because as a communications man, I had a radio strapped to my back, and SCR 300, a rifle, bandoliers of hand grenades, and all the other requisite materials of an infantryman, except I also carried communications material. So climbing down the rope ladder of that ship was the most difficult feat I might have had. So we got into the infantry landing craft and, the bouncing little ship, and finally landed us as close to the beach as they could. And we waded back onto the shore.

Int: Were you a communications specialist when you landed on Omaha?

MW: Yes I was, I was. I was communications specialist all the way through. And for that reason I was eventually assigned to the 115th Infantry regiment, the headquarters company, 2nd

battalion as communications person. I would either do radio or code communication or voice communication using my SCR 300, or I would lay wire. I had to lay wire sometimes between front machine gun positions.

Int: You also had a rifle.

MW: I was also an infantryman, so I had a rifle that I had to use whenever I had to.

Int: And uh, you were in combat at this time?

MW: Yes, shortly after getting on the beach, yes, we were in combat. We were in combat.

Int: And I suppose you had some casualties.

MW: There were many casualties. Especially on D-Day itself, I was not there on D-Day itself. Our main casualties were at D-Day, course there were marked number of casualties after that. but D-Day was the most frustrating of all. And I've had comrades whom I communicate with even to this day, some who never saw the war beyond D-Day because he was so badly injured. And others who, with whom I joined later on in the war in the liberation of a concentration camp, but that was a long ways away. That was going from June/July of 1944 into almost a year later.

Int: Apparently in June/July they called it the hedgerow war.

MW: It was the hedgerow war.

Int: Very difficult.

MW: Yes, we had to dig in along the hedgerows and set up our communications at or near the hedgerows. Many casualties were suffered as a result of this. But there was some effort to keep me going as a communications person because if I were, the earlier that I got killed, the quicker that they lost my skills in communication. So I kind of did what I had to do to stay protected so I could maintain my communications, but also to fire when I had to, to kill the enemy.

Int: Did you have to run strips of wire between the various command posts? Is that part of your job?

MW: I stretched wire between CPs and between gun positions. That was part of my job.

Int: It seemed to be a pretty difficult job.

MW: Difficult.

Int: ...had to move in a hurry?

MW: We had to move fast and we had too many casualties too. Because the Germans were good at it, at zeroing in on a communications person, you want to get him as soon as you can.

Int: You know if you destroy the communications, you destroy the ability to command and control your organization.

MW: Yes, and I respected my position, I didn't try to get myself killed. And fortunately I succeeded until this day to stay alive.

Int: Do you remember, tell your most memorable experiences during this period of time?

MW: Outside of getting off of that ship with all that equipment, I think one of the more memorable experiences was fighting in and around the St. Lo area. I really joined the mass of the 29th infantry, in their efforts, to capture St. Lo in France. And after St. Lo, there was a lot of movement in July and into August when the 29th went from that area of France on into Brest. But all of our recollections indicate, and I have pictures on this too, was that I joined the general, Le Clerc, the commanding general of the French army in liberation of Paris, so I was actually with them in late August of 1945 where a large part of the 29th of the 115th went onto Brest, France to free that major, German submarine base, to capture that base. I was not in Brest but I went on to Paris and to help in the liberation of Paris.

Int: A very bitter battle for Brest.

MW: Yes it was, yes it was.

Int: We had hoped to liberate it long enough to have a port, but the Germans pretty well destroyed it.

MW: They destroyed it. The stories that I hear from my colleagues and what I see in my, the history of the regiment is that the pens were pretty well destroyed. It was eventually used as a port but I think that came later on.

Int: After Brest, after you captured Brest then what did you do?

MW: Went into Paris. The 29th got together in Paris where I had already been with the French army, and then we went on from there and headed eastward to follow the rapid movement of General Patton and the tank divisions. Rapid movement of the tanks and of course the airforce supporting all of this too. We moved rapidly across France by truck and by train into various other countries of Europe which we liberated, including Belgium, Luxembourg and then into Holland.

Int: You fought with the 1st army at this point?

MW: I'm going to make a mistake at guessing which army I was with because we were in assault divisions and we shifted from army to army, but I think you're right, I think it was the first army at that point.

