

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with

JOHN GARRETT

14<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, U.S. Army, World War II

2004

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**Garrett, John**, (1922-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

User copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca. 65 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca. 65 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

John Garrett, an Oak Park, Illinois native, discusses his experience in the Army's 14<sup>th</sup> Armored Division in France and Germany during World War II. Garrett recalls hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor at an University of Illinois fraternity house. He speaks of enlisting at Camp Grant (Illinois), training in the engineering unit at Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri), spending a little time in the Army Special Training Program, being assigned to the 14<sup>th</sup> Armored Division at Camp Campbell (Kentucky), and turning down an offer to attend Officer's Candidate School. He recalls landing in southern France and going into the Rhine Valley and Vosges Mountains. Garrett describes attacking an understaffed Siegfried Line fort at night, blowing up the dragons teeth, quickly entering, and taking prisoners. He tells of catching a German kid who had been aiming a rifle at him and giving the kid to his battalion commander as a mock birthday present. He details setting up concertina wire and improvised pull-type devices and defending against a New Year's Eve German attack, and he highlights how helpful it was that the German troops did so much shouting. He describes bailing from his damaged Jeep during a machine gun attack, holding a road outpost, and reuniting with friends who thought he'd been killed. Garrett states that the Germans made good infantry and tank people, but the Allies had more equipment, men, and ingenuity. He speaks of house-to-house fighting, flamethrowers, half-tracks, and C-rations. Garrett describes joining General Patton's troops and liberating the prisoners of war in Moosberg before an order from Hitler to kill the prisoners could be carried out. He characterizes how the prisoners, despite drastic weight loss and health problems, wanted to go and fight. He talks about encountering less resistance the further into Germany his troops got and taking out the highest point, usually a church steeple, of the towns they entered. Garrett relates a friend's story about an armored column's shooting at deer in the Schwartzwald, unknowingly in view of a German ambush, and the Germans' being so intimidated by the expenditure of ammunition that they surrendered. He speaks of turning down an offer to join the regular Army for fear of being put behind a desk and mentions that infantry units were being put together to be sent to the Pacific. Garrett touches on being the town commander at Neustadt for a short time after the war, joining a quartermaster company, and, after discharge as a first lieutenant, working at a steel company. He describes waiting for his battalion surgeon so they could leave the outfit together, and being told by a restaurant owner, after stopping on the route home in Amsterdam to eat, that, "You don't owe me a thing. You gave me my freedom." Garrett states a friend bought him a membership to the Marco Island VFW. He relates the story of his friend Jack Wentzel's

experience with the atomic bomb drop on Hiroshima; Wentzel flew perimeter sweeps before and rendezvoused with the *Enola Gay* after the bomb drop and looked back as they flew away from the explosion.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2004.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2004.

Transcript edited and abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2008.

**Interview Transcript:**

John: This is John Driscoll, and I am a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives. And today is December 22, 2004. This is an oral history interview with John Garrett at his home in Delavan, Wisconsin. John is a veteran of the United States Army, in World War II. John, thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview and meeting with me.

Garrett: Okay, no problem.

John: Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born, John?

Garrett: Okay, born in Oak Park, Illinois, which is a suburb on the west side of Chicago. July 6, 1922. And that is where I spent early education years, grammar school. Went to school there. High school, went to two years of high school. And after that we moved from Oak Park to a town called Midlothian, Illinois. And we had, we changed -- I went to Thornton Township High School after that. And then when, after graduation from high school, I went to the University of Illinois Engineering School. And that is the sum total of the educational experience.

John: The question I want to ask every vet, what were you doing on Pearl Harbor Day?

Garrett: Pearl Harbor Day, I was, when we first heard of it, I was at a fraternity house. I had been invited there to have dinner there. They wanted to have new members' situations put together. And so that is where I was on Pearl Harbor Day. When that happened, all I could think was, "Well, by God, we're in it." And it turned out to be exactly that. We were in it. So, after that, incidentally, I was also on the football team at Illinois, and doing a few goofy things like that. But what we did was, everybody knew after the initial Pearl Harbor situation, we were at war, and very, very serious situation. So, I went down in, let's see, that was in '41. And I went down and I enlisted in the spring of '42. And I wasn't called up until, I guess it was summer. Of '42. When I was called. And there was no problem. Just entered military service.

John: Where did you go?

Garrett: I went to Camp Grant, which is the northern end of Illinois, and I went through the procedure of, that all new enlistees go through. You have the whole situation, unfortunately. But that's the start of my military set-up. Now, what happened from Camp Grant, I went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Being an engineer by education and everything, why, I was involved in the engineering unit down at Fort Leonard Wood, which was their principle existence. And I went through basic training, and, oh, God, after that went to, we had a program called, God, I

can't think of it. What it was is they were taking all the people with higher education and putting them into a college environment. And I went into that at the University of Cincinnati for a little bit. And that didn't last too long because we were doing so well in the war. ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program], that is what they called it. What they did was take and discontinue that program for all but those that were way up there, and so I got out of staying in the ASTP, and I was assigned to the 14th Armored Division at Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

John: Okay.

