

# Hartwell, John Interview 9-23-95

[Speaker 2]

H-A-R-T-W-E-L-L, McClelland, Iowa. Interview conducted by Dr. Charles Johnson, Director, Center for the Study of War and Society, on September 23, 1995, at the A Company 7th Armored Infantry Battalion, 8th Armored Division Reunion in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Who is with you?

[Speaker 2]

His name is John McManus.

[Speaker 1]

Not a relative.

[Speaker 2]

No, no, no. He's one of my students. I see.

He's my assistant at the Center, and he's working on his PhD, and he passed his general exams last fall. Oh, yeah. And he does some of the interviews for me when I interview veterans, and his dissertation is going to be on the American combat soldier, combat infantryman, in World War II.

[Speaker 1]

By dissertation, you mean like the final test of a doctorate?

[Speaker 2]

Right. It's the paper he has to write for his PhD. They run 250, 300 pages, and he'll use material from A Company people and a lot of other folks.

He's a good student. Did you get him started in this? Yeah.

Well, he did his master's degree out in Missouri, at the University of Missouri, and he worked on some aspect of Americans in combat, and he wrote about a 90-page master's thesis, and he heard about what we were doing at Tennessee. I knew a guy who was working with him, and he said, if you want to do a PhD in military history on what you're interested in, why don't you contact Johnson over at Tennessee?

[Speaker 1]

That's the way things go after you get out of, after you get your first four years. We had a son that, not in your field, but it's a field that is closed, and you got to know somebody somewhere to help you get in. He's an agronomist, and he worked for, and it's our youngest son, and we've kind of followed him all, but he was the only one that took agronomy, and he thought he was going to come back to farm, but I wasn't quite ready, so he went to work for Asbro, and he graduated initially, he got his bachelor's at Iowa State, and that was a good agriculture school.

Then he went to work for Asbro, which is a seed company at Purdue, at Lafayette, Indiana, and he worked there for three or four years for them, and he could see that he was just

going to be a flunky all his life. He needed his master's, but he didn't know how to go about to get it, but he got a job through them, and through a mutual instructor there on a ranch in western Kansas, a big ranch, and he was a consultant for that, and he found out that's what he wanted to do, more than just research in genetics, and he worked on that ranch for a couple of years, and there was a lot of responsibility, but the pay wasn't too good, and so he contacted the guy that they were, that they had basically to do their work, and he was working under, and this guy was a doctor at the University of Nebraska in agronomy, and he took our Charlie under his wing, and Charlie wasn't married yet, and he went back to the University of Nebraska and worked under him for two years and got his master's, and he started a business under that guy in the big territory that was just being vacated by somebody that couldn't make it go. He comes home during the summer and makes sure that I do a good job of farming, and that's necessary.

He walks my fields. I don't have to walk anymore. He walks every 10 acres of every farm he's got, and that's about 30,000 acres that he manages for, which doesn't seem like much.

It's just like I don't have anything to do anymore. I mean, he runs it through a computer. He runs it through the doctor, and I get printouts, and I'm told from week to week whether it ought to be herbicide control or, in my case, pray for rain because I don't have irrigation, and he's changed the method of farming for me.

He's also cost me some equipment change. Anyhow, I know you don't have time for all of my questions, and there's one guy that flies the plane. He's a retired general from Offutt.

He couldn't afford the plane after he retired, so he's told to give it to the Confederate Air Force, and then they maintain it, but in doing so, he has to go nationwide to air shows and promotions, and he always takes a mechanic with him, so he's got about six like my son. They took a gas tank off from behind a pilot seat, made another seat, another set of controls even, and so he goes about once every six weeks somewhere. That's a wonderful airplane.

Well, they dive bomb us about once a month. We're out in the country, and we both are together, so naturally they're doing it for Mark, but we're 200 yards from him, and they come down on us. Even if, well, sometimes he's in it.

It's quite a thrill, especially if you don't know it's coming. I mean, they can throw you to the ground, and he will be, this general is, I wouldn't say he's careless because he's got 12,000 hours in it, and he flew jets in Korea, and he's old enough to be retired, but he didn't fly in World War II, and we've met him a few times. He's even offered me a ride, but I never got it.

[Speaker 2]

Just to stay on the ground.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. He does charge \$400 if you want to take a 15-minute ride, and he has every Saturday when he's home, Sunday, 3 or 4, and he always shows them our roof from close up. From close up.

Yeah. And that's another boy, and I got three other boys that wouldn't care to do that.

[Speaker 2]

But one of them's interested in things military.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. He's got an arsenal. It's legal.

He's an NRA member and does a lot of hunting. We have a farm that has good hunting on it. We have a very fertile farm, but we also have ditches that have a lot of cover, and we'll eventually farm my farm.

[Speaker 2]

Is he the one who's living in the house? Yeah, he lives in the house.

[Speaker 1]

And he's got a son who's a junior in high school, and he wants to go to ag school, and so, you know, I mean, things evolve like that.

[Speaker 2]

Is that you were living in when you went off to war? Yeah. That was back in 43?

[Speaker 1]

43, early 43. I had no brothers, so it was kind of for me to come back to it. I wouldn't have had to.

I worked after I got out of school in 42. I knew I was going to go. I knew I wanted to go.

I had friends and neighbors that were going.

[Speaker 3]

Out of high school?

[Speaker 1]

Out of high school, yeah. I never went to college. I got out in spring of 42.

I did have an advantage over most of those that went in. When the division was formed, it had a basic cadre of maybe 10% of the men. I would imagine 1,500 out of the 15,000 were cadre.

Would that be a reasonable?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Something like that, probably 1 in 10. And those guys had already gone through basic and advanced training, and they all were non-cons. We didn't have any private PFCs come in as cadre.

But when I came in, it wasn't my first choice. I wanted to be an air pilot just like everybody else. My eyes weren't good enough.

[Speaker 2]

Where did you do your basic training? Camp Oak. Camp Oak?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. But when I came in, I had had three years of high school ROTC. Now, most people didn't have that, but I was still strong for that.

It wasn't college ROTC, and it didn't get you a commission, but it got you into college ROTC.

[Speaker 3]

Right.

[Speaker 1]

But it also made me a non-con immediately. I never had KP, never pulled guard duty, and it immediately made me a leader. And I had a certain military poise that they didn't get.

Even though I was just a high school student, I wore a uniform three days a week for three years. I knew how to wear a uniform.

[Speaker 2]

Did you have a weapon?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah. We had a political drill and manual of arms, and we knew how to march in a parade, and it was mandatory. It was either that in high school or you had to take physical training, and those things were looked down on.

[Speaker 2]

The same in my high school up in northern Michigan.

[Speaker 1]

I had three years of high school ROTC. You might not have thought it did you any good. Oh, no, no.

You bet. Well, we had one son that never had that opportunity in high school because he had quit that program. But when he got into college, he decided he wanted ROTC, and he skated.

I was skating. Got his master's, and he was unit colonel when he graduated, and they offered him a regular Army commission because he had excelled, and they picked about, I don't know, I don't think there was anybody else in the school, but we did go with him to general, great neighborhood's office when he was joint chief of staff in the Pentagon, and our son and three others were there representing four districts in the United States, and they each got a \$500 bond and a sword of honor, and that was quite an honor to meet the general that day. Oh, it did.

They let the families come, too, along with Brown Thurman. He was there 30 years. He's still there.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

But he was there. I remember that day. I talked to him.

