

Northcutt, Sherwin H. 2-25-97

[Speaker 2]

The following is an interview with Mr. Sherwin H. Northcutt, N-O-R-T-H-C-U-T-T, at H-C-7-7, Box 15, Colmont, Tennessee, C-O-A-L-M-O-N-T. Interview conducted by Dr. Charles Johnson, Center for the Study of War and Society, University of Tennessee, February 25, 1997.

[Speaker 1]

Well, that's a doorbell, I'll just sit there.

[Speaker 2]

Normally, what I ask to begin with is to give me some background on you, what your life was like before you went in the service. Where you were born, when you were born, just to try to fit you in.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I was born in 1915 in Northcutt's Cove, which is often one of these hollers in Grundy County. Well, I was actually born in Warren County, across the line from Warren County, but I lived most of the time in Grundy County. And went to elementary school there, and then I went to high school in Grundy County at Tracy City.

And then I went to UT for my college work. How many in your family? How many?

Well, two brothers and one sister. That isn't my father and mother I'm talking about.

[Speaker 2]

Were they younger than you or older, or were you the oldest one?

[Speaker 1]

I have one brother that's older, and a brother and sister that's younger.

[Speaker 2]

Did your brothers go into the service too?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, the younger one did for a while, but he didn't have to carry on. He was in the Air Force. He was in South America instead of being in Europe where the fighting was.

I don't know how he managed to do that. That's a much better place to be, if you ask me.

[Speaker 2]

So you went to UT? Yeah. When did you go to UT?

[Speaker 1]

In 1941, 1945.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And just got out of school when I got into the Army, I'd say.

[Speaker 2]

You were in ROTC while you were there?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. I took advanced ROTC. I don't know why I did what I did, but after I did, I was glad I had it, you know.

It was real good, not only for me, but for all of the boys that took it.

[Speaker 2]

What did you major in at UT? Ag. And when did you leave UT?

[Speaker 1]

In 40, I guess 44.

[Speaker 2]

44? Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

That's within 100 miles of it anyhow.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah? Okay. And then you went right into the service after that?

[Speaker 1]

Shortly after that.

[Speaker 2]

Were you drafted or did you just go through ROTC?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I'd been taking some correspondence courses, you know, in the military, just for my own benefit. And one day I get a letter from the War Department saying, you will be called into service on a certain date. If you cannot conveniently enter at that time, let us know and we'll try to change your date.

Tell me you're going to get me, but when. So, I went in and, of course, I had to go to Europe in World War II.

[Speaker 2]

Let's get you through your training first. Where did you go when you went in?

[Speaker 1]

In the service?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

I guess the first I put in was at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

[Speaker 2]

Do basic training at Fort Campbell?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I had a little stuff at Fort McClellan, Alabama, but it was just play stuff, you might say.

[Speaker 2]

Because you'd been in ROTC, you probably had a pretty good idea of a lot of that.

[Speaker 1]

No, that's how I came in. I was there at Fort McClellan. But then I had most of my basic training.

Well, I had a rat's mark, too, that Fort Knox, of course, I was going to be a tanker, and that's a tank school there, you know. And then after I left Fort Knox where I come to Fort Campbell, and I was given the assignment of commanding a company of tanks there. So I was a tank commander from then on until the war was over.

[Speaker 2]

What kind of tanks did you have?

[Speaker 1]

Medium tanks.

[Speaker 2]

M4 Sherman?

[Speaker 1]

Sherman.

[Speaker 2]

What did you think of the Sherman?

[Speaker 1]

Well, it had some good parts, and it had some that weren't so good. The Sherman had some that were a little better. Their weapons were a little better.

I don't know whether their motors in the tank were any better or not. But it turned out we won the ballgame.

[Speaker 2]

That's what counts. In terms of training for being a tanker, how did that go? How were you taught?

[Speaker 1]

Well, it started out at Fort Knox, and they'd take us out on firing range with tanks, not only to fire the guns but to drive the tanks. And they'd have us doing things like pulling up to a hill

and hold a defilade and shoot at the enemy. They had flags out there for us to shoot at, you know.

