Interview with James Graff

Interview #: VR2-A-L-2008-001

Date: January 7, 2008

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Schachtsiek: This is Richard Schachtsiek. I am interviewing Jim Graff of Middletown on behalf of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library. It is Monday, January 7, 2008. Jim was a member of Company C, 134th Infantry Regiment, Thirty-Fifth Infantry Division who served in World War II in Europe. Jim, would you give me a little biographical background data about you prior to World War II?

Graff I was born in Springfield, Illinois, even though my parents lived in Middletown. I was raised in Middletown, Illinois. My dad worked for Glenn & Company as a butcher. My mother was a graduate of the old Springfield Hospital, Fifth and North Grand, Springfield. My dad had had a horse fall on him and broke his leg, and he spent six months in the hospital and that's how he met her.

Schachtsiek: What was your dad's name?

Graff My father's name was Glenn W. Graff. And my mother's name was Minnie. I started high school in the fall of 1939. And in the tenth day of October, 1941, we moved to the country. As the store had closed, we moved out on the farm. I graduated from high school in the spring of 1943 and I tried to enlist in the Marines then, before I was eighteen in the summer of 1943. They wouldn't take me because I wore glasses. I then registered for the draft in August when I was eighteen. I shucked corn that fall here, where my wife Alice lived today, for a man by the name of Joseph Wright. I was working in the timber. And my dad's aunt said to me, said, "If you would go to Lincoln College, I'll pay your tuition." So, I started the spring semester at Lincoln College. Then, janitor work there for the business manager, and one of the teachers, C.A. Balof. I was drafted in the spring of 1944. In May I was inducted in Fort Sheridan. I spent a few days in Fort Sheridan. Then, we were sent to Camp Hood, Texas to the IRTC down there.

Schachtsiek: IRTC?

Graff Infantry Training Replacement Center. Camp Hood is the largest reservation in the country. At that time, there was two designations, north camp and south camp. North camp was at Gatesville, Texas. South camp was at Killeen. North camp consisted of tank destroyer and artillery. That is one reservation where they can shoot 240 millimeter and eight inch. That reservation is thirty by thirty miles. It's as big as Logan County. The south camp consisted of tank destroyer and infantry. They graduated about 3,000 infantrymen a week. About 100,000 infantrymen in Hood at that time.
Schachtsiek: Well, before we get more into Camp Hood, where were you when you learned about Pearl Harbor being bombed?

Graff Well, we had moved to the country in October of 1941, and was always our practice to listen to the news at one o'clock on Sunday afternoon. And we heard on December the seventh that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. My cousin, Arnold Tebussek, was in the Air Force at Hickham Field. My dad called his father over in Decatur and, of course, Uncle Bill –I guess he had heard the news too –but of course, didn't know anything. But Arnold Tebussek survived the attack on Pearl Harbor. That was the only day of combat he saw in the entire war. He was in the ground crew of the Air Force. Never left Hawaii.

Schachtsiek: After Pearl Harbor was bombed and the country started to get geared up for the war, how was your life and your neighbors' influenced with rationing, and what have you?

Graff Well, of course, they began to instigate some things like meat rationing and gas rationing. We had a B stamp for gas because my mother had had a breast cancer. And they gave my dad a little extra gasoline to carry her to Springfield for treatment. That occurred in February of 1942, shortly after the thing started. And a neighbor woman, Mrs. Ott(??), she worked over at Illiopolis at the ordnance plant. And, of course, in Middletown, everybody worked in the coal mine.

Schachtsiek: Where was the coal mine?

Graff The coal mine was just about two miles due west of me in what they call Johnson Valley, because there was five Johnson brothers that run that mine and they all lived in that area. It was kind of a little valley and they call it Johnson Valley Coal Company. And some guys got deferment because they worked in the mine. Of course, there was some deferments given to fellows because they were farmers. There was probably some hard feelings because some guys got deferments and some didn't. But, oh, tires were rationed and sugar was a little short supply, and shoes. You could only buy so many pair of shoes. But we didn't notice any particular hardship.

Schachtsiek: Was that somewhat made easier because of living on a farm because you were able to provide your own food?

Graff Well, we had our own meat, and milk, and eggs. But we always had a big garden, and we hunted mushrooms, and blackberries. And we always had black walnuts, and hazelnuts. I mean, much like that's the way we lived in Middletown. I mean, we had a big garden. We had fruit, and grapes, and you know, traded eggs with the neighbor woman for milk. We had milk. My dad always had a cow. But, you know, people today don't live that way.

Schachtsiek: Did any of your friends enlist and go into the war early on?

Graff Well, no. Most of them—when I was in Camp Hood, two fellows I graduated with in high school with, Henry Fesse and Carl Harris. Henry was in the infantry and Carl Harris was in the artillery in north camp. And a couple of guys had quit high school and enlisted early. One went in the Navy, and another guy went in the Air Force. But most people went in the draft. And because they registered everybody from eighteen to forty-five, my dad had to register. He'd been born in 1899. And he was barely eligible for the draft in the First World War, but had been given his notice. But because of the flu in 1918, he and my wife Alice's father happened to be men that they held back because they had the flu so bad in the camps. They were losing more men for the flu in camps in the states than were being killed in France. But most fellows went in the draft. We had some fellows early on that volunteered for the Marines, and they wound up in Iceland. So, you know, it was just luck of the draw.

Schachtsiek: Do you recall where you went to register for the draft?

Graff In Lincoln. Had to go to the County Clerk's office. And that's where the ration office was. Alice can tell you about that; she had a big garden and they had a big push on victory gardens, and things like that. They saved rags, and the women, they would made rugs. You know, I mean, and scrap iron. One thing that always bothered me, they had an old German World War I cannon and they sold that in the scrap drive. I wish they'd have kept it because they had plenty of scrap without that. But they got that after the First World War.

Schachtsiek: You were saying that you went down to Fort Hood, Texas for your infantry training.

Graff In those days it was Camp Hood.

Schachtsiek: Camp Hood.

Graff Because there's a difference between a fort and a camp. A fort is a permanent installation. A camp is a temporary. And now it's Fort Hood, but you look around in those days, Fort Sheridan was a fort. Fort Meade was a fort. I was in Camp Miles Standish, Boston and it was a camp. Camp Breckenridge,

Kentucky. Camp Campbell, Kentucky was a camp. Now it's Fort Campbell, where the 101st Airborne is. But that was the designation.

Schachtsiek: Tell me more about your training there at Camp Hood.

Graff Well, when I first went there, I went in an outfit that trained I and R people: Intelligence and Reconnaissance. And we were nine weeks into that basic, and they decided everybody should be straight rifle companies. And because there was a little difference in the training, I and R people, we got to drive three-quarter-ton trucks that had a lot of compass and map work. We fired a fifty-caliber truck-mount off the back of a three-quarter-ton truck. And the fifty-caliber rifle companies didn't fire the fifty-caliber. But when you got in straight infantry, you had all the basic infantry weapons. Everybody learned to fire the M-1 in the first six weeks.

Schachtsiek: M-1 Garand?

Graff M-1 Garand. But then we learned to fire the BAR, [Browning Automatic Rifle] the thirty-caliber air-cooled machine gun, sixty millimeter mortar, the bazooka, rifle grenades, and threw regular hand grenades. Plus we got a little experience with demolition. Quarter pound blocks of nitro starch. You couldn't believe it, but the cap that will set off a stick of dynamite will blow a minute hole in the steel shell of a helmet.

Schachtsiek: How did you learn something like that?

Graff They proved it to us. This old boy lit the fuse and put the cap in there under the helmet, put the fuse and lit the fuse; blew that helmet up in the air. Of course, I knew a lot about dynamite because we had a neighbor in Middletown –he was a sheep shearer and a well digger. And, I mean, he kept his dynamite –in the wintertime –kept kept it in the outside toilet. And the nitroglycerin would separate from the sand, and then, you'd have to take it in the house and thaw it out. But in the mine, they didn't use dynamite. They used black powder and they didn't need a cap; all they need is a fuse.

Schachtsiek: What was your housing like down at Camp Hood?

Graff Well, it was just two-story barracks. They were standard. All the different camps—in Camp Miles Standish, Boston, they were single story, but Camp Hood, they were double story –and have about a platoon to a barracks. Down there, we had about 240 men in a company. Platoons raised about sixty men. Little different than the combat platoons because we had four squads. Overseas only had three squads in a platoon.

Schachtsiek: Who were some of your close friends, or people you recall from your training down in Texas?

Graff Well, I had a couple of fellows. There was a lead miner from Missouri by the

name of Woods. He slept up above me. And a couple of fellows from New Mexico slept next to me. One's name was Tharp and the other's name was John Weir. And then I got an emergency furlough. My mother had another cancer operation, and I got a ten day furlough and took about three days to travel. But I had six or seven days here at home. And they set me back then, in my basic training six weeks because I'd missed five days of training. Might have saved my life, you never know. But at that time, they transferred me then, of course, to another company. And I met a young fellow by the name of Henry Hein from San Antonio, Texas. His father was a pharmacist and had a drug store right near the Alamo. And Henry had been over het with the heat prostration and been in the hospital, and, of course, lost out. He and I kind of gravitated together just for the simple reason that we both came in together, and everybody else had kind of buddied up. So, Henry and I were very close friends in basic, wound up. And I even—we got a weekend pass and I visited his home in San Antonio.

Schachtsiek: What were the dates that you were in basic training?

Graff Well, I was in basic training from late May of forty-four, because on the sixth of June they read us what Eisenhower told about the invading the continent on the sixth of June. And we was standing muster in the morning. So, I remember we were in Camp Hood, you know, on D-day, and I got out of Camp Hood, I think I was home here at Thanksgiving. And I went back. We left out of Camp Hood on a troop train. And they dropped me and two other guys off that I knew over here in Chillicothe, Illinois. Hell, I'd never been in Chillicothe, Illinois in my life. Didn't know where it was. But we said something to the depot agent —I told him, I said, "How do we get to Peoria?" He said, "Well, there's a bus." And he said, "I'll call out and if the filling station's still open, maybe they'll stop the bus because the bus just left." Well, by golly, he caught the bus. The bus turned around and come back and got us. Carried us to Peoria. These two guys, one of them went to Bloomington, the other guy went Champaign. on the traction, Illinois terminal. [the Inter-Urban, an electric railroad, later abandoned] I got on the terminal and rode to Lincoln. I was here over Thanksgiving, and then I had to report to Fort Meade, Maryland. And my dad took me to Lincoln, got on the train, rode to Chicago. Run into three guys I knew. One guy was from down here in Missouri, and then an Italian fellow by the name of Gabbarti from Wyoming, and an Indian kid, Wayyeh, from Wyoming. So, we went to the Union Station, Chicago. We rode to Union Station, Washington, D.C..

Schachtsiek: Before we go on further with that, back to Camp Hood. Do you recall anything about a drill instructor? Often times they have a big influence.

