

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ROBERT B. HERRIOT
101st Airborne, European Theater, World War II.

2000

OH
407

OH
407

Herriot, Robert B., (1919-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Herriot, a native of Adams (Wisconsin), speaks about his service in the 101st Airborne in the European theater during World War II. He was drafted into the Army in 1943 and inducted into service in Milwaukee (Wisconsin). He was then assigned to the 78th Lightning Division at Camp Butler (North Carolina). He talks about how he “volunteered” for the 101st Airborne Division and how he had only a month to cultivate his jumping skills before the D-Day invasion. Herriot describes landing on Utah Beach and joining up with his fellow troops. The objective of his particular division was to go inland to Carentan and hold a space open for the men that were disembarking on the beach. After this mission had been completed, their goal was to proceed into St. Mere Eglise where he mentions the fighting that transpired there. After the fighting in France, Herriot wanted and received a transfer to the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment because he saw too many guys landing in water and drowning (because of the combat load). He took part in the invasion of Holland with this regiment. Herriot discusses how the pilots of his glider were killed and how he landed the glider himself. He describes the fighting near Vechel in which he earned the Bronze Star for leading men across a bridge that was under fire. He vividly remembered it raining for 73 days while in Holland which resulted in the foxholes always being half-full of water. He characterizes the fighting at Einhoven and illustrates how shrapnel from a German rocket wounded him. Herriot had to slip through enemy lines to get to his own aid station and subsequently was hospitalized in Lille (France) where they only removed the largest piece of shrapnel (leaving the small ones) before going back to fight as a member of a mortar team carrying the tube. Herriot elaborates on the fighting at Bastogne and talks about the overwhelming feeling he had that the Germans were going to overrun them there. A sergeant from his company escorted the three German soldiers that presented General McAuliffe with the German surrender ultimatum. Herriot changed socks three times a day during this engagement to keep his feet dry and the socks that weren't on his feet were under his clothes near his chest, drying out. He also makes mention of fighting near the Rhine River near the end of the war, and eventually how they fought SS troops near Hitler's Eagle Nest in the mountains near Berchtesgaden. After the war ended, Herriot obtained a job conducting inventory of all the art the Germans looted from all over Europe. After being discharged from the Army, Herriot went back to work for Chicago-Northwestern Railroad until May of 1980, when he retired. He explains how he was awarded his epaulets and speaks briefly on a 101st Airborne reunion he attended in 1960.

Biographical Sketch

Herriot (1919-) was a paratrooper in the 101st Airborne in the European Theater starting on D-Day and lasting the rest of WWII. He earned a Bronze Star for leading men across a bridge under fire. Upon honorable discharge from the service in 1945, Herriot went back to work for the Chicago-Northwestern Railroad until 1980 when he retired.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.

Transcribed by Rose Polacheck, 2004.

Transcription edited by Damon R. Bach & John J. McNally, 2006.

Interview Transcript

JAMES: I'm talking to Robert Herriot, July 27, year 2000. Where were you born Robert?

ROBERT: I was born in Adams, Wisconsin, on December 7, 1919.

JAMES: And you went in the service, what year?

ROBERT: I went into the service on the 23rd of March, in 1943.

JAMES: What held you up? Being born in 1919, you had to register for the draft before the war and all this, I would think that you would have been in the service sooner.

ROBERT: Well, my mother was a widow and I was her sole support and that was basically it.

JAMES: You had a built-in deferment there, for awhile.

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: And then did they change the rules or did you just decide that you wanted to join?

ROBERT: I was drafted but I don't know why. I didn't volunteer. I was drafted but I don't know the reason.

JAMES: When you thought your deferment was going to go on but it didn't.

ROBERT: That's right.

JAMES: I think in 1943 the Army decided that they –

ROBERT: Needed more. [Laughter]

JAMES: Really needed more because they came up a few business short. So where did they send you?

ROBERT: Well, I went to Fort Sheridan, Illinois and was inducted. No, I'm sorry. I went to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and was inducted into service. And later I was discharged from Fort Sheridan, Illinois, but then after I was inducted into the service, they sent me to, I was assigned to the 78th Lightning Division, and they were stationed at Camp Butler, North Carolina.

JAMES: What was the Lightning Division?

ROBERT: That was a regular Infantry Division.

JAMES: Remember what was the number of that division, do you know?

ROBERT: 78th!

JAMES: 78th.

ROBERT: Lightening.

JAMES: And so you had all your basic work there?

ROBERT: Yes.

JAMES: How long was that?

ROBERT: Well, let's see I shipped, I finally shipped overseas, it was either late April or early May of 44. When the 78th Infantry Division shipped overseas, they gave each man a sort of a mini physical you know. A sketchy physical and the doctor that gave me my physical detected a heart murmur, so I didn't ship over with the regular infantry division. And then a few weeks later, why they gave me another physical, and the heart checked out okay, so I was shipped overseas, what they call "unassigned." And when I got to England, they told me that I volunteered for the 101st Airborne Division.

JAMES: They announced that?

ROBERT: Yeah, the officer said "You volunteered for the 101st Airborne Division."

JAMES: But you hadn't had –

ROBERT: I didn't really, you know, but that's what they told me and that's where, that's how I got into the division. You see a lot of these guys that were in the division and trained in the states. I had to take a crash course in England in the jumping techniques and everything in order to qualify. In the Airborne Division, you get 50% extra pay you know by qualifying once a month you have to jump or take a glider training episode. And so that way I was a private first class. My pay was comparable to a staff sergeant or a regular infantry division.

JAMES: How much practice time did you have during as a jumper?

ROBERT: Well I had from late in April or early May, I had till June 5th. June 5th we loaded up and jumped into France you know. D-Day was June 6th but we went in ahead of time.

JAMES: I knew that. How much practice time did you have?

ROBERT: Well, I had like a month.

JAMES: How many jumps in a month?

ROBERT: Well, I jumped probably 10 or 12 times before they qualified me.

- JAMES: Were they pleased with the way it went? Did it seem to go okay?
- ROBERT: Yeah, but after I jumped in France, why I transferred to the glider regiment because I, saw too much of guys landing in the water and drowning because they couldn't get rid of the weight, you know. When you jumped you got your weapons, your ammunition, you're kind of heavy you know. And then some guys got tangled up in trees, and it was mess, and then when you hit the ground, if you were lucky enough to get on the ground, then you were isolated. It took a long time to get the group together. At least a glider, why when you land you got 13 men all in one group to start with.
- JAMES: Theoretically.
- ROBERT: Yea, theoretically.
- JAMES: Right. So where were you training in England?
- ROBERT: We were at, in a place that was close to the Welsh border. And I can't tell ya the name of the, we wasn't in, we were kind of in the country, you know. And I didn't go town very much. I stayed pretty much in the military area so I don't know. But I remember marching through, because I thought it was Wales, but it might have been just close to the border because the, they had these thatched roofs, you know. I thought we were in Wales but it may have been –
- JAMES: They have a lot of thatched roofs in England.
- ROBERT: I know. And it could have been right, but we were close to the border but I don't know for sure. I can't tell—
- JAMES: So then when it, how much notice did you get before they said that you were going to jump for real?
- ROBERT: Well, first time we loaded up and we thought it was the real thing and it was a dry run or whatever they call that you know?
- JAMES: They cancelled it.
- ROBERT: Yes, and so when we did load up for the real thing, we thought maybe that was another exercise. And it turned out to be the real thing.
- JAMES: What time did you get on the plane?
- ROBERT: We got on the plane around 10:00, you know before midnight. I think we actually hit France, it might have been in the early hours of the 6th, really, but we did take off on the 5th. And then we were dropped in behind the enemy lines, you know we were supposed to hold the road open for the other guys to come through.