Int: If it was Luxembourg before the Bulge, that was 1st army...

MW: That would be 1st army, yes sir, yes sir.

Int: Patton was down south and you were where when the Battle of the Bulge started?

MW: Oh, yes, you're talking about December and January, December '44 and January of 1945 before it was finally neutralized. By the time the Battle of the Bulge came along in December of 1944, we were, we had liberated Holland and were actually into Germany in a line along the Roer river in Germany, and the Bulge took place right near that area and we fortunately were in a position where we had to hold our positions while much of the German force pushed in toward Belgium, pushed back in towards Belgium.

Int: On the northern shoulder of the Bulge?

Mw: Yes, correct.

Int: Well, it was the bloodiest battle since Gettysburg for the American army.

MW: It was a bloody battle, and our soldiers did an unbelievable job that's been told many, many times of course about Bastogne, the battling bastards of Bastogne, everybody knows about, and General Patton's contribution to that. General McAuliffe's contribution to that is well known as it should be.

Int: During this period of time, do you remember being attacked by the Luftwaffe, German fighter planes?

MW: During this particular time, I don't remember that, no. The only time I remember being attacked by the German Luftwaffe was shortly, as I recall now, shortly after the Battle of the Bulge. We were out on the field in Germany someplace and some planes came overhead very rapidly, turned out to be German jet planes. We had a 2 ½ ton truck that had .50 cal machine guns attached to it, and I jumped on the truck along with several of my comrades, trying to fire those guns. But by the time we got our gun aimed, then got off our first shot, that jet plane was gone, we never touched it. But there were a few German planes shot down by some of our units, while I didn't personally participate, I fired but didn't shoot, didn't participate in the shooting down of any of those planes.

Int: Somebody, by this time the Luftwaffe was pretty much defeated and not particularly effective against our ground troops because of support from our own fighter planes.

MW: Our own fighter planes were pretty active. I remember pretty well the P-38's and the P-47 Thunderbolts and the bombers going overhead. I remember those were being some of the greatest signs that we had, watching these planes going overhead and the explosions beyond our positions, which meant that much less fighting we would get from the Germans. So they were a big help to us and I'm sure saved a lot of lives. Unfortunately, there are occasional stories about bombs falling short and obviously not intended but it happened and they were bitter scenes for us to witness.

Int: Not very friendly fire if you're the target, it's not very friendly.

MW: That's right.

Int: Well, you moved up to the Roer and you're up the Rhine River?

MW: Well, we're not quite at the Roer, that's getting us into, jumping ahead now. I don't know how long you want me to stay on this particular point, because I can talk and talk.

Int: It's your story not mine.

MW: Well, we were up to the Roer river and dug in there and after the Battle of the Bulge was neutralized and the weather improved, it was a cold, cold winter. We were dug in in fox holes in weather below zero and the most severe snow storm they had in the history of Europe at that time, 1944-1945. But we somehow survived all that by marching together. If you were injured and didn't get care right away, then it would be too late sometimes to get you back to the aid station. The Roer River, when the attacking finally began in about February of 1945, we captured Juelich, Germany, and Aachen, Germany and that whole area. Julich was referred to as a sports platz, the Germans had a major military training academy there. And in crossing the Roer River, there were many injuries. We had, some of my comrades were killed in a bridge across that river, and I myself was injured going across that river. I had a helmet blown off my head and a crease across my skull and was back in the field hospital for two or three days. I don't really remember, I was unconscious and I was carried off the field. This was just after we