Graff We called them cadre. We never called them DIs. That's a Marine word.

Schachtsiek: Okay.

Graff The first one of them that I really knew was a guy by the name of Coughlin. He'd been in the regular army before the war. But he was a very fair man. And Beetle Bailey [a cartoon army character], I mean, they never laid a hand on you. We settled all the differences—well, there was some fights in the barracks once in a while, but if there was—most generally we'd settle them at night between the barracks with the gloves. And cadre generally supervised. Just let them fight it out until one guy give up or got the hell knocked out of him. And then, we had a—well I say he was a fair guy –we had a guy by the name of Erikson from Iowa. And to this day, I don't know whether he was fooling us, or he was really shook up. But he was one of these guys who he was married and he had a kid. He always thought that the war should be fought by single men, not married guys, and he dwelled on that. Hell, that's all he ever talked about. So, one day on a hike, he broke down. And I remember a big old fellow from over in Iowa by the name of Mike Gallo and one of us took his pack, and the other took his rifle, and we carried them on this march. Well, when we went on bivouac –the last fifteen to sixteen week of a seventeen week infantry basic was spent in bivouac –and that was all live fire, and you crawled under machine gun fire, and all that. And I happened to be in the first echelon to go through the infiltration course because I was going to have to be on KP. Well, when I got back from the infiltration course –the first time you go through it at night, and you consisted of crawling about 300 yards under double apron barbed wire, and stuff like that. And those machine guns were set at thirty inches. They couldn't lower them anymore because they had a two-by-four nailed across. But they continually fired. So, if you stood up, you were going to get shot. And I got back to the platoon, and I said to Coughlin, I said, "You know," I said, "If that Erikson goes on that infiltration course, I think maybe he's going to get killed." He said, "Why do you think that?" And I said, "Well," I said, "He's haywire, and I think he may stand up. And by God, if he does," I said, "They'll cut him down." I said, "They don't stop firing." So, you know, by golly, he didn't make him go. And that guy, they give him a section eight –that's mental –and he left out of Camp Hood. But to this day, I don't know whether he was fooling us, or whether he was really haywire

Schachtsiek: Now, you're talking about going through the infiltration course, and live fire. You mention learning to fire the M-1 Garand. M-1 carbine?

Graff Yeah, we fired the carbine. But the carbine never was much of an infantry weapon. They used a lot in the Pacific. But it's more of a—it's like a forty-five. I know a guy that was in the Pacific and shot a Jap seven times, and six of the bullets were in his mess gear on his back. The one that missed the mess gear killed him. In the European theater, I never saw a round of ball ammunition; it was all AP, all armor piercing. And BARs and—it's all thirty-caliber stuff. I mean, officers had carbines, and some runners did. And machine gunners—the gunner that carried the receiver, some of them only had a forty-five, but carbine, it wasn't a—hell, it wouldn't go through a brick wall, or a tree.

Schachtsiek: What was your experience with the M-1 Garand?

Graff Well—

Schachtsiek: In training?

Graff Well, you learned to—first you dry fired it. And then, you went on the rifle range. And I shot sharpshooter. I missed expert by about four points. But, you know, the Garand had eight rounds. And it was easy to load. And, I mean, those we spoke dibs for them. You seen a few of them, and I know a guy that was in the heavy weapons company overseas. He always carried an 0-three [Springfield rifle], but they only had five rounds, and they were bolt action. And you get eight rounds off a lot quicker than you could five. And M-1 was a good weapon. I mean, that's what I always thought, and that's what we used.

Schachtsiek: Any other last thoughts about your time at Camp Hood?

Graff If you survived Camp Hood, you could survive anything, because they killed about two men a day down there with the heat. They had the highest AWOL rate of any camp in the country. Of course, the temperature around 100, a lot of guys went down with heat stroke. And Hood was a tough place. And you come out of Hood, you come out of the infantry basic at Hood, you had about as good a training as there was. Mentally and physically.

Schachtsiek: Okay. After Camp Hood, you headed east, to Washington, D.C..

Graff Yeah, we got off the train in Washington, D.C.. We're walking to a little restaurant. Us four fellows come out and a car pulls up. A guy said, "What are you soldiers doing?" And I said, "Well, we're going to look around a little," I said, "We don't have to be at Fort Meade until midnight." And he said, "Well," he said, "I make a living hauling tourists." I said, "How much do you want to haul us around?" Because it was early in the morning, like seven thirty, or something. He said, "Twelve dollars apiece." I said, "Hell, we ain't got twelve dollars between us." He said, "Have you got twelve dollars?" I said, "I imagine." He said, "I'll take you anyway." So, by golly, he took us by the White House, and took us out to Arlington, and we got to see the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and I don't know what day of the week it was. But we went to the Library of Congress, got to see the Constitution. And spent some time in the Smithsonian. And I always remember, they had the arm of a B-17 gunner that had been shot off by a kraut [German]) twenty millimeter preserved in a jar of alcohol. Well, they had the—now, this was a souvenir from the Indian Wars –but they had the upper lip and mustache of a cavalryman that an Indian had not only scalped his head, but had cut the mustache off. And they had that. You don't see that in Smithsonian today, but you did then.

Schachtsiek: Being in Washington, I'm assuming it was influenced by the blackout, being dark at night?

Graff No, I don't think so. No, you didn't have no blackout here in the country. Only along the East and West Coast. And well, I'll tell you another experience we had in Washington. We're at Fort Meade, and we're there for a few days. Well, there's a couple of guys that I was taking basic training with. One's named Potts. He was part Indian, he was from Oklahoma. And the guy by the name of Lawrence. He'd come out of Arizona. So, we go into Washington, and I didn't drink much and neither did Potts, but I figured Lawrence wanted to drink. So, we got us a place to stay in a rooming house with a woman. She had several rooms. And she had a little card. So, I give this card to Lawrence, and I told him, I said, "Now, if you get drunk," I said, "You give this to a cab driver and he'll get you to this place." So, Potts and I, we go to the Stage Door Canteen. And we dance and step, and then, we go see John Wayne and Marlene Dietrich in *Golden Earrings*. So, we go to this boarding house. And we're about three in the morning. Hell of a racket. We get up, there's old Lawrence, drunker than a skunk. When he started out, he had a garrison cap on with the hard bill. He has lost that. He's got a sailor hat on. He's raising hell. We holler down there—there was an elderly man who was keeping the desk—I said, "We'll take care of him." Well, there's a WAC [Women's Army Corps] shacked up with a sailor. And they come out there – she's got on a khaki slip, and he's got on his white underwear. And this old lady that run this place, she had a younger daughter, and she made the mistake, she mentioned the word MP.[Military Police] When she said MP, that Lawrence made a swing at her. If he'd have hit her, he'd tore her head off. I hit him three times, and then, she got to feeling sorry for him. And he went under the bed and started to jump out through the window. I happened to hit him the fourth time and knocked him out. So, I had to sleep with him. We had a double bed and a single bed. Potts slept in this cot, and I slept with him. He gritted his teeth all night. So, we got up the next morning; he's asleep, and I wake him up, and I tell him, I said, "You stay in here. Don't leave." I said, "We'll get you a cap and get you back to camp." Because he'd be out. Hell, we couldn't get him in there with that navy hat he had. So, we went to a restaurant and stole another GIs cap in order to get him back to Fort Meade. And by golly, he winds up in the same company with me overseas, and then, he gets his feet frozen. But Potts I never did see. I don't never know whatever happened to him. Never seen him after.

Schachtsiek: Where did you go from Fort Meade?

Graff Camp Miles Standish, Boston. And we was there probably a week. We took a hike or two, and we went into Boston, and we got to see the Old North Church. And had a bunch of Italian prisoners. They did all the cookings.

Schachtsiek: What is the date that you're there in Boston?

Graff Well, we left Boston on the—we got on board the ship on the twentieth of December '44, and we left Boston on the twenty-second. So, we're in Boston. It snow on the ground, and it was cold in December. But we leave Boston on

the twenty-second of December. We go on board—we're an advance party. We go on board the twentieth on the old Aquitania. She's a sister ship of the old Lusitania. She's 44,000 ton. Hauls 8,000 men. We were assigned—well, they made me a salt water corporal. They had salt water companies made up regular. And they had salt water non-coms.[non-commissioned officers] I had twelve men, and my job was to keep food on the table. Because they messed twice –you ate two meals a day –but they have twelve settings. They have one kitchen fore and another aft. One of the things in Fort Meade, we come out of a PX and I got a little cross rifles on my overseas cap. Couple guys salute me. And I said, ”What are you saluting us for, we ain't officers?” This one guy said, "Jim Graff." He was Bill Charis. He was a kid from Mason City. His wife, Reeda, graduated from high school with me, and they're friends of ours yet today. They live in Champaign. Bill went overseas on the same ship. I see him everyday. He went to Eighty-Seventh when I went to Thirty Fifth. He got his thumb shot off, and he was back in the states before the war was over.

Schachtsiek: When were you actually assigned to the 134th?

Graff Well, we left on the twenty-second of December. Took us seven days to cross the water. We landed at Greenock, Scotland on the twenty-ninth day of December, 1944. Immediately as that ship dropped anchor, that outfit I was in began to disembark. They carried us across the harbor because big ships couldn't get up to the dock. They had to offload on a small, little old Brit boat. They hand fired it with coal in sacks. And we got on the dock. We got on a railroad train. They carried us to South Hampton. We went into a tent city in South Hampton. Stayed overnight. Next evening –that was the thirty-first of December –we board an English ship. We cross the English Channel on New Years Eve. And when we get close to the French coast, they offload us on to LSTs.[Landing Ship - Tank And then, we go in on the beach. They quit landing men on Omaha beach, but the docks and stuff weren't ready yet at LeHavre, so they still had to land us on the beach. We marched up the hill. Later on, after I got home, I learned from a World War I guy, they had a camp up at LeHavre on that hill, same place that we were in. The Germans had used it because they had a lot of German munitions. But anyway, stayed overnight. The next afternoon we marched down and got on board railroad train boxcars. And we started east, and we were on the train three nights and two days. We crossed France and we came to Metz, and we offloaded. One interesting thing that happened while we were on this railroad train: these GIs found an old car bumper, and filled it up with wood, and they were burning the wood because there wasn't no heat, of course, in them boxcars. Forty and eight. [French term from WWI: 40 men or 8 horses] Damn car caught fire in the middle of the train. And you're going along blackout, you know, it's supposed to be. You know, you're in a fire. You know, and anyway, we got to Metz. And at Metz, they got a big Yepple depot; it's an old French cavalry barracks. It's got a lot of brick buildings, and a big quadrangle out in front, in the middle. And we go in there, and we meet these two guys, and I knew they wasn't replacements

because they got their rifle. At this time, we didn't even have a rifle. They would send some outfits overseas with rifles to get the weapons over there, but at that time, you was using all battlefield salvage.

