

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

ARMIN F. KROHN

Anti-Aircraft Artillery and Cryptography, Europe and Pacific, Army, World War II.

1999

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Krohn, Armin F., (1918-2005). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 100 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Armin F. Krohn, a Shawano, Wisconsin native, talks about his World War II Army service originally as an anti-aircraft artillery gunner and later as a cryptographer in both the Pacific and European theaters of war. Krohn touches on basic training at Fort Eustis (Virginia). Home from Camp Davis (North Carolina) on furlough, he discusses learning of the attack on Pearl Harbor, being ordered to return to camp, missing a connecting train so that his battalion shipped without him, guard duty at the Wilmington shipyards over the holidays, and shipping out of San Francisco in January. Assigned to "Expendable Task Force 4802," Krohn talks about the boat ride on the USS President Taylor to Canton Island and the ship's running aground on the reef during a typhoon. He talks about duty as a cook. After seeing an advertisement, Krohn applied for the cryptography section and was assigned to an Air Corps radio station. He comments on preparing daily intelligence reports, seeing many different high ranking officers, and once getting Admiral Nimitz out of bed at 2:30 AM. Krohn speaks about the island's use as a stopover point for airplanes. He discusses riding in a B-17 bomber, recreation around the coral reef, and the constant need for new shoes since the coral was so damaging to shoe soles. Transferred to the Signal Corps, Krohn talks about running the administrative station, having difficult relations with a master sergeant, being recalled to Hawaii, and spending a few weeks in a quarantine camp. He recalls bailing water after constant rain at Fort Barrette (Hawaii). Krohn touches upon being sent to Camp Edwards (Massachusetts), spending time in the hospital after falling off a truck, his marriage while at home on furlough, and return to service. Assigned to the 132nd Antiaircraft Battalion, Battery D, he talks about duty as a radar crew chief. Landing on Utah Beach (France) shortly after D-Day, Krohn mentions following the infantry to the Siegfried Line, monitoring the radar near Bastogne, having difficulty with mud, and transfer to Holland. He comments on being strafed by German pilots, tracking V1 and V2 rockets, and firing procedure. Moving through Germany, Krohn talks about seeing the bomb damage, the high rate of American casualties during the Battle of the Bulge, incoming gun and artillery fire, crossing the Ruhr River near Jülich, constantly firing the guns at Wesel, and waiting for supply lines to catch up to them. He portrays German soldiers surrendering en masse and processing them as prisoners of war. He recalls V-E Day and replacements finally catching up to his unit. Stationed on occupation duty in a little town in the Harz Mountains, Krohn describes being put in charge of mounted patrol and riding difficult horses. Transferred to the 423rd Antiaircraft Battalion, he speaks of guard detail at a German prisoner camp near Hessisch Lichtenau and interpreting German. He tells of receiving enough points for discharge, his homecoming to the United States, and post-war work. He recalls seeing underground

cities and factories in Germany and addresses food, housing in the field, showers, and Red Cross coffee and donuts. He states he used the GI Bill to attend the University of Wisconsin and veterinarian school at the Michigan State, and he discusses getting a job in a state-run animal diagnostic lab in Madison (Wisconsin).

Biographical Sketch:

Krohn (1918-2005) served in both the Pacific and European Theaters during World War II. He married Margaret Blawusch in 1943 and worked as a veterinarian for the Wisconsin State Diagnostics Lab for thirty-one years. He settled in Madison and died in 2005.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, July 20th, 1999.

Transcribed by Pooja Singh, 2009.

Corrected by Channing Welch, 2010.

Corrections typed by Erin Dix, 2010.

Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Jim: [scraping sound] That's all right. We'll get you. You went from Fort Eustis where you had your basic?

Armin: Yes.

Jim: And did they specialize you in any way?

Armin: Well, I was anti-aircraft artillery, and at conclusion of basic I was classified I guess as a machine gunner.

Jim: So you did the blue games, the A and B down in Louisiana, those war games they had in 1941?

Armin: No, we didn't get down there. I went from Fort Eustis to Camp Davis, North Carolina November of '41—oh, sorry, not, yeah November '41. That outfit was headed for Hawaii before the holidays so I was home on a three day pass at Thanksgiving time, and when I got back to camp they said the departure was postponed until after the holidays so furloughs would be granted. So I came back to Madison on furlough. So I was here on December 7th when Pearl Harbor was bombed, and then December 8th I headed up to Shawano to my folks, got back here later in the week, and on Thursday night at the fraternity dance we got the notice to report back to camp immediately.

Jim: By telegram?

Armin: Yes, a telegram had come. So then the next day I started back and met four other fellows in Chicago and got on our train, and our train was two hours late, five hours late getting into Washington D.C., so we missed our southbound train by two hours. So the MPs couldn't bear to see us hanging around the depot so we spent the night in jail in Washington.

Jim: Oh, my!

Armin: And they made sure that we were on that train the next morning at six o'clock. And as we got into camp, well, we got off the train at Wilmington, North Carolina and then took a bus to camp and as we got into camp the last troop train of the outfit was pulling out for the West Coast and Hawaii. So out of four hundred men on furlough there were two hundred of us that didn't get back in time to go with the outfit. We got transferred to the battalion that was left behind.

So we pulled guard duty in the Wilmington shipyards over Christmas and New Years, and then we started packing and headed for San Francisco in January and sailed—of course I had missed the boat to Hawaii the first time,

but then the second one, why we caught—that was in, sailed in January from San Francisco, but about a week later they said, “Hawaii is about a thousand miles behind us.” Of course some of the—I guess they had told us on board ship that we were members of “Expendable Task Force 4802.” Somebody wanted to know what they meant by “expendable,” and they were told, “You’re not expected to come back.”

Jim: Oh, my.

Armin: So we sailed in a convoy, a destroyer and a couple of cruisers and a couple of freighters and some other troop ships. And then about ten days out, why the convoys split off headed to Australia, and another troop ship and our ship, the *President Taylor* I was on. *President Rutledge* was the other one, and we met two destroyers out there in the ocean. Then with the two destroyers and the *Rutledge* we continued westward while the others headed for Australia. About two days later we dropped off the *Rutledge* and one destroyer at Christmas Island, and we continued on for a couple more days and got to Canton Island.

We didn’t know what to expect there, but when they made contact they found that there were twenty-six GIs and some construction people there. It had been a Pan Air Station on the way to Australia, and a British consulate was there, he and his wife. They were the only inhabitants along with the native servant on that particular island at the time we got there. Then with the twenty-six GIs they knew we were coming because they had been informed by radio. So I was in the advance party that went ashore, and the heavy sea had started running so we quit unloading, and that night a typhoon hit and piled the ship up on the reef. They never did get it off. So we got down there, and of course at the time I had been cooking, which I had started doing back in Camp Davis, North Carolina when the regular cooks were gone on furlough—

Jim: Between shootin’ the machine gun and cooking—

Armin: Yeah, so I was cooking at the time. And then when they couldn’t get the ship off, why all I did was cut meat for the battery for a couple of weeks which was a relief from our chili con carne or spam, dehydrated potatoes, and spinach that we got and powdered milk. And of course water had to be—was brought along so we had to salvage the water off the ship. All our equipment was on the ship so—

Jim: How did you take it off the ship?

Armin: Well, they had, at those days they had cranes on the ship that were unloading, and then they’d unload onto a barge that had a tugboat there, and that took them into the dock. So then the engineers, civilian engineers, were in the process of building a landing strip for the Army planes. They did have a seaplane base there already which Pan Air had been using.