got across the Roer near the Julich area. When we got over that assault and survived what casualties we had, we survived. The Germans I think sustained a tremendous amount of damage at that time too. I should say on this particular point, when the Bulge was over and we were about to start our big offensive across the Roer River we had a massive accumulation of artillery, rifle, and air support in the crossing of the Roer River, and it was a sound that no one could ever possibly imagine could be as severe as it was. We were firing at the German positions on the eastern side of the river, destroyed much of the sports platz area, and I remember when we fought across the river, and this was just at a period of time just before I sustained my own injury. I remember getting to the gun positions, the German gun positions and seeing wide-eyed stares in the eyes of many of the Germans who were there. They were just totally shell shocked and just totally defeated by the intensity of the noise and the fury of the fire that came after them. We didn't have to fight them too hard because they were already neutralized. We essentially rounded many of these up and sent them back to prisoner of war camp. Those who had to be hospitalized, that was done. But it was a very furious time for us, but there was a lot of casualties on both sides on crossing into the eastern side of the Roer River. The fighting from there on was across various parts of Germany, eastern part Germany, initially capturing Munchen-Gladbach, which was the largest city captured in Germany up until that point and very near the Rhine River. Eventually we captured, by the way Munchen-Gladbach, the military headquarters of Paul Joseph Goebbels, the propaganda minister of Adolf Hitler, and captured much of his supplies in that headquarters intact, including souvenirs and cameras and pistols and so on. But we also liberated, we were liberators in France and Holland and all the European countries. Here we were conquerors. We liberated one small slave labor camp near Munchen-Gladbach called Dinslaken, and we liberated mainly a lot of dead bodies, there were still a few

live people still alive. And this was the character of our march clear across Germany in many of the small towns and villages, mass graves, small forced labor camps, and that continued from early March on into late March and early April until we got near...

Int: They were small forced, they were slave labor camps?

MW: Every town and village in Germany practically had one of these camps, they were making something for the German war effort, they declared for their essential needs.

Int: Factories or farms?

MW: Small factories, there could have been small farms producing food supplies, whatever it took to help move the military.

Int: We've all heard about the larger death camps, but these small camps really haven't had that much publicity.

MW: Well, they should get a lot of publicity because there were many of them. There was..

Int: Were there primarily, the people who were slaves, were they primarily Jewish or were they...?

MW: They were mixed. There were Jews, Russians, Hungarians, political dissidents, and in the concentration camps, the slave labor camps, the bigger ones, there were many homosexuals, handicapped people, any variety of people that was not deemed to be useful to the Third Reich. Hitler had to create, Goebbels or Goering that these people would not be useful for the Third Reich. We eventually got across to a little town in Germany, this is in late March of 1945 called Hamlin, the “Pied Piper of Hamlin” story, which is very near Hannover, which is very, just south of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. That was a British zone, the British occupied that area and liberated that area. When we got to Hamlin, we actually continued to liberate these forced labor camps. And recently here in Atlanta, I have met a gentleman when I was talking one time at a church gathering here in Atlanta, he stood up and hugged me and said I had liberated him in Hamlin, and he was a Roman Catholic, he was a Catholic from Poland, a Polish Catholic whom the Germans had essentially put into forced labor, he and his mother, as they did with so many of the Polish Catholics and so many other camps. So there was that mix of people like this as well as Jews and Hungarians and all these, all of these little camps. So this, in 2003, October roughly, met this gentleman and we’ve become fast friends, interesting story.

Int: It was quite a reunion.

MW: It was a reunion, it was a reunion!

Int: Now that the atrocities committed against the Poles are not particularly well publicized as some other. First the Germans, then the Russians, it’s miraculous that they didn’t cease to exist.

MW: I should say that when we were in Germany, near Hamlin, near Hannover, this was the time of, I'm of the Jewish faith, and this was the time of the Passover in the Jewish faith in March of 1945, it was very early that year, and Jewish soldiers were invited, many of us came too, back to Munchen-Gladbach, where we had a religious service in that city at the military headquarters of Joseph Goebbels, and for the record, I'll give you a picture of this, also which is part of our history, of our division, of our regiment.

Int: ____ hold this up so we can get this picture on tape.

MW: This picture has been published in a few sources of the division history, regimental history, as well as 29th Infantry history.

Int: _____

MW: And where Paul Joseph Goebbels had his military headquarters.

Int: Interesting, interesting that you still have the Nazi swastika there.

MW: Yes, that was symbolic, that we had to have. The general saying in the back of this picture, holding one of the religious symbols, this gentleman here, named Minnelstein, unfortunately I found that this man passed away just about a month ago, so time goes on.

Int: So many of our comrades are departing this world.

MW: One thousand every day from World War II.

Int: It's a function of age.