Garrett: Went down there for our training and had a lot of good experience at Camp Campbell. We had a lot of people from the colleges, different colleges were assigned to Camp Campbell at the same time, being all engineers, and that. And the IQ of all the Army people that were assigned to the 14th Armored, the IQ went way the hell up. (both laugh) They thought we were raising a series of geniuses. But, at any rate, that is the story of that. And I stayed with Camp Campbell all the time until we went overseas. And I was supposed to, they wanted me to go to Officer's Candidate School at Fort Belvoir, but I had formed such good friendships and that was both the officers and enlisted men of our personnel that I didn't want to leave.

John: Okay.

Garrett: So I stayed with the 14th, and along about October of 1943, or was it '44?, we had a situation where they - it had to be '44 - the situation was that we put the whole division into a situation where we knew we were going overseas, but we didn't know where. And they had us set for overseas duty, but we had no idea what was coming. And so, when D-Day came for us to leave the States, where do we head but for North Africa. Not Europe, not the Pacific, but North Africa, which is real goofy.

John: The Army has its way.

Garrett: Yeah. Well, we got to North Africa and we had -- supposedly we were to have a landing in North Africa but they had just whipped Rommel, you know, the Desert Fox.

John: Yeah.

Garrett: They knocked him off at El Alamein and so they decided, instead of North Africa, we were going to go to southern France. So we went across the Mediterranean and we got off the boat at Marseilles, and this will tell you the story from there on, where we went up the Rhine Valley into the Vosges Mountains there.

John: Okay.

Garrett: And the Vosges Mountains were mostly controlled by the Germans, and, believe it or not, the French, the French 2nd Armored Division and the 3rd Algerian Infantry, which was mostly Senegalese people out of North Africa; they got the breakthrough of the Saverne Gap, and the Sauverene Gap in the Vosges Mountains to present us with when we got there. Once we got on site, why, we started opening everything up to get into the plains, the Alsacian Plains and that. So we—and again, when you read this, you'll see a lot of that—we, for the most part, we controlled the Vosges area and one of the bad features was we had part of the Siegfried Line, which the Germans had constructed. You've heard of the French Maginot Line?

John: Yep.

Garrett: It was intertwined with portions here and there with the German Siegfried Line and they had in the Siegfried Line they had a much, much better set-up, the Germans did, than the French did, in the Maginot Line. And we got into not too far from the Rhine River. The Vosges Mountains is a mountain range alongside the Rhine.

John: Okay, okay.

Garrett: And so what we did, we went to the Rhine River area and the Vosges Mountains and we started, they ordered us to attack the Siegfried Line fort of Stienfeld, which is what we did. And we, Stienfeld, well, I can tell you something goofy about that. We had a whole combat command - a combat command is one-third of an armored division. And there are three combat commands involved in every armored division. So we started up at Stienfeld, and Kit and I were running point. Kittinger was my platoon lieutenant. I was a sergeant at the time. And so what we did at Stienfeld, we came over a hill and we were looking down at a beautiful, well-kept village of, they looked like wooden buildings, like farm buildings. And what got our attention was they had dragons teeth - you know what I am talking about? The cement tank obstacles for as far as you could see, either side of the village. Well, we got suspicious at that. So, when we got up --

John: Now, were you in tanks?

Garrett: No, we were in half-tracks. The tanks was the 48th Tank Battalion we had with us. But, also, that is in there, too. But, what we did was, this deal at Stienfeld, they looked like wooden farm buildings but beautifully kept and maintained. So I had one of my kids turn a .50 caliber on one of the walls and, Jesus, all the tracers did

was bounce off. And I thought, “Them God-damned Germans have invented a new wood, a bullet-proof wood.” And I told Kit, I said, “You stay here and I’m going to walk back and pick up a self-propelled and bring it up and we’ll see if we can knock some of this stuff down.” So I started walking back, and this is another deal. I got about half-way back along the column, and there were houses on the side of the road leading into Stienfeld, but there was buildings in pretty good shape. The town wasn’t destroyed too much. We didn’t louse any up coming into it. But I heard a tank hatch coming closed. You know, they have a clank that you never forget because it means there is something out there that you don’t want to know about. So, they, a couple of these things came closed and then finally a lieutenant in the lead tank of this column, he said, “Hey, Sarge! Two o’clock, across the street, basement.” He said, “There’s a rifle pointing at you.” I wasn’t too happy with that, so I ran across the street and I came around the corner of this building and, sure enough, there was a rifle aimed at me. I stepped on the rifle and they couldn’t do anything with it, of course, with my big foot on it. So, what they did was, they let go of the rifle and I reached down and I grabbed the back of a coat. Whoever it was handling the rifle. And I pulled him out of the hole, and it turned out to be a twelve or thirteen year-old kid.