JAMES: Yes, I understand. I just interviewed a path finder. A guy who flew one of the path finder airplanes? A guy that came before you and they put out these spots so that your pilot would know where to let you off. [Laughter from Robert] That's an interesting story too because they were really early. How many men in your plane?

ROBERT: I think there was probably about between 40 and 50 of the troopers.

JAMES: In one plane?

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: All right and what regiment were you in, do you remember?

ROBERT: I was in the 327th Glider Infantry regiment, but I don't remember when I was in the troops, I don't remember the regiment or anything.

JAMES: When you dropped, first thing.

ROBERT: No, I don't.

JAMES: Okay. So when –

ROBERT: I got out of that right away. I went into Holland in a glider.

JAMES: Well, that's vehicular heavier. [Laughter] So when you're dropping into France at night, did you hit a tree or did you come under water or --?

ROBERT: No. I lucked out. I hit dry land and my only trouble was I was isolated for a while.

JAMES: Did you have your clicker?

ROBERT: Yup.

JAMES: Did you use it?

ROBERT: Oh yeah!

JAMES: Did you find somebody within?

ROBERT: Yeah! Yeah!

JAMES: Oh. It worked like it was supposed to?

ROBERT: Yeah. That was really a good huh---

JAMES: You clicked once and they would respond by clicking twice, is that the deal?

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: Okay. So you formed up with some of your mates?

ROBERT: Yup.

JAMES: Were they the ones that were on your plane?

ROBERT: Some were and some weren't. Because they were, everybody didn't hit their drop zone you know.

JAMES: I know that. You didn't know where France was supposed to be or it wasn't your job to worry about that did you?

ROBERT: No, not really, no.

JAMES: So you had to figure out where you were and head towards toward the beach—

ROBERT: The objective, yeah, get to your objective.

JAMES: Your objective was what, the canal or the beach?

ROBERT: Well, our objective was to get inland, near Carentan to hold a space open for the guys landing on the beach to—

JAMES: Okay, Utah beach.

ROBERT: Yeah, to get through.

JAMES: And, you found Carentan all right?

ROBERT: Oh yes.

JAMES: Did you have a map?

ROBERT: Well, I didn't really have a map but we had the general directions, you know.

JAMES: So when you got to Carentan, how many were there of you?

ROBERT: I think there was about 19 or 20 of us at that time.

JAMES: Had you run into any Germans by that time?

ROBERT: Well, just a few.

JAMES: How did you deal with them?

ROBERT: Well we tried to avoid them as much as possible.

JAMES: Tried to or you really would have created a stir here.

ROBERT: Yeah. A few of them, why we had to just do away with you know.

JAMES: And when you got to Carentan did you sort of stop and look for more men?

ROBERT: Yeah, we kind of set up a perimeter there and waited for more. It wasn't long and they began to show up.

JAMES: The Germans by this time knew that you were around there though.

ROBERT: Oh yeah.

JAMES: So, were they all looking for you?

ROBERT: Wow, I suppose they were. But you know they probably were trying to set up a defensive action of some kind.

JAMES: Sure. But they didn't send a tank out towards you or –

ROBERT: No. Not many tanks in that area.

JAMES: Okay. Carentan was not too large a community?

ROBERT: No. Not too large.

JAMES: So then what was the next move?

ROBERT: Well I think it was –

JAMES: Did you stay there until more troops arrived?

ROBERT: Yeah, then we moved on towards St. Mere Eglise? And we just kept going in that general direction.

JAMES: West.

ROBERT: Yeah. Then west a little bit north I think. Then of course, towards the end of July why we got taken back to England to rest up for another –

JAMES: Did you go any farther than St. Mere Eglise?

ROBERT: No. I think that is where we stayed. I think some of them pushed on but I think our unit stayed there.

JAMES: Did you meet any of the fort division coming in from Utah beach?

ROBERT: No, I didn't remember that, no.

JAMES: Did you get in a fire fight when you got into St. Mere Eglise?

ROBERT: Oh yeah!

JAMES: Then what were you dealing with. Were you dealing with tanks then or just civilians on foot?

ROBERT: Mostly, riflemen and machine gunners and hand grenades, such as that.

JAMES: A lot of guys get hurt there?

ROBERT: Oh yeah!

JAMES: Because you were probably outnumbered most of the time.

ROBERT: Yeah, we were.

JAMES: So you really couldn't push into them, yet you sort of had to fall back and get defensive.

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: Did you get wounded at this time?

ROBERT: Not in France, I didn't no.

JAMES: So after things sort of stabilized, they, how did they get you back to England?

ROBERT: They took us back by plane.

JAMES: Oh, a regular C47, like they got—

ROBERT: Yeah. Yeah.

JAMES: Took a whole bunch back?

ROBERT: Yeah, just kept taking them back.

JAMES: So then you had some few days off there?

ROBERT: Yeah, we had, oh see August and about a month and a half of rest before. Well you see the next deal was I think September 17th, when we crossed the channel for Holland.

JAMES: The Market Garden.

ROBERT: Yeah, the Market Garden. I could tell you a story about that.

JAMES: I expect, I planned that you will. [Laughter from Robert] But I want to take everything, I don't want to miss anything and get it all in order you see, you know so I'll get it all down right.

ROBERT: Okay.

JAMES: Now, in your leave time there, did you go into town a lot?

ROBERT: No, I didn't. I know a lot of them did but I was, you see I was married before I went into the service?

JAMES: Oh, you had to behave yourself?

ROBERT: Yes, and I also had a son.

JAMES: Right, well you were probably considered the old man of the group?

ROBERT: I guess so [laughing]. See, I was probably, 23, or –

JAMES: Oh well, that's pretty old when you are dealing with 18 or 19 year olds.

ROBERT: Yeah, you see they were all young really.

JAMES: Right, and single.

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: And hell raisers, and –

ROBERT: Right. No I stayed pretty much in the –

JAMES: That was safe. Didn't get into the pubs (?) [Unintelligible] off Holland.

ROBERT: Well, I did a few times but, you know, --

JAMES: Well, you gotta drink a beer now and then didn't you?

ROBERT: Well, yes!

JAMES: Good Wisconsin boys would all drink beer.

ROBERT: Bitters I guess they called it.

JAMES: Well, that's stout bitters. That stuff's –

ROBERT: I went back over to England. My wife and I went over there and I went into a pub and drank some bitters and it didn't taste the same as it did when we were over there. [chuckle] Funny isn't it, lost something.

JAMES: Damn right. And the food, were you into the food?

ROBERT: Well, I thought the food –

JAMES: Well there was rations so they didn't have a lot of food on them.

ROBERT: Well, Army food when you were in England was good, but of course you know when you are in combat, you had those –

JAMES: C rations.

ROBERT: Dry rations, yeah. That wasn't so good but it was enough to –

JAMES: Sustain you.

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: Did you have any trouble getting mail over there?

ROBERT: No. Not, in England no. We didn't have any trouble.