So then I baked for awhile, a couple of weeks there until another ship came in with some supplies and brought some quartermaster, and they took over that so I was supposed to go back on the machine gun. And I saw something on the bulletin board about wanting cryptographers so I went and asked the battery clerk what that was. So he said he didn't know, but said, "If you're interested, go up to headquarters and see the adjutant." So I hitchhiked a ride up to headquarters, and I got a third degree from the adjutant like I'd never gotten before about my past. He said "Well, we'll let you know." About two days later I was out on the machine gun nest, and somebody came looking for me and told me to report to the command post to the first sergeant, and he said "I don't know what the hell this is all about, but pack up all your gear. You're heading to the south side of the island tomorrow morning. Be there at the dock at nine o'clock and report to Captain Carter."

Jim: Had Pan Am stopped their—?

Armin: Pan Am was not flying there. They had quit December 8th I guess.

Jim: How did you get the Brits off the island?

Armin: How I'd get what?

Jim: The British off the island.

Armin: Oh, they stayed there. They were just the consul and his wife and their servant.

Jim: They stayed on Christmas Island then.

Armin: Yeah, they had barbwire strung around. That was off limits to the troops. So I wound up learning what the codes were in the Pacific, and I worked on that station for awhile and then the Air Force had been building up their landing strip and quarters on the other side of the island and built a radio station out there. So I got transferred out there. Of course there were four of us that were on detached service with Air Corps Communications. Then we got, the other three fellows were able to get transfers for the Air Corps Communications, but I was not because on the initial party that we had on the island, a thousand men, there were some infantry, light tank, some artillery—well, we were antiaircraft artillery—in fact, I guess that's all we had was the two batteries of 40 mm and the 3 inch antiaircraft batteries. And originally there were some French 75s on the island, and we had one tree where we stationed a lookout with the field glasses to watch the horizon.

I went over to the Air Corps radio station and worked there as a cryptographer, and we'd handle messages coming through for the Air Force,

for the Army, for the Navy. So in midnight we'd get the S2 [intelligence] reports coming through so we knew what was happening throughout the Pacific and be there for the commanding officer. And then we had planes flying through to Australia. Christmas Island was one of their stopping points; Canton was another one for Army planes. Then they went on to the Fijis, to Suva, and then on to Macedonia or Australia. The Navy planes came by way of, I think it was Baker Island, either Holland or Baker that the Marines held. And then they landed at our place and went on to the Suva, the British naval base. See—wait a minute. The Army base was Mandia in the Fijis—the Army landing place.

Then, let's see, generals come through, and it wasn't unusual at two o'clock in the morning to send—call message center and tell them, "We got a message for General so and so," and pretty soon, general or the adjutant would arrive and bring the general along. Give him the message and one night I got Admiral Nimitz out of bed at two-thirty in the morning—

Jim: Oh, my.

Armin: And he drove out there, three miles out to the radio station or where the code room was, and I was a buck private and had the five-star admiral sitting in front of me.

Jim: What was he doing on your island?

Armin: I was working in the code room.

Jim: I didn't know he was on your island.

Armin: Oh, he was going to somewhere off Australia. He had come from—I guess he'd come in from the States or had been to some meeting somewhere else and was flying on through again. Of course this message came from Washington that I gave to him that night.

And after that I get transferred to the Signal Corps, and they built the administrative station because I wasn't able to get transferred to the Air Corps. So I had to run that code station alone there handling administrative material. We'd gotten some new radio operators and with a master sergeant from the States that were running—to run the radio station.

And of course the master sergeant started telling me what to do with the codes, and I promptly told him where to go, and he turned me in for insubordination [laughs]. He reported me to the officer in charge of the Signal Corps communications there, and I told him, I asked him, "Who is in charge of the code room? The master sergeant or I?" And he said "You are." And I told him to keep that so-and-so out of there. He kept bothering me in the

middle of the night when I was trying to catch a few hours of sleep. So the master sergeant got orders not to interfere with the code room at all. So then I guess they built another new station there, and I sat there with I think I had one fellow that I started training when suddenly my name came on the shipping list. And a boat came in and I was due to go back to Hawaii. I was being replaced by a couple of officers from the States that were fresh out of code school, and so I packed my bag and we sailed.

Then about six or five weeks later in Honolulu I ran into the messenger who had been running back and forth and he had just come in from Canton the week before. And he told me that I was lucky that the ship I was on was out of sight because the commanding officer found out that these lieutenants fresh from the States had never seen the codes that we were using. And the guy that I had been training didn't know most of the call signs yet, and he was—he said things were a real mess, and they wanted to get me off that boat but the boat was out of sight when they [laughs]—

So I spent a couple months in Hawaii and spent some time in quarantine camp. They took about a third of the fellows off the boat and put them in the hospital, and they took another third out of the quarantine camp and would up in the hospital. I was one of the survivors, but I lasted about two or three weeks when I got back to a line outfit and got sent up to Schofield Barracks with pneumonia and a respiratory infection. There was a whole ward of them. See, we'd been down where we were pretty much isolated, although they had built the troops up to about 5,000 when I left and had some fighter planes stationed there, too.

Oh, that's where, I had my first ride on a B-17 on Canton, one that had been, a squadron that had been over making reconnaissance flights on the Marshall and the Gilberts. And they went—so they had to wait for a motor being shipped out from the States at the time. So the navigator was a PFC, the only enlisted navigator in the Pacific, asked me if I wanted to go up on their test flight, and I said "Sure." So when I got up there I had the bombardier's seat. You could see all that glass in front of you and below your feet, and you think "My god, how would they ever be able to find that little island down there!" [laughs] You can see the surf and so forth down there on the reef, the reef where we used to go shell hunting and chasing moray eels when we didn't have anything else to do.

But you got used to taking saltwater showers and that sort of thing down there. Of course, normal uniform here was a pith helmet and a pair of shorts which we had pulled down as far as we could. There were some regulations said three inches above the knees so you pulled them down, cut them off, and then you rolled them up. And then your cartridge belt, your rifle, and canteen, and that was—GI shoes which every three weeks you got a new pair of GI

shoes because on that coral they only lasted three weeks. So every ship that came in down there brought shoes as a part of the “A” priority supplies.

Jim: You said you became ill there.

Armin: Pardon?

Jim: You became ill?

Armin: Oh, that was after I got back to Hawaii, when we got up to Hawaii, but of course back there on Canton, that was the coral rock, or coral reef, and you’d go swimming in the lagoon with the sharks and that sort of thing. But anyway, we got back to Hawaii, and they didn’t know what to do with me there so they sent me off to radar school after I got out of the hospital and tried to get into OCS, and then in the meantime I got transferred back to the mainland so my transfer fell through or my application for OCS fell through.

Then we wound up in California at Camp Davis sitting around there for a month or two and then we went to Camp Edwards, Massachusetts. So I spent a nice summer on Cape Cod which would have been ideal except I spent two months in a hospital there. Got knocked off a truck that—we had gone, been on a three day pass to New York and that was too much effort to jump down off the back end of a cab over engine truck where we had taken a height finder to ordnance. And as the truck driver, a big burly guy, kept trying to get the tailgate open, and most of the guys went over the tailgate, and I was about the second last one when the tailgate opened and I was straddling the tailgate. So I wound up in a hospital with my leg hung in the air for a month.

So of course after I got out of the hospital I came home on a convalescent furlough and got married. And then I went back to the Army again, and then we finished our training up at Camp Edwards, Massachusetts and went down to Fort Bragg. Of course, in the meantime D-Day had occurred. So we loaded up in July and sailed for Europe, and we landed on Utah Beach. Of course at that time the beach was kind of quiet, but we got up on the Normandy. There were still a lot of dead animals and bodies laying around, and they were kind of hung up around Caen and Saint-Lo area so we went down to Saint-Briac and sat down there for awhile and—

Jim: What was your job now?

Armin: Now I was a radar crew chief.