[Speaker 2]

Now, so when you went into the service, you were familiar with at least some of the things that they were teaching people.

[Speaker 1]

I thought I knew a lot more than I did. I mean, I thought that I knew, but I found out that the tactics that we had been taught that I might have remembered were cavalry tactics from the 30s and the 20s, you know, like park your horses downstream when you park for the night. And I, being a farm boy, I had a little different education than some.

I was raised on a farm. I knew how to work. I mean, on my weekends when I'd come home from school, because I lived quite a ways from town, I lived in town during the week in a boarding room.

And, but I'd get up 5 o'clock Saturday and Sunday morning, but not Monday morning to help do the milking. I was used to working, and that work habit helped a little bit.

[Speaker 2]

Do you think that people with a farming background have a little easier time adapting to the military when they go in?

[Speaker 1]

I think so. I think so. I talked to some of my friends when they came back, and they felt like I did.

It wasn't that we had any desire to stay. I had no desires afterwards to stay in the Army. In fact, there was quite a pitch, as I recall, at Camp Grant for those, especially non-coms, when I came back as a tech sergeant.

I certainly didn't, but there was 100 guys in front of me and 100 guys behind me, and I don't think of those 200 guys that went through that indoctrination for a couple hours, I don't think they got one of them. There's still those guys here that I know did that. But I had some place to come back to.

I had a wedding to look forward to, and I had a promise of some land to farm. It wasn't my farm. It was close by from a good friend and neighbor who didn't have a son, and he promised me if I came back, I could farm his farm for as long as I wanted to, which was a couple years until my father decided to quit.

[Speaker 2]

It made room for you on your own.

[Speaker 1]

Right, and that's when I moved into this house, and we lived in that house until 1977 when I had a son that's in there now and got married. We didn't want to move to town like my

father did, and he didn't stay there long, and we built another house for him eventually. But it wasn't available when our son got married, so we have four homes on our 320-acre farm, which is it can absorb them.

It cannot provide for them. It can't meet, but the community can absorb it. We don't want anybody else in our valley.

That's about my background.

[Speaker 2]

Were you assigned right out of basic training to the 8th Army?

[Speaker 1]

No, I didn't. As soon as I was inducted, I went to the 8th Army.

[Speaker 2]

Oh.

[Speaker 1]

They took 12,000 recruits and had never had basic training. We took our basic training with— they were all recruits, including myself, and that's why there was a position for me in leadership, minor leadership, not elusive leadership. I mean, when the guys were worried about close order drill or manual of arms or taking a gun apart, I'd had it all.

And some of the cadres we had were pretty hard to talk to. And I know the guys in my squad didn't go anywhere but to me. It wasn't long before they caught up to me, and many of them passed me, but at least you felt a comradeship.

There was a—it tied us together somewhat. And they knew that I wasn't any better than they were, so they knew they could do it. It wasn't—and they knew that I didn't have any authority to put them on KV or to even holler at them, see?

[Speaker 2]

But at the same time, they could learn from you and— Oh, sure, they could learn from me, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

But not all of them wanted to. We had some lazy guys. They didn't want to learn.

It was something against their principle to learn anything about the Army. And that was one of the advantages of the way they took care of the division. A year later, when we come off the bidwack, we were trained.

We had our field training. We had basic to start with for six months, and then we took field training. And this was like in March, and I'm sure you've got it everywhere on your tapes, but in March of 44, after I'd been in a year, they needed replacements, as you know, and they needed them bad, and they needed them trained.

They not only had to have basic, but they also had to have advanced training. And there was a ripe group of men waiting for them. And they also got some that weren't the best.

So they called out some of the people from 8th? They took all of our privates and PSEs out of our infantry division. I think they did the same in tanks and artillery too.

But we were allowed to keep a few, and we kept some prime ones. Well, it's logical.

[Speaker 2]

You keep the best, and you let go.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, but we had a quota that we got rid of more than we wanted to. But at the same time, we got some wonderful men back in.

[Speaker 2]

We're okay. Just stop for a second. I have it here so I can keep an eye on it.

[Speaker 1]

I see.

[Speaker 2]

Let me see if it keeps turning. But this was in the spring of 1944 that you moved some out, and then they got ASTP people. Did you have any air cadet people?

Because at about the same time, they took a lot of people out of the air cadet program.

[Speaker 1]

That's right. Those that we figured had washed. But maybe they didn't wash.

We didn't talk about that too much. They were there. They had to kind of accept their fate, and they figured it that way.

But many of them adapted well, and they were good guys to be with. Well, we went through another six months of field training with them. They had already had basic.

We kind of resented that until we found out, you know, about the time we started that D-Day was there, and the other guys were in battle. So it was kind of like, you know, we wanted to be there. Well, we were glad we weren't.

[Speaker 2]

It's not your choice. That's right.

[Speaker 1]

We didn't have anything to say about it, so it wasn't like we needed to be ridiculed for it. But at times, we kind of felt like the division wasn't going to get the recognition when we did go in. And we were, even when the war was over, we had to know that the Army was one of the lesser appreciated divisions of the Army Corps.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. You weren't committed to combat until January, but again, that was nobody's doing.

[Speaker 1]

Right, and it didn't make it any easier.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, yeah. I mean, January of 1945 was plenty tough work.

[Speaker 1]

Right, but December was worse. Yeah. December was worse.

And, you know, after the first week in battle, I think that was probably the worst, and I missed most of that. I was injured about the third night in a building that was blown in.

[Speaker 2]

Artillery hit the building? I was screaming, maybe, but yes, artillery hit.

[Speaker 1]

I'm sure they had a forward observer close enough that he could just point to it. It was like 3 or 4 in the morning, and I was a squad leader.

[Speaker 2]

First platoon, second platoon? Third platoon.

[Speaker 1]

Peters was my sergeant. Uh-huh. And Oak was the platoon leader.

Captain Finley was captain.

[Speaker 2]

Had Finley been the captain for quite a long time?

[Speaker 1]

And we came over with him. It seems like we had somebody between him and Cook, but originally when I went in, in 43, Captain Charles Cook was company commander. I'm not too sure he was well-liked by the echelon above him, because we got some details that we shouldn't have gotten.

But at the level that I was, you don't know what's going on. In fact, even during a battle, you don't know much about your own echelon. If you read that letter last night, Lieutenant Pickett had come in when we were in Willery.

Maybe I shouldn't get ahead of that.

[Speaker 2]

We can wait on that.

[Speaker 1]

Let's get you... Get me out of that action.

[Speaker 2]

The first action. Do you remember how you felt when you realized that this was really it, that you were going to be committed to a combat situation?



[Speaker 1]

It dawned on me when I was offered a promotion the night before. Oh, gee whiz, I'm Catholic, and I can't... General Absolution.

There was more Catholics in the unit that night than I ever thought there was. They took us into a little hall that was hardly lit. We were probably about a mile from the line, and we were just advancing through, I think, the 94th.

[Speaker 2]

94th. I believe so.

[Speaker 1]

We come out of that little hall, and there was a couple trucks alongside the road. We were forming up in a broken line to move forward, but we still hadn't moved yet. These two guys got out of the truck, and they were pointing back right here where I was standing.

We got talking to the truckers, and they asked them what they were hauling. They said, oh, take a look. I don't know anybody else we've ever talked to that did it, but I and two other guys went over and lifted up the tailgate, or the back flap on that.

