

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
NORBERT LENZ
3rd Armored Division, Army, World War II
2000

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Lenz, Norbert C., (1917-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 80 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Norbert Lenz, a Manitowoc, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II Army service as a member of the 2nd Platoon, 83rd Reconnaissance Platoon, 3rd Armored Division serving in Europe. Lenz talks about the difficulty finding jobs during the Depression, how he got labeled a draft dodger, and training at Camp Polk (Louisiana). He talks about assignment to his platoon, desert training in California, and the trip overseas to England. Lenz describes the equipment attached to his platoon, duty as platoon sergeant, preparations for landing at Normandy in late June, landing in waterproofed tanks, and the shock of seeing dead American soldiers. He touches upon the problems caused by hedgerows, taking German prisoners during the breakout from St. Lô, and the treatment and sometimes shooting of German prisoners. He describes the platoon's first casualty, which was from friendly fire, and a retreat after discovering the group's first lieutenant had pulled out without word. Lenz and his unit were sent to take Marigny; while radioing positions, he talks about being wounded in the head and evacuated to England. After a few weeks in the hospital, he describes the increasing German resistance after crossing the Siegfried Line, door-to-door fighting in Eupen and Stolberg (Germany), checking church steeples for German observers, and problems retrieving dead and wounded Americans while under fire. Lenz comments on being diagnosed with combat stress related ulcers and sent to a Paris hospital. He speaks of guarding a prisoner of war camp in Cherbourg (France), being in charge of a "cage" of 250 prisoners, and food fed to German POWs. He touches on leave in England and attitudes of English soldiers toward American soldiers. He mentions his discharge from Camp McCoy (Wisconsin), using the GI Bill for an apprentice plumbing program, disability pay for his ulcers, and attending 3rd Division reunions.

Biographical Sketch:

Lenz served with the 3rd Armored Division during World War II. He was awarded the Silver Star for his actions fighting in France and the Purple Heart for a wound received in Germany. He settled in Green Lake (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.

Transcribed by Katie Seelow, 2009.

Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Jim: Talking to Norbert Lenz, the 3 of December, 2000. Where were you born?

Norbert: Manitowoc County.

Jim: Out on the farm?

Norbert: Out on the farm.

Jim: Grew up there?

Norbert: Grew up there yep—in a one room schoolhouse. Through 8th grade, then I went to high school in Kiel. Graduated from Kiel High School in 1933. And after I got out of high school I went to Business College in Sheboygan. Of course, when I got done with that, jobs were pretty hard to get. If I could get a job it was in a garage or a stenographer or something, working for only 45 dollars a month—

Jim: And that was in 1933?

Norbert: 1934. So my dad said, “For that money you might as well stay here, and help me on the farm.” [Laughs] So that’s what I did. Well, then of course I took small jobs—

Jim: Hold on we’re gonna stop for a second [Checks tape] so you worked on the farm for how long?

Norbert: About six years, something like that.

Jim: So that makes you about 24?

Norbert: I was 24 in 1940—in 1940, I took census. Counted in Manitowoc County and that took me about 2 months. And at that time census was a little different than it is now.

Jim: Oh really?

Norbert: Because they gave me the books and the literature on what to do. And I was in charge of the whole town, by myself. I had to take the whole town, it consisted mostly of farmers. There was one little unincorporated village, with a bank, and the banker he was the highest paid man in the town. [laughs] And at that time I wasn’t able to tell anyone, but I guess now I can, at that time he made \$8000 a year. And I thought, “My god that’s the business to be in.”[Both laugh]

- Jim: Right. You're set for life. Right? [Both laugh]
- Norbert: Most of the farmers, if they made over a thousand dollars a year—that was about it at that time, in 1940.
- Jim: No real worries if you could make a thousand a year?
- Norbert: Yeah that's right.
- Jim: That's incredible.
- Norbert: Yeah. So then after I took census, then I worked for a contractor out in Kiel, and I built silos for the rest of the summer, farm silos. And when I got done with that job in the fall, I went to California. I was out in California a couple times, before, over the winter. Took jobs out there—
- Jim: That's unusual. I mean in those days people didn't travel that much.
- Norbert: No. Well at that time, to get to California—One morning, me and another kid, we went down to Chicago we bought a paper, and looked in the paper. And at that time they didn't build no cars in California. So cars were all built here, and they were lookin' for drivers to take a new car out to California. And that's how I wound up—
- Jim: What kind, what company?
- Norbert: Plymouth. I took a brand new Plymouth outta Chicago. I got to Chicago at 12 o'clock, and 2 o'clock I drove outta Chicago with a brand new Plymouth. On my way to California—[laughs]. In had to pay for all the gas.
- Jim: What about a map?
- Norbert: Well, Route 66 didn't need a map. Of course I had been there, to California before. That was quite a deal. Then we had a monitor on the car, we couldn't go faster than 45 miles an hour, for the first 500 miles. And when we got to Oklahoma City—then you took the monitor off [both laugh]—then, after a while I drove all the way to California in a new car.
- Jim: Where'd you stay at night?
- Norbert: At motels.
- Jim: Were they decent motels?
- Norbert: A buck and a half a night, at that time, that's about all.