Jim: You had so many—

Armin: Yeah, well back in the States here I trained on the radar. We had gotten stripes, all of us that come back from the Pacific. We were in the first group

that was brought back from a combat zone area for training new outfits. And we all got stripes of some kind or other. So I got a T4 stripe at that time, so trained on the radar which—well, I'd seen the old hayrack type in Hawaii and spent some time with that, but those were real “hit and by gosh” things that you didn't know if they were going to operate or not. And when we got back to the States here we got into the, I think it was the 584 [SCR-584, a microwave radar developed by MIT], which was an entirely different set up than what they had and we trained on here. Went to school here and then worked on that, and then we also got 90 mm guns where in the Pacific we had 3 inchers. We had 3 inchers in Hawaii the outfit I was with there.

Jim: Those are old guns.

Armin: Yeah, and in Hawaii it was at Fort Barrette which was off of Barber's Point, and they had mounted the guns, the 16 inchers from the Arizona up above us there. And so then we—Fort Barrette was a part of the island where they claimed it never rained, but it started raining just before Christmas and rained and rained. And all their fortifications which had been dug or trenches that had been dug in that clay and dirt there, all started caving in, and we were working 24 hours around the clock pumping the water out of the ammunition bunkers that were underground. And trying to keep up with that so we were working, you'd be on, I think, eight hours on and four hours or four hours on, eight hours off, some kind of shift like that we were on. But bailing [laughs].

But anyway back in the States we—I got to back Camp Haan and then back to or over to Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, and from there we trained and got out to Wellfleet a few times and of course Hyannis was one of the nearby towns and Buzzards Bay, and, oh, let's see, Woods Hole. I think there were a couple others: Falmouth. So we'd go up to Boston or New York on passes, but then when we left there we went to Fort Bragg to do some field artillery firing for about a week and then back to New York and shipped and of course as I said, we landed on Utah Beach—

Jim: And when? August?

Armin: And that was in July that we landed in there, and somewhere around, I think, around the 20th of July.

Jim: What was the name of your outfit then?

Armin: Then I was with the 132nd Antiaircraft Battalion. I mean we had been activated in Camp Edwards so I was with Battery D. And then from Utah—well, we went down to Saint-Briac and kind of sat around there. Things were kind of quiet, and of course there had been some German machine gun or German coastal defenses nearby where we liberated some straw ticks and mattress slats. So when we were supposed to dig in, why, we'd had at least

something to sleep on. And we loaded those up and the radar when we moved, and of course we had the radar which had a bunch of space to pack in our barracks bag and so forth, and then we had a—

Jim: This is on one truck? One six-by?

Armin: That was one unit; it's like a van, like about half the size of these semis you see today. And then we had, what was it, 2.5 ton truck that we hauled ammunition and gasoline. We'd load up with 90mm ammunition and machine gun ammunition and grenades and gasoline, and then they put eleven men on top of it and I'd ride in the cab where it was safe with my driver, and I had my tommy gun in the scabbard and my rifle behind me and the 50 caliber machine gun mounted in the ring mount up above. So we traveled over, got over into Belgium, and we got—went through the Siegfried Line, and that was quite the thing to see, those pillboxes. Of course they had gone through there, the tanks and the armor had punched through there, and see those so-called “dragon's teeth” [German concrete antitank barriers; square-pyramidal shaped] stretched for miles, and we were in the Ardennes for awhile there. And it rained and our guns were up on the line, and they fired at fuel artillery while I sat back in the woods with the radar crew. And we sat back there a couple weeks, and things got kind of muddy.

And then we went from there I guess we went to Bastogne, and we were supposed to dig in. They said we were supposed to stay there for the winter. That there was going to be a hospital or something there, a supply dump, some reason that we were supposed to stay here so I had a crew up there in the woods cutting logs, and we really fortified that old radar. Had combat engineers there with the bulldozers. They had, he could only get down five feet so we had to build it above the ground as he hit hardpan. So we built that up in five days, why, got it all done, and I picked up my mess kit, and go in the chow line. It was dusk, and the first sergeant blew the whistle and said, “All noncoms report to the CP.” So we all got our chow, and we're sitting there, and the captain said “March order. 7 o'clock in the morning you have to be ready to roll.” So we spent all night digging that radar out by hand. I was afraid to hook a CAT [trademark of a tractor with continuous chain treads] on to it and jerk the logs out. They were afraid I'd collapse the radar. So it took us all night. We slowly, carefully had to winch it out, and we got it out. We were on the road ready to roll at the next morning.

And then from there we got to Luxembourg where there was more mud, and from there I guess that was one of those places we had to—it rained some more, and they had to winch everything out, dragged, even the jeeps had to be dragged out with the CATs. And the trailers and they took three CATs to pull one of the 90mm out into the road [laughs]. And then from there we went on up to Holland where the Germans met us strafin' as we were trying to set up just east of Haarlem.

Jim: 109s? [Messerschmitt fighters]

Armin: Yeah, the Me-109s were there, and you could see the guy with his goggles and see him as he was squeezing the triggers where I had been standing about a second before. You saw all these punctuation dots, and I don't know, I thought I dove first, but the guy who was holding the sandbag for me wound up laying underneath me [laughs]. Got under the front of the radar and he went on, turned around and made another pass. Of course by that time we were getting undercover, and our machine guns were able to get unlimbered. Our 90s, we weren't set up yet for action because every time we moved, you know, we'd have all this gear. It took 20 minutes to go into action; it took us 20 minutes to unload all the personal [laughs] gear from the inside. So we were there for a month, and we'd watch the B-17s going over by the hour, see them come back. We'd pick up the LB-30s going over at night.

Jim: LB-30s? [a British version of the B-24]

Armin: The British were flying those. I think that's what they were, the LB-30s flying in formation over, bombing at night.

Jim: That's a heavy bomber?

Armin: Yeah, they were the heavy bombers, and then usually after our planes would go back we'd pick up "Bed Check Charlie" who had come up from the German side. He just always stayed out of the range of our guns, but we could count on him showing up at 9:15 at night, and we'd watch him make that run on our radar scope. It'd always be beyond the range of our guns.

Jim: Was it just to keep you awake? Was that the—

Armin: Yeah, well, I don't know what he was checking, but [laughs] we had to watch for those things. And we, I don't remember where, but I guess it was in France where we saw the first V-1s going over. And as long as we saw that taillight, that red flare behind them, why, we figured it was safe. But if the flare went out, why, then watch out. You didn't know where it was going to land. But then in Holland we had to, yeah, we were still picking up V-1s there. Then we were supposed to orient on certain spots to try and pick up the V-2s. They were launching those from railroad cars. And they'd move, they were mobile, so they'd move them around, and they had pretty well areas spotted that they were launching them from. But didn't know as to which one so they were going to try to pinpoint it and get word to American bombers so they could try to hit them before they moved them to another site again. So that was a couple of our batteries. We'd only have two batteries on search at the time and the other, for other planes, well the other two batteries were kept watching these sites trying to pick up this V-2 going up.