MW: Function of age, right. I should, if you want me to continue with some of this, I'll be glad to. Then we had to go back, we had to go back to Hameln after these religious services were finished. A group of us were ordered to go south of there toward an area of enemy activity that was not identified. We went south of Hannover to a place called Dora-Mittelbau in an area called Nordhausen, turned out that this was a, this was a German slave labor camp, a very large one, and we, with our tank destroyer weapons, we blew down a wall of this Dora-Mittelbau and found inside thousands of dead bodies. Their crematoria where they were handling some of the people who died resulting from the forced labor and literally being worked to death, or I like to say murdered to death. And this was a new experience for us, we were trained infantry, we were trained to fight wars and to kill or be killed, we weren't trained for what we saw there. So to this day, it's become a very difficult experience to think about even today.

Int: It's difficult to comprehend.

MW: It's difficult to comprehend, and going into one of the ovens of that camp, we opened up all the doors and discovered that there was a German SS officer in one of the ovens with a Luger pistol in his hand. He was aiming this at whoever he could reach. He knew the American soldiers were coming, and a comrade of mine, Lt. Ungerlyer and Billy Millander. Billy fired the first shots inside of this oven, killing this gentleman, soldier, this officer immediately. It turned

out that he was the SS officer in charge of the activities of that camp. In other words, he was the chief of cruelty in that camp. This camp, I'm going to add some poetic justice...

Int: This is in Nordhausen.

MW: Nordhausen.

Int: Was there a tremendous tunnel where there were hidden fighter planes and V rockets...

MW: Right, Nordhausen and Dora-Mittelbau, is the poetic justice of it. I was in London when the first of the V-1 bombs fell and then I wound up, I didn't realize it at the time, that in Dornmiddlebaum, I was where the rockets were actually being made in tunnels right near the camps.

Int: What the Germans did was take these factories under ground so they would not be attacked by our bombers.

MW: Right, exactly.

Int: Then they put these people in there, worked them to death.

MW: They worked them to death.

Int: Never came out.

MW: They wound up corpses in the ovens of Dora-Mittelbau and other ovens in other camps. Dora-Mittelbau was one of thirteen subcamps nearby, and Dora-Mittelbau itself originally was a satellite of Buchenwald so it had all of the amenities, slave labor as well as crematoria of Buchenwald.

Int: What happened to the SS commander? Was he, did you shoot him, or?

MW: He was dead, he was in the oven, we shot him dead in the oven, he never left that oven. He was going to fire and kill any American soldier he could, but we were too battle savvy, we knew enough to shoot first before he had a chance to fire. As soon as we opened the door and saw what we saw, it was massive M-1 fire from several of my comrades.

Int: I, you remember they had a newsreel, I think it was Leicester Square in London, it was towards the end of the war, and they were showing the first newsreel of the concentration camps, and I remember going in to see them. It absolutely was unbelievable, people were getting up and leaving and actually getting sick watching these movie like, I can imagine going in the camps themselves.

MW: Yes, a lot of us got sick, it was nothing that we were trained for. We were trained, dead bodies were nothing but when you see thousands of them decomposing and sick and typhus and

so on. The same thing the British found in Bergen-Belsen. The same thing that was found in the other camps.

Int: Did the Germans who lived in the vicinity, did they claim that they never knew what was happening?

MW: They didn't know. They were innocent bystanders. They knew nothing about nothing. Of course they knew everything. If you are near the area, the air itself is a dead giveaway. Everyone has smelled a dead animal, one dead animal. You're talking about thousands of dead human beings lying around decomposing, everyone is going to smell that. And the smoke from the ovens was very apparent too, the crematoria. The smoke was very apparent.

Int: A horrible time. Where were you when the war ended?

MW: After Dora-Mittelbau we were already back into the Hanover area, and the 29th moved as a unit, this was in late April of 1945, toward the Elbe River. And on the way to the Elbe river, some comrades and myself talked about this in a meeting in Ocean City, Maryland, in October or November of 2003, that we saw a place which we didn't liberate because there was nothing to liberate called Gardelegen. Gardelegen was a barn when the, just several weeks or a couple of weeks before we got to Dora-Mittelbau, there were about, there were many thousands, ten or twenty or thirty thousand people in the Dora-Mittelbau camp complex area, most of them were sent off on a death march towards Bergen-Belsen. A couple of thousand between Hanover and the Elbe River where we met the Russians, there was a barn in this town called Gardelegen, and

they put around two thousand people in that barn and they isolated them as Jews, this history shows, and they were burned alive. The barn was set afire and they were screaming at that barn, people desperately trying to stay alive, but there was no way to stay alive. And my comrades and myself saw that scene, there's nothing you could say, nothing you could do except to watch and keep moving.