So, when we got to Metz, and these two guys, they come in there with us and we found out they're out of Twenty Sixth Division. Well, they're supposed to be up there in Belgium. These guys, they took off. They're back down in Metz. They were going from one outfit into another until somebody asked them a question, then they'd move onto another one. So, anyway, well we draw a rifle. One guy even gets one that's got blood all over the stock. And they give us two clips, and we go out and march out to a rifle range and zero the weapon in. And over there three or four days.

One day, they call us out. They start calling off names. And colored drivers, the trucks with black drivers, Quartermasters. And they say, "You guys are going Thirty Fifth Division." So, we get in open trucks. Now, it's six below zero. But some bright officer sitting back in Paris decided that you can't leave the canvas covers on the trucks because in case of an air raid, the men might get trapped. Won't give a damn if they all freeze to death, but then, you didn't want to get them killed by an airplane. So, we ride ninety miles from Metz to Martenlange, Belgium.

As they opened the end gate on the truck I'm on, this big Polish fellow, he pitches unconscious out into the snow. I never see any more of him until the day I'm discharged out of Fort Sheridan, and he walks up to get a purple heart for having his feet froze. I remember the name. It had about seventeen letters in it. And I pulled him down when he went by me, and I said, "Don't I know you?" I said, "Didn't you pass out over in Belgium." He said, "Yeah, that's what I'm getting this purple heart for." Said he never got on the line. He got the purple heart because he froze his feet.

So, we got into Martelange, Belgium and we're in a barn. And we stay with a family by the name of Blum. B-l-u-m. That always made me think of these Blums that lived in New Holland, IL. And the Chaplain, First Battalion Chaplain. They assign us just by alphabetical order. Start out, G, I end up in C Company. Fellow by the name Arthur Busch ended up in A. Howard Clark, he ended up in A. And Fiore, he ends up in B. But I'm G, so. And they assign us to a company, and the chaplain, he gives us a kind of a rah rah talk about what the outfit has done, and everything. We get there the eighth of January, and on the tenth, well, getting towards night, we get on a couple weapons carriers, and they carry us up to the line.

Schachtsiek: Before we get to there, you mentioned you didn't receive your weapon until you got to Belgium.

Graff No, to Metz.

Schachtsiek: To Metz. What uniform, what equipment did you have at that time?

Graff We had all the equipment, but we didn't have any ammunition, or no hand grenades. And just a rifle. And we never got a round of ammunition until we were pretty close to the fox hole line. As we were marching up that night of the tenth, marching up through the snow, there was a barn. And there was a guy with a jeep there, and he said, "C Company men, come here." And he gave us two bandoliers. Each bandolier had six clips with forty-eight rounds. And you put in your web belt, and one bandolier. And then, you got six grenades: you got five fragmentation, and a white phosphorus. And you put them in the empty bandolier. So, we never actually got the doggone ammunition until we were in half a quarter of the front line.

Schachtsiek: You mentioned that it was so cold. Did they give you special cold weather gear? Or were you just in jackets?

Graff I had long underwear and short underwear. I had a pair of fatigues, and a pair of wool ODs[olive drab]. I had a sweater, and a field jacket, and an overcoat. And four-buckle felt-top overshoes with combat boots. Now, we didn't wear the overcoats much in the daytime, except you were just sitting around, but they had them for night. But no, the overshoes –you put a pair of four-buckle, felt-top overshoes on over a pair of combat boots, and you've got a lot of weight on your feet. And got up there, se walking up through the woods, and I see three eighty-one millimeter mortars and they're all pointed different directions. And there's a buck sergeant, he had chevrons on, and he's standing there. And I said, ”Down in front of you,” I said, "why don't you point them all one way?" He said, "You damn fool, we're surrounded on three sides up here." So, we go up a little further and there we see our first—well, we'd seen a dead German on a stretcher back at Metz out there at the rifle range –but we see this stuff sticking out in the trail and thought it was tree limbs. Got up there, it was a German officer. He had on black boots, and he was kind of stuck out of a snow bank. And then, right over there by him, there was a young kraut [German] laying on his back. And he had the bluest eyes. I always remember that. And his mouth was open and it was full of snow. Snow was deep. Probably a foot. And we march up there, and they bring down some prisoners. And we get up there just about dark and it was dark, and this guy said, "My name is Sergeant Storm. You're in the second squad." He said, "Go over there and get in the hole with that man over there."

So, I walked over there. This guy said, "Over here." And I said, "I'm Jim Graff from Middletown, Illinois." He said, "I'm Bruce Boyce from South Paris, Maine." And he talked like a down Easterner. He broke the top half of his false teeth, so that didn't help him much either. But when in the line, really, didn't see what the guy looked like, anybody, until morning. And they were in reserve because on the fourth of January, they had got in behind the Germans in a snowstorm. Got through the German front lines. krauts were hunkered down. Company walked through them, and got in the German

bivouac area. Then, all hell broke loose. This sergeant and another fellow killed thirty that day. Shot a lot of them out of the chow line.

Schachtsiek: So, this was your first combat experience?

Graff Yeah. And so, this company, they only had thirty-seven men left. And so, we we're—there was forty-two of us: an officer and forty two enlisted men. First replacements they'd got in the Ardennes. And so, I stay on. Boyce and I, we're in the hole all night. Now, C Company, they was pretty good. We drew four blankets and a shelter half and that was a blanket roll for one hole. Now, I've hand carried them for a mile, but we were never burdened down with mess gear or blankets. I never carried, in combat, nothing but a gas mask carrier with a couple of K rations and a pair of wire cutters and a few personal items —never carried blankets. They had a lot of extra men in the company rear. Guys whose nerves had gone bad, or something had happened to them. And rather then send them back, they done menial tasks. They butchered, done KP, and hauled. And we'd roll these blanket rolls and that was the way with chow. We most of the time got two hot meals a day in combat. Tank outfits, they was always—they never got nothing warmer. They was all dependent, almost entirely, on cold rations. But you take, in C Company, by the time I got there, the Company Commander was a guy from Creedmore, North Carolina,. Wallace B. Chappel. And he was a replacement officer. He'd been there probably about six weeks. But Old Chappy, he was a fair guy. And he thought of the men. And my first American casualty was a self-inflicted wound.

Schachtsiek: How did that happen?

Graff First morning we roll in our bed rolls and a shot rang out. This guy shot himself through the wrist, he said, while he was rolling his blanket roll. And later, fifty years later I meet his friend, and his friend asked me if I knew Fred Webb and I said, "Well, I only knew him through the morning reports, but I remember the morning he shot himself." And he said, "Shot himself?" He said, "He didn't tell me he was wounded?" I said, "Yeah." But I said, "He shot himself rolling his blanket roll." I seen three fellows do that.

Schachtsiek: You mention that you always got hot meals up in the front line. What did the hot meals consist of, generally?

Graff Well, morning we generally have spam or bacon, and pancakes. Coffee. And they bring them up before you jump off. And you'd rotate. One man would stay in the hole, the other guy'd go back and get something to eat. Krauts were the same shape we were; they was cold, and they was hungry. And the thing is, you didn't fight all day and all night because, by God, you had to get in the hole at night or you going to freeze to death. I mean, a lot of American wounded froze to death. No doubt. The night of the twenty-fifth of January, it was twenty-five below zero, documented in Danny Parker's book.

Schachtsiek: What book is that?

Graff Huh?

Schachtsiek: What book is that?

Graff Well, it's *Hitler's Ardennes Offensive,* written by Danny Parker. And it's a story of the Battle of the Bulge. And it documents the temperature in January in 1945. In January of 1945, that company I was in suffered 201 casualties. That's killed, wounded, frost bite, sick, and missing. About seventy-some odd of them were MIAs.[missing in action] Got captured on the fourth of January. Thirty-one men got killed. It was over forty men wounded, and over forty men frostbite. And probably twenty-five sick. But people don't realize the weather, how atrocious it was. And you take with all those clothes we had on. You advance across them snow swept fields. And, you know, you couldn't run. I know guys that got shot laying down because the snow held them up off the ground. And this sergeant that shot all those krauts, Rev Storm, he lived down here in Robinson, Illinois. He even saw the tracer that hit him. We went in to be slapped back in machine gun fire. And he seen that tracer coming, he said, "I knew that was going to hit me." And he turned sideways and instead of hitting him flush in the leg, it hit him in the butt. And 1991, Alice and I was able to take his wife to the place where he got wounded. But that winter campaign, I spent three weeks in it. And by the end—there was forty-two of us that went to C Company, and by the thirty-first of January, something had happened to twenty-nine of them; killed, wounded, or frostbite. And bad, sad time.

Schachtsiek: You are talking about your first combat experience. Then there were times when you were pulled back from the line?

Graff Oh, yeah, we'd be in reserve. But when we first went in the woods, we were just southeast of Bastogne. And we were fighting in conjunction with the Fourth and Sixth armored, and the Ninetieth and the Twenty Sixth Division, and the Eightieth, and the Thirty-Fifth. They all in Patton's army. All in the Third army. South hinge of it. C Company had to help relieve the paratroopers outside of Bastogne. Little town called Marrie. We drove, then, in a northeasterly direction.

Our first real combat outside of the occasional shell fire, and stuff, was on the seventeenth of January when we attacked up near a town by the name of Arloncourt. And the Bois Lambert –Bois Forest –Lambert. Alice and I were fortunate enough, in 1979 to meet a young man that's father owned that. Lambert was their name, and they owned that timber. And he had two men working for him, and I told him about: as we were rifle companies moving in the woods, there was a 6th Armored tank sitting over here by this house. And a kraut tank comes out of the woods, and he shoots at this tank and he misses. He's using AP, and he's high. And those guys were standing around. The

driver was in there, and the gunner jumped in there, and in three rounds, they knocked him out. And this guy tells us that these two fellows –they talked to Alice and I –they went up there and there was three dead Germans in that tank. But they'd been working—they still worked in 1979 –they'd been working for this kid and his dad on this acreage.

But things was very confusing. And I think it might have been the same tank the night before. He pulled down into the open. And a gas truck pulled up, and they put in fuel. And two 6th Armored tanks are sitting there. And an officer come over to Old Chappell. That's when I knew Chappell was all right. He said, "Now, how about you putting some sixty mortar rounds on that gas truck. Hope to set it afire." Chappel said, "If you ain't got guts enough to fight them with tanks, I ain't going to fight them with a rifle company." And we let him gas up, the kraut pulled out. But, you know. And we knocked that tank out, and we got into the woods, and then, find out later on by the morning reports they were fighting the Ninth Panzer [German for panther][Tank] Division. And they got dug in tanks. And one shell killed one man in my platoon, and wounded six. And that was the first casualty. The guy killed was a kid by the name Kittleson. Lived up here in Lisbon, Illinois. And he'd gone overseas with me. But that was our first casualties. But funny thing with this, after they'd send us up a medic, and the medic—old Doc Youngs—he was a good medic because he'd been in a base hospital in England for eighteen months. But they have some heavy casualties in the medics, and they'd send them down there to the rifle company. Sent him up there, and didn't even have an entrenching tool. But we corrected that.