- Jim: Your battery was operating all the time, 24 hours?
- Armin: Yeah, we were, there were always two batteries on search, watching for planes.
- Jim: So you worked eight hours and then off?
- Armin: So, well, we worked, our battery we worked a 12-hour shift. You'd be on for 12 and then off for 12.
- Jim: How many men did it take to run your battery?
- Armin: It took us, let's see three, four, we could get by with four. We preferred five. We had five until we started to lose a couple. Actually, it could operate with three, but we had what they call IFF equipment which took a fourth man which was, that was to identify whether the plane was friend or foe. But if went into action or anything started showing up I'd be on the telephones, one in each hand, and I'd be watching the scopes with the two operators in front of me **[End of Tape One, Side A]** and the third one in the rear. I had to watch the two in front as to where the plane was going and tell them when to fire.
- Jim: Who were you in contact with at each moment(??)?
- Armin: We were—well, the director was in the center, and the four guns were at, we covered like a large city block, like it'd be four corners, and then there'd be machine guns outside of those, and the radar would be kind of in—well, not in the middle, but we'd be within inside with the guns there, and then we could control by remote control the 90 mms. So the boys on the guns weren't always too happy when we lost the plane and switched into search without them being notified right away because suddenly that 90 mm starts making 360 degree circles [laughs]. And of course they had to get off the platform if that occurred.
- Jim: That's what your phones were connected to?
- Armin: Yeah, the battery, and then there was a battalion hot loop so we knew its--of course usually I'd have a battery hot loop in one hand and the other one would be battalion to see what was going on there, and then on the battery hot loop, there'd be the officer, the range officer would be at the director. He'd be the ones that would give the actual order to fire.
- Jim: You were a T4 then?
- Armin: Pardon?

Jim: You were a T4?

Armin: Yeah, and I'd be watching the radar scopes, and when they were getting in range I'd tell them we were just about where their range was, and if I thought they were close enough to fire, I'd say "Now," and the officer would give the command to fire. And then the other crew, there was a buck sergeant, radar who was on, had the other crew. Of course the captain used to refer to us as his "high priced crew" because we had more stripes than any of the guns or any other group. [laughs]

But then when we got into Germany the first of December at Alsdorf, and the minute that we crossed—well, while we were in Holland there we'd have stuff going off our field artillery, shells be going over us, and one night they killed around 200 people in the town of Heerlen that was about a mile behind us. And so we had infantry outposts in front of us. We were up where the field artillery observation post had been or was, and so they'd bring the infantry up behind us and march them around in front of us to man the outpost there. So that first of December we went into Germany at Alsdorf, and the minute we crossed the line from the border you could see a lot more damage than what had been done in Holland. And I don't know where we went from there; we moved on in a ways, and see, December—

Yeah, we were, made one or two short stops, and then we got to the Ruhr River, or on the Munchen-Gladbach pincher movements; we got in on that. See that was, guess that was after we crossed the Ruhr. We got up to west of Julich, west of the Ruhr River and got hung up there, and the American troops were hung up on the Ruhr. And that's where we were sitting when we got ordered to the Bulge about the 19th of December. The Germans had broken through, and we had to pull out, and we went up to Stolberg to take over 1st Army positions at—where they'd pulled out to take over positions that the 106th and 108th had been in and where they were overrun. I think they were mostly wiped out, and they told us something like 75-85% killed, wounded, or captured of the 106th and the 108th because there were a lot of green troops in there, and they were up in the Ardennes, and a lot of those had never been on a firing line before. In fact, they told us some of them hadn't even been on a firing range.

Jim: Which [unintelligible] supposed to have(??) basic—

Armin: Yeah, they were about six weeks in the Army [laughs]. That was it.

Jim: ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] programs.

Armin: And so we sat up there at Stolberg, and Christmas day and machine gun, or German planes came down strafing our battery street while some of us had gone to the Ruhr for showers, and we could hear the activity as we came out

of the, we were in the showers yet, came out and got back in the trucks to head back to the outfit. When we got back there, the machine gunners had shot down a German plane again. These were all those cloudy days, and the American planes weren't flying, and we were down in our dugouts, the dugouts that the 1st Army had abandoned there. And then on New Year's Day we got, got another plane coming down the battery street with the machine guns. When the Bulge gets to—we could hear the burp guns at night, and watch the 88s shooting down the American planes during the day. Those 88s were pretty a good gun. Well, our 90s were the first thing that compared with them.

And then we went back to Julich at a slightly different location on top of a slag pile where an old mine was. And there we got into one night there they came over with everything, and I don't know how they missed us because the next morning you couldn't walk fifty yards in any direction without getting into a bomb crater, but they just missed our outfit sitting on top of the slag pile. The machine gunners, one of the machine gun crews got sprayed with gravel and stuff from a bomb that dropped right off the edge of where their machine gun was stationed. That night they ran out of ammunition; they were put, throwin' up armor-piercing ammunition, and they got the cooks out and headquarters and the clerks and all those and sent them back to the rear to bring up more ammunition that was back couple of miles behind us. But the radar crew, we didn't, the off-duty crew didn't have to go. But it would be beautiful out there, you'd see all these tracers lazily weaving those red lines all over the sky and those white bursts in there. Of course the off-duty crew would get out and watch the action while the crew on duty, all they could do was sit there and stay on the scopes and try to keep their target, keep the radar on target.

Jim: How far out did your radar go?

Armin: We went out beyond, was it, 32,000 feet or 32,000 yards, and it was 10,000 feet was what they figured the effective range that we could control them with the guns. Although the 90s, I guess they had about eight or nine mile range, but they weren't that accurate at that range anymore. They liked, I think it was around 10,000 yards that we'd like to have them at before they start really opening up on them. And we never did fire the 90s during the day when there was an activity going on. Why, the machine guns and the 40 mms and those would be shooting, but I don't know if any of the other batteries fired during the day, but we never did during the day. We just kept undercover then.

But from—well, we went from Holland on up to Germany at Jülich. Then our battery was supposed to cross—well, we had to wait for the jams to be—the Germans controlled the dams up the river, and if they blew those away they could wipe out any troops or bridges crossing. So we had to wait for them to, for the 1st Army to take the dams, and I guess finally they controlled one or

one part of it, and the Germans had the other part. And then the Germans blew that part, and so that flooded the plain below. And then of course we were getting the word that as soon as the water was down to a certain level, be ready to cross.

So I think it was the about the 23rd of February we got word to pack up, be ready to cross the next morning. The river, the water was dropping, and when it hit the certain level the troops were—then they put a barrage across that night. The other two batteries all fired like field artillery, and the tanks and the field artillery, everybody cut loose against Julich. So the next morning we were supposed to cross as soon as the shock troops were in 600 yards to set up on the other side of the river. So that night I don't know how many bridges were put across, but there was at least one bridge they put across nine times before they had one that stayed put. And when we crossed the next morning the shock troops were in about a 1,000 yards, and you could have walked across almost half the river on the dead GIs laying in it and the bridge entanglements.

Jim: Oh, my!

Armin: So you see all these bodies floating in the river there.

Jim: Americans?

Armin: Americans, yeah, the engineers and people who were trying to put the bridge across the night before under cover of that fire. There were pillboxes right up to the river's edge, and then, of course, as we got into the town they had to bulldoze a road through the town of Julich so that the tanks went through, and then we were going through with the tanks. And then after we got through there, I guess the little town they called Mersch, that's where we set up then. Well, the rest of the troops kept coming across. And then I guess we headed off around from there went to—all I can think of when I saw Julich was "Then there shall not left be one stone lying upon another." It was just a pile of rubble. And then we got on the Munchen—pincer movement around Munchen-Gladbach and wound up on the west bank of the Rhine River about three days before the infantry caught up with us. Some general comes through there wanting to know what a heavy outfit like ours was doing up that close to the front [laughs].

Jim: You said "We do, too?"

Armin: Pardon?

Jim: You said "We do, too"?

Armin: Yeah. Here, a guy's diggin' latrine up there in the apple orchard, and when the incoming freight was knocking the stuff off and the guys dove into the latrine which had already been used [laughs], come out and said, "What so-and-so had been in there?" But they were clipping the apple branches off the apple trees up above us there, and we were in the buildings there just below that. But then anyway, we got from when the things got straightened out again then we lined up on the west bank of the Rhine River, and for days they were hauling ammunition up, and for miles it was stacked up like cord wood about five, six feet high as far you could see, and guns were lined up, batteries were lined up with the 75's and 76's, 76's I guess. The tanks, they were in front of us. The 105's were in front of us. 155's were behind us. 8 inchers were about next to us. There was an 8 inch battery, they were on the same line with the 90's, and then they finally cut loose that one night.