Int: It's always been difficult for me to comprehend the Germans, the most literate nation in Europe, more universities, very heavy concentration of Catholics, Protestants, tremendous Jewish community, that these people would simply tolerate what amounted to a gangster taking over the country. As if the mafia took over the United States.

MW: But they did, and we can only hope that today the people have learned something. Today German is a different people and a different nation. We've got to hope and pray this because I keep telling this story and I talk to others about it because if people, young people especially don't learn about the history, history can repeat itself in all of its horrible times and days. So we hope to prevent this by telling our stories as we saw them whether it's good or bad. After Gardelegen, I might say, as an interesting kind of a pleasant side light, one of the people who was liberated from that camp who was not liberated, was put on that death march from Dora-Mittelbau toward Bergen-Belsen, whose name I don't think I'll mention, but he turned out to have been freed by the Americans not too far from the Gardelegen area. He was fortunately freed by the American soldiers who were coming in that area. I think it was the 30th Infantry Division because I got this story afterwards. Turns out this gentleman tells his little story about Dormiddlebau and he turned out, years later, to marry a cousin of my wife's. So today he's my

cousin, we're good friends, we share the common story about our experience of the Holocaust and the war and the fighting, and it's a little of a bright spot in an otherwise dismal kind of a screen there that surrounds us all.

Int: I've noticed you have some pictures here, perhaps you'd share these with us. We saw the one of the camp.

MW: Yes, well, I would like you to see this picture if you can see it. That's a picture of me taken by a young Dutch girl near Amsterdam, Holland, a young woman named Maria Yacob. And we went back to our little town in Holland during the 50th anniversary of the landings in Normandy, and this young lady had saved this picture of me all these years and gave it to me with a book thanking her liberators in Holland.

Int: She was probably a grandma when she gave you that picture.

MW: She is now, but she wasn't then, she was about 11 or 12 years old at that time. But I knew her parents, I spoke French with her parents and we were living in foxholes just outside of their town, dug in before going into Germany. And we got permission to go to their house and have a warm meal and a warm shower, which for a dirty infantryman, that was a pretty inviting kind of... Same helmet in this picture was the one that was shot off of me, shot off my head, and when I did, I did have a scalp injury.

Int: That was 1944?

MW: 1944. This was in 1944.

Int: Sixty years ago?

MW: Correct, that's right. Little bitty area there.

Int: I flew in operation Market Guard.

MW: I know about that.

Int: It was the subject of a book and made into a movie, so a number of years ago I was in England, a friend arranged a trip back to Holland, and I was amazed at the hospitality of the Dutch people. And I met a gentleman, I think he was a Catholic priest, I'm not quite sure, at any rate, he had made a career of what happened in Holland in World War II. I went in his office, which was twice the size of this room [with books] from floor to ceiling, and when I mentioned the 491st Bomb Group, he pulled a book out and he told me things I had never dreamed about that particular group. And I bet if you went there and mentioned 29th Division, he could do the same thing for you. It is amazing what these people have done, and the memorial they built, I went to a museum which resembled a parachute. One other thing, they really have no use at all for their neighbors the Germans, because of the way they were treated in World War II. Now we're back to you.

MW: That's OK because my wife and I actually went back to Holland for the 50th anniversary of the landings in Normandy but was also the 50th anniversary of the liberation of that area of Holland.

SIDE B Tape 1

MW: ... parades going on at that time and we participated in parades in the area of Dimagen [phonetic], right yes, and we participated in parades. My wife and I participated in parades at that time and had many memories of that. And solemn memory is right near Amsterdam where this family came from in Holland, there was a cemetery called Margaraten which is an American military cemetery. And at the 50th anniversary was one of the most difficult times I'd had in 50 years. I saw my comrades and my units lying there, they were dead when they were 19, 20, and here at my age, I have family, children and grandchildren, and all I could do was walk through that cemetery and salute and cry for hours. It was a very difficult time for us.