I dug three fox holes that day. And we got up there on this here highway, and we were in the woods, and I see this tank come by. And the gun swings over this way. A bunch of our guys kind of grouped up, and I thought, Oh my God. But to this day, I still think he was German. But I don't think he knew. I think he had one of our tanks that they captured. Because he went right back through the German lines. But he never fired a round. But they was as confused as we were. And that was our first combat. And that night, they brought up food, and we'd hand carried it following a sound powered telephone wire. And I and this Sergeant Storm were drinking coffee and eating a sandwich, and this guy walks by. It's moonlight and we're kind of in an open spot in the timber. Storm says, "I'll be, that guy's got on kraut mess gear." About that time, somebody hollered out, We got a prisoner! That German had walked through two platoons of infantry, and a section of heavy machine guns. Nobody had questioned him, nobody had halted him. He never said a word. He could have stuck a hand grenade in Storm and my pocket. He walked right by us, and somebody out of the headquarters challenged him, and then, he give up. I mean, you know.

Alice and this fellow I knew who recently died—they buried him the third of January in Arlington—he was taken prisoner on the fourth of January. And he said, on the fourth, he knew things was going to hell, so he

didn't give up on the fourth, but he didn't know where he was or nothing. So, he decided he was going to have to surrender, so he disassembled his M-1 and threw the parts away. Made up his mind he was going to surrender to the first German he sees. He walks around an Evergreen tree and he runs into this German. This kraut knew who he is right away, and hollered. And then, he said another kraut showed up and that's the end. But Dorschner he was a prisoner in the end of the war. You know what I mean, that's the way it goes.

Schachtsiek: You mentioned briefly that you were serving in Patton's Third Army. Always hear stories about Patton. Do you have any stories, feelings—

Graff I have one. When we were going from Metz to Martenlange, Belgium on the road, we were on these black quartermaster trucks. We hear this horn honk. And these drivers, of course, they don't want to get off too far off the road because the road's not very wide and there might be mines on the edge of the road. But this guy's wanting around. Well, who would it be but a forty-two Chevrolet staff car with a brigadier general license on it. Well, see, that was a designation that you could tell he was a brigadier general: one star. Well, pretty soon, here's another horn honk. We look and we see this elderly guy. He got a thirty-caliber windshield mount [machine gun] and he's in an open jeep. And somebody says, who's that old bastard? And I was sitting right close to the end of the truck, and I could see, by gosh, I said, "That's Patton. There's his pearl handled revolvers." And he documents it: he said he passed a bunch of the Ninetieth Division. They was moving up about the same time. But I still think to this day that he was passing us. Because the Ninetieth, they was just coming up into the Bulge then. And after, on the sixteenth of January, our regiment, the 134th, and the 161st Field Artillery Regiment, 105's, and a medical battalion, we were designated as attached to the Sixth Armored. They'd lost a lot of armored infantry. And from then on until the thirty-first of January we was an integral part, actually, of the Sixth Armored. The rest of the 35th Division had gone back down south, and to back up the Forty Second and the 100th Division in that north wind deal.

And when we drove out of Belgium then, we started across the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. And the worst fight that I ever had in Europe happened on the twenty-fourth, the twenty-fifth and the twenty-sixth of January. And we attacked out of Wilwerdange and into a town called Weiswampach. We had twelve men killed. And let's shut it off for a minute.

(Break in tape)

Schachtsiek: Ready?

Graff Yup. Yeah, our attack up Weiswampach was the worst combat that I saw in the European theater.

Schachtsiek: What was that battle concerning?

Graff Well, the 6th Armored –we were attached to them, and we even had their half tracks [vehicles with front wheels and rear tracks] – and so we either rode on their tanks or rode on the half tracks. We didn't have to do much walking. We

found out later, the krauts, of course, they were backing off from the Bulge. And they had about twenty armored vehicles in this one town. But they only had enough fuel for three. And so, they didn't want to give them up. And we attacked. They begin to hold because they were getting close to the German border; just across the Ouy River was the German Border. They caught us out in the open, and we suffered some casualties, and kind of had a funny thing happen. We got a bunch of replacements, and this Polish fellow that I made assistant BAR man out of. I'm in the lead, and Sokolowski's behind me, and the medic's behind him. And these krauts open up these machine guns, and these bullets crackle over the heads. This guy, he's a retrained rifleman. He's an anti-aircraft mechanic. Didn't even know how to get a clip in an M-1. Youngs hollers, the medic hollers, "Graff, your buddy's hit." Well, I wait a minute, and get up, and run back, and here's Soke, he's face down in the snow. I thought, By God, they've killed him. So, I roll him over. Couldn't see any blood on him. Course, had so many clothes on, you couldn't see it anyway. By golly, he batted his eye—he'd just fainted. First hostile fire he'd heard. He'd been up there a couple days.

Schachtsiek: You mentioned BAR now. You're not carrying an M-1 Garand?

Graff No. I tell you what. I started out as a platoon runner. A guy over here in Missouri –I met him the first day on the line –and he said to me, "Where you from?" And I said, "I'm from Illinois." He said, "Chicago?" And I said, "Nope. I live over around Springfield." He said, "I used to haul corn from Lawndale and Mount Pulaski." He lived over here, forty miles west of Hannibal, and his dad had a coal and grain business. And he said, "You know anything about a five forty six walky talky radio?" And I said, "No." But I said, "I'm willing to learn." I said, "That's what they sent me over here, and I'll do anything to make a go." He said, "Need a runner." He said, "You have any experience in the woods?" I said, "I've wandered around the woods all my life." So, he said, "I can teach you the code." So, it takes off. Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog. And so I was the platoon runner. And I stayed with the platoon CP. Didn't have any officer. Had a platoon sergeant. And Landrum. Landrum was the platoon guide. Platoon sergeant was a guy by the name of McRae. He'd been seventeen years in the National Guard, and five years in the army since he's been activated. Been wounded at St-Lo, and just recently came back. But Scotty had a lot of know how. And so, I was the runner. And I had an M-1 then. But on the seventeenth of January, got the aerial shot off of it. So, I wasn't happy. And third squad of the third platoon, the BAR man, his feet froze. So, I took the BAR. Schachtsiek: The only prior experience you had with a BAR was at Camp Hood?

Graff Basic training. Yup. But the squad leader was a guy by the name of Elwell Sanborn. He was from Laconia, New Hampshire. He had been in the line since he was the first bunch of replacements come in after St-Lo. Never been hit or anything. But he wasn't in very good shape. But him and I, he'd been a BAR man. We cleaned up the thing and all the magazines, and everything.

Even took the magazines apart. But we didn't fire the thing. When we got into this deal, this machine gun fire, and I found out that Soky wasn't killed, I run up on the hill beside a guy by the of Baker and opened fire. That damn thing wouldn't eject. I shot twenty rounds and dug every one of them out with a pocket knife. So, when we finally got into the woods, Landrum, this guy from over here in Missouri said, "What's the matter, Graff?" And I said, "I don't know, Landrum." But I said, "This damn thing won't eject." He said, "That ain't no good." He said, "Just make sure that nobody else uses it again." He said, "We've had two or three men killed. I'll get you a rifle." So, I took the magazine out of it, and got her by the barrel, and bent her up against an Evergreen tree. Put a pretty good bow in it so you couldn't get a magazine in it. Threw it down in the snow. Far as I know, it's still up there in the woods.

Schachtsiek: That's a pretty heavy weapon for a relatively small guy like you to carry.

Graff Yeah, but you know, I carried that thing for a long time, then, I got a new one later on and carried the thing practically the whole war then. But, you know, I'd carried newspapers and, like I say, I shucked corn. Louis Boward and I scooped corn in the corn crib: 771 bushel in one day. And, you know, I wasn't big, but I was pretty stout. But after that escapade, I got that new BAR, I then done real well with it. And the next day, of course—and probably one of the saddest things happened right after we bent the rifle, the BAR. We had dug in along the edge of the woods, and it was a kind of a raise here. And three krauts come up over the hill. One of him had his arm in a sling, so he'd been wounded. One of them still had on a helmet. And they had their hands up. Well, after this escapade on the fourth of January when C Company had been trapped behind the German lines, in the melee they'd found six of our men that had been killed by small caliber weapon. They were just beginning to find those guys about two weeks after they'd been killed. Well, somebody – they laid it onto the first Adolf Hitler Panzer Division because we were fighting them in their own back yard –so they said, If you find any prisoners out of them, shoot them. And we didn't know what the hell these guys were out of, but somebody said, "Kill the bastards," and everybody starting shooting them. Well, two of them went down. One of them jumped in a fox hole, or a shell hole up there. And a guy that went overseas with me by the name of Gertshbauer, he run up there and he shot this kraut eight times. And that kraut's hollering, "Komrad, Komrad." And Gertshbauer hollered, "Comrade, you son of a bitch." And he just kept shooting him. And then, Gertshbauer he gets wounded the next day. He gets hit in the head. We're going into this Weiswampach and he comes back, and I grab him and drag him down. I said, "Get down you damn fool. You're going to get killed." He said, "Graff, I'm hit in the head and I'm going to the rear." He had a piece of shrapnel in the side of his head. I clipped myself shaving worse than that. Of course, it's cold. But when he came back to the company, he come back to see me. He said, "You know I've made the last attack of this company I'm going to make." I thought he was going to go run off. I'll be damned, he didn't shoot himself in the hand. Twenty minutes later we call up, we're going to move out

across the Rhine. They call up, said, "Send the medic over to fourth platoon. Somebody just shot themselves." So, you never know. I always thought maybe if this chain of events... [hadn't happened he wouldn't have shot himself.]

Schachtsiek: You mention about getting ready to cross the Rhine. What was all involved with that?

Graff Well, when we had gone—after the Ardennes campaign, the 35th Division was moved up on the Roer, The R-o-e-r River. And they had been kind of river crossing specialists anyway. So, we were sent up there. The Ninth Army was the newest army. And some of the divisions hadn't been in the line long, and they wanted us to make the river crossing. But in the melee, the Germans opened these big dams down river and flooded the whole—inundated the whole river valley. Well, it didn't work good because it kind of trapped the Brits. They'd already jumped off. We couldn't jump off. And they had a lot of fight in the [meantime]. We were supposed to have jumped off together. We were actually held up from the eighth of February until the twenty-fifth before we could jump off. The whole area'd been inundated. And then, we moved and captured the bridge over [the Roer] at Hilfarth before the krauts could blow it. And we moved in and met the British. Our company was the first physical contact the Brits and Americans had on that Grenade deal at Gelderen, Germany on the third day of March, 1945. And then, we moved on towards the Rhine and we got there when they blew the bridge. If they'd waited two hours, we'd have been on the wrong side of the river.