I think it was around the 18th of March, something like that. Of course my radar crew, we were off duty so we just all sat up on top of the radar and took in the show that night. As far as you could see there was just an orange glow, north and south and behind us and in front of us, and you could sit up there and read a newspaper. And every once in awhile there would be about two or three seconds, there'd be sudden blackness. It'd die, sweep across, and then it would start a wave of orange come sweeping down again as everyone was opening up again. So our battery fired 2,000 rounds that night. Well, they were supposed to keep firing until noon the next day so they had, I guess they didn't start firing until a little later in the, 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning and then were firing about 60 rounds an hour after that. So their gun barrels were hot, burned the paint off. They were pouring water over the breech blocks and we put grease on the recoil slides and run off like kerosene, and here it's March, everybody's stripped to the waist working [laughs] there, and that old pile of shells just kept getting bigger behind them. We had to send some guys out there to throw them out of the way so that when they were firing—and some of them, I guess two of our batteries went across that night after when they went across, and then we sat there and waited until the bulk of the troops were across. That was at Wesel where we crossed there, or "Waisel" [speaks phonetically] I guess they called it. Then after we packed up when we left the Rhine I think that's where we had some fresh meat. We had butchered a few heifers that were running around there. Weren't supposed to do it, but we liked a little fresh meat for variation. And then you got, of course, you always knew where you were when the convoys would move up, whether you could tell what color the uniforms were laying alongside the road and whether how many empty cigarette packs and K-ration packs were alongside the road. As soon as they disappeared you knew exactly where you were, and that there wasn't anybody—

Jim: Nobody in front of you.

Armin: Nobody in front of you anymore.

Jim: On your side.

Armin: Or very few of them were there. But then we went on. We bypassed the Ruhr and headed out for the east. Of course, see back in Holland, see we never knew what outfit we belonged to other than the 132nd Antiaircraft Battalion.

Jim: You changed Armies—

Armin: We were kind of a bastard outfit. We got assigned here, assigned there, and sent on. And then we were—suddenly we were under Corps Artillery in the 19th Corps. Materialize was the 19th Corps was in Holland, and we were assigned to the 19th Corps, and then the 9th Army of stars and stripes materializes out of the bogs on Holland, and at the time the 19th Corps was the 9th Army. By the time we hit the Rhine, why—well, by the time we hit the Ruhr they'd picked up more units already, and then whenever we'd go, move up, we'd go with the 29th Infantry and the 2nd Armored. Usually the 2nd Armored would be the one that was pushing and we'd travel right behind them and 29th Infantry, and then I guess there was the 30th Division was in there, too, and then, of course, when we were at Stolberg I think there we were kind of adjacent to the 83rd division for awhile, but when we crossed the rivers, why, we were following the 2nd Armored or traveling with them.

Then we let out for the east, and the tanks in front of us—we got as far as Hamelin, we had to stop there and laid over for gasoline and ration supplies to catch up with us. They told us there were a couple of German divisions setting up there in the woods that had run out of gas, but they were straddling this highway that we were pushing east on. So we were south of Hamelin there for a day, and when we got—the Red Ball Express [enormous convoy system set up to supply Allied combat units after D-Day] was always bringing gasoline and ammunition up, food supplies, and they brought us, caught up with us there. And then we headed on again, and you go through these little towns, the Germans are frantically trying to surrender. You know, they're hanging out white flags as we go through the towns.

Jim: So you didn't see any [unintelligible]?

Armin: Pardon?

Jim: So you didn't encounter soldiers?

Armin: Civilians, mostly civilians. We did, but then as we got past Hamelin, then we start running into German soldiers on the road trying to surrender. Of course we weren't messing around with anybody, taking prisoners. We'd just wave them on to the rear, and there were some trucks with infantry following right close to the tanks, and they were being dropped off with 50 caliber and 30

caliber machine guns and some ammunition and some K-rations and water supplies. We cut the wires and herd the German prisoners into these fields and tell them to—Germans would be throwing down their armaments, their guns and bayonets and coming in with their hands behind their heads. And the further east we got the more we saw of that coming by, and of course, we'd just wave them on. And people wondered, "Gee, with all those guys, they get a couple hundred or a thousand German prisoners there, and about two or three GIs sitting at the gate with a machine gun" [laughs]. And of course at that time the Germans are folding up, but from what we heard later that one of these Panzer outfits came down out of the hills right after we left Hamelin, but we were gone when they came down.

So then we got over to Magdeburg, and that's where we hit that in the afternoon, and we had got orders to stop there. The tanks had crossed and gone across and had a bridgehead, but we pulled down to Schonebeck, and we sat there. We only had half of our outfit; the rest of them were scattered out for 50 miles behind where they'd run out of gas. And I got there with my crew and the radar got there. I guess we had two of the 90's and two of the CATs and one or two machine guns, and the rest were—it took them a week to find those guys back there [laughs] on the road and get gasoline to them because we got the word that one of the big supply convoys would get through to us because there were only about 10,000 of us up there at the—or less than 10,000 of us up there at the Elbe River, and the nearest, the bulk of the American troops were close to 300 miles behind us. So, only, if only a lone truck would go through or four or five, something like that, the German army was picking them off yet. So they needed larger convoys that were armed going, who were heavily armed than their trucks did which all they had were 50 caliber machine guns on them.

So then from there we sat around there and folded up our guns because everything was done by second of May up there, and we got the word that the fighting was—let's see, when V-E came. Then one day a couple of trucks pull in, and all these fellows start piling off, and we wanted to know who they were. They said, "Oh, we're your replacements." Well, God, we hadn't had any replacements since we left France. And of course our casualties weren't all that heavy either 'cause artillery fire would go over our heads most of the time, and we're just out of range of the small arms fire. But here were some of the guys piled off that we had lost back in November before from our outfit. They said, yeah, they were only in the hospital for a month, and they kept trying to catch up with us ever since. They'd go from one repple-depple [troop replacement depot] to another. He said, "Every time we'd get there," he says "you were gone again."

So then we pulled back and occupied and got into some little town in the Harz Mountains. I got called in by the first sergeant, and he said, "Here's a map of this area." He said, "We have to patrol this." He said, "They're only two roads

in here, and we can patrol those by jeep, truck and we'll have guards at each end, but all this area here, there's no roads in there. There's only foot paths." He said, "We have to patrol that by horseback." He said, "You've got some horses. You know something about horses." I guess he asked me first, you know, something about horses. Well, I told him I'd worked on farms so of course that was on my MOS or whatever you called it at the time, your history back there when you got inducted, I think; I think that was MOS they called that. And so he said, "Well, you're in charge of the mounted patrol. You go find yourself two other riders, and there will be an officer to go with you every day, and you be back here at one o'clock, and somebody will take you down to the German remount station that was about a mile down the road," a German remount station and breeding farm, yeah, a mile, maybe two miles down there.

So anyway, so I get back, I found my buddy and another guy that was willing to go. So and then the lieutenant came, the junior lieutenant, so they took us down to that station, and they told the guy to saddle up some horses for us and boy, the way those Russian prisoners swarmed in on the horses, the horses were about climbing the wall in front of us. My god, that's what we gotta ride? [laughs] And we had a couple of four-year-old Hanovers. They're big, tall horses, and then there were two Regular Army horses, or cavalry horses that they were two smaller ones.