JAMES: And were you entertained by the USO?

ROBERT: Yes.

JAMES: I imagine they came over. Some dancing girls and singers and stuff.

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: You don't remember who they were?

ROBERT: No, I don't, but I remember they were good, you know.

JAMES: You didn't see Bob Hope?

ROBERT: I don't recall seeing him actually, but we did, I did see a lot of entertainers.

JAMES: Did you see anything with the Salvation Army or the Red Cross?

ROBERT: Well, I saw the Red Cross, and later I will tell you a story about that.

JAMES: Good. Let's get it all out there. Okay. All right, so you are a month and a half in and they announce that you have another exercise.

ROBERT: Yup, yup.

JAMES: Did they tell you anything about it or just said you're –

ROBERT: Well, I think they briefed the officers and the non-commissioned officers but I don't think that in my class that –

JAMES: They didn't dribble down through the –

ROBERT: No. No. Even though I was a private first class I wasn't considered a, I was kind of like in no-man's land, you know, I didn't get a lot of the dirty work but I didn't get any responsibility either. I was just like a, I was like a warrant officer in the commission ranks. [Chuckle]

JAMES: So, but you knew it was going to be a longer trip this time.

ROBERT: Yeah, we thought so.

JAMES: What time did you leave England for that haul?

ROBERT: Well we left, as I recall it, we left in the like, it was after midnight I believe, but it was in the early morning hours and my brother had twin girls born while I was in the air over the English Channel and I always get confused because either they were born on the 17th or the 18th and so we either crossed on the 17th or the 18th and I always get those two dates confused. But I thought it was the 17th and I think that they were born on the 18th, so maybe we, maybe it was after midnight, or just before midnight when we took off, and it got to be the 18th when, before we got there. See, that could be. And then their birthday is the 18th.

JAMES: So this is a longer flight than the Holland one?

ROBERT: Yeah, it was.

JAMES: So when you dropped, it was daylight then when you dropped there?

ROBERT: Yeah it was. And I was in the glider then you know.

JAMES: Oh, oh, I got ahead of myself.

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: Now, you just asked to be switched to that?

ROBERT: Yeah. I submitted a transfer, I wanted to get into the gliders and then –

JAMES: And this one was during your rest period, yeah? Was there any objection to that?

ROBERT: No. It went right through.

JAMES: And then you had to have some glider training?

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: Well, I don't know, I think we cut too fast here? Now tell me how did that go?

ROBERT: Well, that went real good because you know they take you up and they take two gliders, and one is on a little longer rope. The nylon ropes are about an inch in diameter and one is a little longer than the other so that if you get this kind of a deal, the gliders can't hit each other. Yeah, they take you up and they cut you lose and then the pilot and the co-pilot are separate from the air borne troopers you know. They are a separate breed.

JAMES: They sit up, right in front of you though.

ROBERT: I think they belong to the Air Force. Yeah, they are in, and they glide the plane around and then they finally they land it, and then few guys

JAMES: How many guys would that glider hold?

ROBERT: Thirteen.

JAMES: Thirteen. What kind of a glider was it do you recall?

ROBERT: I can remember the name of the British glider, that was a Horisef. The American glider, I cannot remember the name of it but I know what it held.

JAMES: Winkle?

ROBERT: It could have been but I ----

JAMES: Well anyways, it's carrying 13 men, --

ROBERT: Yeah, 13 men and then the pilot and co-pilot.

JAMES: And, what were you sitting on in that glider?

ROBERT: Well, not much of anything.

JAMES: Your backpack, or --?

ROBERT: Just, yeah, your own. It's just like a big box kind really. It's a frame and stuff's --

JAMES: There are really no seats in there was there?

ROBERT: No.

JAMES: Have any back supports to lean against?

ROBERT: Well I think there was kind of like rib cages that went up to hold the – and then you could brace yourself against those.

JAMES: Well the deal was your instructions were when you got ready to land, put your feet on something ahead of you and then brace yourself, or what? How did that go?

ROBERT: Well, yeah, you were just supposed to put your head down and put yourself as close to the fetal position as you could. And then after the plane stopped shaking or whatever, why then you would bail out.

JAMES: Right. They, what were you carrying with you at this time.

ROBERT: Well, at that time I had a, a carbine that had a metal handle that folded up?

JAMES: That was the stock?

ROBERT: Yeah, the stock, it was metal and it folded up. And a trench knife in the boots. Of course we wore those fatigues with those big side pockets? We had hand grenades in those. There were of course –

JAMES: And ammo for your –

ROBERT: Yeah, we had the ammo across the –

JAMES: For the carbine?

ROBERT: Yeah, we had that. And then the belt and then the one over the shoulder.

JAMES: Okay. Did you have a poncho wrapped in something?

ROBERT: Yeah, we had like a raincoat and a blanket and one of those shovels with a folding handle. And the mess kit, stuff like that.

JAMES: A couple of K-rations.

ROBERT: Yeah.

JAMES: That was about it?

ROBERT: Yup.

JAMES: So how did the landing in Holland go?

ROBERT: Well, actually the pilot and the co-pilot were killed in the air by anti-aircraft fire flack. And I was sitting the closest to the controls, so I moved into position and

landed the glider myself. And what happened was that we ran through a barb-wired fence and nosed up in the ditch; cracked the glider up pretty bad but all 13 troopers got out without being hurt.

JAMES: You soloed, [chuckling] in Holland.

ROBERT: Yeah, that was our start of that deal.

JAMES: They should have given you a medal for that, did they?

ROBERT: No. No they didn't but I did get a bronze star awarded later.

JAMES: I saw that.

ROBERT: Later.

JAMES: Well, we will get into that. Now, don't rush us here. [Laughter from Robert] I don't want to miss anything.

ROBERT: Oh, okay.

JAMES: Well, that was a hell of an achievement!

ROBERT: Yeah, that was a –

JAMES: Did you ever think you could do such a thing?

ROBERT: No, I didn't have any training for that either.

JAMES: Well, how did you figure it out?

ROBERT: Well, ---

JAMES: Course, gravity was controlling you –

ROBERT: It all happened so fast that I don't know what I really did, really do but I managed to get it on the ground with out getting anybody hurt you know, that was the objective.

JAMES: All you had were two foot pedals and a wheel.

ROBERT: Yeah, that's all.

JAMES: Well, that's remarkable. Those 13 guys must have been pretty pleased with you.

ROBERT: Yeah.