- Jim: What kind of a job did you get out in California?
- Norbert: Well previously, other years I worked as a roofer, did roofing jobs. But this last year I went—I went to a Cudahy Packing Plant. I worked in a packing plant and I made margarine. Me and one other guy, we made margarine at night. We made between 11 and 13 tons of margarine every night.
- Jim: In California?
- Norbert: In California—Los Angeles, right downtown,
- Jim: A margarine factory in downtown Los Angeles?
- Norbert: Not far from the Santa Fe depot downtown. You ever been in Los Angeles?
- Jim: That's the Union Station now, isn't it?
- Norbert: Yeah.
- Jim: Yeah, I took a train outta there about 10 years ago. Yeah, it's a pretty station, I remember that.
- Norbert: Oh yes, nice Spanish design.
- Jim: Right, nice Spanish motif. Well now, we're getting' close to war time here.
- Norbert: Well then, Yeah—like I said I had been working at the packing plant, I started on the 1st of December or something like that.
- Jim: Of 1940?
- Norbert: 1940. And I worked there till April of 1941. Then I went back to report to Manitowoc.
- Jim: So by this time you knew they were lookin' for you? Or you just assumed they were.
- Norbert: Oh I knew they were [laughs]. I wrote um, then my mother wrote um, the place you know.
- Jim: Course this was after they had the article in the paper that you were a draft dodger?

- Norbert: That's right, yeah. [Laughs].
- Jim: I can't believe that
- Norbert: Yeah, oh well—
- Jim: You weren't there, and they had no clue. And that's a terrible thing to say about a young man.
- Norbert: Yeah, that's right.
- Jim: Your mother must have been madder than hell.
- Norbert: Oh yeah, my Dad too. [laughs] Well I suppose I should've let them—Well they knew I was in California really. Because I took my physical in California. But I didn't know that if I was 1-A [eligible for military service]. I never got the report that I was.
- Jim: You didn't send the card to your home, in Kiel?
- Norbert: No. Like I said, on my birthday, the 24th of March, I got the letter from the draft board, "You're 1-A. Report for duty in 2 weeks."
- Jim: So where did you go?
- Norbert: Got drafted out of Manitowoc, in June— June 11th—1941. Then we went to Milwaukee for examination. Then I went to Camp Grant, Illinois. Stayed there four, five days. Then we went to Camp Hope [Polk], Louisiana in 1941. We were the first ones in the new camp. There was a brand new camp in Fort Hope at that time.
- Jim: Were you in the 32nd Division right off the bat?
- Norbert: No, this was the 3rd Armored Division. I got put in the 2nd Platoon, 83rd Recon of the Battalion, in the 3rd Armored Division. And I stayed in that same Platoon all through basic training, and into combat.
- Jim: So you started in the 3rd Armored Division?
- Norbert: Yes, 3rd Armored Division. 83rd Reconnaissance Battalion.
- Jim: Okay, so you were down in Louisiana for how long?
- Norbert: We stayed in Louisiana for—One year, and one month. 'Bout the middle of July we went out to the California desert. We took desert training—we

thought we were gonna go to Africa at that time. And boy, when we got out to the desert—Louisiana was hot, but the desert was about 120°. [Laughs] Oh, that was hot.

Jim: So you were all set to go east, fight in the desert, and fight Romell.

Norbert: That was about it. Then September we got a notice, we were supposed to take off for the east. We went to—Camp Pickett, Virginia is where we went. And from there we all got our furloughs, and we were supposed to go overseas. And we already sent some guys overseas—to Africa—to kinda scope things out. It so happened— we didn't know at that time, I found out later—our equipment, our tanks and stuff, that we sent over to Africa, got sunk.