Maybe they had cave rations or something. It was full of dead soldiers, and they were a cemetery crew. I don't know whether they were cemetery crew, but they were recovery crews.

Yeah, and these guys were frozen in grotesque positions, and I realized them. And that word passed through the whole outfit. I'm not sure everybody saw it, but it was very similar to the experience later that we had when we went into our first concentration camp.

We didn't see one of the major ones, but we saw minor ones, and the people that were there were all but dead, and the guards were gone, but they were dead later on too, and you just couldn't imagine that it could have been that bad. We didn't know we heard about it. We thought that it might be, but we never thought we'd see anything like that.

[Speaker 2]

Do you remember the name of that particular camp that you saw? Did it have a name?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we overran it, but then it really wasn't an action. I mean, it just happened to be there, and it wasn't like we had to fight our way in. The guards were gone, and we went through it too fast.

We left a few men there, and men from battalion came and kept those corralled because they were wild. I remember they were eating potatoes that were rotten, and we had seen enough by then that we were a little harder to it. It didn't bother me.

It just made me mad.

[Speaker 2]

People could do that to other people?

[Speaker 1]

That's right, yeah. Some of these things are a little fuzzy after 50 years, but there are some of those things that are quite vivid, and I don't dream about them often, but there for a while I woke up in the middle of the night screaming. My wife said I did.

I never threatened her in bed, but, I mean, there were some that said they did. They were hard to live with for a while. I know my dad and mother said that they could hear me scream and jump at night occasionally.

My dad was in the service, but he never fought. In fact, he knew General Devine when he was in World War I. My dad was farming a homestead farm in Colorado.

He was an oldest son. He had six brothers on the farm where this house is, but my grandfather wanted him to go to Colorado and homestead 160, and he was like 21, and he was there to farm two years, and he got the harvest in in the fall of 17. He went into the service, and he went to OCS at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and it was a big class, and he eventually was first lieutenant of a platoon of that class, which was a pretty good plumb, but the colonel was a young cadet by the name of John M.

Devine, and he knew him well enough. They weren't together too long, and I think General Devine later might have gone to, probably never got in service. I mean he never got in the war because my dad didn't.

He never got overseas, but I think he probably went on to West Point afterwards.

[Speaker 2]

I would be surprised. Right. Otherwise he wouldn't have been a veteran.

And he ends up commanding your division.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, right, and I met the general one day, and I forget the name of this town too, but I was in reserve with my platoon at that time. I was a platoon sergeant, and I was in the reserve. It was a town where we lost a couple of men.

It was near the pillboxes, and we took a pillbox that day finally, and Lieutenant Hammerschmidt was killed by a grenade, I mean by a mine that he shot. He was riding in a jeep, and he shot down the ground. He had a couple of Germans on the front of the jeep, and it killed both of them, and it killed him.

And it was in that same town that the general did a line to see what was going on, and he tapped me on the shoulder and wanted to know what was going on in hell. I said, I don't know. I've been told to sit right here with my men.

And I had him in a house, and it was before we moved out. And I mentioned to him the name Hartwell, and whether he remembered or not, he said he did. You know, chances are he did, because it was kind of a small-knit group, and I remember names, and that would have been 30 years before, and I can remember names that were prominent to me, although his name would have been more prominent to my father than my father's would have been to him.

[Speaker 2]

But he was a general.

[Speaker 1]

They were together early in the war. There was a little tie together, you know.

[Speaker 2]

As close as you ever came to the general.

[Speaker 1]

That's as close as I ever came to him, you know. I met Pat in about the same circumstances. He spoke to me, you know, but I didn't speak back.

I had appendicitis attack after the war was over, and I was sent away from my unit and had my appendix taken out of Pilsen. And after I recovered from, I mean, after I left the hospital, they sent me to the 81st Division to come home with them because I lost my point. Put me in with them if I wanted to go with them.

And so I recuperated at Linz, Austria, and during that recuperation, I wasn't required to do anything. But being an old farm boy, I knew how to ride a horse. An Austrian farm boy can ride an old horse.

In fact, I had a pretty good one at home. And so I got a horse out of the stables, and I was riding down a little narrow street in the town that was 3 foot and a half wider than this room. And two motorcycles with three stars on them and a squad car, and then the command car comes through, and the guys in the motorcycle stop, and they said, Hold your horse.

Get off the way. So I got off, and just about that time, the general come by alongside, and the window was open because he had to slow the automobile to a stop. And he said, Hang on to that horse, son.

That was it. That was all the contact. He liked horses.

Oh, he did. He did. He had polo horses, polo ponies.

[Speaker 2]

Right.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I'm sure he... Anyhow, things like that impressed me, impressed me, you know. And still, I knew I was not legal where I was.

I was supposed to be recuperating, and not on a horse out there jogging around. But he didn't ask me what I was doing. Come in.

Come in. We just got a look for telephone books. They don't have them, do they?

They don't have them. I'm in confession here. I'm getting a hell of a penance.

Yeah, I was...

[Speaker 2]

We were talking about that night that all you Catholics got extreme unction that night. And that must have been eerie, too.

[Speaker 1]

Even that was eerie, because I never had it before. I guess if you have faith, why do you think? And I do.

But I was young then, come from a devout family. My mother is an Irish, was Irish. My father was English and had been from a Mormon background, and eventually goes back about 19 generations.

We traced my heart, well-named, to Mayflower, third flight. And our ancestors were... had a tavern right outside of Concord, between Concord and Lexington.

The home is still there. The old tavern is still there, preserved. Go back a long ways?

Hey, I get in the front row. They held it open for us. We got there a little after five o'clock, and the lady that was a ranger at that little site, you know, and she said, why do you want to see it?

And I said, well, my name is Hartwell. And back about 17 generations, it started here. She said, I'm going to give you the whole tour.

She stayed there for an hour and a half with my family. So that impressed the kids a little bit.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

That will.

[Speaker 2]

So you were...

[Speaker 1]

What are we?

[Speaker 2]

You were sort of within the sound of the artillery, and these two trucks came by with the bodies in them. Right. That must have...

I've heard other people say the same kind of thing the first time they see American dead. Right.

[Speaker 1]

Charlie, what happens to you? Right. It didn't make me...

I wasn't fatalistic about it, but it made me realize why we were there before we got in action. And then about probably ten minutes later, we were screening out along the ditch from where they had been, from where they had come, and the word came back, and I was in the third platoon, second squad, third platoon. We were going up first, second, third.

And they called back for all bazookas. Well, the bazookas and the loaders had to get up and go forward, and it was like goodbye forever, see you again, see? Well, within two hours, they were all back again, or we were up to them.

But that was probably, following what we had seen, that was devastating, too. And because I had a couple men in my squad that went with them, too, and there was... I don't know if they ever found a target or not.

[Speaker 3]

Well, there was something bad up ahead.

[Speaker 1]

That's right. And then, you know, then when we got up there that night, I thought it was poor tactics, but I didn't want to be alone, and the whole company went into a building. Hell, if they'd have known it, they could have blown the whole company up.

And we were in that building until daybreak. Then we spread out a little bit, and we had some narrow escapes that day.

[Speaker 2]

For artillery mostly, or...? From snipers and artillery.

[Speaker 1]

I was in the church, along with Peters, my squad. We were in there until about midnight, and a tank come up and stuck a barrel in the church itself. And they got out and came in.