- JAMES: Wow! I couldn't have done this. How come that anti-aircraft ride didn't bring the glider down in a heap? Were you pretty close to ground?
- ROBERT: Yeah, we were close to the landing drop zone when they got hit and maybe if we had gotten hit higher up it would have forced it to probably drop.
- JAMES: Drop and stall. How did you get them out of the way when they were obviously dysfunctional, and weren't quite dead yet, but
- ROBERT: Well, I just kinda moved the one guy over, out of the way and got in there and managed to do it.
- JAMES: You sensed that they were seriously wounded then?
- ROBERT: Yeah, and I'm sure that they died as a result of it.
- JAMES: Once you got to the ground, did you fuss with them at all?
- ROBERT: No. The thirteen of us got out of the plane and started high-tailing it for our, for our rendezvous, you know,
- JAMES: So the pilot and co-pilot more or less were left—
- ROBERT: Well, they were left on their own, I mean, we had to --- I'm getting ahead of myself but look, there were a lot of times we had to step over the dead and the seriously wounded then, because we had orders not to, that was the medics job, to come –
- JAMES: Right, and you didn't carry any medics on your glider so –
- ROBERT: No, we didn't. No. And another thing, you see, the airborne division is a lot fewer than the regular infantry division by about 4,000 men, 6,000 compared to about 10 and we couldn't get any of our artillery in by air so we were dependent upon the British for our artillery support and I'll tell ya a story about that but that will come later.
- JAMES: Okay. Don't forget all these little stories you are going to tell me now.
- ROBERT: [Laughing] Okay.
- JAMES: So when you landed in Holland, you bounced out of this thing and started running for what?
- ROBERT: We actually landed near a small village by the name of Vechel and I think the, we made our way towards there and we came to kind of like a bridge and the bridge was under fire. You know, by the Germans? We had orders to cross the bridge and go through a country church yard and then get behind an embankment. There was a, you know, like in Holland, there were lots of canals and embankments, so

our orders were to cross that bridge and go through that church yard and then get behind that embankment and start to dig in.

JAMES: This was the spot that was preplanned. You landed where you were supposed to land?

ROBERT: Yeah, barely, barely.

JAMES: It was the spot they told you about so there was no surprise there.

ROBERT: No.

JAMES: And who led you? Did you have a sergeant aboard your craft?

ROBERT: Yeah, we had a sergeant and a corporal.

JAMES: No officers?

ROBERT: No officers, no, just –

JAMES: Alright. So you had to get rid of those Germans on the bridge?

ROBERT: Well, what happened was this group of men I was with, why they all, they didn't want to cross that bridge you know. So I crossed the bridge under fire and then I re-crossed the bridge and then that time I got the guys to follow me and we went across and that's where I got the bronze star medal for crossing the bridge under fire and to get the –

JAMES: What inspired you to do this?

ROBERT: [Laughing] I don't know.

JAMES: Huh?

ROBERT: I don't know. Maybe self-preservation. I knew that we had to get there and get dug in.

JAMES: Right, even if that meant saving your lives staying where you were.

ROBERT: Right, I thought we were—

JAMES: Safer—

ROBERT: Safer over than where we were told to be.

JAMES: So you crossed the bridge, carving and spewing in all directions?

- ROBERT: Yeah, and then they kind of stopped firing for a while and I went back and then those guys followed me. Then we went in through the church yard, but one guy froze on the, there was a fence kinda, we had to get through a fence before we could get –
- JAMES: To the church yard?
- ROBERT: Well, we could get to the church yard but then there was a fence before we got to the embankment? And this one guy froze on that fence and I had to get him. He just wouldn't move you know. Finally, I stayed with him and talked to him and everything. Finally I got him to kind of relax and then I got him to get under the fences, I didn't want him to go over the top.
- JAMES: Something to shoot.
- ROBERT: Right. Finally we all got there and we were about half way dug in when we got the orders to move out. So we had to leave that place, go back through the church yard, go back across the bridge and then follow these guys up. See, some officer must have showed up and they cancelled this deal that we had set up and they was gonna do something else.
- JAMES: How about the other gliders? Did they land in the field? I forgot to ask you about that. You were not the only glider in that field were you?
- ROBERT: Well, no, there were other gliders but a lot of those landed fairly decent without all ---
- JAMES: Right, but you didn't go with that group. Your troops stayed as a unit?
- ROBERT: Yeah, we did.
- JAMES: So you don't form, all form together all at once?
- ROBERT: No, we did later on.
- JAMES: So back across the bridge—it's safer this time.
- ROBERT: Yeah, safer this time.
- JAMES: You killed all the Germans that were in your way.
- ROBERT: So, then we got together and they took us and now we were headed for Einhoven. That was our ultimate objective was Einhoven. You see the whole operation, of the British First Airborne Division was supposed to take Arnhem, the 82nd Airborne Division was supposed to take Nijmegen and the 101st Airborne Division was supposed to take Einhoven. We were on the southern, my legion was in the middle, Arnhem was on the far north.

JAMES: Got it.

ROBERT: So we were headed for Einhoven after we got straightened around. In Holland, why a lot of times we were dug in our foxholes in like apple orchards or something. Well, somebody's here I guess.

JAMES: UPS.

ROBERT: Oh, say Heather?

JAMES: Yeah, she's coming.

ROBERT: Oh, okay. So yeah, we, and then we actually were in Holland was probably the longest single engagement of any, that the 101st Airborne was involved in. That was 73 days, but not for me. I was wounded on the 10th of November and evacuated.

JAMES: How did this come about?

ROBERT: Actually, it happened about noon on the 10th of November of 1944. I was in my foxhole; we had been in this location for some time so I kept improving on my foxhole, making it better. I had it dug out and then I'd scrounge around and I found some logs, and I put logs over the part of the hole, and then the sod that I had left while I dug the hole, I put that to one side. Then I put dirt over the logs and then put the sod back over the dirt. Well, on this 10th day of Nov 1944 about noon I was in my foxhole and I was lying on my left side and I had my right arm up. I had a little shelf dug out and I had a little mountain stove in there and I was heating a cup of coffee. And this 155-millimeter or German artillery shell must have hit a limb off of the apple tree across from my fox hole and then it exploded. Some of the shrapnel from that penetrated all that stuff and got me in the triceps of the right arm, severed the triceps. At this particular time we were naturally surrounded by Germans because we always were you know. So when we got to Bastogne later it was no surprise to us to be surrounded, only to the rest of the world I guess. But, actually, --

JAMES: What happened after you got wounded?

ROBERT: Well, I'll tell ya. Well see I had to wait until it got dark and then I had to slip through the enemy lines --

JAMES: You couldn't move your arm then?

ROBERT: Well, it was painful, yeah, and so I waited until it got dark. I slipped through the enemy lines to get to my own battalion aid station. When I got there they kind of patched it up a little and they took me by jeep back to division headquarters and when I got there they took me by motor vehicle to a train station and then the train went way south and then it went, it turned way east, and then it turned and went way north. It ended up in a little town by the name of Lille, and that's in France,

but it's close to the Belgium border and that's where I was hospitalized. And there I met a fella that was in the Belgium Army? He was in the hospital there too and his name was Charles Freith and I got a picture of him back here. Anyway, I was there and so they fixed me up and then they released me. This was early December and of course the division was in Holland until the last day of November, before they got taken out. And one thing about that Holland deal, was that it rained. It's hard to believe that, but it actually rained at least part of every day for 73 days.

JAMES: I hear, I hear 73 days of combat were in rain.

ROBERT: Yeah, of course I wasn't there the full time but they tell me and all the time I was there it rained part of every day. And so our foxholes were always at least half full of water and that's what we lived in you know?

JAMES: Right. How did you join up with the bigger group? How did that come along?

ROBERT: Well we just kept –

JAMES: Adding?

ROBERT: Yeah, and kind of progressing. And then in Holland, a lot of the times the dividing, what divided the Germans from our own troops would be just a railroad track and at one point, I remember where we were dug in along side of the railroad track, and on the other side of the railroad track there was a factory. That factory changed hands in four or five times in 24 hours because a lot of that was an observation post. They could get up high to see and of course I was mostly, my main, I was mainly attached to the mortars. My weapon was a mortar.

JAMES: In the Airborne?