So our equipment got sunk, then we got transferred from Camp Picket— then we went to Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania in January, 1943. Then we were in Indiantown Gap until the end of August. Then we went to Camp Kilmer, Virginia in the end of August, 1943. Then from Camp Kilmer we went to sail out of New York on Labor Day 1943. It was the 5th of September; we sailed out of New York—On the *SS John Eriksson*. It was a great big ship. Then we joined in a convoy out of New York.

Then we sail over—Course it got warmer and warmer, we thought we were going to Africa. And all of the sudden they made the announcement—we were going to England. But then it got colder and colder. We went way up around Iceland, and then we landed in Liverpool, England—let's see, what day was it?—it was around the 17th of September. It took us twelve days, in the convoy to get across. Then we went from Liverpool – we went to Warminster, England. Then we went to a little Camp. We were there from September, until after June.

Jim: So after D-day?

Norbert: After D-day, yeah.

Jim: Specifically what was your duty?

Norbert: At that time I was a Platoon sergeant. I was made Platoon sergeant when we left the desert.

Jim: What were particular responsibilities involved?

Norbert: Take care of my Platoon—

Jim: Right, but did you have a vehicle, or—

Norbert: Oh yes, I had a armored car. We had four armored cars in the Platoon—

Jim: Now these armored cars, were they APC—an armored personnel carrier—

Norbert: No—the motor was in the back—

Jim: No track?

Norbert: No, no track. It was a wheeled vehicle, with a turret on top. And we had a 37 caliber in the turret. With a 30 colt bound with a 37 cannon. Then we had 50 caliber machine gun in the turret, you could fire that everywhere. And everyone had their own personal weapons.

Jim: And an outfit like this was it a recon outfit? Or your duty was it in—

Norbert: We were the scouts. We had to leave every charge. We were the first ones to go.

Jim: And you went in groups of four?

Norbert: Groups of four, yeah—

Jim: And you were in charge?

Norbert: I was in charge. Then I had a scout section, we had four jeeps in a scout section. Each jeep had two, three people. And the scout section they had 60 mm mortars. Then, of course, we had the machine gun mounted on their jeep too.

Jim: They traveled with you?

Norbert: Yeah they traveled with us.

Jim: That was a large troop.

Norbert: Yeah it was pretty good size troop.

Jim: So that was about 50 guys.

Norbert: No well, it was about 43 or 44 or something like that.

Jim: There was a lieutenant in charge of the whole thing?

Norbert: We had two officers. One first lieutenant, he was in charge. Then we had a second lieutenant, he was more or less in charge of a scout section. Then I was the Platoon sergeant—

- Jim: So they told you what to tell these guys.
- Norbert: That's about it [laughs]. But the best part was, you know-- When we got out in the desert that time. I was acting Platoon sergeant then already—
- Jim: In training?
- Norbert: In training. 'Cause my Platoon sergeant got yellow jaundice in Louisiana. I was acting Platoon sergeant then. I wasn't Platoon sergeant till I went to Virginia. I was Platoon sergeant in Pennsylvania on the way across too.
- Jim: Now what kind of training did they do there in England? Several months before D-day. How did you train there?
- Norbert: We went out on certain—they had a place there—we went out nights. Then we went to Wales one time, right on the coast. We had the aircraft carriers—we shot our 50 caliber machine guns, to see if we could hit the targets that they was draggin' across the sky.
- Jim: Did you hit um?
- Norbert: Oh ya, we hit. [laughs]. Sometimes we cut the cables. That was pretty good, course they had all tracers on them you know. You could tell what they were shooting at.
- Jim: Did you have to care for those guns? Like the cannon, and the 37mm. Was your Platoon trained, to keep them in order?
- Norbert: Oh ya, I went to gunnery school when I was in Louisiana. In Fort Knox I went to gunnery school. You had to know how to take them apart and everything. Like the machine gun—we took um, the 50 and 30 caliber, we had to apart blindfolded, and put um back together. Because in combat, ya know, it's dark. [laughs] You work on um—you gotta know your weapons.
- Jim: Was that difficult to learn?
- Norbert: No, it wasn't too bad.
- Jim: Just gotta do it. Do it. And do it.
- Norbert: It's a repeat field. Just gotta do it, ya know.
- Jim: Now, where did you keep the ammunition? Was there a special case for ammunition, or—