And the people that were observing would be up on a hill over here watching what we were doing. And we were graded on how well we performed in getting our tanks and our tank crew in there to perform and do what they were supposed to do.

[Speaker 2]

Were you a lieutenant then? No.

[Speaker 1]

I was a second lieutenant at that time.

[Speaker 2]

What was the quality of the people you had to work with? Did you have pretty good folks?

[Speaker 1]

I had good crews. Once in a while I'd get one. I had one boy, but I didn't get him until I got to Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

But he would take part in activities and so on, but when we began to get close to going overseas, I could tell he began to mellow, you know. And he says, I'm having stomach problems. I've got a headache.

And finally I told him, I says, Blithe, there's not anything wrong with you except just your mind. You don't want to go overseas. He says, you're damn right.

Just told me point blank. Well, I told him, I says, you're going to have to go anyhow. I sent everybody to the doctor, physical exam, which is what you had to do.

And the doctor comes back and says, he's A number one. And would you believe it, he got a bottle of peroxide. Can you imagine?

He turned it up. It come out of his nose and his mouth. I thought he was going to die.

I had a sergeant come in by the name of Weston. He said, wait a minute. I was thinking, well, no need to carry him to the doctor.

He ran to the mess hall and got a bottle of milk, and there's a glass bottle on the bottom top of it was about that big. He just put it in his mouth. And a couple of boys held him by the arm.

He put that quart of milk down him, and I thought he was going to drown him, you know, if nothing else. And when he got the milk down there, they turned him loose and picked him up with the heel. And you have never seen stuff coming out that old.

I don't know. Got rid of everything, did it? I thought he was going to die over a few minutes.

I bet you he did, too. First sergeant went and got some milk. They drenched him with a little milk.

He upped that, you know. And took him to the medical clinic and the doctor examined him and said, he's okay. He said, he doesn't have any more sense to do this.

Just take him back and put him to work.

[Speaker 2]

Some people really didn't want to go.

[Speaker 1]

No, he didn't want to go. So when we got on the boat, you know, if they wrote any letters, they had to be, what do you call it?

[Speaker 2]

Censored? Censored.

[Speaker 1]

And the censor had to put his name down there. And I had, of course, I had officers in my company, too, you know. Everybody had to, of course, everybody in the GI was writing home, writing home.

Just tubs full of letters going out of there. And this boy Blithe was writing his fiancée a letter. And you should have read it, because he knew he was going to cut it all to pieces.

He had in there the most vulgar words he knew, what he was going to do to her and all of that stuff. And when he got through, you know, the letter, all you could see just the script that he wrote. Well, he hadn't gone overseas.

And after he got there, we went into the heart of France. And they moved us out to an area where we would be able to start regrouping and getting our ammunition stored in the tanks and anything else that we had to do to get ready to go into Germany, you know. He even sat down to write his girlfriend, his fiancée, and I'll tell you what he said.

He still wrote her just the most vulgar letters I ever saw, and we'd whack it all out, you know, put it in the envelope and send it on to her. And it wouldn't be long, he'd get a letter, you know, and he'd write and fill it up with all that dope, you know, and we'd whack it out. But when he got into Germany, and I guess our outfit was perhaps lucky.

I can't think of any other thing. We didn't run face-to-face with the Germans like a lot of them did. We had a few short times, you know, maybe a half a day or something like that.

But the Germans was already at the point of throwing up a flag in a lot of places. And inside of a week's time, after we got into combat and began to pump some ammunition out there, they surrendered. And, of course, that was a happy day for everybody, them and us too.

[Speaker 2]

Blythe particularly, it sounds like.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, it sure was.

[Speaker 2]

When you were in training with the tanks, were they still mounting the 75, or was it the long 76 that they'd put on? Remember? Well, they got the 76s and then the 90-millimeter.

[Speaker 1]

Of course, one of those tanks, a few tanks that had the 90-millimeter, ooh, when that thing went firing, that old tank was just like on its heels. But it was very effective.

[Speaker 2]

It puts out a real high-speed round, and a big one.

[Speaker 1]

We were going in a place in Germany. I had just one tank with that 90-millimeter gun on it. And we run up on a group of people.

It was horses and men out there plowing the field, you know. And one of the ladies come running down to know where the white flag was. She says, please don't shoot, please don't shoot.