ROBERT: Yeah, and –

JAMES: The 61 mobile unit?

ROBERT: Yeah, and see it took about three men to man one of those. One to carry the –

JAMES: Base plate?

ROBERT: And the tube and then a couple of them were what they call ammunition barriers.

JAMES: You carried the tube?

ROBERT: Yeah, I carried the tube. [Chuckle] We got pretty proficient with that. We could get quite a few rounds in the air before the first one. And then after they started going it was “blubb blubb blubb blubb” [chuckle]

JAMES: Right.

- ROBERT: They were close together you know. And they were devastating within several –
- JAMES: When you left with your glider, who brought the ammunition for that? Did it come in a box along with you or ---
- ROBERT: Well I don't remember just how it came but some of that stuff they dropped by air you know and we got –
- JAMES: By parachute? So then you just had to retrieve it.
- ROBERT: Yeah, but we brought in some by, some with us and then some they dropped.
- JAMES: So after you got back from the hospital, then you never got back to the 101st?
- ROBERT: Oh, yeah, I did.
- JAMES: So how long were you in the hospital?
- ROBERT: Well I was there from, I don't know if it was the 10th of November when I got there or the 11th, but I don't know how long that train trip took or anything but I was there until around about the 2nd of December. That's when they released me and then –
- JAMES: What did they do for you in the hospital? Really.
- ROBERT: Mostly what they –
- JAMES: Have surgery?
- ROBERT: Well they took out, yes, some --
- JAMES: Some shrapnel?
- ROBERT: Yes, they took out the biggest piece. They located the biggest chunk and they removed that. But the, all the small pieces they left in there and later, at the VA hospital in Madison, ooh, I had one removed, I think there is one now that should be taken out, but they are real small. They work their way to the surface, and they fester, and then you can almost get them out yourself. Well, getting back to, the division was in a rest area near Reims, France at this particular time? So when I was released from the hospital I went back to Reims and had a few, week, or on the 16th of December, so I didn't have too long you know. But I was fortunate, because while I was in the hospital and before they released me from the hospital, they reissued me a whole outfit of like a new wool blanket, new wool sweater, three pair of wool socks and all this kind of stuff that these other guys were still having their old stuff.
- JAMES: Well, how fortunate!

- ROBERT: Yeah, well, see then on the 16th of December we got the notice to go to Bastogne, and they loaded us up in trucks and we went up there. Well, that's what saved my feet, I had these new, I had all this new stuff I could keep. And then another thing I did was I put one pair of socks next to my chest underneath my underwear and sweater and all that stuff and there was some heat there. And try to dry those socks out. I would change my socks about three times every day. Yeah, I had three pair of socks and I just kept rotating and I think that's what, so many of the guys froze their feet. I had a friend of mine that found out about that and every year about Thanksgiving time he gives me a new pair of wool socks. [Chuckle] He don't want me to get cold feet again. [Laughing] Anyway, that's what I, I say that's what saved me. The fact that I had new equipment.
- JAMES: Oh yeah. So when you got to Bastogne, they weren't surrendered yet, quite.
- ROBERT: No, not quite. So we set up—
- JAMES: What did you understand that you were doing there, just sort of holding the regiments at an important point?
- ROBERT: Yeah, there was about a major intersection there—
- JAMES: About seven roads.
- ROBERT: Yeah, and our job was to try to hold that open and prevent them from making use of it.
- JAMES: Right. Let me ask you one point now. At this moment, did you recognize what the German strategy was? Did you realize what was going on?
- ROBERT: Not really, not at that point, no.
- JAMES: It's too confusing.
- ROBERT: Yeah, it was all kind of confusion then.
- JAMES: Because at that point the last thing you remember we were winning the war and then the next thing you're pulling back and so it must have been really sort of confusing for you.
- ROBERT: Yeah, right. So we had to and then later on the Germans, they decided that they were, you see our Commanding General Maxwell Taylor was in Washington D.C. at this time and the division was in charge of General McAuliffe? Well, the Germans decided to send us a surrender ultimatum.
- JAMES: Yeah, that's a famous story.

ROBERT: Yeah, well okay, I am going to tell you about it. So when these three Germans came, why, guess what. A sergeant from our company, I was with Company F of the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment, and the sergeant from our company was the one that escorted these three Germans through the, back to General McAuliffe and they served the surrender ultimatum to him and he answered one word “Nuts” and by the way, I have a brass plaque commemorating that. I gave it to my son, he lives in New Hampshire. He’s got it out there.

JAMES: Oh, how nice.

ROBERT: Otherwise I would show it to you. But anyway they took that answer back to the Germans and pretty soon they come back with their white flag and he takes them back. They want to know is that “affirmative” or “negative” [chuckling]

JAMES: Yeah, that was an expression that they would understand.

ROBERT: So, when they finally found out that we were not going to surrender, that’s when they started laying down the artillery barrage and the tanks started coming.

JAMES: How did you stop those tanks?

ROBERT: We had to have our tank bazookas and –

JAMES: Use some 105 artillery? Laid those things down? Is that a tank weapon?

ROBERT: They had some artillery there and they had the bazookas, and then—

JAMES: Because you would think that if the Germans really wanted to they could have pushed right through?

ROBERT: Yeah, it seems like, I don’t know why they hesitated, but see they had orders to take Bastogne. That was the key point for them. They had orders to take Bastogne and hold it I guess before they advanced, see their objective was Amsterdam?

JAMES: I understand.

ROBERT: Oh, okay.

JAMES: Yes, I’ve read many books on this.

ROBERT: Well, we were the only thing that was between them and their objective. But I credit General Patton for rescuing us because he turned –

JAMES: So does he by the way.

ROBERT: Yeah, he turned his armored division around and made –

JAMES: Made a left-hand turn.

ROBERT: And he got there in a hurry. Remarkable, a lot of people figured it couldn't be done but he did it.

JAMES: Now during this siege around Bastogne, how long were you there? Roughly how many days?

ROBERT: I would say roughly --

JAMES: Around 22 days?

ROBERT: Well, something, maybe just short of a month.

JAMES: And tell me about the food. Now as it's starting to dwindle, how did you deal with this?

ROBERT: We finally, when they re-supplied us from the air, with the ammunition, --

JAMES: That was afterwards.

ROBERT: Yeah, that was later.

JAMES: Before that.

ROBERT: Well you just made do with what you had and you got real hungry and --

JAMES: There was no food in Bastogne?

ROBERT: No, not really, at all.

JAMES: There's a man named Hans Saudis. He lives in Stoughton, who jumped with the 101st on D-Day. He was at Bastogne and he said there was a farm building back there and that he and his buddies used to go back there and there was some --

ROBERT: Get some fresh eggs? [Chuckle]

JAMES: There were chickens back there and they got some eggs and you know stuff like that. Supplant the diet, the bigger food.

ROBERT: Well, one story in Holland that I forgot to tell ya was that one night, a real bad cold night, I found this farm and there was two large hogs, sleeping in the straw. I was cold and wet and miserable and so I got in between those and absorbed their body heat and I got dried out and warmed up then come morning I moved, but you know, I mean these are the kind of things that you would do in order to survive.

JAMES: That's the next question. How did you deal with the cold other than keeping your socks dry in Bastogne. That was a real problem?

ROBERT: Yeah, I think that the weather really was what got more guys than the enemy did you know. I lucked out. I really did.