- Norbert: Ya, we had a special half track.
- Jim: A half track?
- Norbert: Ya, we had that much with the Platoon too. And a ammunition carrier, we had. We brought the ammunition up. The we had one tank. We had—it's a M.A. tank, that had a separate 5 mm cannon on it. We had that in our Platoon too. Then of course you got the ammunition carrier and the half track we had. Then we had a—another half track besides that—we had quite a few vehicles there. And then we had one guy—one motorcycle we had.
- Jim: Oh really?
- Norbert: Yeah [laughs]. He was a messenger.
- Jim: Oh really, did he just have one duty—
- Norbert: Yeah, he was the best [laughs]—
- Jim: To keep contact with the rest of the world?
- Norbert: Ya, that's about it. Sometimes we were on black out. Ya know, and he had to send a message back to the company head quarters—
- Jim: What about the radio? No radio?
- Norbert: Oh we had radio.
- Jim: Alright, tell me about getting over to France, how'd that go?
- Norbert: Well—we didn't go on D-Day—On D-Day, we had camp all emptied out already. We had a English camp, is where we stayed at—it was an English army camp. We had already turned back over to England before we went over to France. And I already knew where we were gonna go in France. We had a meeting, like all the officers, and the non-coms. We were told where we were gonna go in France. We were told we were going to land at Omaha Beach. And we were going to our first base—Acigné was the name of the town, right off the beach—
- Jim: I've been there.
- Norbert: Oh, you've been there--- Well by god, we went over—we didn't go over until—we went over the 23rd of June we went over to Normandy. Right after the storm, that big—

- Jim: That's right that took out that mulberry—
- Norbert: Mulberry pier out there, took that out. So we pulled right up to the beach. And we waited for the tide—
- Jim: You were on an LST then probably--
- Norbert: On an LST ya, waitin' for the tide to go out. And then they put the ramp down, and we'd go right off. But then the ship right next to us—put their ramp down—they hit a place where they dropped a bomb—a crater— [laughs].
- Jim: So they dumped everything into the hole—
- Norbert: They had to go through the water, they can't get off. [Laughs]
- Jim: Well, tanks can't swim—
- Norbert: Well we had um all waterproof—we had the mufflers, and the air intake way up—still quite a deal though. Boy, ya know, we from the Midwest we didn't know a thing about the tides. Ya know, the tide went out about a quarter mile, and there was those ships on dry land behind us. That was quite a deal—then we drove off, and we got to shore, and we took our waterproofing off. And we went, we all had to—they call that impregnated loading, in case of a gas attack.
- Jim: I notice, a lot of the guys I talk to, they hate landing, they really hated that.
- Norbert: Oh, some guys got sick from that—
- Jim: The fumes, apparently they were terrible—
- Norbert: It was terrible—
- Jim: You got rid of that quick—
- Norbert: We got rid of that quick when we got on shore. [Both laugh]
- Jim: Then you found a camp that was already established, or—
- Norbert: Well then we went to Acigné. We got ahead of the artillery; they weren't in very far yet when we got there. The first night the artillery were shooting over us. We were right close to the front line when we got there. And in fact, the next morning—they brought the dead back from the front

– and that shocked us. When they saw a whole truck load of dead GIs in a truck. [Laughs]

Jim: That's impressive—

Norbert: [laughs] They know, boy, this is no picnic comin' here.

Jim: So did you set up a chow hall, or how'd you do that?

Norbert: Well more or less our company stayed together. And the company had a mess sergeant—

Jim: That would cook the food—

Norbert: That would cook food the first couple days you had—but that only lasted a little while then—we got there the 23rd and the 28th was the first time we saw combat. There wasn't too many of our officers—they have to get a feel for what's goin' on—you know, and some of us got pushed to the front.

Jim: You gotta tell me about that, now we're into a new experience for ya—

Norbert: [laughs] Yeah—

Jim: How did you deal with that?

Norbert: Well [laughs]—Scared as hell—Cause of all those darn hedgerows—

Jim: And you didn't know where the enemy was—

Norbert: And the fields they were small, they were only about maybe—if the field was about 20 acres, that was a big field. Most fields were only about 10 acres, some even less. And the hedgerows were about 6 foot high. And you didn't know where the hell the Germans were—well then, anyhow we got acclimated to combat, and that was on the 28th. Then we pulled back, and then we didn't get back into to combat until the 8th of July. We took off, we crossed the Eure River. My Platoon, we were in the lead. When we crossed, the river, the Germans, they were shelling us already. And it was, on this side of the river—railroad tracks—then up a little higher there was a town. And when we'd go past, we'd go through the houses in the town. A lot of times we saw a lot of American soldiers, burnt up and stuff. I tell ya, it was quite an initiation.