John: Oh, man.

Garrett: At the start of the Battle of the Bulge, we had bad times with the 6th SS Mountain Division. We killed every one of them because they were doing it to us, our guys. We didn’t take any prisoners. Which made our G2 people very unhappy. But, at any rate, I picked this kid up, and I was walking him back along the column, and he was a little rascal, and about every third step his feet would hit the ground, and I was walking along. And I came across Colonel Morrison, our battalion commander, and he looks up at me and he says, “Garrett, what the hell have you got there?” And I said, “When’s your birthday?” And he blurted out some day that was his birthday, and he says, “Why did you ask?” And I said, “Here is your first present,” and I put the kid on the hood of his Jeep. He was ready to kill me. He says, “What am I going to do with him?” So, at any rate, that was the story of Stienfeld. Then I went a little further along and I got a self-propelled out of the 48th Tanks, and I rode him back, and we got to this hill overlooking the Stienfeld fort, and I told him to bore-sight the little building on the end here, and so he, they did bore-sight the building, and hit one round, and all that did was take one little divot out of the thing. And I said, “Those God-damned Germans.” That was all I could think about. So we didn’t get much further there. And that night, this is where Tony Weiss comes into the story again. Tony Weiss, from Cable, Wisconsin. Tony was given the task, he had five men on either side of this one building. We were going to blow the dragon’s teeth out. And then come in with a dozer and ramp over them. And that is what we did at two o’clock in the morning. And Tony got a Silver Star for that, and well-earned.

John: Yeah, I saw that here.

Garrett: What we did with that, we were able to come in behind the fort. And they had an armory in the fort, they had sleeping quarters, they had stuff for a complete unit, except they didn't have the personnel to manage it. So when we got around the fort, we were real quick inside, and we picked up a whole bunch of prisoners. They were all out of fight, when they saw what we did getting through. So, that was our deal with the Stienfeld situation. Now, the other thing I was going to tell you was on New Year's Eve night. Now, I am going back a couple of weeks. On New Year's Eve night, we had the first attack by the 6th SS Mountain Division against us. And we were the first unit that they caught. Now, what we had done, we were listening. We had listening posts out at night. And when we would hear movement, railroad car movement, and vehicles bringing in equipment. We knew that was what they were doing. And we knew we were going to get it, sooner or later. So what we did was, there was a German military depot at Berenthall, not too far from where we had dug in at Banstein. What we did, we took equipment they had—you know what a concertina coil is?

John: Yeah.

Garrett: We found some of that there and we criss-crossed all the deer trails and mountain roads to slow them up, because we knew they were coming. And the other thing we did was we didn't have any grenades or that, we were short on ammunition and everything, and we were half-way rationed on stuff. So what I did, we got into this depot at Berenthall and we would make our own pull-type devices. We'd take a quarter-pound block of TNT and wrap a whole bunch of nails around them with tape. And then put a pull-type device to set them off. We had those all through the area where we knew the attack was coming.

John: With a trip-wire?

Garrett: Yeah.

John: Okay.

Garrett: We knew where they were coming. So we did this and we put out a bunch of stuff. And the attack that night, I had been up there the day before with Albert Powell, one of my corporals who would go to hell and back with me. He was nutty, too. But, what we did was we surveyed the area. We knew there was only one route they had to come and that was right at us, so we had everything set up for them. So we had the attack. And these guys, they were, I swear, they were schnapped-up because they were coming at us screaming like a bunch of idiots, "Die, you