JAMES: The reason these other guys had their feet frozen with, uh, they didn't take good care of themselves? It was preventable in other words?

ROBERT: I think it would have been yeah. But I think they let it go and they didn't change their socks. You know if your, once you get wet, yeah, its –

JAMES: Did the Germans shell constantly or did it go for so hard and then stop?

ROBERT: It was intermittent.

JAMES: Intermittent. Did they do it during the night too?

ROBERT: It was around the clock, yeah.

JAMES: But it wasn't continuous because they had to reload of course. And they had large artillery shells primarily?

ROBERT: Yeah, I think there were, like a 155 at least.

JAMES: How close did they come?

ROBERT: They came within yards.

JAMES: Within yards? Within yards they could hit them with your rifle. But they made no rush. No big bayonet rush on you or any then that you had to stop.

ROBERT: No. no.

JAMES: They decided not to try that.

ROBERT: Evidently they thought that they could do it with their artillery.

JAMES: I'm surprised because it seems like such an obvious solution.

ROBERT: Yeah. Oh, if I could skip back to Holland for a minute.

JAMES: Do it.

ROBERT: Well, I had a friend, a buddy in Holland, and his name was Shorty Siramella (sp?) and the reason we called him Shorty was because he was only, the Army had a regulation that you had to be a certain height, and he wasn't, he was a few inches short, but they let him in. So we called him Shorty Siramella (sp?) he was from White Plains,

New Jersey? Well, he and I went on night patrol one night and we found a factory and we found some jam and some bread and we loaded up with that stuff and [chuckle] we were on our way back and broke daylight. You know it got to be dawn and you have to cross those, in Holland, every time you have a canal you have to cross those, so every time you get up on top of one of those you are silhouetted. And these artillery shells were coming in you know, two at a time, and well when they came in why we hit the dirt and then after they landed we would get up and go. [BLANK TAPE]

JAMES: And then what?

ROBERT: After we loaded up with this bread and jam from this factory after we got done with our night patrol, we headed back for our location and we had to cross these ridges, and when you get on top of them you are silhouetted, and these artillery shells were coming at us two at a time, and we'd hear them coming and we'd hit the ground and then after they exploded why we would get up and go always and then, couple more would come. We did this about three or four times and then we finally got back to our location and we got where we were supposed to be and it wasn't too long and a British sergeant showed up. He said, "Any shells landing around here lately." We said, "Yea, we thought the Germans were shelling us." He said, "No, our forward observer gave us the wrong range." [Chuckling] We were getting shelled by our own artillery. [Chuckling]

JAMES: The British?

ROBERT: Well see, that was our artillery. The British, we depended on them.

JAMES: I know it.

ROBERT: So we were getting shelled by our own guns. Evidently nobody got hurt. But, that's just something I happened to think of. Well, let's see --

JAMES: Now, how did you know that you're winning in Bastogne. Tell about that sense of how ---- [unintelligible]

ROBERT: I don't remember ever recall having --

[CAN YOU GET THE TELEPHONE?]

I don't ever recall having the feeling that we were going to win. I never really had that feeling. I always thought that we were going to lose.

JAMES: Lose what? The battle at Bastogne?

ROBERT: Yeah, all of the battles, in France, in Holland, and Bastogne.

JAMES: Oh, you thought that the Germans were going to overrun you?

ROBERT: Yeah, and on Myron and Seattle was in five major engagements all together,

JAMES: But you were confident –

ROBERT: No. Every time I went in I was scared to death and I thought that maybe it was going to be the last –

JAMES: Sure.

ROBERT: No, I didn't think ever felt, that we were going to win anything. Thank God Patton got there and we got relieved and got out of there.

JAMES: When you saw the first tanks coming up in the south of Bastogne, was that when you knew at that moment you were going to be okay?

ROBERT: Yeah, that's when I started feeling more confident. [Laughter]

JAMES: How about when the weather cleared and the airplanes came in?

ROBERT: Well, that helped too, you know.

JAMES: Yeah, I would think that would have fed your confidence because they could keep the Germans off your back too.

ROBERT: Yeah, that helped. That was a big help and both of, that sequence was a big --

JAMES: So what did you do after that delightful month in Bastogne. What did they do with you then?

ROBERT: They took us back and, let' see that was about, --

JAMES: Let's see you're getting close to the first year now.

ROBERT: Yeah, it was after the first of the year I think, it was early

JAMES: Went back to Reims?

ROBERT: Yeah, and then we were there awhile, and then we went to what they called the Rhineland Campaign. I don't remember the code name for that, I know Overlord was the D-Day France, and Market Garden was Holland. I don't know if there was a code name for Bastogne.

JAMES: Oh, I am sure there is, there probably --

ROBERT: There probably is. The Rhineland, we were, my outfit where we were was at Düsseldorf on the Rhine River. There was a house facing the Rhine River and it had a big window that faced the river and we broke the window out, or enough of it out and we had that all sand-bagged and set our machine gun up in there. See,

when I, when we had a second lieutenant that was what we call a 90-day wonder? And he came to our division and he transferred me in to the machine gun section because they were short of men? And I told him that, okay, I would do that but as quickly as he got some replacements,

JAMES: You'd be back by –

ROBERT: Getting me back to the mortars because you see the mortars were always set up a thousand yards behind the front lines and that's where I felt more comfortable. [Laughing.] But to tell you this story, on the Rhine River, I told this lieutenant, I told him, well we had that gun set up in the window you know, he wanted that machine gun set up on the river bank. I said, "Well you know if the Germans decide to cross the Rhine River, there is only two times that they're gonna cross. One is after dark and the other is just before it gets daylight in the morning. And those are the two times that you are gonna have that gun down because you can't leave it there all day." You got to bring it back and forth and that was a heavy machine gun and that means it took three men to move it. Then I said, "Well what are you going to do with all the dirt?" He said, "Well you gotta take your blankets down there and put the dirt on them and bring them and then dump the dirt behind the building." [Laughter from James] Well, we finally did what he said. And then of course we had a rotation like, we had different guys on the gun at different times. Well, fortunately I wasn't on the machine gun the night that the Germans crossed the Rhine River, but the three guys that were, why they got killed because they crossed at the wrong time when they had the machine gun disassembled. So that was one of the –

JAMES: The lieutenant had realized he had made a mistake.

ROBERT: Well, I don't know.

JAMES: All of them dead.

ROBERT: So then it wasn't long that I got back on the mortars and then I was real comfortable there.

JAMES: There was a jump across the Rhine River.

ROBERT: Yeah, we didn't participate in that. That was a different outfit.

JAMES: Okay.

ROBERT: Then after this Rhine land campaign –

JAMES: Did you cross the Rhine then and proceeded on into Germany or no?

ROBERT: No. We stayed on the eastern side of the Rhine River,

JAMES: The western.