But then the whole Thirty Fifth Division got a rest. And we moved back to a little town called Little Bracht, Germany. And we even got a pass; we got to go back to Brussels. And we come back up, and the Ninth Army, the Brits were on our left. And British paratroopers, they dropped in the British zone. And the Seventeenth Airborne American, they dropped in the Ninth Army zone because the river's a lot wider on the north than it is on the south where Patton crossed downstream. Where we crossed, it was probably three-quarters of a mile wide. About like crossing the Mississippi. The river. The Seventy Ninth and the Thirtieth, they made their river crossing. The Thirty Fifth—I know a guy here over at Riverton that helped build the bridge. But those guys had a pontoon bridge across the Rhine in twenty-four hours. We didn't have to go in. We walked across. But man, they was just, you couldn't believe. The air activity. Germans was after us Americans; anti-aircraft, they had barrage balloons, krauts shooting down barrage balloons, and that big fire, you know, from that hydrogen. And I seen our anti-aircraft shoot down three German planes. Our anti-aircraft gunners were manned, and the guns right behind the trucks while they're going across the river. Rifle companies walked on the tread way on the side, and trucks and tanks went down the middle. But we went across the Rhine on the twenty-fifth of March. Then, we fought all the way through the industrial area of Germany.

Schachtsiek: You mentioned briefly that the Ninth Army was serving with the British. Did you have any direct contact with British soldiers?

Graff Oh yeah. Yeah. We come close to shooting a bunch of them. When we took Gelderen in Germany, we left on our drive across the Roer, the Thirty Fifth captured a few Dutch towns. And the biggest one was a town by the name of Vehlo And we 320th infantry captured Vehlo and we pulled up there, and we left out of Vehlo on black tanks.

At the end of the Ardennnes campaign, we left our black tank outfit down in the Seventh Army sector. And we got a black tank regiment, or battalion, 784th . Never hear anything about them. The only ones you ever hear about are the 761st, fought with Patton. But these guys fought two campaigns with us. But anyway, we're on board tanks, and we coming up the road, and recon's up there. And they got some krauts sacked up in a house. And they had a short barreled Howitzer on a, well, it's a recon tank. But it shoots a 105 millimeter. And we stop, and there's a small convoy of vehicles over here. I don't know what they were. Any way, he had a trailer on behind a jeep. And there's an MP officer standing there at the crossroads. This guy –I don't know where he thought he was going because he couldn't run over that armor –he pulls out on the edge of the road and hits a mine. That thing, the motor went up in the air about fifteen feet. Came right back down through the jeep. He walks out of it. Wounds three men on the left side of the tank I'm on. Squad leader Sanborn, assistant BAR man Sokolowski, platoon guide Robert Landrum. And so, we get this mess cleaned up. We're going into this town, and this colored guy, he opens a turret up and he said, "Anybody know how to man a fifty-caliber." I said, "I do." He said, "They done told us to button up and watch bazooka men along the road." Well, so I put it on. I put a round in the thing, you know. Here we're going along. Come to the bridge at this little town. Just as the lead tank gets to it, they blow it. And a kraut stands up with a Panzerfaust and he knocks the lead tank out. With the company commander, lucky. Piece of shrapnel went through his pistol holster and lodged in two plugs of tobacco that he had in his hip pocket. Wounds five or six men. And these krauts they're shooting these damn rockets, these screaming mimi's at us. And we dismount. And the squad leaders carry tracers. This old colored boy in this one tank, he said, "Pick 'em out, white boy, and we'll shoot 'em." They were shooting everything. Well, we go down, and we was able to get across the water because the bridge was enough debris, we didn't get our feet wet.

So, we get up there, and there's a creamery on this side of the road. And right across the road, a big farm. And it must be fifty milk cows in the barn there. So, this Polish guy, I said to Soke, I said, "We get up in the attic, in the hay mow," I said, "we'll have a good field to fire." So, we were up in the attic, hay mow. Take off, knock off some tiles, you know. About that next thing you know, you see this line of men coming. And old Soke, he begin to get excited. I said, "Just take it easy." I said, "Let them get in close." I said,

"We're getting more of them up in close." We were just ready to open fire, and the runner comes up and said, "Don't shoot. The British are coming." Sound like Paul Revere. And so, about that time, Limey officer come in. He's Lieutenant Barnaby Atkins of the Eighth Armored Brigade. And he said, "Aye, lads. We dashed twelve miles today." And old Scotty McRae said, "Aye, lads. We dashed thirteen and got here before you did."

And so, the Brits are on one end of town, we're on the other. Here's a kraut chow wagon, and this one horse. And that horse, he runs up this way, German's shooting. He runs back down towards us and we shoot. And he's running back and forth there all night. Well, we got some prisoners. And this buck sergeant –old F.M. Loos out of Coshocton, Ohio –he's going to take this kraut across the road to the creamery where we was holding the prisoners and putting the wounded in it. Well, about the time he started across the road with this here kraut, they shoot. Well, this kraut, he don't want to get shot by his own men, so he stops. And Loos jerks and he's got a rifle grenade. He jerks it [the grenade] off of the rifle and he pounds that kraut with that rifle grenade. So, the kraut, he decides he better run. So, Loos takes him over there. He comes back, then I notice the pin's out of the rifle grenade. It was armed. But, you know. I mean, there's crazy stuff. Funny, you know. But dead serious. But I remember old Stenses hollering, "Don't shoot. The British are coming."

Schachtsiek: Was that your only close contact with—

Graff Oh no. We encountered them all along. And they was—they didn't have good discipline, or stuff, I didn't think. Most of the time they didn't know what that sign was, or the counter sign, or the… And they walk around at night with flashlights. Of This one town, I told this one guy, I said, "You better put that flashlight up." I said, "Some GI's going to kill you." Well, he said, "I can't see." Well, I said, "You put your lights out. Period." You know, I'll tell you, some people, they don't realize, I don't think, sometimes how deadly a business it is. I mean, it's like when we made that attack across the Roer River. This water had been up. Well, the Americans had been on the Roer since back in November, so, there was good holes, they had good tops, they had dugouts. The Brits had been in there. They had trenches dug. They had barbed wire just like it was in World War I. And Germans knew where everything was. And they come into our lines one night and because we come out of the Ardennes soshort of men, and automatic weapons, they sent me out of the third platoon down with another platoon with the BAR.[Browning automatic rifle] And these two guys were recent replacements. These Germans got to throwing hand grenades at these holes. And this one guy –I had to finally wrestle the rifle grenade away from him –he almost shot it off in this dugout where the three of us was. He could have killed all three of us. Well, I got up, and the German threw a hand grenade. And I guess this threw debris or something in my eye. But anyway, I wind up with a king sized infection, and then, I spend six days in the 105th evacuation hospital in Sittard, Holland.

Schachtsiek: What are the dates that this happened?

Graff Sixteenth of February. I come back the twenty-second. And then, the night before we attacked this town, well, I'm going to brag a little because we got the medal fifty years later. Fifty-seven years later. But we went on a patrol. We had new officers. And, of course, they didn't know me because I'd been in the hospital. And we went on a combat patrol. We took six BARs, and six M-1s.[rifles] A lot of these M-1 guys were recent replacements. We'd got a lot of replacements that were artillery mechanics. They'd been in Europe for almost a year but they'd give them sixteen weeks of basic training in France and send them in as infantry replacements after Ardennes. This lieutenant had been in the artillery. They put two tanks on the hill, and they had this town of Hilfarth coordinated where they thought these automatic weapons would be, like churches and stuff. And then, they figured this guy, being an artillery [man], he'd be able to register some fire, which he was. I had been up the afternoon before pretty close to where we were going with the engineers, digging up mines and cutting barbed wire, and stuff. So, I kind of knew where I was at. Well, it was two tree lines, but this one here, you had cover back to the water. Up here was about 100 yards before you get to this next tree line was all open ground. So, I'm guessing there's mines in there.

So, the Lieutenant, he wanted to go up to this first tree line. I said to Baker, I said, "I don't think we want to go up there." Baker said, "I don't think we ought to either." So, him and Christopher and I—this Christopher, he's a guy out of Ohio, he's been on the line a while too –and so we refused to go. And I told that lieutenant, I said, "We can scatter out along these trees." I said, "All we're going to do is draw fire anyway." He didn't like that, but he couldn't do much about it. So, we opened up on this town. I shoot eleven magazines out of thirteen because I figure them new men is going to shoot all of theirs. So, I keep two magazines back. So, when we get ready to pull out, I said to Baker, the buck sergeant, I said, "You take them out Bake." I said, "I'll cover you." I said, "I'll be the last man out." Because I said, "I was up here yesterday." And I said, "Just tell them engineers not to shoot me," because the engineers had a small bridge across the creek. I said, "Tell them not to shoot me because I'll be the last man." Well, by golly, everybody got out, and I started up and here's old Chris. He's in the water, and he said, "Graff," he said, "Wall fell in the water and I can't find him." So, I said, "Okay." So, I got down there, and I'll be damned, I stepped on him. So, I reached down and handed my BAR to Christopher, and I got the guy up. And he's still alive. So, I said—he couldn't walk –I said, "I'll carry you." About that time, the lieutenant comes back. He said, "If these men can't keep up, we're going to leave them." And I said, "We ain't leaving nobody." Because I said, "I wouldn't want to be left." Old Chris pulls on down on him with a rifle. He said, "If I shoot you, they'll never recover your body in this water." And I said, "You'd better leave, lieutenant. Because," I said, "He means it." And I said, "We'll get him." And I said, "We'll get him." So, I carry this guy 300 or so yards, and got him up on dry ground. And I said to him, I said, "You think

you can walk if Chris helps you?" He said, "Yes." So, I said, "Okay." So, I told Chris, I said, "I'll stay here in this knocked out pill box. Cover you." Because I thought these krauts might come out of town after us. And they were shooting high, but they machine guns, and the damn mortars, they didn't bother unless you had a direct hit or in a tree because they'd drop in that water, and the shrapnel wouldn't hit you. And so, I stay, and I come in the last man. Well, Company Commander Chappel, he's up on the hill there, counting them in. He sees everybody got out. And he said to me, he said, "How was it out there, Graff?" I said, "It was mighty damn wet, Captain." He said, "You go back to weapons." He said, "We got pancakes and bacon." He said, "Dry your clothes." So, no more was said.

That night I went back to get the cigarettes and the mail back at the company CP [command post] because we always got cigarettes everyday. And this runner said to me, he said, "What happened this morning out there, Graff?" And I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "The lieutenant wants to court martial you and Chris." Oh, I said, "Had a little problem." I said, "One guy fell in the water." And I said, "He was drowning." And I said, "We got him out." And I said, "Lieutenant wanted to leave him." And I said, "I told him we wasn't leaving anybody." I said, "What'd Chappel say?" He said, "Chappel told him he'd better learn to get along with his men because he's going to have to fight with him." So, I go back to platoon CP. It's down in the cellar of a knocked out building. And this old boy from over here in Missouri, Bob Landrum, he said, "Come down here, Graff. Lieutenant wants to talk to you." So, I went down to the basement. He said, "Apparently I made the mistake this morning." Didn't apologize, but he said, "Apparently I made a mistake." I said, "That's all right." But then, now that I look back on it, and the young fellow that graduated from college with Bill pointed it out to me, it was in the military, that guy, they kept him away from us almost the entire rest of the war. Whenever we had an important attack to make, he was never there. He was on a pass or something. And this kid said, company commander probably figured that somebody would shoot him because when we crossed the Rhine, we was nine days straight attack. He was on a pass to Paris. Never did catch up with us. So, I don't know. But, you know, Chappel might have knew what he was talking about.