Yankee bastards!” You know, stuff like that which we’d heard before, too. But it was good for us because by the sound of their voices, we knew where they were coming from and we’d turn the machine gun on them right away. So, that was our phase of the battle, of the attack. Now, what we did, we took all the guys from our unit that was in our platoon, the 3rd Platoon, we had them get out of the vehicles, out of the half-tracks, and then in a silent column we were walking up the road toward Banstein. Now, we had a platoon at Banstein, one of our platoons, and what we were doing was we were going to reinforce them, along with the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion, which was on the other side of town. And so we got up there and we killed a hell of a lot of them. But, thank God, their officers were nutty enough to let them keep hollering, because that’s how we found them. So, we got through that mess and, again, it’s in a continuation, right here, of the article where we got back to where our company headquarters was. I had, well, I got to find it for you. We collected guys out of the 2nd Platoon and the 1st Platoon. We maybe added fourteen or fifteen, that got to where the old company headquarters used to be, in a little town called Ferno Nuch, which is about ten houses. And what we did was, I had figured, I had seen an overlay map of the area before, and I knew that our battalion headquarters was going to be located in a little town called Reipertsville. We had, well, it was still mountains. So we went, I took these guys and we went to, again, we were running a single column, a silent column, and I had, well, what we heard was motorized vehicles coming and we didn’t know for sure who they were. But I saw trucks with our markings on them, and I got out on the road. I had everybody back in the forest until I found they were our vehicles, and then I got out and I stopped the lead truck. And it was a sergeant from the 62nd Infantry Battalion, and he said that they had just pulled out of Banstein and, he said, it looked like a German infantry company were in there. And he said there was a unit on the other side of Banstein. I said, “Yeah, that was our 3rd Platoon, we were coming in to reinforce them.” And he said, “No use, they pulled out too.” So, what we did was, on this deal, I asked the sergeant, “Do you have enough room? Can you load fourteen more guys in the truck?” He says, “Sure, pile them in any way you can.” And this was on the road to Reipertsville. So we got to Reipertsville and I saw our battalion radio half-track in the middle of the town, so I knew that was where we were located. So I got my guys out and, I don’t know where I found an empty barn, but we put them in there to catch some sleep if they could. And I went in to see Major Williams, who was our battalion exec. And I told him what had happened at Banstein. And I told him it didn’t look like we lost any of our people, but the sergeant from the 62nd said there was a motorized column on the road that he thinks was coming up to nail us. So Williams got ahold of me and he said, “We’ll have the guys unload the radio half-track. You take the half-track and the .50 caliber, and all the ammo you can hold, and outpost the road.” So I did. I picked out eight men who didn’t look like they were real tired. And I put them in the half-track and we went down the road. And I picked a bend in the road where I could see maybe half a mile or so down it. And that is

where we spent the night. We dug in and mounted the .50 and that was all we had. That is where we spent that night. And then when I got back, Williams sent out a crew to relieve us, early in the morning, and I got back into town and, by God, Kittinger was there, my platoon lieutenant. How the hell he got back from Banstein, I don't know, but I was so glad to see him! Because I was afraid over that railroad embankment that, all they had to do was make a little noise and they were going to nail a whole bunch of our kids. Well, it didn't happen that way. So, and then, Corporal Zoits, when I bailed out of my Jeep—they killed my Jeep, the Germans did, with a machine gun burst. And that is another story that will be in here somewhere. Corporal Zoits, he was running a .50 caliber machine gun.

John: Can you spell that?

Garrett: Z-o-i-t-s. And he was running the machine gun in the vehicle behind my Jeep. And he fired at the muzzle flashes of the Germans. The Germans were using a lot of what we called the MG42. It's a high-volume, twin-barreled machine gun. 1,700 rounds a minute was what it fires. Well, at any rate, why, Zoits got them quieted down to where I was able to bail into a small depression off of the road, and I guess the Germans thought they killed me. But they didn't. And that's another thing, Zoits, when he saw me at the Reipertsville, he looked at me and says, "I saw you killed!" And I said, "No, you didn't!" And he had told Kittinger that, that I was nailed, too. But it wasn't so. I made it up the hill, after I had bailed into this depression. I saw a rock outcropping, oh, about, I don't know, about fifty or a hundred yards up the hill. And when the machine gun stopped, I knew they had to stop to reload the thing, and it's a bear to reload, even in good times. But I made it up to the rock outcropping, and they stopped shooting at me. That is an article, in here. I don't know where it is. I'll find it for you. But that was, outside of all the other minor skirmishes and wrestling matches we had, why, that's pretty descriptive of what we went through. The Germans were good. When I say they were good, I mean they were good infantry people and good tank people, and they gave us a fit a bunch of times. But we had the advantage of more equipment and more men, except this time we were outnumbered about three to one. In this attack. That made me very unhappy, but there wasn't much I could do about it.

John: No. I am going to run this forward and then turn it over.

**[End of tape 1, side A]**

John: Okay, there we are. I think we're back on. This is side two of tape one.

Garrett: Okay. But, pretty much that describes the type of fighting we were in. And in house fighting in Hatten and Rittershoffen where all of this is detailed for you. The fighting in that was we were house-to-house. And a lot of times we were

house-to-house on different floors.

John: Oh, yeah?

Garrett: Yeah. And that was an unhappy experience. And they will tell you, history will say that during the European war we weren't using flamethrowers. The hell we weren't. Man, that's how we cooked the Germans out of most of these houses. And it was a matter of necessity. The only way we could get clear of them. And so, for whatever, in Hatten and Rittershoffen, this is what they were talking about at that POW meeting I attended yesterday. And the guys, they were principally from another POW camp, Bad Orb it was called, way south of us. But Moosburg was the one we liberated. And I might as well tell you about that while I mention the names.

John: Sure.