Jim: They were burnt up from what?

Norbert: The Germans were shelling them, and they burnt the buildings.

- Jim: Ah, and they got caught in the fire.
- Norbert: Yeah, they got caught in the fire. They were shelling when we went along there—
- Jim: Did you lose any of your people?
- Norbert: Not right there we didn't—then cross the river, the bridge—and when we crossed the bridge—then there was some Germans coming back already, surrendering. Entry was ahead of us a little bit. They already were across. And we got in about 5 miles— and we got started about four o'clock in the afternoon, and it didn't get dark till about 10:30, 11:00 at that time— So we were out about 5 miles, getting into their territory. So we parked our Platoon in a field, and set our—
- Jim: How was your protection set up? 50 calibers on the perimeter?
- Norbert: Well we did take them off the armored cars. Then one guy stayed in the armored car, the rest got off the armored cars—two guys to each—to protect the perimeter. And the scouts were out too—
- Jim: On foot?
- Norbert: On foot, yeah. So—well just before it got dark, we could hear some Germans already, off of the field, on the other side of the hedgerow. So one kid comes crawling back—he was by the out post— and he was gonna report in. And one guy shot him right between the eyes when he comes crawling back. He was gonna report that the enemy was right out there—
- Jim: Did you have passwords?
- Norbert: That was our first casualty. Oh, we had passwords.
- Jim: Guess the guy on duty got trigger happy.
- Norbert: Got trigger happy, ya.
- Jim: What did the captain, or the first lieutenant, say about that?
- Norbert: They didn't say nothing, they called me.
- Jim: Well, what the hell can you do about it?
- Norbert: What can I do? I said well, “All you can do is... Well it happened so.” The guy was shook up; he didn't want to do it.

Jim: The guy who shot him, I'm sure he felt terrible?

Norbert: Oh he felt terrible. You know he's one guy.

Jim: Right. How did the other guys react to that?

Norbert: Well it was terrible. You know, what can you do. I said, "Well all you can do is cover him up with a rain coat"

Jim: Did you take him along?

Norbert: No we didn't take him along. Meanwhile— and we stayed out there till about 2 o'clock or something like that—and the Germans were coming closer. They were dropping Screaming Mimi's in on us.

Jim: What was Screaming Mimi's?

Norbert: Some guy got big border-like, it was a artillery shell. And they scream like hell when they come in. But it was one big explosion. But when they came in, they [laughs], they scared the hell out of us. Then we could hear the Germans talking to us across the hedgerows. Then I could hear German tanks comin' in too. The German tanks, they weren't very quiet, they didn't have no rubber—

Jim: Well you didn't have any thing to oppose the German tanks.

Norbert: Well, we had about 75, so you know, we had our—

Jim: But not that much.

Norbert: Not much. So, then I went down, I was gonna talk to the—We only had the first lieutenant, the second lieutenant we didn't have no more by then. We only had one officer.—so I was gonna go ask the officer what the hell we should do.

Jim: Stay or go home right?

Norbert: But the officer, he already had pulled out!

Jim: He was gone?

Norbert: He was gone, he didn't tell us! Didn't tell us that he was going.

Jim: Chickened out—

Norbert: So he chickened out. So he took off. With his armored car. So then I got—

Jim: He left you?

Norbert: He left me. So then I got my other guys all together. I said, “We’re pullin’ out.” I says “Let’s go.” So—well it takes a while to get them all rounded up, get um all pooled together ya know—

Jim: Get your vehicle started and all that—

Norbert: Ya. So then when I got to pull out, my driver had to seal, or to close up the driver’s side. All he had was a little slit to look out. And I was sitting on a turret, I was guiding with my feet. Ya know, ya turn left, turn right. When all of the sudden, he turned right towards the enemy! So I say, “Hay! Open your gosh-darn hatch!” I says, “You’re going the wrong way!” So he backed up a little bit, and turned left. And then he turned left, then I got shot. The German shot me with—they had the tank gun—

Jim: Did they hit the car?