We're making a guard. We said, we're not going to bother you. You go ahead and make a guard.

We're just shooting at that German tank going yonder. And she said, oh. You know what, she didn't know it.

I knew good and well she knew. But about her knitting. We went after that tank reserve.

But before we got to A Company, which was on my right side, we got him right on the side, you know, and hit him right in the track and that disabled him. So up went the white flag on his tank. Didn't kill anybody, any of their crew.

They got out, told us what they were supposed to do. And so we just sent them on back to let our division take care of them while whatever happened to them.

[Speaker 2]

Now you were in B Company? Yeah, 20th Tank Battalion. 20th Armored Division.

Okay, you stayed in there through the whole war?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

When you were?

[Speaker 1]

Take a small of that? I guess. It's got a little alcohol in it, I'll tell you.

I went to see Dr. Woodley, Jim Woodley the other day. I don't know what it is, but he said take it home.

[Speaker 2]
Does it work?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, it works pretty good. I don't know what it is. Anaplex.

I guess so.

[Speaker 2]
Where did you leave from in the States when you were going overseas? Boston. From Boston?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah. We were at Fort Campbell and we had to go by train to Boston. It was there we got on boats.

It was colder than the Blue Blazes.

[Speaker 2]
You took your tanks with you from Campbell? Oh, yeah. You moved as a division?

[Speaker 1]
Of course, we didn't see the tanks until we got into France. Yeah. I believe all of them went into Le Havre.

[Speaker 2]
That's a big harbor.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah.

[Speaker 2]
And so they took you off and they took the tanks off and put you back together again? Yeah.
How many men in a company?

How many men were you responsible for by that time?

[Speaker 1]
I had 107 in my company. And it's four companies in a battalion.

[Speaker 2]
Yeah. And how many tanks in your company?

[Speaker 1]
I had 17. Of course, sometimes we'd have 16, sometimes 13, 14. Depends on if we had a breakdown in the track or anything.

If they had to be dropped out, of course, our maintenance crew was right behind. They'd come on. If they couldn't fix it in the field, why, they'd have to pick it up with a wrecker and take it back to better maintenance.

But beat on wood, we got through the entire thing without losing any tanks. We got hit one time with a tank, but it didn't kill anybody. It hit the gun first thing.

I guess that's the reason it didn't ricochet at all. I thought to myself, what if that thing had hit right in the end of the barrel? I don't know whether the concussion would have knocked the shell out back in our lap or nothing.

[Speaker 2]
Hard to say.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah. Hard to say.

[Speaker 2]
It was lucky.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, I just look in the book this morning, well, I guess it's in there. Maybe I had it. Yeah, there was pictures of Dachau.

Did you ever see Dachau?

[Speaker 2]
I was in Dachau in 1991. I was over there with a group. We were doing a battlefield tour, and we spent part of the day at Dachau.

But, of course, it's all cleaned up now. When you went into Dachau, how much time had passed? Were you the first people in, or had there been people in for some days before you got there?

[Speaker 1]
You mean the inmates in there?

[Speaker 2]
No, were there other American troops there already when you came in?

[Speaker 1]
When we first got there, there was maybe two or three riflemen. No other tanks anywhere. Of course, we was coming in at different directions.

We'll say this is a camp here, and we were coming this way. But here was a branch with a bridge across it. But that bridge was just a wooden bridge.

So we had to go around this way with our tanks and find a place where we could cross this branch, which we did without any trouble, and come back around on the back side and come in there. The tanks just went up to the fences around the thing and just pushed it down, no problem. But when the first tank got inside there, and I was at the main gate over there, I could see through there and see what was happening.

I was watching this tank come in, and then the second tank come in. And the inmates come running toward those tanks, you know, in the striped suits that they had in there. Some would fall down ever so weak.

Just to run 25 yards, you know, they couldn't do it. So me and my first sergeant went around and come in with our jeep, you know. And boy, oh, boy, there were the furnaces where they burned them, you know.

And they had three hogs pictured on the wall up there, Hitler going and who was the other one?

[Speaker 2]
Himmler, maybe.