- ROBERT: Oh yeah, the western side really. I'm confused in directions. Yeah, we stayed on our own side of the Rhine River and then after that we down to Southern France and set up sort of a perimeter there and my particular company was close to a small stream and I'm not too good at words, but I got something here [paper shuffling] however I thought maybe – I don't know where it is.
- JAMES: Well, we can get it later maybe.
- ROBERT: Well, it's a poem I wrote about the stream.
- JAMES: Well, we'll certainly look at it afterwards.
- ROBERT: Well we were set up on this small stream and we had to take turns on guard you know and I wrote this poem I call it "On Guard." Well, nothing much took place at that vicinity and then we were headed for the, at one point we were headed for the Brenner Pass in Italy. Before we got there, they cancelled that and we came back. But on the way there, the Germans were beginning to surrender. In fact they were surrendering in such large numbers that there were more Germans around than there was anybody else. They just threw their guns down and surrendered. There was like generals, and the roads were clobbered with, we could hardly get back to through where we were supposed to go. And then later we got in the Berchtesgaden area in Germany itself. We had the job of mopping up the SS troops that here hold up in the mountains around Hitler's Eagles Nest there in Berchtesgaden?
- JAMES: Was there a lot of them?
- ROBERT: Well there was, we routed them out with flame throwers.
- JAMES: Those were SS boys.
- ROBERT: Yeah, and then after they saw us using the flame throwers, why they kind of threw in the sponge and they –
- JAMES: Gave up.
- ROBERT: Yeah, they were supposed to stay till the last but they didn't. They gave up.
- JAMES: Flame throwers tend to discourage people don't you think?
- ROBERT: Yeah, I think so. [Laughter] I wouldn't want to be burned alive.
- JAMES: So what other, did I just sort of run out of things to do. The war is over here.
- ROBERT: Now, after the war was over in Europe, and that was May 8th, I think. V-E Day was May 8th, why they had a point system in effect. And I had points enough so that I could –

- JAMES: Yeah, I heard about that. With your age and everything you were ready to go home.
- ROBERT: Yeah, I had points enough to go home. But they couldn't ship everybody home at once so they said we'll ship ya home as soon as we can but in the meantime if you want to, you can go to Oxford University in England and take a short course. So I signed up for that.
- JAMES: In what?
- ROBERT: Well, I don't remember what it was going to be in, probably literature or English or something you know. Oh, I got ahead of myself. And then while we were, after the war was over on May 8th, they said, I noticed they had a notice posted that they wanted somebody to go to Berchtesgaden and work as a typist to inventory all that art and everything that the German Army had looted all over Europe. They had all of that stuff assembled in the old nutpwapt barracks in Berchtesgaden, and so I applied for the job and I got picked. And I was put on detached service from the 101st Airborne Division and they flew me to Berchtesgaden. When I got there, there was a sergeant from some regular infantry division and in civilian life he was a professor of art at Harvard University. In the Army he was a sergeant in the infantry division, but anyway his job was to try and determine what these paintings were and who they belonged to so that we could return them to the proper owners and my job was just to –
- JAMES: Catalog them?
- ROBERT: Yeah, to do the inventory. I was a typist and I typed up an inventory and I've got a copy of it here, 81 pages of legal-sized paper, single-spaced typewritten. They list all they paintings and the gold and silver, the sculptures –
- JAMES: Thousands of things.
- ROBERT: Yeah. They told us, I don't know how true this is but we were told that at that time that was the largest collection of art and other valuables ever assembled under one roof anywhere in the world.
- JAMES: I believe it.
- ROBERT: Yeah, and the President was scheduled to come and see that but he never, didn't actually come, but a lot of the important people did come and go through that sort of a museum. But then anyway to make a long story short, why when that was done then they were supposed to fly me back to Reims, well the weather was either bad over Reims or bad over Berchtesgaden, so they couldn't. So finally I asked the commanding officer if we couldn't requisition a jeep and drive back to Reims. He said, "Oh, I don't know why not." So this sergeant that I was telling you about and myself, we got a jeep –

JAMES: The professor.

ROBERT: Yeah, the professor. The art professor and myself we got a jeep and that's about 1200 kilometers, you know, from Berchtesgaden to Reims. And we didn't have no schedule so we could drive through the countryside and the war was over so we got to see some of the stuff that ordinarily you would never get to see. And we could, if there was any kind of an Army post or anything, we could go and get rations and get gasoline and continue our trip. So we went back by jeep. Then when I got back there I thought I was going to go to Oxford University? But then they came around and they said things have changed, and you can ship home now. And of course, I was a married man, I had a son, so I thought well it would be foolish for me to go to Oxford University. I am going to ship home so I said yeah, I'll go. So, guess what, on October 31st, 1945, why they loaded us up on one of these guiser ships, steel ship, we got about mid-ocean. Here comes a hurricane. Now, a guiser ship just like ours, only it wasn't a troop ship. There was 1500 men on board the ship I was on, but this other one, about a day or so behind us, left Europe about a day after we did. It was a cargo ship and only had the crew on it, and they didn't get very far out and they hit this hurricane and the ship broke in half. They sent out helicopters and stuff and they rested the crew that way, but see, our ship, they never could've even done that because we were so far out and this captain was a Norwegian and he never told us till afterwards that he didn't know if he could keep the ship afloat or not. Because part of the time we would be up on top of a, and then part of the time you would look down there in the valley it was like about as tall as the empire state building and there was about three days, iffy, and at one point in the storm I remember this distinctly. At one point in the storm everybody was real quiet. You could have heard a pin drop almost on this ship. This colored boy was kneeling down and he was praying. What he said was "Oh dear god, why didn't you make this ship a submarine?" That kind of broke the –

JAMES: Spell.

ROBERT: And then the storms started to subside and we were 16 days coming across because we lost, and then it took us a few days to get back on course, and so I thought that was interesting.

JAMES: So they went to New York or where?

ROBERT: We put in at some place I think it was Virginia, Norfolk?

JAMES: Norfolk.

ROBERT: Then we hung around there for a while and they got us on a train. We left on October 31st and then we were 16 days so that would be what?

JAMES: It looks like November.

- ROBERT: November, yes. Then they shipped us to Fort Sheridan by train and I was discharged there. I got on a train and came here and I got off the train I think on the wrong Thanksgiving time. I got off the train station in Adams and stepped into snow right up to my waist. I didn't go to work for 90 days you see I had railroaded before I went in to the Army.
- JAMES: Oh, that was your experience?
- ROBERT: Yeah. See I started working for the Chicago-Northwestern. The first time I worked for them was in June of 1937.
- JAMES: Doing what?
- ROBERT: Well it was on a work train. There's dandy dancers and stuff. That was real interesting and then I got laid off and there was no work for almost five years. But then I went back to work, in the meantime I went to California and back in late 1937 and came back early 1938. Then I went into the Civilian Conservation Corp. that was in Camp Peaboil near Necedah in 1938, 1939 and 1940 and maybe three months in 1941. But I wasn't there the full year of 1938. I was there three years all told, 36 months. Then I served a year in Sparta with the War Department. I had a civil service job with the War Department.
- JAMES: This was before the war?
- ROBERT: Yeah, this was before the war. Then I was with them most of 1941 and then almost a year I guess I was with them and then early 1942, like April 1942, I went to work for the railroad the second time and then of course in the spring of 1943 I went in the Army. So then I, when I came out of the Army they gave you 90 days to make up your mind. So I took that 90 days and that was one of the worst winters we ever had. Then when it got nice I went back to work and then I retired.
- JAMES: You worked at the railroad again?
- ROBERT: Yea, I went back to work on the railroad and I retired on the last day of May in 1980.
- JAMES: Boy, you were with the railroad a long time?
- ROBERT: Yeah, well it was 43 years from my first start but they gave me credit for 38 years of service on my, well you had to have 30 years and be 60 years old to get a full pension.
- JAMES: For the railroad?
- ROBERT: Yeah. So when I retired see I was 60.
- J; What did you do in the railroad when you were growing up?