And we were in the front part of the church, in the pews. And I'd just been to church the night before, and it sure didn't look right to blow that church up. But we threw grenades at them right out in the middle of the pews and took out the back vestibule.

And after having thrown a grenade at the tank, and it just popped off of it. Even after we threw a grenade at it and it popped off, they come in the church. I thought, what kind of crazy men are these?

I don't know how many of them. The way they screamed, we killed a couple. Then we found out later they had a man in a steeple.

And he was up there all night. He was in the steeple in the belfry. Got him out.

Somebody shot him the next day. But that was after I left. We left there.

[Speaker 2]

Did they pull the tank back out again, or did the tank stay there?

[Speaker 1]

That tank was there by morning. Somebody had got a bazooka in it, but we didn't have a bazooka. And so I don't know who got it.

We pulled out of there into the back. And that tank never fired in the church, but it was ready to. I think those men didn't know where that grenade came from, and they went in to get their man out, probably.

[Speaker 2]

Maybe so. But odd that they'd gotten out of the tank.

[Speaker 1]

Well, they might have had infantry alongside the tank.

[Speaker 2]

Maybe that's it.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, but it was pitch dark. Maybe it was cloud cover. There was no moon, and you couldn't see a hand in front of your face.

[Speaker 2]

It must have been scary.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I was scared that night. So was everybody else, I guess. I didn't have an opportunity to shoot my rifle that night, but we did throw a couple of grenades.

You didn't just shoot nothing. It was the next day that we were in. We had a couple of battles during the day.

I'm not sure I shot anybody that day, but I sure as hell know I missed a couple because they kept running. Funny things do happen, too. The next morning we were advancing, and I had a squad leader.

The squad leader of 1st Platoon was named Paul McCullough. We had taken the backyard of a house and then a street and then the front yard of another house and got in the backyard, and there was a separate cave. It had a door on it that opened up out.

We didn't know what was in that, but we were getting pretty trigger-happy. He took a concussion grenade and threw it down there and slammed the door shut and laid it against the door. I blew that door off about ten foot, but not enough to hurt him too bad.

And everybody laughed, including Paul. At that same time, there was probably seven or eight Germans along the other side of the wall. They were dressed in white, running as fast as they could from right to left.

It was just like a shooting gallery. I had my whole squad. They were just going like that.

Never one of them dropped. Not a one of them dropped. Right there.

We all wondered what the hell, but we were all excited. We weren't taking careful aim. It wasn't by then that we didn't want to kill.

It just didn't happen. It wasn't as easy as you thought it was going to be. There was a couple other events that day, but I can't really recall how they happened or how they, but I can tie that together and root mainly because I remember Paul flying through the air.

[Speaker 2]

Was this in Minig?

[Speaker 1]

Yes, it was in Minig. This was about the second morning we were there. Then that night, I don't know where we'd been up until dark.

I can't remember where. We had retreated some, I know, and there was a street to the front of the church. The street went lengthways out of town.

We had nearly everything on the left side. Looking north, I would say it would be. Everything on the left side was ours and everything on the right side you didn't know what was there because we were getting firing from all directions there.

But we owned everything on the left side. There was behind that, those raw houses, was a, well, you'd call it an alley here, but it was only about this wide. It led between each house, and it led up to the street, and the company command post was right at the end of that, just not too far from the church.

The tomb leader, I didn't see the tomb leader. I don't know whether, what happened, but he wasn't there, but Peters was there and had at least two squads with him and I was one of them. And we took Occupy House clear at the end of that block.

And I remember that night. We were supposed to be in hiding. We were supposed to, we had a whole, I had my whole squad in one room and another squad, too, and we were standing guard outside.

I had two guys with me, and I think it was like between two and three we were standing because, hell, everybody else was tired, and, you know, we had to have some sleep. And maybe it was three to four that I and these guys did guard, and we just got off guard and I got three more guys up there to watch the windows and the doors. We laid down on the board floor, and everybody else was asleep in the room, and we crept in there.

We knew where the three guys come from that replaced us. One of them was Joker Kelly, and he was a very good friend. He could sure as hell cook.

We had just liberated a goose, and we'd had it just before we moved out. He was a good Catholic and went to church with me that night. He was in my squad.

He laid alongside of me, and a guy by the name of Luckfield was on the other side of me, and he was in my squad. And we hadn't been there probably more than 10 or 15 minutes. Maybe they were asleep.

I wasn't asleep. And a screamer made me hit back, and then I hit the front, and just about that quick, boom, boom, boom, and it hit right over our heads, and it killed them. But I was laying on my stomach, and I had my helmet on.

They were on their back and had their helmets on. There were guns along their side, but they were laying on their back, and it suffocated them or what. I don't know.

It didn't knock me out, but the pressure was tremendous, and the pain was, well, it was bearable. It didn't knock me out. I mean, I was conscious, and I knew I couldn't move and I couldn't breathe, but my arms were kind of like this.

My head was like this, and I could wiggle my feet. And Bob Johnson was my assistant squad leader. Bedlam was in that room.

The guys were screaming, and I could hear that, but I was paralyzed. I was under rubble pile that had come down over me, and he pulled me out. I could feel him pulling, and he knew where I was, and he pulled me, and he said, John, John, you okay?

And I mumbled something, and he got me out, and I don't know why Bob did it. Bob just took me in his arms and took me up this path and took me to the aid station, and when I got there, I could start to move a little bit. I had a hell of a pain.

I didn't, I don't know how much pressure it would have been, but it would have taken quite a bit because Bill Crocker came to help relieve the bedlam, and they unloaded that pile of rock and got the two bodies out, and they found my helmet, and it was crushed sideways. And he said, told me later he never figured I'd come back. They took me to the aid station, and I don't remember except that I saw a guy by the name of John Corder who was in my squad.

I didn't know what happened to him, but I lost him like two hours before this happened, and he must have gone berserk because he was having, and he never came back, but he was sitting alongside of me, and we talked a little bit, but he didn't go where I went, and I didn't have any blood. They didn't send me back. They sent me back to battalion, and this Red Sewell in here, he was there.

I remembered he was, but I didn't know what was the matter with him. Apparently he had, he was a mechanic or a driver, and he got something in his eye, and his eye was all puffed up. So they sent him back.

I think it was brake fluid or something. Brake fluid or something, but he was like that. I don't remember that.

All I know is Red took care of me, and I was in that room for four or five days and never moved. There was an old German lady that fed me hot milk, changed my pants, and all of a sudden, about three or four days, I was recovered.

[Speaker 2]

That's amazing.

[Speaker 1]



Yeah, I mean, not that I was really glad to be back, but I was glad to be, to be back, and I went to the unit that night. Now, this is strange, too. The night before we went to knitting, we stayed in a little town, probably three or four miles back, and I don't know these names, but I'm sure it's somewhere in here.

It's irrelevant about the names, but when we went into that town, we thought we were getting awful close. The captains had us on, on one hour on and two hours off guard duty, which it was, hell, it was 75 men on guard duty around this little town all night. You couldn't move without having somebody challenge you, and I had a, and it wasn't in my squad, but in the squad within the platoon, we had a guy by the name of Carbone, I remember.

He was assistant squad leader, I think, the machine gun squad, and he went to sleep on post, and he was threatened court-martial right on the spot. I thought they were going to kill him, and he proved himself pretty well during Nimming, apparently. When I came back, it was, Nimming was over, they had just come back, and I walked down to Company Street.