[Speaker 1]
Might have been. I forgot. With the spurs on those hogs, swine, you know.

Hitler was the best, you know, and the other people were swine. It didn't take long for them to get those pictures out there. But the inmates in there could see the beds that they had to sleep in and so on.

Of course, we told them, you can go home. Where do you live? Some of them could speak a little English, you know.

I said, well, do we have any transportation? We don't care. We get home.

We get home. Boy, they poured out of there. You couldn't help but cry with them, you know, sympathize with them because their risk was no bigger than half of mine.

It was deplorable.

[Speaker 2]
Had you heard anything about anything like that, or was this a complete surprise to you?

[Speaker 1]
Yes, and our battalion commander sent a runner up to my tank. I was in the lead at that particular time with my company. They would take a time-out, you know.

And he sent a runner up there to say, we're approaching a concentration camp. That's all we know about it. Be careful.

Well, when we was coming to this gate and we saw this wall of fence in front of us, here come a little guy running down the street coming to meet us. And he's doing like that, and I go, stop, stop. And I thought, yeah, maybe he's wanting to get in a position where they can knock our hat off, you know.

So I had a little guy in my company by the name of Shemisky, and he could speak fluent German. Well, he could speak several different languages. I said, Shemisky, go see what that dude wants.

He went on down there and got it, and it was the chaplain of that concentration camp. Can you imagine a chaplain? A chaplain?

Yeah. So the chaplain took my boy Shemisky in the house that was down on the side of the road, reached under his vest that he had on and pulled out a piece of paper, and he had the names of all the Germans that were in charge of that concentration camp, their addresses, even a lot of their phone numbers and everything. And he says, this is everyone that's in there.

I don't know the inmates that are in there because they're so poor, and he says, I haven't had a chance to, but he was supposed to be the chaplain and have services for them, you know. Well, it didn't take us long to get all of our crew in there and clean that place out.

[Speaker 2]

Were there any German guards still there, or had they taken off?

[Speaker 1]

They headed to the bushes. And a girl, after the war was over and I was over there for occupation duty, a girl that was my secretary. I wasn't a trial judge yet, but I was a prosecutor and courts martialled all the time.

But this girl who was my secretary there, I found out after several weeks, maybe months, she lived in a house just outside of the concentration camp fence. And she swore and be darned that she didn't know what was going anywhere. And I said, Eva, you're the biggest damn liar that I ever heard talk.

I says, I can stand right here, or I can sit down here, or I can lay down on the ground here, and I can see that porch over there. Now, when you come out on the porch, you're standing up, so you're five feet or six foot tall. You can't see over there.

It just got to her. She says, I have to admit, I told you a lie. But she went ahead and worked for me and made me a real good secretary.

But every time I'd open my mouth, she'd jump. She knew that I'd never forget that. But she was a good typist.

She'd take a short hand.

[Speaker 2]

What did you think when you first got there?

[Speaker 1]

I don't know hardly. I didn't know. Some of the country guys said, whether to spit or wind my watch.

And that's where we were, you know. And we didn't know whether the Germans would come at us with full force or whether they was running and just leave it to us to take the concentration camp in, which is what actually happened. Well, I had a medium tank company, and Captain Maxey had a light tank company, and those light tanks could scoot around fast, you know.

And he saw what was happening, so he made a circle come around and got to come in on the backside, too, and got in there and rounded up a lot of the guards that were in there. And we got together after we made it in there, and we had them all to line up, you know, and sit down on the ground. We told them otherwise because we didn't know what we was going to do with them.

And he said, two or three of them can speak English. And I found out about this in a short time. And I said, well, we won't have any trouble interrogating them and seeing what we're going to do with them.

And I said, Max, let me call the battalion commander and tell him what we got on hands and then let forces behind us come along because we're getting close to Munich here, you know, and we need to be moving on.

[Speaker 2]

How many guards were there that you'd rounded up?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, there's about 18, I guess. There might have been some that escaped, but we didn't know. Some of them could speak good English.

And, of course, they had those furnaces there where they had burned some of them, and we could see the ashes where they had burned them. You know, they had been piled out. And, of course, ash didn't make much from a human body.

It was just like pouring grease on a fire, I guess. But it was something. I made a lot of pictures.