Garrett: We crossed the Rhine River at Worms, and at that particular time, why, we went from 7th Army to 3rd Army, into Patton's, you know. And we weren't with Patton too long before we had broken, a young British officer, they had broken the German code. Enigma, they called it. And they were able to decipher everything that the Germans sent. And they knew of the attack before it happened from Banstein and the citadel of Bitche where we were wrestling all this stuff. And what happened was, with all this going on, and the Germans not knowing what we knew, they would send a coded message that we picked up in Britain, and transferred it over to Patton's control. And the message was Hitler had ordered all the POWs in both Moosburg and Bad Orb killed. And this got everybody's attention, and we didn't know it. They wouldn't tell us. What we had orders to do with Patton was, Patton said, "Take a full load of gasoline, as much as you can get, and all the ammo you can get in there, and head for Moosburg. And he said, "And be prepared for everything," he says, "because we know a lot is happening." And that is all he said. He didn't say anything about everybody getting killed, or that. So we headed for Moosburg, going like crazy, as fast as a tank column can go. And what we did was we split the combat command. We had half in the railroad end, the unloading end where they brought the prisoners in, and other half in the front end, the road end, where they brought fancy prisoners in. So we took the column, the 48th Tank column, they were coming from the railroad end, and we were able to show them where the gun emplacements, the machine gun emplacements, were because the SS guard company was preparing to do just that—shoot everybody in sight. And so what happened was, they didn't quite get the job done. We put the 48th Tankers to overrun the gates in the back end and every time they saw a revetment, a machine gun revetment, they were to put one round of HE, high explosive, into it, and that just blew everything all to hell. So within about an hour or two hours, we had killed all the SS we could find and in

the meantime, why, we ran into guys that were taken from our first platoon in that attack on New Year's Eve, the attack.

John: Oh.

Garrett: They were in there. And, you know, those guys, well, they had all lost thirty or forty pounds apiece, because they weren't eating. And all they wanted to do was, "Give me a gun." They wanted to get in the half-tracks with us and let's keep going.

John: I can understand.

Garrett: Can you imagine?

John: Yep.

Garrett: Well, at any rate, that is how things ran there. Of course, we couldn't take any of them with us. The 86th Infantry, I think, was taking care of shepherding all these guys into trucks and then running them back to where they could get some help. And they all needed help.

John: Yeah.

Garrett: They were in bad shape, dysentery and everything else wrong. And there was about 11,000 of them.

John: Oh, my God. It's a miracle you got there in time.

Garrett: Sure. Well, we did. And that is another story that won't be told. Nobody knows about that, but that's what happened at Moosburg. And then we went on, we were running, you'll see the maps where we were running. We were into Nuremberg and, oh God, a whole bunch of places. We ran all along here, and here is where we ended up. And it worked out pretty good. Because the further along we got into Germany, the less resistance we had. The Germans, the side that was, oh, for want of a better description, that -- they just didn't have the manpower, any fortification they put up, they couldn't do it. On that side of the fence, we were king dogs, I mean, we had it all. And so we just kept going like hell, once we got across there. And we were using, this is crazy, we were using German gasoline. Gasoline made from coal, to run our vehicles with.

John: And it worked?

Garrett: Oh, yeah. It worked. It was only about 65 octane, but the first vehicle we tried it

on was a half-track. We put it in, and all held our breaths when we started the engine. By God, it ran. And it ran pretty good. So, that is what we did, anyway. And we ran the route into Germany. Like I say, the resistance got less and less. Because they didn't have the manpower to take any of the stuff that we were pushing at them.

John: Did you come up against German civilians? What were they like?

Garrett: Ah, not very much. They, in Alsace, the history of Alsace is French, and the Germans during the Sudetenland, and all that crap that Hitler was pulling, they were indicated that their heritage was German, you know, their loyalty better be to the Germans. Well, that wasn't the way it turned out. The people, for the most part, were glad to be through with the war, and we were the ones that ended the war. So they didn't have much in the way of argument. And those towns that we got into, usually, there was very little resistance. They'd have, like, we hit a town and what aggravated us was that the Germans would pick the highest point in town and use it as an observation post for artillery. And as we were coming in, why, they would set up, as a matter of fact, that was the principle use of all high points. So we got to the point, every time we came to a town, we'd look for a church steeple.

John: Take it out.

Garrett: Yeah. One round. Take it out.

John: John, you mentioned the one time back there you were short on ammo and short on grenades, and that. Did that happen often?

Garrett: No, not very often. That was, oh, God, Luderhouse, (?) Berenthal (?), Reipersville (?), that area. And we, a lot of the ammo and gasoline that we were supposed to get went to the group that was, again, Patton was involved together with Bradley and some of the others, they were using as much as they could of the ammunition and gasoline and that to run that. And there on the Vodge Mountains, we were using German stuff. I was using a German -- I told you how we made grenades. That's a hell of a thing to have to do, but it works. Yeah. That is one thing the Americans had, ingenuity. The Germans didn't. We would use stuff and adapt it to our use. They were unhappy about that.

John: What about food, clothing, things like that?