Schachtsiek: When you crossed the Rhine into Germany, did you have any contact with German citizens? What was your feeling because of all the war time propaganda when you actually met German citizens?

Graff Oh, German civilians, they were all good. And we never had any trouble with them. I'll tell you, one of the things that we never had seen, hardly, a German civilian west of the Rhine. They had evacuated all of them. So, really, that was the first real contact we had with enemy civilians. And this Ruhr Valley area that—R-u-h-r—where all the industry was, it was very badly bombed. Gelsenkirchen, Germany, that we captured, the rubble was so deep the armored couldn't get through the streets. They had 325,000 peace time

population, and they only had 25,000 of them living above ground. And I guess one of the things with the German civilians we liked, they didn't wait for the Americans to do something. I mean, as soon as you moved through, they was fixing their houses up and when we moved up to the Elbe River, towards the end of the war, we come into this little town called Zibberick. This German woman, first thing she done was kill two chickens. And began to fry some sausage she had fried down. She had one son killed at Stalingrad, one boy all shot up at home. Three missing on the Russian front. She said, "I thought, hope some Russian mother is cooking for my boys." We never had any problems with the German civilians.

Once, after the war was over, we kind of got a couple of arrogant women once in a while. This one gal, she thought she was too damn good to clean the house, but somebody threw her down the stairs, she thought different.

Schachtsiek: You mentioned earlier that fighting the German soldiers, the first SS. What was your feeling about fighting the German soldiers?

Graff Well, they was just like us. They had to fight. They could defend their own country. I mean—

Schachtsiek: You weren't fighting Nazis? The evil nazi?

Graff Well, I don't know that. We kind of made fun of the thing. Like this guy from down South, Old Storm, we'd be moving up, say in trucks, and there'd be a lot of civilians standing. And we'd each stand up and give the Hitler salute and holler, Seig Heil[the infamous Nazi salute] in case we lose. . And most of those German soldiers, when they was ready to give up, they was ready to give up. And yeah, they'd come in. Hell, they'd have all their gear packed up, and they'd have a bundle of junk you can't imagine. But a lot of them—it's like one day we moving up, and these two guys step out of a building with their hands up. This one guys said, "Hi, Yanks." I said, "You talk pretty good English." He said, "I graduated from the University of Southern California." Of course, you don't know whether he did or not, but he talked good English. He said, "I told this other fellow these Americans aren't too bad of guys." Well, you knew they had made up their mind to give up because they had artillery braid on their cap. You don't capture artillery unless you overrun them, you know, unless they want to give up.

And, like, when one of the better days I had in combat: we moving up and the regimental history documents said, "C Company took a castle." Well, I got the radio again because the runner, he gets sick just before we're ready to jump the Rhine. About twenty minutes before we move out, he takes ill. Of course, you know, then they didn't have nobody to do it. So, call me over. Landrum said—first this lieutenant, Cox, the guy we had the problem with in the water, he's not there –we've got Lieutenant Ellis. He's a weapons platoon

leader. He's going to lead the third platoon. He said, "You're going to be the runner." I said, "Play hell." I said, "I ain't going to be the runner." I said, "Landrum and Scotty knows why I don't want to be the runner." He said, "I'm ordering you." I said, "That ain't going to make no difference. I ain't going to pay no attention." Landrum says, "Oh, shut up." He said, the lieutenant said, "Let me talk to him." So, me and Landrum go in the other room. Landrum said, "That son of a bitch don't know nothing anyway." So, he said, "Just," he said, "Take the radio for me." He said, "Finn got sick and I don't know what's the matter with him, but he's evacuated." And he said, "We ain't got no runner." So, he said, "You be the runner." So, I said, "Okay." So, anyway, we go into this town, Recklinghausen. We didn't know the name of it then, but this castle –big wall around it –and they poked holes in it, like, from bazooka men, or riflemen, you know. And there's a driveway. And I start up the driveway. These two krauts break cover. I throw the rifle up, hammer falls on a bad round. Didn't fire. I jerked quick. Threw another round in. One of these krauts, he steps back out of this house. And they run into him. And I shoot, just tear the facing off the door. We get two officers and forty-five enlisted men out of there. And he's got a light machine gun set in the evergreen trees there. If he'd stayed in there, he'd really knock me on my butt. But see, he don't know.

Schachtsiek: As you're approaching the Elbe, did you have any contact with any Russian troops?

Graff No. The only contact with the Russians we ever had was with liberated Russian prisoners. We were fifty miles from Berlin. G Company of the 134th Infantry was the closest that any American got to Berlin when the war was on. Most of those Russians that the 69th and them met was after the cessation of hostilities. The Elbe where we were at was, like I say, about fifty miles from Berlin. Because see, we're far north. And we had a lot of problems with Russian and Polish prisoners after the war because they thought they could have a free rein and do any damn thing they pleased. Well, they didn't reckon with the American military. And they had gangs of men, they went to the country side raping, and killing livestock and stuff. And we put an end to that. And it was just like we come up, we had a patrol. We had about six towns right after the war was over. And we come into this one town. We always took a guy that maybe could speak a little German, and a guy that could speak Polish or Russian. And Miskowitz, he was a Polish guy, and I could speak a little German. And we had a jeep driver. And we come into this town and this German woman, she comes, and all her face was all swelled up. She had a hell of a bruise, and she's a crying, and all I could get out of her, the Russians were killing the swine. So, we go up there and, of course, those court yards [they go around the barns]. [These Russians] had the one pig already dead. They had him loaded in a sack. They had him on the handle bars of a bicycle. And this big old boy had on a quilted uniform. He had a sticking knife about that long. They had another pig tied up to the wheel of a wagon. And one of them guys had an old kraut down and beating the hell of

him. So, we jerked him off of him. And this one old boy, Miskowitz [the other GI] told him to throw the knife down. He just looked over and smiled. Started towards that hog. I threw a bolt forward on that BAR. He knew what that meant. He threw the knife down. So, we rounded those guys up and give them the pig they killed. Started them down the road, kicked them in the butt a few times, got them going. Then, of course, we had these other towns. Pretty soon, we see a hell of a fire. Get over here, there they are. They raided another damn farm and they set the barn on fire. And a lot of those guys, they didn't want to go back to Russia either. They was committing suicide up in Hanover at the railroad station. They didn't want to get on the boxcars and go back to Russia. The Russians, they was tough on the German civilians. No need to think they wasn't.

Schachtsiek: You're speaking from particular experience?

Graff Well, just talking to the women, particularly the DPs [displaced persons] that's over here. You take Ruth Jones. She was a gal. She wasn't very big. I think she was eleven, or thirteen. But they walked out of East Germany. And yeah, they raped the hell out of the women, and well, you read—I got a book there by a guy by the name of Graff –he shot down, oh, about 150 [Russian] aircraft. And he talks about when he was a prisoner, the way they treated the German civilians. But, oh, of course, the Germans had been tough on the Russians. Don't need to think they weren't. I mean, it was payback time. But yeah, it was payback time. We had a lot of POWs [prisoners of war] that had been in Russia. A lot of them were falsified faces and stuff like that. We had a big POW cage after the war at Hanover. And there was a lot of kraut hospitals there. And they threw all the German patients out and put DPs in. And we had several guys that had both hands and feet froze off. We had to assign a man to carry them around and feed them. But there was one kraut particular that I met. We first went in there, they didn't have their officers and the enlisted personnel segregated. Well, that ain't a good idea, especially in the German Army. So, we separated the officers from the enlisted men. This one guy, I don't know why he always watched me. But anyway, I knew from day one that he was a first lieutenant because we knew the insignia of the German officers. Then, when we segregate him, he's minus his coat. But he's still with the enlisted men. So, I'm walking down the road on guard. He says, "How do you like that BAR?" I said, "You speak pretty good English." He said, "Where are you from?" I said, "Illinois." He said, "Whereabouts?" I said, "Springfield. Near Springfield." He said, "That's where they have the state fair." I said, "Why do you know so much about it?" He said, "My dad and mother live on the south side of Chicago. My dad works in a slaughter house." Said, "I was born in Germany, but I was raised in Chicago." Said, "I came over in thirty-eight to go to medical school and got drafted in the German Army. I've been an anti-tank officer on the Russian front." Of course, you can't believe that. They might have fought the Americans too. And I knew he knew what he talking about because there wouldn't be very many knew that the state fair was in Springfield.

Schachtsiek: Where were you when you learned that the war was over in Europe?

Graff We'd come off the line on the twenty-seventh day of April. And we were in this little town of Harkenblack, which is near Hanover. And we stayed in Harkenblack about a month, and we had, like we say, this big POW cage to watch. And then, there was an airplane factory and a bakery. Of course, that was to keep the Polacks and the Russians out of the bakery. But yeah. Of course, see, lot of this stuff didn't come in to be until after Japan surrendered. We didn't know that we was in redeployment. See, they was already started us back on redeployment. We was in the redeployment camps near Rheims, France when they dropped the atomic bomb. Thirty Fifth Division coming back to the states to make the March 1, 1946 D-day on the main island of Honshu. The Japanese Pacific Division were going to invade Kyushu on the first of November, forty-five. The European divisions were coming in on Honshu. The Thirty Fifth, and the Second, and the Forty Fifth were all scheduled to go in Tokyo Bay.

Schachtsiek: What was your timeline from when you had your last combat in Europe, and then, coming home?

Graff Well, we come off the line on the twenty-seventh. What happened was this. Why this is indelible in my mind. Of course, that's what the book says. But we were in Zibberick, Germany. Up on Elbe. And we'd had a little combat up there. and been on some patrols, and stuff. Well, this Robert Landrum, this platoon guide over here in Missouri, his brother was in the 102nd Division. And he happened to be in the same battalion that our medical officer, Captain Stillman's brother was a medical officer in. And Stillman told him, he said, "If I ever get a chance to go over and see my brother..." Of course, he had access to a vehicle. Said, "I'll take you over and you can see your brother." Because 102nd was near us on the Elbe. So, Landrum, Stillman come by one day and picked him up. Well, that evening, about four o'clock, this guy from Coshocton, Ohio, old Loos and I were on the street and they come back. And I can tell that something's wrong. Landrum, I said, "What's the matter, Bob?" And he said, "They've killed my brother, Jim." Graff. He never used the word Jim. Called Graff. He said, "They've killed my brother, Graff." So, Loos said to me, he said, "What are we going to do?" I said, "Let's go talk to Chappel." So, we walked over to CP. Chappel said, "What can I do for you boys?" I said, "Captain," I said, "Landrum just come back from the 102nd Division and," I said, "krauts have killed his brother." And I said, "He been in the line a long time." He'd been in since September. And I said, "We think he ought to have a furlough." He said, "So do I." So, by golly, he called back the regiment and First Battalion, and of course, Landrum was pretty much a Christian. He'd been to Sunday school. But you'd never know it from his language. But he'd been superintendent of the Sunday school at Honeywell for forty years later on. But the chaplain, he knew him well. And by golly, that night, ten o'clock, he had a vehicle up there and he carried him out. He got in the Division rear that night and found out Thirty-Fifth's coming off the

line. So, I told him, I said, "You get back to the states, call my dad."