Int: You know for every one of those who died, there was a mother, father, sister, brothers, fiancées, some of them had wives and children.

MW: Or as surviving veterans, we suffered a lot, many clinically with post stress syndrome from grief and guilt. Grief over what you're seeing of your former comrades and guilt they didn't make it and you did and look what you have and they had nothing. Fortunes of war...

Int: Fortunes of war. War was over...

MW: War was over. We went on to the Elbe river, we met the Russians.

Int: Did you ever go to a place called Magdeburg?

MW: Yes, Magdeburg, yes.

Int: I made six trips there. It was one of the most heavily defended targets in Germany.

MW: Yes.

Int: It was the boundary between the Allies and the Russians.

MW: Yes, I think Magdeburg is a city where a brother of the gentleman who was eventually to become my cousin in marriage who liberated from Dormiddlebau, his brother was murdered in Magdeburg. There are many camp survivors in that area. We left off after meeting the Russians at the Elbe river, we went on to Bremerhaven and were part of the army of occupation. That was from May, of course the end of the war in Germany was in early, early May, from May until December of that year, we were in the Army of Occupation.

There initially was some concern that we would have to board boats again and go to Japan because the war with Japan was not over yet. And until August came around and the atom bombs were dropped, we were concerned about that possibility, which of course didn't come off. 'Cause if we had gone as a rear assault division, we would have wound up on the mainland of Japan, so we remained in Germany protecting the displaced person camps, guarding the prisoner

of war camps, and maintaining peace in those communities. We were armed all the time and I was maintaining communications in headquarters. And our job was then to keep the peace until it was time to go home, and that was in December of 1945. I was discharged in January of 1946, and I went back to school as quickly as I could.

Int: So you saw “everybody’s girlfriend” with the torch at New York harbor, the Statue of Liberty.

MW: Yes.

Int: I came back on the “Ile de France.” We were going into New York harbor, the captain of the ship came on, he not only requested, he demanded that we not all go to the side next to the Statue of Liberty because we could capsize the ship. 15,000 on board.

MW: We came in on the S.S. Erickson actually, it was run by the US Navy, so we had great food, had our eggs the way we want them, and it was a good trip. It was a good trip across in very very stormy seas in December of 1945. But we were so happy about it, I don’t think any of us would have gotten sea sick. We didn’t get sea sick, we had our own beds, showers, good food. We were on the way home. I had a postcard of the SS Erickson in my folder, the SS Johnny Erickson that took us home, it’s a small graduation certificate there somewhere. OK, I’ll find it and give you a copy of that.

Int: Why don’t you show us some of your artifacts.

MW: I'm sorry, yes, I take it back, this is it, this is the Army Service Forces Transportation Corps when we were sent home on the SS John Erickson in December and January of 1945, 46.

Int: Your port of embarkation.

MW: Headquarters company 115th infantry, returned to the United States on the ship NS John Erickson on 3rd of January 1946.

Int: You have a certificate certifying that you did so.

MW: Yes, indeed. And I have also here a notice from my draft board in 1950 telling me that I was ineligible to serve because I was too old. Four years later. I was classified 5-A which was a lot different than 1-A, that I was classified as originally.

Int: Were you married during the service or was it after?

MW: No, it was after. I was married in 1949. So not too long after the war.

Int: New York harbor, what did they do, take you to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey?

MW: Yes, from there to Camp Grant, Illinois where my separation was completed.

Int: You were separated where?

MW: Camp Grant, Illinois, near Chicago. They separated you at a place near your home area. They did a fairly good job of that and I was out of, I remember I had been overseas over two years, I hadn't seen anybody for over two years. I was in the army only three years, in combat for a year. Went overseas from all of 1944 and all of 1945 and so when our train rolled into the 12th street station in Chicago, my family knew that I was coming. And one of my brothers had to hold my mother back from jumping over the rail, I was able to wave to her, but she couldn't come down and see me, she had to wait until I was actually discharged at that time.