Garrett: Clothing, we had what was on our back. And that was it. And the food, it wasn't too swift. It was C-rations, mostly, and we'd just throw a case of C-rations in. I'd get new replacements up and they'd say, "Hey, Lieutenant, how the hell are we

supposed to eat this?" I'd tell them to put it in their arm pit and wear it around for about four hours, and that would thaw it enough to where they could open it. And that is what we did. That's the only way we could get anything down was to do it that way. So, it worked. I'm trying to think. What else? Once we got way into Germany, the Schwarzwald, the Black Forest area and that, God, they were surrendering like crazy. They knew it was all over. And Kittinger, I wasn't with him then, but Kittinger and my platoon sergeant had a lot of fun. He said, "As we got into the foothills of the mountains heading into the Schwarzwald, they had a lot of deer.

John: Oh, did they?

Garrett: Yeah, and the deer had four years, three or four years to grow without anybody shooting at them because of the war, you know. So there was a bunch of deer. And Kit says, "Here's a whole armored column, and some deer." The Germans, we didn't know it at the time, Kit said, but they had 200 or 300 men in foxholes in the forest waiting for us. But all the fight was out of them. So the deer jumped up and they started running away from all the commotion. And our guys with .50 calibers, .30 calibers, he said the whole column was trying to kill a deer. And he said that the Germans, when the Germans saw all this expenditure of ammunition they thought it was for them, so all of a sudden they all were doing this, you know. They were all busy surrendering. But Kit said it was really funny. "Hell, we weren't shooting at the Germans, we were trying to get a deer."

John: Venison.

Garrett: That was it, anyway. Oh, God, I don't know what else to tell you. There were so many.

John: Where were you when it ended? When you heard it had ended?

Garrett: Oh, we were way into Bavaria. It's all in there. You read that and you'll get a good picture of it all. But then I was sent up, we had a lieutenant general by the name of John Courthouse Lee. He had invited, there was about twenty-five of us he invited into Wadbay (?) section in Paris for some dinner and he wanted to talk to us. And well what he wanted to talk to us about was joining the regular army. He said that you people are the future of the Army. He said, "With the education you have and the battle experience you have, you are going to be the regular Army." So, Kittinger and I, we didn't volunteer. I had leg problems and our battalion surgeon said, "Your legs aren't going to last too long. You'll be running a desk." Well, that ain't for me. I was a field officer. I went back and I told General Lee, I told him what our battalion surgeon had said, I'd be behind a desk after a little bit. I couldn't make it on the legs. And Lee said, "That's all right!

We'll find a spot for you. You just sign up." So I was unhappy, but a couple of them did sign up. Tony Weiss did, and he went into the reserves. And Tony was a lieutenant colonel when it all ended up. And the other one was Jack, oh, God. I can't think of his last name.

John: That's okay.

Garrett: When the war ended up, we were all first lieutenants. I was commissioned overseas, too. But Jack Dillard, that was his name, and he was a graduate of Virginia Military Institute, and General Lee got to him.

John: Oh, sure.

Garrett: So he signed up, and the last I heard from Jack, he was a major general.

John: Wow.

Garrett: So we had a pretty good bunch of guys.

John: Now, when it ended, did you hear anything about being sent to the Pacific?

Garrett: Yes. As a matter of fact, they were putting what they called infantry units together. Infantry platoons and infantry companies, and that was done right outside of Marseilles. And they were, they were called infantry packages, where the guys would go over as a complete unit. And they figured that they'd get to know each other, you know, on the boat transport into the Far East.

John: Sure.

Garrett: And we really didn't have much of that because the war ended, and then all of a sudden, the 14th Armored was sent home. And they disbanded the unit there. And a lot of the other division units, I was, I agreed to stay over and I was the town commander at Neustadt for a little while, in the 9th Armored district. But that didn't last long, and then they went down to Rheims. And the deal at Rheims was a quartermaster company, a trucking company. From going to army into quartermaster, that's like going from hell to paradise, I got to tell you. And that worked out pretty good. Doc, our battalion surgeon, he didn't have enough points to come home. But I could have given him some of mine and we'd both come home when it was warm. But, anyway, Doc, do you remember the program M\*A\*S\*H on TV?

John: Yeah.