So, when he called the old man, of course, that wasn't until he got back to the states, but he knew we'd made the war because the Thirty Fifth's coming off the line. But that was on the twenty seventh of April. And we moved back to this little town of Harkenblack, and we pulled all this extra duty, I mean, it was just like me. We had a prisoner there that was shot through the mouth, and he was wired up, and couldn't eat nothing but soup. Well, we didn't have nothing but C-rations to feed him, you know. So, Chappel said to me, he said, "Graff, do you think you can discharge this guy?" He said, "You ought to know where he lives." He said, "Can you talk to him well enough that you can find out?" and said, "Just take him home. Tell his wife to burn his clothes and keep him." So, the old boy, he directed us, and we took him home. And I told his wife, "Burn all the clothes, keep him at home." Next morning, of course, one man short. And this military government guy, he's all bent out of shape. He said—and he never did find out what happened to him. But, of course, we'd—I'd had a problem with him before.

One night –we was on guard at night –and the Brits brought in seventy prisoners in one truck. Well, we didn't have no place to segregate or nothing, but had two small rooms. So, they pretty much had to stand up. Well, this one guy, he was hesitant to get out of the truck, and I jerked him out of the truck and he fell on the road. But he got up, and anyway, the next morning he's dead. Well, there was a German officer, lieutenant colonel, oh he raised all kinds of hell. He speaks good English and he'd said that we'd murdered him. And Chappel, he didn't believe it. I told him what had happened. I said, "Guy was hesitant to get out of the truck," and I said, "I did jerk him out of it." And I said, "He fell but," I said, "Hell, he was alive. He was able to walk in there." I said, "I think somebody's killed him." Well, Chappel said, you know, he said, "That guy's got a hell of a mouth on him," he said, "Just take him in there and take his clothes off him. I want to see if he's got an SS tattoo on him." By God, he did. You know what we found out about that guy? He was wanted for the death in one of them labor camps in the South, and if he kept his mouth shut he'd have been home free. But I'm wondering if he didn't murder that German soldier because that guy may have been his orderly. I don't know. But that's always been in my back of my mind. And he tried to lay that death on me because he knew I'd jerked that fellow out of the truck.

Schachtsiek: So, how did you—from there, how did you eventually...

Graff Well, from there, from Hanover we went back to Munster. And from Munster we went back to Coblenz. And we were near Coblenz at a little town called Burgbrohl and the thirty-fifth division got a lot of unit citations. We had a big parade at the athletic stadium in Coblenz. And 134th , our C Company 134th got three unit citations. They got one, the 134th infantry, a whole regiment got—or first battalion—got one for St-Lo. C Company and the first platoon

of Dog Company got one for crossing the Blies River at Habkirchen from Sargamines, France into Habkirchen, Germany. In the Seventh Army. And the whole 134th got one from the twentieth of December until the seventeenth of January for the Ardennes. So, our company had three unit citations. More than any other company in the whole division. And then, from Coblenz we moved down river to Zell, a town where all the wine's at. And we stayed a couple weeks there. And then, they trucked us up and put us on boxcars again. We went up through Holland, and finally, wound up near Rheims, France in Camp Norfolk. It was a redeployment camp. And while we was in Rheims, while we was there, we got to go to Paris, and Troyes, and Rheims. And then, on the end of the—they moved us. This time we rode in passenger cars. We rode from Rheims to Camp Lucky Strike near Lehavre. And on my twentieth birthday, we crossed the English Channel.

Schachtsiek: What's the date?

Graff August 20, 1945. As my twentieth birthday we crossed the English Channel back into France and almost got sunk by a floating mine. The navy was de-mining the North Sea and this mine had broke loose, and it was floating down. Of course, the current goes through the English Channel. And just luckily, the lookout on the ship spotted this mine, and they detonated with a forty millimeter. And we went in to Southhampton, disembarked, trucked us to Salisbury, England to Tedworth Barracks. That's on the Salisbury Plain where the Brits always maneuver. And we got to go to London, and several places. Some of them went to Stratford-on-Avon. John Struck and I, we went to London, and stayed in Hans Crescent Red Cross Hostel. And we walked all over. We got to see all of the lot of stuff. We rode the underground out to the Tower, and there, we run into a British police lieutenant and he took us down on the East Indian docks. And we had quite a time down there because he knew all the prostitutes, and all the characters down there. There was a guy looked just like Long John Silver. He had a crutch, and a short leg, and a Polly parrot. He probably played the part, I mean, that was part of it. But all them whores would holler at that lieutenant out the window. But we stayed there and on the fifth day of September, 1945 we off-loaded on the Queen Mary, the first time that one of the Queens was ever able to get into the dock at Southhampton. Always before they had to off-load out in the channel. But the Americans dredged the harbor. And we took us five days to cross the ocean. We hit a hurricane half way across and the main deck was fifty feet above the water level, and I seen the waves rake over that. They had 15,000 men on board and they had 2,500 sleeping on the open deck, so they had to bring them down. Then, things really got bad because the latrines got to filling up because the sea got running high, you know. They dumped out into the water in those days. And when we got to New York, they just washed her down with fire hoses. There was puke all over it.

Schachtsiek: So, was it more crowded and worse coming back than going over? Or about the same?

Graff No, about the same. Only thing that the hurricane, and the water got up in the latrines. It was about ankle deep. And a lot of guys got sick. And, of course, they didn't allow anybody but first class passengers on the main deck because there was women. Oh, I mean, there was some of the American, I guess, State Department and Brits, you know, going back and forth. They had the first class passenger. And we, well, First Battalion 134th , we were pretty lucky. We were MPs. We'd done MP duty on the ship and we slept right behind the bridge on what they call the sun deck. So, we had pretty good place. 'Course, we went two hours on and six off. And we could mess whenever setting that worked with us. We had an extra badge. And, of course, it helped that we had a better place to sleep than them other guys. We wasn't four and five high, deep. And in those days, everybody smoked, and it was bad under down below.

Schachtsiek: Where did you go once you got back stateside?

Graff Went to New York, and went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. And immediately –I guess we might have stayed over night –and got on a troop train. They sent us to Camp Grant. And what they done was they sent different troop trains. And, like, the guys that went to Camp Grant, it was Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa. And then, we had to go back to Camp Grant, Rockford. Then, the Thirty Fifth was reassembled at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. That's down near Henderson. And they, course –in the, oh, let's see –in July of '45 they was already sending high point men back. That's why I think they knew they were going to drop that atomic bomb, or they wouldn't have been letting these high point men come back to the states. But if you had eighty-one points, you could come back. But it wasn't very many, only most of them was out of headquarters, because the rifle companies were all—there wasn't one man in C Company, outside of the men in the kitchen, that went from St-Lo to the Elbe River that something didn't happen to him. They'd been in the hospital, or something. None of the original men. There were a few still around, but most of them, something had happened to all of them. We suffered 131 men killed, I think, in our company, and over 300 wounded. And our regiment, the 134th, had more men killed and wounded than the rest of the Thirty Fifth Division put together; than the other two regiments for artillery , we 134th had more KIAs.[killed in action]

Schachtsiek: So, you were then mustered out?

Graff No. At Camp Breckinridge, I only had forty-one or -two points. See, the points was dependent on a lot of things. The number of months you been in service. You got a point for every month, plus two if you'd been overseas. A man with children, he got twelve points for the child and being married. And so much for the child, so. I mean, we had men that had three and four kids. Of course, I know a fellow who lives down near Waterloo, Illinois, his father-in-law was killed in the 134th, had six kids. Three men in my platoon had babies born when they were overseas. When they drafted men to start with, they had

to build up these units. So, what they did first, they needed rear echelon people. They needed supply people. So, all the single men got in to the support units. When they started having heavy casualties in ’44, and then, they was only getting kids like me and fellows that they’d passed over, and most of them were fathers. That's why we got 183,000 war orphans from World War II. A lot of people don't realize that. But hardly any men with me: Sokolowski and Lowes were the only two real married men. That [one man] had been divorced twice. But some of these guys—I know McCrae didn't get married until he was about seventy. But there was an awful lot of married men.

Schachtsiek: So, when were you actually mustered out and where?

Graff Well, I went to Camp Breckenridge. So, the low point men, then they transferred us to Fifth Division and Camp Campbell, Kentucky. So, I went to K Company, Second Infantry, Camp Campbell, Kentucky in, I think, I went over about Armistice Day in 1945. And I didn't get discharged until April 24, 1946. But that wasn't all bad. We got to be in the Army Day parade in Chicago, April 6, 1946. First Army Day parade after the war was over, and we got to see Truman, and Eisenhower. And had a 600 mile motor march from Camp Campbell one night at George Wright Field at Lawrenceville. One night at Rantoul. Then we stayed in Chicago up near where the O'Hare field is. It was nothing but a brush patch then, and one landing strip. So, and they made me a Squad Leader even though they wouldn't give me the stripes because I wouldn't sign up for another year. I probably would have signed up, but my mother wasn't well and, hey, I wouldn't have met Alice.

Schachtsiek: After you mustered out, what, in general, has been your life since your service?

Graff I went to carpentering, and working on the farm. And that's what I done.

Schachtsiek: When did you meet Alice? And what kind of children did you have?

Graff Well, I kind of got to know Alice twice. I got to know her, I guess, in the fall of—did I get to know you before I went to Champaign to school?

Alice: (inaudible)

Graff Yeah, but I really—you and I got together after February of ’48.

Alice: During ’46.

Graff Yeah, I first met her in the summer of ’46. But I met her and started going with her then in February of 1948 because she was in the Army Cadet Nurse Corp at the Memorial Hospital in Springfield and she had a commitment, and she didn't graduate until—she went in in ’44, and didn't graduate until 1947. And see, what I done, I come home and I worked on the farm and

carpentered. And then, my mother wanted me to go to school, so I went to U of I the fall of ’46 and the spring of ’47. And I earned enough ag credits that when I came back to the farm then, I taught on-the-job farm training and done that all the way up to the Korean War, along with the farmer. But then, we always did supplementary income carpentering.

Schachtsiek: Do you have any just sort of general thoughts from your experience in World War II?