[Speaker 2]

What happened to the guards?

[Speaker 1]

The division sent a group of four men up there that had a carry-on vehicle where they could put them in there and took them away. I don't know what division. Never did know.

The division, I guess, wanted to bring them in and interrogate them.

[Speaker 2]

I'd heard it said that there were some guards that were killed on the spot there at the camp, but I don't know about that.

[Speaker 1]

I guess it's true. And, of course, Maxine liked to come in there, you know. He says, I don't believe in taking any of these Germans prisoners.

And he didn't take many of them. You know, he said, I didn't come over here to take them and feed them and pet them, you know. And he had his whole company with that attitude, you know.

If they're German, shoot them.

[Speaker 2]

Stay there at Dachau?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, I guess about five or six hours.

[Speaker 2]

Were you glad to leave when you left?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, Lord have mercy, yes.

[Speaker 2]

Must have smelled bad.

[Speaker 1]

It wasn't bad at all, because when they burned them, of course, they had these furnaces with tall stacks on them, and smoke all went up. It wasn't bad at all. When we went into the gate on foot with our infantry and with our rifles, of course, we didn't know what we was going to run up against.

A lot of those people come to us that could speak English, and they hugged us. They did everything. They wanted to know what to do.

I said, go home. Where's your home? All of them tried to tell at the same time.

I live here, and I live there, and I live there. And I says, get out and go home. If you live a long ways from here, why don't try to get there today?

Just take it easy. Oh, they thanked me and all of my crew. Oh, it would make tears come in your eyes.

[Speaker 2]

I'm sure. Did you have food that you could give them?

[Speaker 1]

No, not at that time. Of course, our chow truck was right behind us, but that was for our own people. But any number of us, we can find food when we get out.

Then go to the Germans, I'm sure, and get it. Because if people lived in some of those houses, I have no doubt that they communicated maybe some while they were in there just by talking over the fence.

[Speaker 2]

You wonder how something like that can happen. I don't know. Where did you go after Dachau?

[Speaker 1]

We went on toward the Austrian border. Of course, we were there before we got into Munich. We went through Munich, and we had to stay in the town of Munich for maybe three or four hours, just moving the tanks around about up one street and down another, you know, so as not to run into each other, to see what we might run into there.

[Speaker 2]

Did you run into much resistance around Munich?

[Speaker 1]

We got outside of Munich, going toward the Austrian border. On the Autobahn, we went through a pine forest. I said we went through it.

Pine forest was over there, and the Autobahn was here. What was going on there? The pine trees were real tall.

It was like looking in that hearth, you know. The trees had been cut out way on back in the forest, you know, and that's where they put your planes for concealing, you know. You could have seen them from there.

Real neat trick that they had. And some planes were still in there. So the machines or planes that they had in there, we shot those up where they couldn't get off of the ground.

I guess that was foolish. We could have just left the guard there until the division come along and took over, you know. They might could have used them.

I don't know. But we had instructions to destroy, destroy, destroy, you know. So we destroyed them.

But that was a pretty neat idea. The planes would come in there and maybe get more bombs or whatever have you, you know, come out on this runway and take off. They'd be in the air before you could blink an eye.

Clever. Yeah. And after, I was over there for occupation duty.

After that, I just wanted to take a look and see what that place looked like. So I got in the car, and he was in the car too, but I don't know if he remembers ever seeing it. But we went down that place to see, you know, just what it looked like.

But what they'd done, they'd cut the most of the pines down. I guess they hauled them off to a wood market somewhere or a lumber market. But the paved roads back in there were still in place.

[Speaker 2]

Going back to before Dachau, you remember what it was like when you loaded up and got your ammunition and geared up and headed out, your first contact with the Germans? With the enemy, I mean, the German Army.

[Speaker 1]

By the time we got past Munich and had our little inner counter there, we didn't waste, I'd say, two dozen rounds of ammunition. By the time we was pulling these planes and so on in

there, we got orders to move on towards Salzburg, Austria. And we didn't meet much resistance of any kind, and if we did see any Germans, up goes a white flag.

I could have driven down through there in my car. I'd have been safe, I guess.