So my buddy took one of those, and the lieutenant took the supposedly the easiest one to ride. Well, no, wait a minute—my buddy didn't take that little chestnut. It was another corporal there that took that one. Well, my buddy took the big, big chestnut, and so when he got on the saddle, why, the other two guys they mounted and started out the courtyard. So my buddy gets onto the big sorrel, or chestnut I guess they call them, they're that kind of breed of horse, and he started out across that cobble—well, the jeep driver was supposed to hold the horse for him, but he let go of them before George had gotten both feet in the stirrups, and these are English saddles that we had to ride. So he took off across that cobblestone courtyard, and I sure thought that George was going to line up plastered all over the place. Horse went bucking and headed right straight for the opposite wall, and I sure thought he was going to hit that wall, but about that time George got his other foot in the stirrup, and he finally got the horse under control and circled around the courtyard and headed out the gate.

Then I got on this big old bay, and I was the only one that was tall enough to reach the stirrups on him, and he did some half-hearted bucking when we went out of that courtyard. In the meantime those two others they had started on the trail, and there was just a dirt road going, and so when they got out there a bit they let those horses run. And I kept trying to hold this old bay back and finally gave up on him and just let him run. And there were three of us, the two chestnuts and the big bay, we all wound up about a mile or more

down the road and turned back and suddenly the little [unintelligible] comes running up. And she says, “God, where’s the lieutenant?” [laughs] And we finally turned around and was looking for him. We find him way back there about a half mile behind us in an oat field walking [laughs]. We caught up his horse and went back and got him—

Jim: The horse kicked him off?

Armin: Well, he fell off or got thrown off, whatever. So anyway, that first half day we went out, and that was the last time I had an officer with me, and after that I had be eight hours a day in the saddle in that mountain country in English saddle. And I slept on my stomach that first week because I hadn’t ridden a horse for four or five years. So I guess we were there for about a month or more. So after—

Jim: You didn’t see anything on your--

Armin: Ah, we found some German ammunition stashed away, and a few little things like that. There were no prisoners, at least none that were wearing uniforms. If they were German soldiers they were in civilian clothes, and the German civilians wanted us to do something about the wild boar that were raiding your potato patches, and we could tell every time we got near a thicket where during the day where the wild boar were because there’d be tracks, and the old horses would start snorting. Of course we didn’t want to tangle with those boar because they could rip a horse’s belly open in a hurry, and they’d charge you, too. So we stayed away from them.

But when we’d go in to check anything we’d leave two guys back in the woods undercover, and they’d—usually we’d carry carbines when we were patrolling. They were easier to handle than a rifle, and we’d have two guys stay back in the woods to cover the two of us and that’d go in, and we’d dismount and walk in behind the cover of our horse, behind its shoulder with our gun poking around the front of the horse. But we didn’t need them for at least—didn’t have any problems there as such.

Of course those first couple of days those horses would be dripping wet and in a lather, and you had to take it easy with them; they hadn’t been used to that hard of work either, but after that, after about two weeks of that, why, they were doing pretty good. They’d only be wet under the saddle and of course by that time our blisters had healed too [laughs] and so forth. And then I don’t know, we went up, moved out to a couple other little towns to occupy, and then one day my name was on the shipping list to go home. I was supposed to go home on points so they were transferring high pointers to the 108th, and I think I wound up with the **[End of Tape One, Side B]** 423rd Antiaircraft Battalion.

They were, the battery I went to, they were using that to—they were setting up a political prison camp so they had a whole bunch of these political prisoners in this camp, and we had a couple. There were a couple of SS men. They got rid of those in a hurry because they were agitators, and they had some Germans there that could speak some English. There was a PhD there who was kind of the German in charge—[Approx. 8-second pause in recording]

I did a detail. I'd go to the prison camp, and it had been a German prison camp for where the Germans had been keeping prisoners. And the Americans had taken it over, and that's where they had been putting German soldiers now after the fighting stopped, and they were processing them and discharging them going home. So we'd go down there to get a work detail of German prisoners. So these fellows, they'd beg you to ask for them again, you know, if he had needed some more on the detail. So we found some guys that were pretty handy at carpentering so we were built a day room there with a bar and so forth in it.

Jim: So that was the attraction.

Armin: Yeah. And I had to get the straw and so forth. So then this one guy who spoke English that I had, and he'd be, well, we'd talk to his people. I'd tell him what we wanted, and then he'd tell the burgermeister [master of the town] or the places that the burgermeister would send us to, and we wouldn't tell the other people that I could understand German. He put me wise to whether it was a good deal or not, and so I'd kind of like to take him along because he knew his way around and what the score was because, you know, you get into a strange country and you don't know. So then he'd want to know if we'd stop at a bakery in a little town where they could pick up some bread to take back to camp. So usually I'd—these German prisoners had some money in there so I'd let one or two of them go in there to the bakery. And of course they'd come back because [laughs] they had a guard with them who'd just love to shoot one of them; who had a "grease gun" [machine gun].

Of course I carried a gun, too, but I usually had a couple other guards that were with us, and of course we had to be back by a certain time to the stockade. So I'd get whatever I wanted out of these guys, and the burgermeister of course had been told to line up this stuff before. Well, even before this already, whenever we'd get into a town and had to deal with any of the German population or so, I was one of two fellows in the battery that could speak and understand German. So usually they'd have the local people, they'd tell them to find an interpreter or somebody who could speak English. He'd have to come to the command post to do any dealings with 'em or what he'd tell the people what we wanted.

So usually the first sergeant would call me in and tell me to do something or other around there to be busy within hearing range of the interpreter and the

Germans here so to see if what he was telling him was the straight goods and what he was telling our officers pretty much what was true. When people would find out in some of these areas that I could speak German they wanted to know when I left Germany and when I immigrated to the States. Well, of course I didn't give them a direct answer on that, and I said well, my German had gotten kind of rusty because I'd been—or well, when I was a kid, you know, that my German had gotten kind of rusty because I lived in areas where they didn't speak German. So if I wanted to know what something was I'd just ask them, "Wie nennen sie dieses?" or "What do you call this?" and they'd tell me and so forth and most of the time I could carry on a pretty good conversation with them as long as they stuck to high German. And of course my low German wasn't as good, but I could understand that, too, at the time. Of course today both of them are real rusty.

So, well then finally I think I missed a trip to Sweden because I was—well, I guess that one was when I—well, anyway I went back on a three day pass to Paris. Meantime a shipping list came on, and my name was on it, and I wasn't there so I missed that one. And I guess I missed another shipping list when that came out. You never quite knew when they'd come out, you know. They'd take out a certain number of men to be sent back to the States, sent home to be discharged. In the meantime, of course my old outfit, they were supposed to go to Japan or to the Pacific so they took everybody out of there who had 60, above more than 60 points. So those of us that had over 100, why, we were in the, supposed to be on the priority list to go home. So then I guess a furlough came up or whatever they called it, recreation, to go to the Scandinavian countries, and I was ready to sign up on that, and then a shipping list came out, and my name was on it, and I wanted to go home at that time [laughs].

So then we got back to, went down to Karlsruhe where I couldn't understand any of the German there. See, this political prison camp, this had been up at Hessisch Lichtenau. That was up in the province of Hesse. And the Karlsruhe, I got down there, and I couldn't understand their local dialect at all. I'd have to tell them to find people who could speak high German. So then I could talk with them. And then we got on the train and went to Nancy and then to Le Havre, and there we sat at camp there for fellows that were being shipped back to the States waiting for boats to go back.