Graff Oh, I met a lot of good guys in there. And still correspond –‘course few of them still alive. And we just, like somebody said, what'd they teach you in the army? I said, they taught me to kill people. Someone asked me the other day, said, "You ever killed anybody?" And I said, "Well," I said, "I shot a fellow across the canal up there, that he didn't get up after I hit him twice." But I said, "I poured 220 rounds in a town." You know, you don't know whether—and it's not a slam bang thing like you see on TV. It was a little different war in the Pacific. But you didn't kill nine or ten Germans to one, like you did Japanese. I wonder if we would've fought the Japanese, we'd have probably gotten a bloody nose or two before we [caught on]. But the fellows that I know that fought the Japanese, they killed them all. Loren McCarthy told me, he said they killed them all. He was in the Forty Third Division. It didn’t make any difference wounded or not, but he shot them all because, he said, that's what they done back.

Schachtsiek: After the war, did you get involved with the VFW, or the American Legion?

Graff Oh, I joined the American Legion in Middletown, and I've always been a part of the burial squad. And, I guess, I've been the Chaplain for forty years.

Schachtsiek: American Legion not the VFW?

Graff We don't have a VFW in Middletown. I belong to VFW in North Enders in Springfield. But then, I’m just a dues paying member.

Schachtsiek: What about meeting with any of your former?

Graff Well, this year I'm the President of the Thirty Fifth Division Association. This is my second term. I was the president in 2002. And yeah, we're pretty regular attenders at the reunion. I went to the first reunion they held after the war in ’47. And then, Alice and I we only went—used to go when it was in St. Louis. That was about every ten years for the first thirty years, I guess. And then we got to going pretty regular.

Schachtsiek: What about friends from your particular Charlie Company?

Graff Oh, well—

Schachtsiek: The 134th et cetera?

Graff Well, Lloyd Frey, he lives in Pennsylvania. He's was a replacement. He come in after me. He's still alive. I visit, talk with him. Paul Haines, he and I went overseas together. He lives in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Marvin Gardener –he lives up here in Moravia, FL, –well , he went overseas with me. My old squad leader, Elwell Sanborn, he's still alive in Florida. He lost a leg thirty years after he got hit?

Schachtsiek: From wartime?

Graff Mmm-hmm. Got hit by a mine and—oh, Bob Hodge, there's a good old boy here in Longview, Texas.

Schachtsiek: Have you been back to Europe since then? To any of the places where you were involved?

Graff Been back in ’79, ’83, twice in ’91, ’95 when we dedicated a memorial. And then, we went back to sixty years Battle of the Bulge. I belong to the Battle of the Bulge group too. I'm member sixty on the life membership. But the Battle of the Bulge, that was a real rewarding deal. And as you can see before you, this monument that we were instrumental in getting put up at Weiswampach, Luxembourg.

Schachtsiek: Explain a little bit about the memorial.

Graff Well, in the fall of 1994, a lady called me from Denver. She said her name was Marilyn Jensen, and her father, Rex Bowers had been killed in 134th Infantry and wondered if I maybe knew anybody that might knew him. And I said, "Well," I said, "I'll tell you what." I said, "He was killed in my company and he went overseas with me, but I've got to be honest with you, I didn't know him. He was in a different platoon in C Company, and when we went overseas together I didn't know him." And so, we talked and she said, "I want more information from you." So, maybe about a month later she called up. She said, "I'd like to put a plaque up in Weiswampach, Luxembourg for my dad and I just wanted your thought on it." And I said, "Well," I said, "I've got a question for you." She said, "What's that?" And I said, "Is money no object?" She said, "Money's no object." So, I said, "I'll tell you what," I said, "We lost twelve men there in three days." And I said, "Give me a little while," and I said, "I'd like to put up a memorial to all of them." Well, Alice and I, we had some contact with some people in Luxembourg: woman by the name of Tilly Kimmes. She was a Secretary of the Ardennes Association, Luxembourg. And Camille Cohen, he was the President. And I called Tilly and I said, "You think we can get the people in Weiswampach to work with us?" She said, "I'll talk to them." So, I told Marilyn Jensen, I said, "I'd like to design it. I'd like to make it a memorial to all of them." So, all of it is mine, except that last line. She put that in there. I didn't have anything to do with that. But do you know, from December 46, ’94 until April 1 of ’95, they got that monument up.

They got a seven ton stone, and that plaque, and there's an American flag on the right side as you face with it. Luxembourg on the other. Then an eternal electric flame and brick around it. It's right in where the town hall is. And it's pretty much where –when we took the town –there was a German tank on fire. I guess they couldn't evacuate it; it wouldn't run or something. And they destroyed it, their own. But these fellows here, Richard Larrieu, the Lieutenant, he was there about two days when he got killed. Roy Cooper, he was a Staff Sergeant; he'd been on the line a while. Frederick Crider was an original man, wounded St-Lo, come back and got killed in the Ardennes. Konajska, he was a replacement that got wounded and came back and got killed. Patrick, he had been wounded and came back and got killed. Stacey, and Polson, and Palladino, and another one, Show, they'd only been there just a few days.

But this Melvin Scott on the bottom: Stacey wrote one letter to his mother in Indiana, and said he met a guy by the name of Melvin Scott that had had an automobile accident in 1937 in front of their house over here in Indiana. And this Melvin Scott, on the fourth of January, when C Company got in behind the German lines, he and two other fellows hid out for seven days in a straw stack. And the Germans took straw out of there for their horses or their foxholes. And I heard this story from Kinney Sutton because later, months, Kinney come back from the hospital and he was in my squad. That's this old boy right there, Coleman, Alabama. They had five K-rations and a bible. And they stayed there seven days. Two of them was wounded. Sut was hit in the arm and this other guy was wounded. But they wasn't bad. They decided they was going to have to leave. They got out of the straw stack, started walking. Germans stood up and shot at them five times. Missed them all the times. They knew that was the wrong way, so they turned around and walked back the other way. Come into our lines. Melvin Scott come back to the Company and got killed. If he'd been taken prisoner, he'd have probably survived the war. Then, we find out, by golly, he's had a brother killed in the 134th Infantry. But when I got the mortuary report on him, it don't tell what company he was in. So, a lot of extenuating circumstances out of it. But people of Weiswampach, I'm going to tell you Richard, they turned out. I bet there was 1,500 people there. They had a tent up, they had flowers, they had wine. And they had a big parade. They had a woman mayor, and even the American Luxembourg Ambassador, he came down and spoke.

Schachtsiek: So, any last general thoughts about your experience? Something that you had, maybe, if you went to talk to a school group—

Graff Oh, I've talked to a lot of them.

Schachtsiek: That you would want to share with them?

Graff You know, one kid asked me a question one time, he said, "What'd you do on pass?" And I said, "Chase women and drink beer." No. Jerry Boward and I,

he was a veteran, and Jeff Dorgan, we put on a lot of programs, used to, for the kids. Oh, I tell you what, these draft dodgers, and these politicians today that are anti-government, and anti-military. I think the military is the best leveler there is. Now, there is some favoritism, and probably there's a lot of enmity maybe between the West Point people and the National Guard. But, you know, the officers never bothered us much, and we never bothered them. Some of them were good, and some were—just like the enlisted men. Some of these guys never fired a shot in anger. First time a bullet went off, you'd never see them until night. But we got the job done.

Schachtsiek: Get this going again. We are now looking at some photos that Jim is making available. First one, number one, is roughly a five by seven, black and white photo. Shows two soldiers at the "at ease" position. Would you tell me a little bit about the photo? Who's in it.

Graff This photo was taken on the Elbe River on April, 1945. The gentleman on the left is Sergeant F.M. Looos. He's my Assistant Squad Leader. He's a grenadier. He's armed with an M-1 and a rifle grenade. And I'm the soldier on the right, and I'm armed with an M-1 Browning automatic rifle. We were in the Third Squad of the Third Platoon of C Company, 134th Infantry.

Schachtsiek: About when would this have been taken?

Graff This was taken April, 1945.

Schachtsiek: Okay. Picture number two is a much smaller two by three, black and white photo. Shows two soldiers, "at ease" position in heavy winter gear. Who are they, and when was that taken?

Graff That's taken maybe about the same time. Those soldiers are PFC Marvin Gardener on the left, and PFC Joe Kelso on the right. They both were gentlemen that went overseas with me and joined C Company at the same time I did. And they finished the war. Kelso, he had a unique experience of—at least he said he was captured and escaped from the Germans. And we called him commando Kelso afterwards.

Schachtsiek: Number three is a color drawing, on paper, profile of a soldier with glasses. What's the story of this drawing?

Graff The POW that we had in the prison camp in Hanover, Germany drew this picture of me for three cigarettes. In May, 1945.

Schachtsiek: Next photo is also a two by three, black and white. Shows a single soldier holding a BAR.

Graff That, again, is a picture of me taken in April, 1945 up on the Elbe. About the same time the picture of Loos and I was taken.

Schachtsiek: Next one, picture number five is a studio portrait, color, eight by ten. Shows, I believe it's you.

Graff Yes. It's a picture of me taken in November ’44 before I went overseas, up here in Lincoln, Illinois.

Schachtsiek: So, you have a garrison cap on with infantry light blue piping. Infantry collar disks. No unit insignia on your sleeve because you're not assigned yet.

Graff No. Just come out of Camp Hood.

Schachtsiek: Okay. Picture six is a scanned image. Three photos on one page. Five by seven, black and white at the bottom is the one we're interested in. And that shows a group of soldiers.

Graff These ten men are the Third Squad of the Third Platoon of C Company. Taken in April of 1945 on the Elbe River. Consists of Schaefer, Sokolowski, Simuneck, Graff, Loos. That's left from right. And standing, left from right is Sutton, Steinhauffel, Appod, Burr, and Pitcock.

Schachtsiek: And the two pictures at the top are enlargements of individuals within the group photo.

Graff The left one is James Graff. And the other one is Jimmy Steinhauffel.

Schachtsiek: Page seven is of two color photos, roughly five by seven of a memorial on the left, and the plaque on the memorial on the right. This memorial is in memoriam to our Company that was erected in Weiswampach, Luxembourg on April Fool's Day, 1995. The plaque was donated by the Rex Bowers, one of the deceased. And the stone and the monument was set up by the citizen of Weiswampach, which is in the northwest corner of Luxembourg, right on the Our River, right on the German border. This combat that this portrays was on the 24th 26th of January, 1945.

Schachtsiek: That describes the seven images that Jim Graff is allowing us to make copies of.

Graff Cooperation we got from the people of Luxembourg.

Schachtsiek: Go ahead.

Graff They're in Weiswampach. This memorial was started in, say, December of 1994, and we dedicated it on April 1, 1995. And it was complete. The Luxembourg people really done a number on this. And we had a huge crowd, and it's not bragging, but it's one of the best individual memorials in the Ardennes. There may be some unit memorials that are better, but for an individual company, this is one of the best if not the best in Ardennes.

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