The command post was, I mean the CP was in the same place. I walked into that unchallenged, and I, and the captain said, go down and take over the platoon because Peters is gone. Peters had been hurt?

Peters had been hurt during that three hours. He got shrapnel wounds, and he did come back. In fact, he wasn't back too long, and then they sent him away because they gave him a battlefield, which left me with the platoon, and I was his assistant most of the time, even in this case.

He and I were good friends, and he wanted me as his assistant, and so naturally it was kind of assumed that I would be, I wouldn't have had to be, that I would move up, and that's where I stayed in the rest. He came back once in a while, but he never came back to serve the platoon.

[Speaker 2]

I imagine the captain was glad to have you back.

[Speaker 1]

It wasn't the same captain, but no, no, Captain Finley was hurt, and he was gone too, as I recall, and I don't know who it was, McKenna, McCaffrey, and I don't know which, but there was no doubt. Oh, sure, he wanted me. And the men wanted me, I guess.

Sounds like it. Yeah, I suppose it did. I remember a very strange thing.

The only one that might have resented it at all was the squad leader of your squad, and his name was McCullough, and I got off to the wrong start with him. When I walked in the room, they had just got rations, and the rations included a watch. I had my watch, and the squad leader said watches.

He had a watch too, but he wanted another one, so he kept the second watch, and I hadn't been there more than five minutes, you know, and they were off and running, and a couple of them said, hey, McCullough kept the damn best thing in the ration for himself, and it, you

know, was free, and I said, well, now that can't be. We can't start out that way. We're going to have a drawing.

Pick a number, and I had about, there was about 20 men left in the platoon there. We hadn't got a replacement yet, and guess who won the watch? McCullough.

So we got his damn watch, and everybody else was satisfied, but he was pissed off at me, but I knew it was right, you know, and we never had any trouble. Paul always did what he was told to do, but I guess I never contacted him since. Pete tried to, and he wouldn't talk to him.

He told me about that. I see. He told me he was at Bradford, PA.

I knew he was from Bradford, PA, and he stopped there. The guy was in the factory and didn't want to come talk to him.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Pete said that he asked the foreman. The foreman went upstairs, supervisor went upstairs, and came down and said he doesn't want to talk to him.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Well, that would be a turnoff, wouldn't it?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, really, and apparently Dick told me that he had written to him afterwards and said that he was sorry that McCullough wouldn't talk to him but that he had no hard feelings and that he was just sort of wanting to chat with him, and Dick said that one night a few weeks later he got a phone call from McCullough. Oh. And McCullough said, you know, he said, I got kind of a bad conscience about refusing to see you because we went through a lot together.

He said, but for me, the war is over, and he doesn't have very much in his arsenal, really.

[Speaker 1]

I remember at one time before I left Towson, and then we knew that we could only take one home, and I had a luger, and I had two lugers. One of them was a 1942 model, the other was a 1919, and it was in the best shape. I had another one with a short stock, metal stock, kind of a red stock and a long barrel.

The barrel was that long, and it was clumsy. I guess I should have kept it, but I didn't. I traded it.

I had a P-38, and I had a .32 Walther, and I had a little nickel-plated handgun, and all at one time, and I really didn't. I wasn't hunting for them, but I didn't. I remember I found that little nickel-plated handgun, .25 caliber, in the bottom of a foxhole. Right shortly after I was denied by that guy when we went back down there, a little Joe, and I forget his last name. He was our medic.

[Speaker 2]

Did each platoon have a medic?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, each platoon had a medic. His name was Herdinger or Messinger or something like that. The little Joe hung to me like I was glue.

I mean, he was going through shock, and for a couple weeks, he never left my side. I felt very secure having a medic, but I wasn't far from the men either, but he followed me on every... He was by my side on every attack we ever made.

[Speaker 2]

Was there anything particular that shocked him that made him particularly troubled?

[Speaker 1]

I think so, because he had to handle some pretty gruesome... He was left with men that were dying, and all of a sudden, his nerves were getting to him, and he was with me. We advanced down through a valley, but we didn't have any contacts.

We could see where they had been, and there were some foxholes down there. We looked at those foxholes, just checking them out. There was somebody in it, and this gun was at the bottom of it, and I remember he being alongside me.

I said, I'll get that gun for you, but let's take our time. Let's clear the area first, and we'll come back. We didn't know whether it was booby-trapped, or anything.

We always thought it was things, and still, I never did find one booby-trapped, but you don't always find them in the bottom of a foxhole like that either. Yeah. It was strange, and he made me come back and get it, but he didn't want it.

He didn't want it, so I put it in my pocket, and I said, well, Joe, if you ever want it, well, you can have it, and he never had wanted it. He might have got another gun sometime. I don't remember seeing him much longer after that.

His memory just fades from me, but he was pretty important. He was kind of like your little brother. He was small in stature, and, God, he'd do anything for you, not that you'd ask him to, but once in a while, he was in the way too.

[Speaker 2]

Your little brothers are like that. Yeah. But his job was to patch people up, and I'm sure that was hard after a while, but...

[Speaker 1]

Right. I don't think he was a real strong character. He was a little too babyish, a little too young for his job.

He didn't take command of anything. I mean, he could call for a jeep and a medic, and he could give you, you know, a morphine, or he maybe could put on a tourniquet, give you a little comfort if you needed it, and that was his job. He would mainly make contact to get you...

To get you out. To get you out. And, see, it had just been an hour or two before that we lost a man.

And, I don't know, I remember that was strange too. Somebody else right beside me lost their trenching tool. It was split right off their leg, you know, and splinters went into the leg, but it didn't draw blood.

It knocked the hells and gone, you know. And you weren't expecting fire and all, it didn't... But the guy got it in the jaw too there, and he was a point, and a point man is generally the one that got it, and he was out on point.

His name was Boulder, and he was from Carolina somewhere, and we called him Bull because why not? And he was, he was a good scout. I had a couple others that were more willing and more perilous, and they came all through it.

Greg Guido, his name is Guido actually, and he should have been here, but he's in Italy with his wife today, and we've been to his house. He lives in Utica. He was, he was my runner, and confident, you know.

He was, he would do anything, and hurry back. It wasn't always that they would hurry back. It wasn't like you were telling them to do the impossible, and, but he was there when you needed him, and he was, he would go out on point, and he would be careful, but he moved, and so you could all move, but you, a lot of instances like that.

You move until somebody hears something or does something or sees something or gets shot. Or gets shot. Yeah, and you prefer that it was one of the other two or three, and most often it was, unless you were really tied up, and you couldn't move, but then, but then you didn't need scouts out.

[Speaker 3]  
Right.

[Speaker 1]  
Then they fell back where they belonged, you know.

[Speaker 2]  
Did you, could you tell the difference quickly as to the quality of the enemy unit that you were facing? Did you know pretty well that these were, these were good experienced troops or people who weren't very good?

[Speaker 1]  
I don't know whether you could distinguish that right away, but it didn't take long. If they'd give up, they were, were mocked. Yeah.

We assumed they were all, All SS? They were all SS after the first week. I think they were all, were, and, but they weren't.

A lot of them were pretty meek. A lot of them wanted to give up. After we got, even in the pocket, for the time up in Holland that they didn't want to give up very bad, but as far as I'm concerned, the issue was over after we crossed the Rhine.