They had poker tables or crap tables all lined up behind the tents. These guys start in with thirteen tables, and pretty soon there was one table. And that one big game, the guy who won that had \$50,000 stuffed into two barrack bags, and they put a couple of armed guards on him with machine [laughs], Tommy guns until they got on the ship where they put that in the purser's office. Oh, when we went to Europe we sailed on the Queen Mary from New York, and of course we had picked up our equipment in England and spent three weeks getting ready to cross the Channel, and we got halfway across and then a

storm came up, and we pulled back into—see, I guess we shipped out of Southampton and then went back to Portsmouth, waited until the storm let up, and then turned around and went back, went across and waited until the tide went out, ran in at high tide and then let the tide go out and then drove off. Of course the old water was still a couple of feet deep when we drove off, but our equipment managed to get ashore alright there.

Jim: Did you go to any concentration camps in Germany?

Armin: I didn't as such, but some of our, when we were up at Shonebeck waiting for the Russians they sent a detail in. There were some camps in between us and the Russians that they had to go in and get the people out. We sent some men from our battery; I wasn't with that group that went over there. They had to go in and get some of those out. But we didn't get into the camps as such; although we did get into some places where we were underground cities, and you'd drive through what looked like a street that was on top of these concrete buildings underneath that had grass and lawns on it, shrubbery growing there, and then we'd get into the doors that would open. There would be a driveway going in that was camouflaged, and get inside and there were huge factories underground there that hadn't even been touched with the bombs and so forth when we got there.

Jim: Did you meet any Russians at the Elbe? [U.S. and Soviet troops met along the Elbe River on April 25, 1945.]

Armin: Some of our fellows got to meet them that were in the, getting these—we had this kind of a no-man's zone in between the Russians and us, and the officers had contact, and there were a few fellows that went with them. The rest of us, they didn't let us go in there to get direct contact with the Russians there. Well, actually when we were up there it took them over a week to come back. Some of our tanks were up into the suburbs of Berlin when they got called back. And it took them a week to get back because some of them had run out of gas over there, too, and on their way coming back, had to send some troops in there to get them back over across the river again. So there we had to sit there while the Russians took Berlin where we could've been in Berlin. The 19th Corps might have stopped there.

Jim: No problem?

Armin: Pardon?

Jim: No problem? You could have gotten in?

Armin: No, we could've. That day. If we would've kept on going we'd have been in Berlin, but, you know, that was the deal that had been worked out that—

Jim: Did the food follow you pretty well when you got into Germany, that still the supplies kept coming in okay?

Armin: Yeah, we had—well, of course whenever the phone would ring in the radar and says, “Pick up so many cases of K-rations” you knew what was going on the next day. When the phone would ring—

Jim: So what did that mean?

Armin: That would mean we were moving up. So that happened frequently. Then if we were lucky, we’d get 10-in-1s [a type of field ration]. Of course, those were being doled out too for supposedly for longer periods. Of course 10-in-1, that was 10 men for 1 day or 1 day for 10 men. So when we were back in Holland, some of us managed to—we knew a supply sergeant who managed to connive some of those for us.

Jim: What was in those that was better than the usual?

Armin: Oh, we had canned pork and canned beef in there. This is all cooked and ready to eat, hot, cold or you could warm it up. Well, it was an improvement over hardtack. There were some canned vegetables and some dessert. Of course there would always be some cigarettes and candy and that sort of thing.

Jim: Did everybody smoke?

Armin: Ah, not everybody, but a lot of them did.

Jim: You did?

Armin: Well, I did some at that time, too. I think quite a few of them. When we’d be moving up and I’d have a layer of 90 mm ammunition shells on the bottom of that truck and about half a dozen to a dozen cases of 50 caliber and then another half a dozen cases of more rifle ammunition and then anywhere from 10-35 gallon cans of gasoline and a little water and some other gear, and then they put 11 men up there, and somebody would lay up there and says, “Hey, got a cigarette?” And the other guy says “Yeah, you got a match?” You know you kind of wondered about things. Of course, and when when there’d be burning tanks alongside you when you were traveling with that kind of a load, and, you know, I guess we were lucky.

Then we get down low(??) and we got some of these 10-in-1s, why, I had a case of those, too. I had them buried in the sand underneath where I was sleeping, that tent I had pitched in the woods there in Holland or supposedly our foxholes. You’d dig only about so much, and then you’d put a tent over it. We had a little shack we carried along with us that we had liberated, and we had liberated innerspring mattresses. They had these beds with three sections,

like for a single bed with three sections. Well, two of those made a nice bed in our shack that we'd have which we'd have to tear down every time we'd move, and we had a tarp stretched over the top of us, and four of us would sleep in that. Like one night when things were getting a lit bit exciting, why, we had our gear up on the second above us, and I was trying to find my helmet, and some guy was leaning on it underneath my bunk and on my boots so that I couldn't get out right away. You know, you always put on your helmet and your boots to go out to see what the activity was and stand in this trench that you'd dug going into the shack. Well, and there were places we'd have pretty good cover over us depending on what kind of buildings or shelter we'd find to get under, but a lot of the time all we had was some canvas and a few boards above us. So any junk coming down, why—

Jim: Not much protection.

Armin: Wouldn't be that much protection. We were just always playing the odds, you know. I know one night when my crew was off duty and we were watching the activity, why, one of my crew was on top of the slag pile that had been dug by the bulldozer for where we put our radar in, and he was on the highest point he could find. Standing up there, "Gee, isn't this beautiful? We'll never see anything like this again." Gee, you'd see all these tracers going up and 90 mm bursts, and the bombs are rocking things. I went up there and dragged him down. I couldn't afford to lose a man there, but then I wondered what I was doing up there beside him.

Jim: Did you ever see anything of the Red Cross?

Armin: If we got far enough to the rear, we did see them a couple of times when we went to the rear for showers.

Jim: That's about it?

Armin: So you get a shower about once every, maybe you're lucky if you get one once a week; most of the time, it'd be once every two, three weeks. Then we'd go back there where there was some mine or something like that where they had these mass showers. See, and that's where like in one of those where I was when Christmas Day when the Germans came across and everybody was shooting at them again.

Jim: They would have coffee and donuts or something?

Armin: Yeah, they had coffee, and they had donuts.

Jim: Did they sell them or give them to you?

Armin: Well, I think they gave them to us at that time, the couple times we saw them.

- Jim: Did you see anything of the Salvation Army?
- Armin: Not that I remember. Because I think more, they stayed back where the infantry was or behind the artillery and that because the only time we saw them was when we went to the rear or went back like for showers or something like that.
- Jim: So you're about getting ready to go home now?
- Armin: Yeah. So we got—I guess we sailed on one of the Victory ships. Of course on that ship I got sick again, too, and got home, and got back to Camp Shanks, New York, and we pulled there. Of course the old [unintelligible] met us at the harbor, and the IRS people met the ship, too, to get their share of that \$50,000 pot that somebody [laughs] had won in a crap game. So we got into Camp Shanks and had a steak dinner there, and I guess we got a couple hours sleep, and then they rolled us out and got us on a train and headed us back for Fort Sheridan. We got into Fort Sheridan in the wee hours of the morning and lined us up and gave us furloughs and some money and sent us home, come back for discharge later on.
- Jim: 30 days or?
- Armin: I guess about two weeks later I went back to get discharged.
- Jim: So have you kept track of any of your friends?
- Armin: Oh, I did, a couple at first. I tried to, a couple of them, but then I didn't hear anything more from them. The fellows that we were with in the 132nd, they were almost all New Englanders and New Yorkers. Those guys still thought there were cowboys and Indians west of Buffalo. [Jim laughs] But on Canton there, I mean that outfit, you just left piecemeal going back, and you don't know what happened to those fellows. Well, we came back, you know you went to school, and you kind of lost track of things, and a couple years ago I found my history of the outfit which I guess had been sent to me sometime after the war. I didn't even know they had even been compiling that. There were pictures in there—they wouldn't—
- Jim: From that division or from your—
- Armin: From the battalion. There was also a brief history of the Corps, of the 19th Corps and what their path was. And of course we were directly under Corps Artillery. So of course that book had gotten kind of buried when I went off to school—
- Jim: Is that what you did when you got out?