Int: You were awarded a Bronze Star medal?

MW: Yes, this Bronze Star medal was commonly awarded to veterans who did some combat, but it was an honor to have this because I felt like this specifically had to do with my communications efforts at the front line with wire and of course it all happened about the same time when I incurred that one injury where my helmet was shot off. The injuries that many of us suffered that wasn't really an injury was trench feet. There was a lot of trench feet in World War II; you hear a lot about that in World War I, but there was a lot of it in World War II. You never took off your shoes and socks, you never could change properly, you were wet and dirty. It was a natural thing for biologic agents to get in there and cause this skin disease. There were, there were men who did lose toes and feet, frozen trench feet. And at the same time I was in the hospital for that, or about the same time I think was when I was in those few days after I was carried off the battlefield. I don't remember the exact dates of these because so long ago and you try to get on with your life. Fifty years after the war was over, I didn't get on with my life in terms of accepting what took place and telling the stories to others. So at the fiftieth anniversary

when my wife and I went to celebrate at the various events all over Europe, we realized there were a lot of Holocaust survivors all over the country and all over the world, and you can't tell somebody like myself who was an eye witness to what you saw both in the forced labor camps and the slave labor camps like in Dora-Mittelbau that it didn't happen. So many of us started to tell our stories and we're out telling our stories now so the young people will be careful to not even think about making wrong decisions, making right decisions so we don't make the same mistakes that we made at one time. So I'm a believer of that now, very intensely, and so for ten years from the fiftieth anniversary to the days of the sixtieth anniversary of our landings, I've been talking very openly about this.

Int: My daughter-in-law is an attorney and one of her close friends is Stuart Eisenstadt [Atlanta attorney], who was ambassador to NATO. President Clinton asked him to look into reparations for those who were in the concentration camps. It came to his attention because of a lady from New Jersey who wanted to collect on their life insurance policies of her father, and Stuart has written a book about his experiences, it's called *Justice Denied*. He was able to obtain considerable, I say considerable, a measure of justice for some of these people for monetary compensations from Germany and other countries. And the thing that really appalled me, there's a book about an incident that came out about two years ago, so Stuart was kind enough to send me a copy. The thing that really appalled me was the attitude of the Swiss government. The Swiss government, the Swiss banking system was actually the conduit for the wealth of the Jewish people who died in concentration camps, you know _____.

MW: We had the pleasure of hearing Mr. _____ here in Atlanta, he's from this area, and he spoke at the Breman museum not long ago, and at that time had copies of his book which we purchased and we have since read. So, yes, he told the story at the William Bremen Heritage Museum here in Atlanta, and yeah, we're familiar with that story, and it's not over with yet. They're still trying to settle the thing. I hope it will be settled.

Int: It's very difficult to obtain justice. There's no way to obtain justice for what happened, you can only, that's what he did _____ significant but it really was appalling to me the attitude of the government. I'm involved with the American Legion and other organizations. One of the things that really upset me was that _____ and the gist of it was to portray the Japanese as victims, fortunately between the _____ American Legion and some other people, we managed to get that corrected.

MW: I must say in passing then, I've certainly appreciated the opportunity to come back after the war and get an education that allowed me to eventually become very involved in areas of research that I've been very interested in. So I was a professor at Emory University where, from which I retired about twelve years ago, thirteen years ago. And I am very pleased about the developments in life since that phase of it is over. We do want the young people to know what took place, though.

Int: If you had not had the GI Bill, would you have been able to pursue your academic career?

MW: You know, I am going to answer that in an interesting way. I have a copy of the letter that I brought with me that's in the folder, in one of these folders.

Int: You had a very distinguished academic career, I noticed you went to the University of Miami.

MW: Yes, I went to the University of Miami in 1947 and graduated, got my bachelor's degree there. And then went on from there to the University of Illinois and went on to get my master's and my doctorate's degree at the same time that my wife also got her degrees. Interesting question about would I have been able to go to school. I happened to find in these old papers of mine that the stipend from the Veteran's Administration that I would be given an adequate allowance for education and subsistence. This was the original letter which is about falling apart, of ninety dollars a month and plus my education and training. I'm not sure in answer to your question I would have been able to do all that because I didn't have a very substantial source of income to do otherwise.