ROBERT: Well, I was mostly a crew dispatcher.

JAMES: Crew dispatcher, in Adams?

ROBERT: Yeah, I spent my entire railroad crew in Adams. I was kind of unique in the railroad industry because I made all my papers when I got hired in 1942, and I made all my papers when I retired in 1980 because, I think because the agents, the gentlemen who was the agent when I hired out was, well I wouldn't say he was lazy but he would rather have somebody else do it if he didn't have to. Then when I retired, the agent then was the same way. He'd rather have somebody else do it if he didn't, so that's what happened—

JAMES: Did you reward yourself a gold watch in retirement?

ROBERT: No, no, all I got was a little plaque.

JAMES: If I may ask, what does the railroad retirement pay a person? After 30 years.

ROBERT: Well, let' see now, my railroad pension runs around \$1600 a month.

JAMES: That's a good retirement.

ROBERT: Well, I got a Veteran's compensation too, ya know, because of being wounded in action and I get \$323 a month from the VA.

JAMES: From the VA. You are on a 10% disability?

ROBERT: 30%.

JAMES: 30% disability because of your shoulder?

ROBERT: Well, yeah, I had a 10% but then you see my arm was like this. I was carrying my arm like this and if I wanted it straight, I had to push it straight with my other arm and I went on to Madison VA hospital, and they did a tendon transplant? At that time they rated me 100% for three months. And then they re-evaluated and afterwards they rated me 30% and that's where I've been.

JAMES: You got a nice result.

ROBERT: Except I don't have a lot of backward motion.

JAMES: Well, don't need much of that.

ROBERT: No, I could show you the wound.

JAMES: No, seen enough wounds.

ROBERT: No, it isn't really bad either.

JAMES: No, I am sure. No, I've sown enough shoulders up, I don't need more. So that was your life then on the railroad?

ROBERT: Yeah, mostly my life was railroading.

JAMES: Right, once the 400 came rolling through?

ROBERT: Yeah, the 400s. You see the first 10 years on the railroad I worked in the passenger department uptown selling tickets. And then when the passenger trains were removed I went down to the freight yards and finished off down there.

JAMES: My father used to travel to Minneapolis from Madison frequently, and I would drive him up to South Beaver Dam, and we would catch the 400 there, and then they would go to Minneapolis and then I would pick him up a couple of days later. He got to know the conductor on that route so one time I; they let me get into the engineer cabin. And so I took the 400 up with the engineer not all the way to Minneapolis but somewhere along, probably along Tomah. It went through Tomah didn't it, or nearby?

ROBERT: Sparta, I think.

JAMES: Maybe Sparta, maybe it went as far then I got off the engine and caught the next train coming the other way. That was a big adventure for me and as a young man. To sit in that cab with the engineer, boy what a thrill!

ROBERT: Yeah, it would be.

JAMES: Okay, now let me get back to the awards that you won. The Bronze Star we talked about and of course the Purple Heart and all the field ribbons. Now these epilates or these braids around your shoulders, tell me about those, just describe what they were.

ROBERT: Well, the one is the fourrageres awarded by the French government for the Normandy campaign. And one on the other shoulder is a fourragere from the government of Belgium and that would be for the Bastogne engagement and the other one on the left should is what they call the orange lanyard, and that's from the government in Netherlands and that would be for the invasion of Holland. Then of course our government, the United States awarded the division what they called the Presidential Unit Citation, was an oak leaf cluster because were awarded for the Normandy deal and also for the Holland campaign.

JAMES: Yeah, my hospital shipped one; we won some of those in citations.

ROBERT: And then also the Bronze Star has an oak leaf cluster and the reasoning for that is that anyone who has earned the combat infantry badge is entitled to get an oak leaf cluster on their Bronze Star if they have it.

JAMES: Oh, I didn't know that. See, I learned something today.

ROBERT: Well that's what they tell me.

JAMES: Oh I am sure.

ROBERT: And the rest of it is mostly campaign

JAMES: Oh, I know about those. Okay, have you kept track of friends that you were with in the combat area?

ROBERT: No, I haven't. I went to one reunion.

JAMES: A division, a First Division?

ROBERT: Yeah, I went, yeah, 101st Airborne Division.

JAMES: You went to one of those?

ROBERT: Yeah, it was about 1960 I think and it was in Nevada, Las Vegas? Well I got on the plane to go and the steward, the girl on the plane ya know? She came to me and said, "Is this your first flight?" And I said, well, this is the first flight that I stayed inside the airplane. [Laughter] She didn't catch on right a way and I said, "Well I'm going out to Las Vegas to the reunion of the 101st Airborne division, and we are used to jumping out of these things." And then she caught on, you see, so no, I didn't find anybody that I knew out there. Of course, a division is a big outfit. I wanted to tell ya that you know when it came time to ship home, there wasn't hardly anybody left that you knew anymore. Most of these guys were either dead

JAMES: Wounded.

ROBERT: Captured or wounded and sent home. So that –

JAMES: So when you go to a union there really isn't anybody there that you know.

ROBERT: No. A lot of replacements and so, I went to that one and I never went again.

JAMES: It was no big area doing, right?

ROBERT: And I tried to keep track of this soldier friend of mine from the Belgium Army, but he got married, and over there when they get married, they take the woman's name and it's sort of like here, and his name is Charlie Sprietdauvester (sp?).

JAMES: What kind of an arrangement is that? I hope you don't think—

ROBERT: Well, I don't know, that's what they do. So I wrote a letter to him, Charlie Sprietdauvster, (sp?) at the last known address that I had and I never heard from him again, so I lost track of him too.

JAMES: Have you been back to Europe?

ROBERT: I, my wife and I went to on our 47th wedding anniversary, which would have been about let's see, we were married in 1942, would be about 1989 would it. In 1989 well our kids all chipped in and sent us over to England and I was going to but I couldn't get a visa so I couldn't get over to the continent. We did go to England, Scotland and the British Isles.

JAMES: But you didn't go to Germany?

ROBERT: I didn't get to France, Holland or Germany.

JAMES: Why?

ROBERT: Well, I couldn't get a visa.

JAMES: Why?

ROBERT: Well, I don't know. I mean I didn't get one in time and then when I got over there it was my own fault I could have.

JAMES: You see, I went to Europe several times in the 70's and I think –

ROBERT: I think now maybe you don't even need one anymore do ya?

JAMES: I think so.

ROBERT: Well, my passport has expired anyway; I have to get a new one, another one. I do intend to go. I want to see, I want to see--.

JAMES: See if you can find that fox hole.

ROBERT: Well, I don't know if I could or not.

JAMES: It's probably covered over already.

ROBERT: Yeah. But I would like to see, I would like to go into France, and Holland, Germany.

JAMES: Follow the path

ROBERT: Yeah, go where we went.

JAMES: That would be nice.

ROBERT: You see, my wife says you won't recognize it, and if I went to Düsseldorf, she says, it'll be so different you won't know, and that could be true, I don't know.

JAMES: Full of decisions and expenses.

ROBERT: Yeah. [Laughter]

JAMES: I think that does it.

ROBERT: Okay.

JAMES: Thank you.

ROBERT: You are welcome.