Armin: So I went back, yeah, I went back to the—

Jim: To the GI Bill.

Armin: Yeah, the GI Bill, I went back to the University of Wisconsin here and was two credits short of my bachelor's there when I was accepted to vet school. So then in my first year of vet school I finished my two credits by correspondence for Wisconsin. Took a three credit course; it was a snap course.

Jim: So where'd you go to vet school?

Armin: Michigan State, so four years there. And then from there we graduated from there in '51. So I graduated from the University in '48, which I didn't know anybody in that class.

Jim: Then you came back here to practice?

Armin: Then I went to Illinois. I was down there for about eight months there and couldn't get used to that kind of a practice there with the cornfields and no hills.

Jim: Big animal practice?

Armin: Yeah, that was, well, that place was a third large animals, a third hogs, and a third cattle. And 85% of his cattle practice was beef cattle, and I'd been raised with dairy cattle. So I learned to rope in a hurry, and I learned to use leather gloves when I roped, and most of those farmers didn't know anything. You hand them a lariat and they promptly drop most of it in the manure, [Jim laughs] or they get themselves wound around the snubbing post. I had to do my own roping and learned how to stay out of the way of these beef cows with calves.

Jim: Are they harder to handle than the female cows?

Armin: Oh, yeah. As a whole, they were. Although the worst cow I ever had to handle was an old Holstein found in Grant County. That was a wild one, and I had three ropes and a nose lead before I got her tested [laughs].

Jim: They're just so darn big. They just stare at you as they stand there.

Armin: So when we left there, I came up to Wisconsin here to a couple of practices that I was going to look at, and by the time I got up here they'd already hired somebody else. My wife wasn't real enthused about going to some of these towns because she was a Madison gal. So for a temporary job I went working

for the state at the animal diagnostic lab. So that got to be a permanent job, a temporary job for some thirty years, and of course it was much like practice because I handled only referral cases, and I had the microbiologist and a virologist and a chemist and all that when I needed their help and so forth. So I got to see the odd and the unusual and the problem stuff. I'm the only one that—there are only two of us living in the state yet that worked with the anthrax outbreaks that we had here in this state. So I handled most of them. I saw that mink and dairy cattle and hogs, and the amazing thing was that you never saw any sick minks. You only saw dead ones and live ones.

Jim: Died that quick?

Armin: Yeah, they died that quick, and you'd go back ten minutes later and you'd find more dead ones. See, they had picked up some of those cows that had died. Mink ranchers used to pick up some of these freshly dead and disabled animals to feed the raw meet to the—so I even closed up a rendering plant that had been taking some of these animals because as soon we had gotten a report of suspected anthrax I'd head out there. Because I think the first ones I heard about when we were still in Illinois. The vet I was with said, "They're crazy. There's no anthrax in the Midwest." Well, there were scattered outbreaks due to contaminated feed that some raw bone meal that had been shipped in from India got into feed channels instead of bone black where it was supposed to go for sugar refining. And it got dumped into feed channels so we had outbreaks in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and you never knew where they were going to show up, but we traced it all back. In Wisconsin, we traced it back to All American mineral mixture, which came out of up around Marinette someplace.

Jim: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

Armin: Well, I got around to American Legion kind of late, but I didn't continue that either, but—

Jim: No VFW?

Armin: No, a friend of mine recently asked me to join them, and I don't know whether I should or shouldn't, but when you get out and go to school and you don't get contact, and when you go to vet school, that first year of vet school, you're only in class 44 hours a week, and then you got to study outside of that. Besides that I was working part time some too while I was in vet school. See that's where I learned how to embalm animals as a part time job [laughs] for the anatomy classes. So I mean this veterinary business has been interesting. The new veterinarians are never going to see some of the stuff that some of us did. We wrote the book on some of these diseases that they talk about now or the vaccines for—

- Jim: I have the same experience in medicine. I saw tuberculosis now that they never see tuberculosis. I mean all kinds of tuberculosis, not just of the bones. Now—
- Armin: I mean some of the old vets I was with they said, “Yup, I had a banger cow I cleaned yesterday” or “delivered a calf from.” They’d break out, have this allergic reaction. Their arm would all break out [laughs] from going in through the cow’s vagina. Of course, I went through the hog cholera days and the infectious bovine rhinotracheitis. They’ll never see the stuff I saw, the old virulence that—
- Jim: What was that? A virus infection?
- Armin: That was a virus, and, boy, they were really spectacular when you’d see that in a bunch of feeder cattle.
- Jim: It went right through the whole outfit?
- Armin: It’d go through the herd, yeah. Yeah, it’d go—
- Jim: You didn’t go in there and kill them?
- Armin: Well, the death laws, they’d usually die of concurrent pneumonia. Some people call it secondary infection; I preferred to call them concurrent infections.
- Jim: So this is here under the flu epidemic after the First World War that everybody died from. What they really died from was secondary causes—
- Armin: Yeah.
- Jim: Not the flu itself.
- Armin: See, and then I’d see salmonella outbreaks in cattle, and one of my first questions would always be, “Anyone in the house have diarrhea?” Yeah, and usually I’d get the answer, “Yeah, my wife” or “the kids,” and that would clue me in. Well, of course I got to the point where all I had to know was that the cows had a diarrhea and a temperature—
- Jim: That was salmonella.
- Armin: That there were more than one involved.
- Jim: You just made sure of that.

- Armin: Then I'd be pretty sure of that, and I'd take my cultures and handle it like salmonella. I mean, once you get that warm trickle or warm stream running down your pants leg you'll sure watch those tail heads when you went into the barn after that. [both laugh]
- Jim: Yeah, you had to be careful. That was contagious, right?
- Armin: You had to get out of the line of fire, yeah. And that stuff was contagious, too, you know. So you'd always handle it with rubber gloves and plenty of disinfectant.
- Jim: Well, I think we've run out of soap here. Anything special about your war experience that you haven't told me that you remember?
- Armin: Well, I don't know—at least kind of hit the highlights. You'd have to—
- Jim: What medals did they give you? What decorations?
- Armin: Well, let's see, I guess I had the—
- Jim: The standard ones, the European Theater and—
- Armin: European Theater and Asiatic Theater.
- Jim: Yeah, you had both theaters. Now, that's unusual.
- Armin: Yeah, and then I had a Good Conduct, and I never did get my Victory Medal, and let's see, I had the Air European. Let's see, what's the other one there?
- Jim: American _____ ??
- Armin: American I guess. And, see, I had three battle stars on the European one. Of course there are a lot of little things that happened that take a little time to recall or just kind of hitting the high points. I managed to come back without a scratch. Like, when we got to Fort Sheridan, we see these little fuzzy cheeked MPs, and they're trying to tell these fellows that had just come back to wear their caps and to put on their neckties and button their jackets, and the MP sergeant arrives up in the boost in a jeep there, and starts getting out, starts telling this fuzzy cheeked MP what they're supposed to tell these guys to button up [**End of Tape Two, Side A**], put on their caps and so forth and their neckties. And of course we're all wearing combat Eisenhower jackets and combat boots, and he looks at us and looks at the MP, and he tells the sergeant, he says, "You go tell them. These guys tell me to go to hell and a few other things." And the MP gets in the car and drives off.
- Jim: That's nice. Thanks.

Armin: I was supposed to meet somebody from my hometown. I guess I had gotten in my letter one day that he was at some outfit and he was trying to contact me, and we could never get together although our outfits were traveling parallel there for awhile. I don't know wherever he went after that.

[End of Interview]