[Speaker 2]

Nice way to fight a war.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Everybody was tickled to death of that. Of course, we didn't know what to expect.

And we got down close to Chemsee, the road went around that way, and the autobahn probably went on that side of the way. And to go around this route, which we wanted to take, we wanted to stay off of the autobahn, because we were wide open and vulnerable there, you see. Then we had to go across a bridge, or start to cross it.

I thought, wait a minute, let me check this bridge. So four or five of us went down underneath to see if there was any dynamite or whatever waiting for us to try to cross it, you know. But it hadn't been touched, so we couldn't find nothing at all.

So I went across in my jeep. And I had some half-tracks, and I split some of them across. Everything was okay, so here come the tanks.

Everybody had a bit of trouble, and we went about not over 500 yards. The lake was out there. It was a two-story house.

And I could see people's heads out of the windows. They all looked young. I thought, what in the world is that?

So we just drove up there, and I stopped. The first tank drove up there and just swung his gun around us, you know. And then a man come walking out with his hands up, had a white collar on.

He was a minister. And those children there were children that had been taken from homes where their parents had been lost during the war and was taken care of. And he said, please don't kill the children.

He said, you can kill me, but please don't kill the children. They're victims. And I said, we're not going to kill them.

I said, do they have any food? He said, we can get food for a while, but we don't know what will happen later on. I said, I'll radio my division and tell them what we found and let them come home.

I said, you need to be afraid now. I said, they'll come and they'll tell you what they can do. And away we went.

And I called the division, you know, and told them what we found. They said, thank you, go ahead. So we traveled on and come to a crossroad.

There was a house. Well, it was an interesting experience. I wouldn't want to go through it again, but.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Your son was saying something that you had mentioned to him, that there were bodies on railroad cars or on a train.

[Speaker 1]

I think I have some pictures here somewhere. I know I do have.

[Speaker 2]

Was this near Dachau?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. They just loaded them in a boxcar and shipped them to Dachau for burning. Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Or they died on the way.

[Speaker 1]

They, in the northern part of Germany, where they had killed and taken in a lot of people, especially not German descent. And they loaded them in a boxcar to send them to Dachau because they could burn them down there. You see, they had furnaces.

And they had a car that had not been unloaded when we went into that camp. So we went in this way. Oh.

It was in your nose, huh? It must have been awful. It was sickening, you know.

But there was four of us. Sergeant MacMahon lives in Texas now, and I've talked with him every once in a while. He was with me.

We just walked side by side, two guys behind us. And when we first saw that car with those things in it, you know, oh, it would just make you want to upchuck. And, of course, when we got inside, the able men that was walking around in there, boy, they didn't hesitate a minute to come up and talk to us, you know.

He says, What can we do? What are you going to do with us? We're going to turn you out and let you go home.

How far do you live from here? Oh, don't mock snicks, mock snicks, you see. It didn't make any difference.

[Speaker 2]

They'll get home. They'll get home.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, bitte, bitte, bitte. Please, please, please, you know. We go home, I says.

There's the gate. Go. Must have been quite a feeling.

Oh, I tell you, you'd make anybody cry.

[Speaker 3]

Mm-hmm. Should.

[Speaker 1]

The clothing that they had on was all that they had. When it got dirty, they had to wash it, let it dry or put it on and let it dry. And I don't know why they didn't die when it was cold and all that sort of thing.

Probably a lot of them did. Oh, I guess so, yeah. What did you all do with those boxcars?

Turned them over and burned them. The bodies in there, they took them out. We had a bulldozer.

Each company had a bulldozer with a dozer blade on the front of a tank. And this driver we had in our company went just outside the gate and started digging. Oh, he knew what was going to happen.

And so we got all the men in there with us. He says, unload that car. And they had two-wheel carts with long handles on them.

Heck, the handles on the wheelbarrow wasn't as long as from here to that table up yonder.

[Speaker 3]

Mm-hmm.

[Speaker 1]

And the wheelbarrow was just a flat bed with a little sideboard about that high up. And he says, what have you been doing in there? Hauling the bodies out there.

They'd been doing this for a long time. So he said, well, take all these others out there. Take them out there and burn them.