Int: In effect, I was bankrupt as I graduated from high school so I went to work at the local auto dealer for \$12 a week. And I had eighteen months of college but the way I did it was I washed dishes 40 hours a week and got paid \$68 dollars a week. So the GI Bill was really a Godsend to me. Did you know that the educational establishment, the president of Harvard, fought the GI Bill because they figured that education belonged to the elite and this would make college degrees available to the great, pardon my French, great unwashed. And it passed by one vote, the one solid vote was a congressman from Waycross, Georgia. Very interesting.

MW: Well I'm sure glad to have had this opportunity to speak to you, I hope that I'm covering the points that you want covered.

Int: How did you wind up at Emory?

MW: Well, actually when I finished my graduate training at the University of Illinois, I took a job, I was offered a job in industry, pharmaceutical industry in Cincinnati, Ohio. The industry did not appeal to me. I stayed up there about a year, not even a year and found out through a fellow graduate student of mine there was an available position at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, and I had my Ph.D. degree by this time. And I stayed there for six or seven years, became director of research in the department of ophthalmology. And then about that time, an old comrade of mind, friend of mine from academics invited me to come to Atlanta to Emory University. They were looking for somebody to start a research program at Emory University. This was in 1962, and I came up, was interviewed several times, and we've been in the same house, I was with the same institution all these years until my retirement in 1991 or 92. I'm professor emeritus at Emory University now, I'm a director of research in the Department of Ophthalmology and also professor in the Department of Physiology because I got my doctorate degree in physiology at the University of Illinois.

Int: I had a good friend who died about a year ago, Jake Goldstein, Audrey is his wife's name, had some great times with Jake, he really was a remarkable man, did fantastic research in physics.

MW: Yes, he did.

Int: It's interesting to me that a _____ to this fantastic_____.

MW: He was a big contributor directly to much of my research. It was called the Trebor Foundation. I had an endowed professorship and much of my research support from Trebor, well, Trebor is Robert spelled backwards, Robert Woodruff, so they're very helpful to us, and my old boss, Dr. Calhoun, Phinezy Calhoun, his father was an ophthalmologist in Atlanta, but Phinezy, Jr., brought me here to Atlanta to develop the program in ophthalmology. It was his great grandfather, his kin, who actually were eye doctors in the Confederate army during the Civil War, so they go back in history. I've enjoyed this.

Int: An eye doctor in the Civil War. I have a great uncle who was a Confederate surgeon fortunately, and my grandfather was left for dead at the second battle of Bull Run and his brother-in-law, Oliver Doyle was his name, saw him lying in the ditch on the roadside and rescued him. So except for Dr. Doyle's kindness I would not be here.

MW: OK.

Int: Well, Dr. Waitzman, thank you for an intriguing interview. In reflecting on World War II, that is now sixty years ago, what sort of final words for future generations do you have?

MW: I've heard it said recently by some very dear friends of mine that people don't want to hear anymore about this stuff. They've had enough. They've had enough of the Holocaust, they've had enough of the war, and they've... My reflection is very clear, I don't think anyone has had enough, I think this is a perpetual education that we have to keep teaching this generation and future generations about what took place so they can handle all the information they can to make the best decisions they can make about how they run their lives and how they treat their fellow human beings. These are the things that we must learn and we can't learn it unless we understand what took place in history, the good and the bad and the indifferent, we must know about it all.

Int: I was appalled at the attitude of the second generation of Filipinos. The Philippines were effectively destroyed by the Japanese, 100,000 civilians were killed, slaughtered, by the Japanese, it's a horror story. But the young folk, they don't think that if the Americans had not been there the Japanese would not have invaded! That's far from the truth. The Japanese were for taking over the whole Pacific, and I understand that the same attitude is now apparent in Korea. Having spent several months there towards the end of the Korean war, if we had not chosen to stand, Japan might well be in the same category as North Korea. The Communists were just as difficult, what's the proper word, ruthless, probably more so. It's a continuing problem.

MW: I thank you very much for having me and helping us both understand all that took place and passing it along.

Int: Thank you for coming, thank you very much for your support.