Norbert: They shot my back wheels off. Lucky the didn’t shoot higher. They would a shot higher, they would’ve—

Jim: Taken you off—

Norbert: They would’ve got the turret. Cause’ they shot the motor in the back and the back wheels went off. There were four wheels in the back, and they shoot two of them off. I call it the “Panzer faus,” we call it.

Jim: Oh yeah, so sorta like the bazooka?

Norbert: Like the bazooka—

Jim: Well that stopped that progress?

Norbert: That stopped that progress.

Jim: You got the hell outta that place.

Norbert: So we got outta that. I got my guys together. And then I run back and I got the, scouts are comin’ out **[End of Tape 1, Side One]**

—And they were behind us, the jeeps were behind us. And well one jeep came out, and one guy got shot in the chest. And he died too. So that was two casualties we had then. Then we got goin, and I jumped in another— Oh I jumped in one of the half tracks. We pulled out—we got outta there--

- Jim: You backed out of there.
- Norbert: Ya, we backed outta that. Then we got back about, oh I'd say about three miles. The Battalions had already set up, some pretty good stuff. We were safe for the night. But the next morning, when we woke up—well we didn't sleep, least' I didn't sleep that night—there was a gosh-darn German sniper up in the tree. And in the break of day, every once and a while, he'd clean somebody out. And we didn't know where the hell the shot came from.
- Jim: Did they kill somebody?
- Norbert: Sure, they killed about a half a dozen, Americans they killed. Finally we spot him up in the tree. And boy he [laughs]
- Jim: Came out, with a thirty or 47, millimeter—
- Norbert: [laughs] Oh ya see, we opened up and got him down.
- Jim: Bet there wasn't much left of him when he hit the ground.
- Norbert: Oh then, before-- when my officer left – I sent my motorcycle guy, my messenger, I sent him into the company headquarters. He was supposed to find out what the hell we should do, before I made up my mind to leave.
- Jim: So you got to a higher authority?
- Norbert: Ya.
- Jim: So how did he respond to, when you told him the captain backed out?
- Norbert: Well I didn't tell him that yet. Then I had the motorcycle back, and when he got there, the bridge was already shot out again; this was the second time the bridge got shot out. And when he got up to the bridge, he was up by the company commander. Both—the company commander got hit and—my motorcycle driver lost a arm. So that was—it was quite a night—and the best part was they asked me, “Who's the ranking officer in your company?” I said, “My first lieutenant is, the one that run out on me.” And he made captain. That night he made captain, he was up by the company commander.
- Jim: So your first lieutenant was now a captain?
- Norbert: Oh ya, he was a captain.

- Jim: Did you run into him then?
- Norbert: Oh ya.
- Jim: Well what did he have to say about him leavin you?
- Norbert: He thought we were all comin. He thought he left notice—
- Jim: He's not even leading the charge—
- Norbert: He thought we'd follow as soon as he'd leave—he took it for granted that we'd be following him—
- Jim: And you're supposed to believe that?
- Norbert: Well we didn't talk too much about that no more. Well then I didn't have no officer in my Platoon from about, oh—the 8th of June till about the 20th—I didn't have no officer in my Platoon. I was in charge of the Platoon. They put me in for battlefield commission. Course I didn't stick around long enough then. Because, on the 25th of July, that's when we had all the airplanes come over. They started coming at 8:00 in the morning, first the small bombers came—
- Jim: So, at the pocket. At what was it St. Ló?
- Norbert: Ya, at St. Ló. So General Mac Nair he was on the ground, he was in charge, he got killed. So we were supposed to—the plans started coming at around 8:00, at 12:00 the big bombers came. I saw 5 big planes get shot down; 2 B-17s, three B-24s, got shot down. Right above us, now they didn't fly too high. I could see the bombs come down.
- Jim: Were you thinking that one of these bombs would end up over where you are?
- Norbert: They got a lot of us.
- Jim: I know that, they fell short.
- Norbert: They fell short. And a lot of dust came up, and the wind blew the dust over us. And the bombs fell short. They dropped um into the gosh darn dust. And we were supposed to jump off at 12, but we got so demoralized, we couldn't go. We didn't jump off till the next morning.
- Jim: You were fearful of being hit by your own airplane.