Oh, I get it. And they had to unload that out of that car. And they took those and put their wheelbarrows out there and took them out to burn.

Didn't bury any of them?

[Speaker 2]

Huh?

[Speaker 1]

Didn't bury any of them? They might have if some of the men folks in there were sympathetic with us the way they sounded. And they said they would like to take some of the people that are still alive in there.

They'd like to take them home. I says, tell them to go home. We're not going to kill them and bury them or burn them.

But now those that are in that car there, you can have some of the able-bodied men that's in here. Take them out there and burn them. I just thought that was the best way in the world to do it.

Of course, we had a tank. We could dig a grave, you know, and get to them. And the light tank company had a little narrow blade.

He could dig a better grave than we could. And he came up from the rear of our car. Come in and got the able men there to clean the place up.

And I don't know. We went on. If we'd been there maybe a couple hours, we kept on going.

Until we got into Munich, you know, and then headed to the Austrian border. We heard later on that they'd cleaned that camp up. But you'd never know it had been a displaced persons camp.

That is, the Germans themselves cleaned it up. I guess they saw, you know. But they couldn't do anything about it while it was being built.

Or while these people were being brought in there.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, it's shocking to learn that that camp in Dachau was opened in March of 1933. Right after Hitler came to power in January. And they opened Dachau in March of 1933.

And that's a date that's always impressed me. I've got a picture here of some of those bodies, you know, in a car.

[Speaker 1]

I've been back there since then, you know. Of course, it doesn't look like the same place. Oh, did you go back to Dachau?

Yeah, yeah. Of course, when we lived over there for a while, he was there. A lot of times when I'd be on the trip, I was working for Care Incorporated, selling care packages.

I separated from the army, you know. And I'd go into Munich and Dachau and all the towns around about. To drum up a train, you know, to move these packages.

And, well, I see that place again. But they'd cleaned it all up. Didn't look like the same place.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, it looks very neat and park-like now.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

It wasn't that way when you saw it first. How long did you stay in the army? How long did you stay in the army?

Oh, I guess about...

[Speaker 1]

I've forgotten what time I got out. I guess it was about six years.

[Speaker 2]

So you thought, did you think it was all about making it a career and going?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I debated it. After I'd been over there, and I separated from the army over there and took this job with Care Incorporated. And the reason I did that, because it was a major, John Christensen, had found out about it, about handling these care packages, and it'd be a business, and he says, you make three times as much money handling, going with care than you can staying in the army.

And I said, well, I'll just go. And so I terminated my services for the army just as fast as I could get there and took this job with Care. And Lordy, lordy, lordy.

And they furnished me an automobile, a truck to deliver packages with, and we hauled care packages every direction that was on a map, every road that was open. We delivered care packages to needy families, because so soon after the war, you know, they hadn't had time to rebuild their pantries and their cellars with potatoes and what have you, you know. So Care come in there with millions of boxes of packages we had.

They had baby lead packages, food packages, everything that a family needed, it was in those packages. And my office for them was in Stuttgart, and the rail come in there, you know, and the airport was there, so if we couldn't get it by air, we could get it by rail, and we'd get it by both, because it was, oh, it's hard to imagine how many packages that we delivered, and no doubt, maybe hundreds of thousands of people never did get to see one. They just submitted it, you know.

[Speaker 2]

Were you a captain when you left the service, or a major, or a captain?

[Speaker 1]

But I got a promotion soon thereafter, and then I stayed in for quite a while. I've forgotten what time I got out of the service, but I got my second promotion before I got out. I went to a hotel girl.

Boy, time goes by, don't you think?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, being in the Army made a difference to you, I guess, in who you are and the kind of life you had afterwards?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I don't know, it might in some ways. I'm sure it must have, yeah. The Army did one thing.

It taught me to get up and go. When you decide to do something, get up and go. Our battalion commander, Colonel Duncan, he was a West Pointer, and he didn't believe in seeing anybody drag their feet.

I don't care who it was, whether it was in our own battalion or some other, if he saw somebody dragging their feet, one time, he thought, well, get us cold places. Then he said, we're going to have to go out and fire rifles on the range. I thought, boy, how can we, cold as it is, how can we hold a gun steady?