- Garrett: B. J. Hunnicut, he was a carbon copy of B. J. Hunnicut, in personality, appearance, and everything.
- John: Okay.
- Garrett: He was a great guy. And I stayed over until he got the pink slip, we used to say, to leave the outfit. So we went home. And there is another thing. I had a nice, when we went home, I had written all this up how we went home. We were routed through Belgium, France, Germany, all the way to Bremerhaven.
- John: Okay.
- Garrett: And what we did, I had taken a full load of gasoline and a couple of Jerry cans extra in case we ran out, plus a couple cases of C-rations. And the second day out, Doc talked to me and said, "John, I can't take any more of these damned C-rations. We got to find a place to eat." What I was looking for was an American unit with a mess hall, you know. The road that we routed on, no American units at all. So I came up over a, there's a letter there on the piano I'll give it to you. But there was a big white house on top of a hill in Amsterdam, right outside of Amsterdam. And there ain't may hills in Amsterdam.
- John: Yeah, that's right. It's all flat.
- Garrett: So I went into the house. On the top of the entranceway it had a word "restaurant" spelled out. And I went in and I asked the houseboy, I said, "This is a restaurant?" and he answered me, "Yes, definitely," in German. And I said, "Could I talk to the owner?" And he took me in and a white-haired old gal about fifty-five or fifty-six years old. A real wonderful gal. I started talking to her in German and she puts her hand on me and says, "Speak English." And she spoke English with a clipped-British accent. Hell, she spoke better than I did. You know? So I told her what the problem was and I said, "I have no money to pay, just French francs, and I know you don't want them." And she walks out to the Jeep and she gets Doc Dickey and Bill Gant, who I was taking them home with us, and another infantry officer. And she drags us into the restaurant and, honest to God, we were eating for two or three hours. Wines, beautiful wines and everything. And we had just a hell of a good time. And then as it got to the end, I told Doc, I says, "I don't know how the hell I'm going to pay her for all of this. Geez, this is going to cost a fortune. We're going to have to give her the Jeep and walk to Bremerhaven, you know." And Doc said, "Well, do the best you can." So I told her what the problem was. And she said, "You don't owe me a thing. You gave me my freedom." Can you imagine?
- John: That's great. And, you did.



- Garrett: Actually, it was. And so that's how we got a free meal on the way home.
- John: Well, I can understand after months and months and months of C-rations.
- Garrett: And then, when we left, she kissed each of us and thanked us again. And I told her, "We're thanking you." And so we got about a mile down the road and I remembered Bill Gant was a cigarette smoker, and he had a couple of cartons of cigarettes in the back of the Jeep. So I turned the Jeep around and I went back to the house, and I took all the cartons of cigarettes that he had. And I gave them to the house boy and I said, "Now, when we are out of sight, you take these in and give them to her." And that would pay four or five times what the meal was worth on the black market.
- John: Sure. That's currency.
- Garrett: Yeah. So, he said he would. And so I gave him all the cigarettes, and very quietly, we left on our way to Bremerhaven. And we get down the road and Doc says, "What makes you think he's going to give her those damned cigarettes, John?" And he was probably right, you know. It didn't register at all; I was stupid as hell.
- John: Well, you made the effort.
- Garrett: Yeah. But that is how we got to Bremerhaven. And at Bremerhaven, I had my own Jeep. And so we were able to go, you know, Bremerhaven, the Danzig Corridor. I don't know if you remember your history. It's the border adjacent to Poland. It's the Danzig Corridor that goes out to the sea.
- John: Danzig, or Gdansk, depending on who's in charge.
- Garrett: But, what we did, we loaded up the Jeep and we had all the gasoline we needed. We went into Poland and I had ten days and we didn't have any problems. Waiting for the boat to come in and take us. That's what I did. That was a nice ending to a terrible war.
- John: When did you get back?
- Garrett: October, or September, of 1946.
- John: Okay, and then you got out right away?
- Garrett: Yeah.
- John: What did you do afterward the Army, John?

- Garrett: I went to work for a steel company called Briggs. And I went to work for them as an employee in the warehouse division, and then I got up the ladder a little bit, and then I was foreman.
- John: Okay.
- Garrett: In the warehouse. And, eventually, sales manager. So, no big problems.
- John: Did you join any of the vets organizations? The Legion? The VFW?
- Garrett: Well, a friend of mine who was down at Marco Island that I had contact with right after the war, Gene Austerman was his name. He was commander of the VFW. And Gene said, "You don't belong to any veterans organization, do you?" And I said, "No, I don't." And he said, "Well, you do now. I just bought you a life-time membership." So I belong to the Marco Island vets, the VFW.
- John: How about the GI Bill? Did you get the GI Bill? Did you ever use it?
- Garrett: No.
- John: Okay. Before we wrap up here, will you tell that story about Jack Wentzel?
- Garrett: I might give you a letter that has the whole thing.
- John: Okay, I am going to just shut this off for now. **[tape stop, start]** I'll put this back on.
- Garrett: Yeah, copy these two, too. I don't think you have this one. This is how all this started and Lisa found my name. I don't know, I did something bad or awful good.
- John: But they got your name.
- Garrett: They got my name anyway. And I'll give you copies of that. But Lisa was a historian and she came over here and spent a week with us.
- John: Oh, that's great.
- Garrett: Just to say thank you for, I sent her pictures of the whole battle area that we fought through in the Vosges Mountains. One whole wall of the museum is pictures I sent her in Hatten.
- John: But the story about Jack?

Garrett: Jack Wentzel.

John: Jack Wentzel.