Even though we had to be careful and even though we had to fight, the issue was solved and it was just a matter of time for us to get there. Of doing it. Of getting it done.

Right. And I didn't question the leadership as much after we got that far either. Not that I knew anything about it, but, no, I'm comfortable with the way things went afterwards even though we lost some men.

But there was, there were times when I could make some decisions where I thought I could save some men and I did and I could. I was always constantly aware of it. But their livelihood just didn't center around being kept alive from gunfire.

They had to be taken care of. I mean, they had to be controlled. They had to be out of harm's way, but they had to be ready and they had to be fed.

And you had to make sure that they didn't party too much and you kept track of where they were so that they weren't off. We did lose one man. Hell, he was gone for a month and he finally came back.

Now, he said that he got lost in the crowd of the unit. I'm not sure. That's right.

But he joined in and kept right on going again. And he was a target in my platoon. Well, maybe he was.

Maybe he was. But he could have been drunk for two weeks, too. Maybe more likely.

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, I heard somebody tell me about the time that you all came upon a warehouse full of liquor. I don't know if it was your platoon or not. No, we did.

One of the platoons.

[Speaker 1]

We had a good share of liquor, a good share of wine in the brackets that we built on the back of our halftracks. I think that the drivers had a lot to do with that, too. They were confiscating villages in the rear and we never got into the cellars.

We never were short on wine. And it was pretty good. But we didn't get drunk, either.

I mean, we kept our wits about us. There was strict rules against that in fraternization. And there aren't too many that have used it.

There was always a few.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, sure.

[Speaker 1]

But not too many in the company? No, and there was never anything blatant. I mean, it wasn't like somebody would bring a girl into a crowd party.

Once in a while, maybe somebody would sneak away and wonder where in hell it was and you'd send a buddy to go get them and they'd come back smiling. But most of the guys were pretty straight arrow. We had a couple that couldn't hold their drinks very well.

We found out about that when I turned blind overnight. Don't know what it was he drank, but he was all right in a couple days. Oh, okay.

It wasn't permanent? No.

[Speaker 2]

You said something about the story that Pickett sent in, that your remembrance of that particular...

[Speaker 1]

Okay, I wasn't aware of what the command was coming down. And you're familiar with the story that he wrote. So I can talk from there instead of having to repeat any of that.

I didn't know the command from... the coordination between artillery and division and combat command. I do remember a few things that happened an hour or two before and we kind of settled in.

We knew that... I don't remember the half-track coming up and then leaving with our baggage heli that made so much noise up where we were. They weren't there.

They might have been back a mile and we left them because we were on foot coming up. This ditch and this field he's talking about, I don't remember him being with me. He might have gone with me partway.

He had never been in action before. This was it for him. He might have been a few little sprinters, but this was it for him.

And he was, as far as I could see, he was put in charge of the company charge. And if it wasn't typical of the Pickett charge at Gettysburg, you'll never see anything that was. You would have been embarrassed.

You would have laughed if you could have seen it. There were two mistakes made. Oh, there was one or two.

First of all, we should have pushed off at 5 instead of 6 when it was dark yet. At 4 o'clock, I took three men and we walked up alongside of that. It wasn't a road.

It was a ditch, but it was a bush. And I didn't get all the way into town with that patrol. I wasn't supposed to.

I was supposed to be back by 5. And I got back about, probably took me 45 minutes. It was dark.

It wasn't moonlight. There were stars. And you can see a little bit after you become accustomed to it, even at dark.

And so we picked our way up and we found no opposition whatsoever all the way up, almost up into town. And then was the time we should have taken the whole company up. Called off the artillery barrage and just taken the company in there.

Well, hindsight, you know. Artillery barrage was impressive, but it was so far out in front. We should have been up there and just had it in front of us.

[Speaker 2]

I wondered about that when I was reading it. To go 1,000 yards after an artillery barrage.

[Speaker 1]

I mean, you've got 1,000 yards. It took us, God, it took us hours to get up there. Everybody running at full speed.

Craziest thing you ever saw. And Pickett in the back, run, go men, go men, you know. And he'd never been in combat before.

And the guy alongside of me said, I'm going to shoot that son of a bitch. And I said, no, you're not. We're going to do this.

Let's get the hell going and get this over with. We never had a fire. There was no 88 that shot to us.

The only fire we had was from a couple of machine guns behind that misfired and shot two of our men. One of which was a Pollock replacement that came in the day before and wanted to fight with us. And we gave him a uniform and got it right in the back.

Killed him? Oh, yeah, yeah. Two men died right alongside of us.

And that was the only firing. When we got up in the edge of town, we did have some, we had to clean out some houses. And I remember a little bit, but it wasn't dramatic like he said about it.

We had a couple, we had a few give up and one of them did it, two didn't want to and we had to do some shooting. When we got up the railroad track, our mission was the railroad track between these two churches. And we were the only ones there.

And I don't know where in hell the rest of them were. They got caught in some houses and were probably cleaning them out. There was a warehouse that we all fired from the hip at, you know, but there wasn't nothing, no fire coming from it.

And we probably, it was probably 300 yards away from the warehouse. But we were sure blazing coming up through there. And we might have scared somebody that they didn't shoot at us, it's possible.

Who knows? I mean, we were so fortunate that we didn't have any opposition. One machine could have just wiped us out.

And so anyhow, we got up to the railroad track and there was the Union Station and that was just, Dorston was a pretty good sized town, probably 20,000, I would just guess, from

the park that we were in. And the station was, well, it was probably bigger than my hay barn at home, which is 100 by 60 feet and a big high roof in it and no trains in the middle. But I mean, they were, and we went into that station.

Well, before we got to the station, there were some foxholes out in between the tracks and there was still firing from probably our own men on another sector and we hit in those foxholes and hell, we found dead soldiers in there and they were American.

[Speaker 2]

Dead American soldiers?

[Speaker 1]

They were dead American soldiers. We got into the station and there was, well, there was a squad of men in there and most of them were all wounded and they were from another division. They had taken the damn town before the artillery barrage ever came in and our own artillery barrage, had you ever heard that?

[Speaker 2]

Not this story, but I've heard it happen.

[Speaker 1]

Well, but this happened and we didn't take that town. We knocked out some, we took some Germans out of the street that we come up there, but they were just fringe compared to, if there was any coordination, that was a slaughter and that didn't happen. But that wasn't Pickett's fault.

It wasn't Pickett's fault. But from then on, the men resented Pickett. They didn't want to trust him and to this day, I know Ray Guido says that there was a couple times when he was tempted, but you know, that my job was not to save him, but I wanted to.

I didn't want to be the sole leader of that outfit either. He would put in there to do his job, but I was probably, to a certain extent, a governor for him. I held him back from doing some crazy things.

And I think he probably gave me credit for that, and the men, I made it easier for him, I'm sure. He probably wouldn't have been very tolerant from their actions had he seen them. He shouldn't have been in this position, and that would have made things difficult.

My life wasn't difficult, but I realized I had a different role than I had when Peters was there. I mean, Peters was a leader, and our lieutenant Volk was too, but he didn't last long. He didn't come back from Nenning, and Peters did, so...

Was Volk wounded in Nenning? He must have been. I think he had frozen feet or something.

[Speaker 2]

Well, a lot of that.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.