Well, when we got out to the range, you know, they sent crews out there to build fires, and they had, I don't know where they got their lumber and stuff, but they had just piles of dirt, and the blades going high as the ceiling. You could keep warming up, because they had the range from where we'd stand, you know, to keep the target really close to these fires. You didn't even suffer too much.

But if it hadn't been for those fires being built there, you'd freeze to death, really. Because we didn't walk fast enough, there was no walking to do except walk back and get your helmet off your gun, walk up and shoot. But we had a battalion commander, he was a West Pointer, and he was very considerate, you know, on most things.

He was firm, but if anything that he thought it was sensible to do, go ahead. Some of them weren't that way.

[Speaker 2]

Do you still stay in touch with some of the folks you were in the service with?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, I have three or four that I keep pretty close touch with. One lives in Texas, San Antonio, Texas. His name was Mac Miller.

There was one, he'll call me. Charlie Warden lives up in East Tennessee. I'm in touch with him.

And there's a man that wasn't in my company, in, what's the town? Yeah, Houston is his name. It was a highway or somewhere up in the Midwest, you know.

I hear from him every once in a while.

[Speaker 2]

Does the division have reunions that you go to?

[Speaker 1]

Do you go to the reunions? The last one was in California, I didn't go, but I wish I had now. But they're going to have another, and I think it's going to come back to Nashville.

It's more centrally located than any of the others they've ever had. So if they have it or don't have it, I'm going to try to go.

[Speaker 2]

Does the division publish a newsletter or is there a mailing list that you get stuff?

[Speaker 1]

Something that's of interest to the entire division, they do. But our battalion has more or less been an active battalion, but a lot of them have just disbanded and that's it. They don't have reunions or anything like that, like we do.

[Speaker 2]

So you've got a battalion that has reunions too?

[Speaker 1]

Oh yeah, I have. Oh, that's good. Yeah, that's good.

I've got a pamphlet out.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, 20th Armored Division Association.

[Speaker 3]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Yes, you'll see this picture up here of all the units. All these reunions just came up today. Uh-huh.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, it was... Oh, there's parts of the life in the Army that was tough, especially in bad weather. Oh, I always begged to go out on the firing range when it was cold, basically.

Always would build up fires, you know, it was warm before we'd go up on the firing line. Have to go out and teach new guys to come in how to drive a tank, and those old tanks were colder than the digits, you know.

[Speaker 2]

Did they hold up pretty well, the tanks?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah. The American tanks held up real good. Oh, now and then you'd find one that would blow a bogey wheel or something, and they couldn't get it repaired suddenly.

But as far as the motors were concerned, to start out with, the motors weren't too good. They were just a little bit too light to handle the weight that was in that tank. So they got bigger and better motors put in there, and boy, it sure made a big difference when we'd get ready to go on a road march.

While we'd take off, we didn't need a car. All we needed to do was get in our tank and go. They'd move right along, you know.

I guess it cost the U.S. government a lot of pennies to put those motors in those tanks.

[Speaker 2]

Sure. You said some of the German tanks were better?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. They had a bigger one. They had a 90 millimeter.

We finally got a 90 millimeter. Boy, that German had a tank going. Oh, yeah.

But luckily, beat on wood. I never lost a tank. The gun fire lost some by a mechanical problem breakdown, but the maintenance crew would go back and get them the year they'd come.

[Speaker 2]

So you had a normal component of 17 tanks and Jeeps, and you had half tracks, too?

[Speaker 1]

I had two half tracks. That went with our maintenance crews. Because stuff that they had to have to keep maintenance going on 17 tanks, they had to have a lot of stuff.

Jacks and all that kind of stuff, you know.

[Speaker 2]

Heavy-duty equipment to do the repairs on. Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, when you go to breaking the track on that tank, they had to get that gadget on there, you know, to pull the track together to loosen it up where you could get the pins out and so on. Hot weather wasn't so bad, but when it's cold weather, oh, that was miserable. I felt sorry for those guys.

I never did have to do it, but I saw it done a lot of times.

[Speaker 2]

The Autobahn must have been pretty impressive when you saw it. The German Autobahn?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, we lived in Germany for, I guess, two years.

[Speaker 3]

Yeah.