Garrett: It's true. You have to know Jack to know it's the truth. He's an attorney and a great guy. He passed away. I've lost so many good friends. Well, here, we'll wait until Loraine copies this.

John: Okay, we're back on.

Garrett: Okay, to describe the, my friend's knowledge of the atomic bomb drop on Hiroshima. His name was Jack Wentzel, he was an attorney with offices in Gillespie, Illinois, and he was chief counsel for the Progressive Mine Workers Union. And I got to know him because I bought a coal mine from Consumers Coal, and went through the process of setting it up for junking, for want of a better word. We took all the iron out of the mine and sent it to Inland Steel. And Jack Wentzel, during the war, at the tail end of the war, he was a squadron commander, a fighter squadron commander on a carrier. And I forget, with my good memory, I forget the name of the carrier. But that was his position. And he said the night before the atomic bomb was dropped, and he didn't know it was an atomic bomb, or he didn't know what was going to be dropped. He said that they have an early morning briefing that the ship's captain, of the carrier, they called the whole squadron in to give them a briefing, and the briefing was this: they were going to drop a new type of bomb in Japan and they had indicated that there were certain procedures that they had to follow. Number one, all you are going to do, Jack, and his squadron, is do a perimeter sweep. Now that is a large area sweep, hunting for anything in the way of Japanese fighters, or what have you, to eliminate them so there is no problem. And the ship that is going to drop the bomb is a B-29. And so that's how it all started. Now, they also told Jack that they would have coordinates for a rendezvous point where he would meet the B-29 and make sure everything was on track. And they would go over the business of dropping the bomb after that. So, okay. They did their chores. They met at the rendezvous point, and one of the orders from the ship's captain was you can go on open line communications, radio communications, because the Japanese aren't about to put up any fighters, they think. But they didn't know, so that was the reason for the perimeter sweep. So they also said that they had orders that when they hear, "Bomb bay doors coming open, and bomb bay doors closed," that particular phrase means the bomb is dropped. And he said you are to go full throttle and get the hell out of the area, 90 degrees from the bomb drop. Get the hell out of there as fast as you can. Well, that's okay, they've done that before. So, Jack said that they met the bomber, *Enola Gay*, at the rendezvous point and he said that was okay, no problem there. Then they heard the B-29 say, "Bomb bay doors coming open," and all that stuff.

You know, the regular procedure for dropping a bomb.

John: Let me flip this over.

**[End of tape 1, side B]**

John: Okay. Go ahead.

Garrett: Okay. Well, they heard the usual sequence, bomb bay doors coming open, bomb out, and what have you. So, following the ship's captain's orders, all the fighters in Jack's squadron did a 90 degree full-throttle getting the hell out of the area. So, Jack says, you know, "It's funny, I was in the war from the beginning. We started with hundred pound bombs. Five hundred pound bombs. Thousand pound bombs." He said, "I just imagined this was another one of those, about as big as a submarine come out of that damned B-29." And so Jack said that, contrary to instructions, he was looking back, which he shouldn't have done, at the bomb drop. And he saw the bomb come out of the B-29, and all he could say, and this was, all the guys in the squadron heard him, too, Jack says, "That little son of a bitch!" And he said that the bomb dropped and it went off, and he said, "Holy mackerel, what a sight that was." There is an explosion and implosion effect. He says the explosion knocks you away and the implosion sucks all the air and the oxygen away from you. He says, "That happened. All our engines quit." And he said, of course, they started up right away, with the props twirling, and as soon as they got a little air, they were back in business. But Jack said they got back to the carrier and then the captain told them it was a new type of bomb, an atomic bomb, and he said, "This is going to end the war." And Jack said, "Sure as hell, it did." So Jack, when I went to his office in Gillespie, one whole wall was pictures of guys in his squadron. And Jack flew a gull-wing Corsair fighter. And he had a hell of a war record. Medals like you couldn't believe. He had one thing happen to him. He said, "You know, my dad was bald. Not a hair on his head." And he said, "I had a little problem." He said some Japanese flak came up through his cockpit plexiglass, and it hit him right here, and it peeled his scalp back. And Jack said, "Thank God I had a good wing man, because he ran me back to the carrier and landed on the carrier." Jack was doing the flying but he was following instructions. And he said, "I got on the carrier." And the wing man told him, Jack was hurt real bad. So Jack said that they got the medics up there, pulled him out of the plane, took him down to the operating room, and the surgeon looked at him and said, "Shit, you ain't hurt bad. I got others hurt worse." He said, "You sit there. I'll get to you eventually." He said all he did was peel the flap back and put a handful of sulfa powder on his head, and put it back again. And you should see the head of hair Jack has now. Curly, wavy black hair. Oh, it's the damndest head of hair you ever saw. And he said some good came out of the war. I got a head of hair.

John: That's great.

Garrett: But that was Jack Wentzel, and he is a tremendous guy. Another friend I miss.

**[End of Interview]**