[Speaker 2]

Did Pickett learn as the weeks went on? Did he get any better?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I don't think he ever would have learned too much. I like that. Yeah.

I mean, he might have known what men's capabilities were. I mean, you can only put your man to much and he runs out of gas. Um, but Pickett, I think he wanted to be a hero, and sometimes that's at the expense of somebody else.

Yeah. Now, Peters never wanted to be a hero, but his men followed him, and it happened, and it was a short life, but he had earned it, and nobody resented it. They did.

They did resent a new J.T.O. coming in that had never done anything like Pickett, and they didn't, they wouldn't have resented anybody in the unit that got it, you know. I don't know. I suppose maybe, I don't know whatever, I don't know when he left.

It wasn't a big deal. I don't remember when he left the unit, and he might have been up, he might have been there clear to the end. I don't know why.

I just don't recollect anywhere I wasn't responsible to him later on. I mean, I had my job, and I knew I was going home or going to Japan or somewhere, and it was only during that short period of time that I have vivid memories of him, you know. I really wasn't looking forward to seeing him, and he's not here, but he'd come, and I didn't bring that flag for him anyhow.

[Speaker 2]

You hang on to that flag.

[Speaker 1]

Well, my son said it's his.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Right. But it's interesting. I think the flag means more to my son now than ever.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Because somebody else wanted it. I can understand that.

[Speaker 2]

Did you trade for that flag, or did you find it?

[Speaker 1]

No, I took it out of the belly. There were flags everywhere. Oh, sure.

The Germans were great for flags. Oh, hell, they had flags everywhere. But it was taken down.

It wasn't folded up.

[Speaker 2]

Another question I had, in taking prisoners, and you took quite a few, were there any instances that you heard about or knew about where somebody had been fighting against you, and then at the very last minute decided that they were going to surrender, and the people didn't give them a chance to? I mean, I know that that happens.

[Speaker 1]

No, that never happened. To me, I can remember taking prisoners that you were mad at, but you weren't mad at them when they got their guns down. And I never followed up on a prisoner.

I sent a detail back with them. And my place was not to be worried about a prisoner. Once he was a prisoner, he was somebody else's.

And I never sent one back with anyone that I knew was going to do anything to him. And I wouldn't have, because I wouldn't have probably cared so much about that prisoner as I would my man. Your man and how you would have felt about it, too.

Right. I would have been responsible for what he did, and I didn't want him to be responsible for what he did. I couldn't be responsible if he wasn't on a detail for me, though.

That's somebody else's problem. That's his then. But if he's a detail for me, then I'm responsible for him.

I felt that. That's good. Not in a sense that I would talk about it.

I guess I wouldn't have told him. I would have known.

[Speaker 2]

But you knew which ones in your platoon were trustworthy that way and which ones might not be.

[Speaker 1]

Right. I knew there were a few that were trustworthy that way, and I wouldn't have sent them alone back. It didn't happen very often.

We took prisoners individually. I don't recall ever taking a prisoner, an individual prisoner, by myself. I was always in a group.

It wasn't for me. I was never in a position where I was alone. I mean, I had men around me.

I wasn't a point man, except on the case of this bridge. No, that was never a concern. And I, like you say, I knew that it happened, and I knew that it happened in our unit because it was bragging.

[Speaker 3]

Really?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Not in my platoon. But in the company?

Yep. And it was not that I, it was, I wasn't there. I mean, it was just hearsay.

And I can't recall who it was. I remember the distaste I had for it. And I guess maybe I had never seen what happened to our prisoners.

I knew that they died. I knew we had men die. We never had anybody captured, per se, that I know of that was, until afterwards I heard, that were mistreated.

I guess that happened, but I wouldn't prove positive.

[Speaker 2]

Did you ever have anybody in your platoon who broke down psychologically? Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. And a strange, it wouldn't be the men you thought it was going to be. That little guy in my third squad, his name was Woody Copeland.

He was from the hills of Kentucky, and he went to great pains to show me how to make moonshine. He did that for a living, I think. Oh, wow.

And he was a real hillbilly and a gunman. And he wasn't a leader. He was not even a good follower.

I guess he, I remember Willie always, he said I wasn't chicken shit, but he said I sure do have hen house wits. That was kind of a running joke. I mean any sergeant is chicken shit sometimes.

[Speaker 3]

Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

But just one day he just went all to pieces. He just shaking and pleading and crying, and we were not, and we were back, it wasn't right in the middle of it. It was all those things that happened that day.

And I had to send him back and I never saw him again. And I'm, you know, maybe he would have been all right the next day or two, but apparently not, or he would have been sent back up again. He wasn't the type that would shoot himself in the foot.

In fact, I don't, I never heard of that. Only in movies.

[Speaker 3]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

And he wasn't the only one. There was a couple others in the first days of mending that happened too. One of them I knew personally, and the other one was a sergeant in the first platoon, and I didn't know what the hell happened.

I knew they were talking a little bit about it, but those things were, we had other things to think about, and he was already gone. And I had his address, and about ten years ago I tried to contact him before we come to the reunion, and I don't know, he was kind of flaky I guess afterwards too, but something happened at mending that first day, and he must have thrown his gun down and run, and they just sent him back, and he never would have lived that down. He had broke his marriage, and his family disowned him, and I called his home address, and his wife answered, and he had died in another town about a month before, and I talked to his wife and his son, and they were ever so grateful to hear from someone who was his friend before it happened, and had acted like he was forgiven.

He was forgiven for all I, hell, it could have happened to me that first day. It could have happened to anybody, and maybe if, under different circumstances, he would have gone through that stage and been as good as he had been before. It was just, I think the fact that there was such a reaction among his men, among the platoon, it might have saved some others from quite going over the brink.

You wouldn't look at him and think that he was weak. I think in reading since then and following wars, they probably had a better way of handling it, and they didn't lose that. The use of that man, like we lost him.

[Speaker 2]

And there was, I remember someone else telling me about the first person killed in the company, in Medic, the Mormon soldier.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, and I don't, I think his name was Johnson. Yes, and he was in another platoon, and I guess he, well, was he killed?

[Speaker 2]

He, the story I heard was that he just walked into the square where the Germans were with his M1 in his hand down, just holding it inside, and then was shot.

[Speaker 1]

Well, yes, but he didn't die, did he?

[Speaker 2]

I think he did.

[Speaker 1]

It wasn't listed in our book.

[Speaker 2]

Maybe he is.

[Speaker 1]

Maybe, I haven't looked at that book for years. I didn't know him. I should have known him, but maybe if I saw a picture of him at the time, but I wasn't aware of that until I heard it this time here.

Somebody told me that back in 87. I see. No, I couldn't verify anything on that story.

I'm sure that it happened, and I, but I didn't remember his death, and I didn't remember, I thought somebody said here that he did survive it, but he must not have.

[Speaker 2]  
It's in the roster.

[Speaker 1]  
In other words, you're saying that he just wanted to die. Yeah.

[Speaker 2]  
That was the story. I don't even remember who told me. It might have been Bill, Bob.

I'm not sure. Yeah, maybe so. But it was...

[Speaker 1]  
Well, I wouldn't deny it, but I didn't, it didn't go through the crowd like a ripple.

[Speaker 2]  
Yeah, you had a lot of other things to do, too.

[Speaker 1]  
I guess so, and maybe we all kind of felt the same way there for a little bit. Well, no, I never felt like I wanted to walk out in front of a machine gun, not without shooting back in the arm. I mean, there were times when you knew you were, and being stupid, but you couldn't get there without going from here to there.

You were in the 3rd platoon then all the way through? All the way, yeah. Well, no, I started out in 2nd platoon before they got rid of the cadre, and then I went into 3rd platoon when we got into field training, when they started passing out chevrons, I went into 3rd platoon.

Yeah, I got Buck's Sergeant stripes in August of 43 and went home a proud sergeant.

[Speaker 2]  
Okay. Did you think at the end of the war in Europe that you might have to go to the Pacific?

[Speaker 1]  
Oh, we all knew we were planning. That was a... The division had good equipment.

We hadn't been in very long. We were well trained. We were up to strength, and we were told that we were being scheduled to get on a boat and that we were going to go through the canal and that we wouldn't be going home, and they give out 10% furloughs to London for seven days prior to around the 1st of August, and by the 1st, the middle of September, we thought we were scheduled to go, and so there was probably 20 men from the company

that got on half-tracks, I mean on deuces and a half and met with other companies, and there was 1,500 men that went to England during BJ Day.

That was a great place. Come in, Bill. It's...

Do I have to go? No, you go ahead. Keep talking.

What are you doing?

[Speaker 2]

I can make it... We can get out of here. Now we're about to...

[Speaker 3]

Now we're talking about you. You all done?

[Speaker 2]

We're getting close to done.

[Speaker 3]

Yeah, good.

[Speaker 2]

I usually end up with a question that says, is there anything else you want me to know?

[Speaker 1]

Anyone else? Someone made a mistake seven or eight years ago when I talked to you. You know, I'm tired of...

I didn't talk to you long like this, I didn't want to talk. But there was a young man that came in in April of 1944 along with a lot of these other guys and kind of tied himself to me because he was put in my squad and he was a brilliant young man. Enough so that he wanted to be up on...

I remember taking him to a half-track and taking a .50 caliber machine gun apart and putting it together for half an hour or an hour until he could do it too. And the next day he committed suicide. Really?

Right. And it wasn't who I thought it was. I knew who it was at the time.

But he was an important young man. His name was not Carnegie, it was Kerrigan. Kerrigan, Kerrigan.

Andrew Kerrigan III. He had been in ROTC in high school and he had been his cadet colonel in ROTC in high school and junior ROTC. Then he went into ASTP and that was in the back and he was just destitute from being moved to a high authority place in his ROTC unit to a PFC, to a private infantry outfit.

I guess he just couldn't take it. Couldn't take the... And then on an Easter morning of 1944 we were out in the mess line and he blew the top of his head off in his shelter house right next to mine.

I never saw him. I didn't know where the fire came from and I knew there was some hollering and rattling back there. But that's over the hole and the top of the roof and blood all over and blood in the trench around it.

I'm probably the last one that had much contact with him. I didn't know that he had a problem.

[Speaker 2]

Was it obvious that...

[Speaker 1]

Well, I sure couldn't see it. It seemed like he was very interested and I know he would have liked to have been squad leader and maybe platoon sergeant someday and he probably was very capable. He was a short man and a boy.

He was a boy. But he also had impressed some people where he would have been cadet colonel even in junior. So that bothered us all for a while.

[Speaker 2]

Had to lose somebody like that.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. But that was the circumstances that happened. I remember a couple of the guys that came in with him from ASDP went back to San Francisco with him and they never told what happened to him.

Said it was a field accident.

[Speaker 3]

There was no use...

[Speaker 1]

No, no, there was no point. There was a... They had a beautiful home, they said, and a beautiful burial and a lot of rich friends and he had a hell of a background.

Now, I never knew whether he was of the true Andrew Carrigan that made the flight the wrong way, but I think there was a connection. I don't know whether his name was Andrew or not, but there was a Carrigan that flew to England.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, wrong way Carrigan. Yeah, Warburton.

[Speaker 1]

Anyhow, we always... I think this guy had come from a real class family and money. From what the guys said that when they came back they were treated royally, but it was under sad circumstances.

Go ahead. Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

So that was just...

[Speaker 1]

Anyhow, what I told you wrong before is I thought his... I always remembered his name as being Carnegie.

[Speaker 2]

It wasn't.

[Speaker 1]

It was Carrigan. I only knew him for a couple of days and at that time neither one of the names... In fact, Carrigan meant more to me than Carnegie.

Might have been a hundred million less.

[Speaker 3]

Right.

[Speaker 1]

But it was that.

[Speaker 2]

Anything else that you want to be sure I know?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I had... What I was coming home to, I was the truth before I left. Got married to the same woman I'm married to now about four months after I come back and we're going to have her 50th in another couple, three months.

[Speaker 3]

Congratulations.

[Speaker 1]

I come back in January of 46th and we were married in June of 46th. Congratulations. She was a very lovely mother of seven children.

[Speaker 2]

And you just picked up the farming and...

[Speaker 1]

Well, yeah. I never did anything else after I come back. I did work for the Union Pacific Railroad for nine months before I went in because there wasn't that much to do on the farm and I knew I was going to be going and I thought there was an opportunity for me to come back.

But when I came back, I didn't want to come back to the railroad. I would have had a good job in the headquarters building in Omaha. But I had friends that did that and my brother-in-law did it and it was kind of a rough life.

I enjoyed what I do. I enjoy it, yeah. That's it.



It was probably easier for me because I come from a farming background. The farm was there if I could handle it. But there was a time in 1960, my dad and I sat down and we talked things over and we said, you know, we're not making any money.

You're not going to have a life here, but it is the farm. What do you want to do? And I said, well, I sure don't want to do anything else and the kids are coming up great and if we can hang on to the farm, let's do it.

And we had lost a lot of money in the 50s in feeding cattle and he was a good cattle feeder, but the prices were wrong. And he didn't have much money equity in the farm anymore, but I took over his loans and things worked out, you know.

[Speaker 2]

Did you make any use of the GI Bill?

[Speaker 1]

Only, only, it's kind of like welfare. You know, that's a sign. The farmers could, we went to school once a week at a basement in a school and we had an instructor there that didn't know as much as I did and I drew \$40 a week for 50 weeks and I needed it, but I used it.

It was \$2,000. I suppose I learned something, you know, that was the object of it and that was my, that was the part of the GI Bill that was available to me or I could have gone away to college. And I never resented, because I went, I've been going to school all my life, through Extension.

[Speaker 3]

Right.

[Speaker 1]

You have it available to you and you do it, you know. I didn't need a sheepskin. All my, we put all our family through school.

Well, I wouldn't say we, those that went through graduate school, they did it on their own and there were three of them that did that and the last one is still paying his loans off, but they got through, the other, they got through the first four years. We were able to do that. Our farm could do that.

It's hard to do that now because it costs so much. It costs more than when we were sending ours through and I hope that our care kids do and I will help them some, but they got to help themselves and our kids did too. They all worked, but we could pay them tuition, room and board and if they wanted to go out on Friday night, it was their money and, good Lord, I bought enough used cars and I was a mechanic and so we were there and they'd keep them running.

I was like, God, they have to stay home. No, that, no, that, that was life and I don't, I never had a car until I was, after I was married, two years after I was married. I drove my father's old beat up pickup until I could afford to buy a car in 1948.

[Speaker 2]

Well, I thank you.

[Speaker 1]

Okay. I thank you. I thank you for listening.