- Norbert: Yeah, that's right. Then the next morning, then we jumped off. And boy, you see the German wreckage, all the dead.
- Jim: They left a lot of stuff
- Norbert: Oh, a lot of it. And then we broke through, and then we had fairly good going.
- Jim: And what about this battlefield commission you were gonna get.
- Norbert: I'm gonna get to that. Well, so, that was the 25th, and the 26th we dropped off, and we only got in—oh I don't know how many mile we got in—And on the 28th, the company commander, he deceived me that night--
- Jim: Your old buddy?
- Norbert: [laughs] My old buddy, he said, later on – this is funny—I saw him later back at he states, at reunions you know. He says, “Lenz, you're the one that took care of me, when I wasn't in the company.” I says, “Ya I did.”
- Jim: You didn't flinch, you did.
- Norbert: So that morning, he was supposed to meet with the Battalion at 7:00. So I says, “Hay, ya better get going.” Cause what were we supposed to do the next day. So a course, then he went. Meanwhile, then we went about—we caught a couple German prisoners. They were surrendering when we got on down the road.
- Jim: Tell me about how that went. You're slowly goin on down the road lookin' ahead. And all of the sudden you see these soldiers walkin at you.
- Norbert: They come walkin out. They'd had enough—I interviewed one, cause I could talk German—I interviewed him, I asked, “Where the hell did they come from?” He says, “I was right in here, I waited for everybody to go, and I was gonna give up. I just came from Russia, and that was terrible. And now they send me here.” And I ask, “For what?”
- Jim: Was he a Russian? Or was he a German?
- Norbert: He was a German.
- Jim: And he had been at the Russian front.
- Norbert: He'd been at the Russian front and he got wounded. And then he got sent to Normandy.

Jim: So he'd had enough.

Norbert: He'd had enough. So then—

Jim: So what do ya do with a prisoner like that? When you're busy, and you aint got enough time to deal with him?

Norbert: Well I took his papers, and I read, to know who he was, and we gave him his papers. And we said, "You just keep walking, with your hands up, and go find someone to take care of you." And that's what we did with most of them. We didn't keep many prisoners.

Jim: What, so you didn't wanna feed them? You didn't want to affect the morale?

Norbert: No, no—

Jim: You didn't wanna shoot them, or—

Norbert: No, we didn't wanna shoot em; a lot of them did though.

Jim: What?

Norbert: Shoot um.

Jim: Did they?

Norbert: Yeah, there were a couple of guys in our company that I know, that they shot the Germans. They told um to go back, and then *boom* they shot um. Well some of the guys, ya know the Germans, they pulled out—this got the Americans mad—They pulled out American cigarettes, now where were they getting the American cigarettes?

Jim: They'd get um from dead Americans.

Norbert: They'd get um from dead Americans. Well when the Germans would pull out a pack of American cigarettes, that'd—

Jim: That'd sign their death warrant?

Norbert: Yeah, signed their death warrant. [laughs] I never shot any though. I can say that. But some guys, they would. And then, the 28th we went, oh a couple of miles. And we got to a—what was that—a chalet they call it. That's where Catholics learn to be a priest?

Jim: Oh, a seminary?

Norbert: Seminary, that's what it was. They were all happy. They were come by us. But we didn't pay no attention to them. They were so damn glad that the Americans were comin. Ya know but then, meanwhile--

Jim: You were still in France though, so these were Frenchmen?

Norbert: And then, one of my armored cars got lost, some ways down, in a ditch. I didn't know what the hell had happened to it. So I was gonna go back, and look for um. And I jump in a jeep with 2 other guys, and I says, "Let's go look for, Johnson," his name was, the car commander, "to see what the hell happened to him." So when I got down on the highway—First before I got on the highway, there was, around the bend in the road, there was the gosh darn Germans, Tiger Tank. I says, "Hello?" But, lucky an airplane just had got um. One of the B-47s had shot him, and knocked him out. So we went, go a little further, and I saw, it must've been a hundred Germans lying in a ditch. They all got shot, the airplane must a got them too. But ah—

Jim: Soldiers?

Norbert: German soldiers, that must a come in, they must've been on a march comin' in or somethin. "Forget about them," I says, "There might be some alive." And I didn't, you don't wanna mess with them. Because the Germans, a lot of them, they had grenades on um and stuff. When you roll them over and the grenades would go off.

So, anyhow, then I went down, and all of a sudden, here comes, gosh darn—Patton comes pulling in that day. He was just—his 3rd Army was going. And they run us off god darn highway. They says, "You can't..." I says, "Well what the hell, I'm looking for one of my guys!" "Well I don't give a damn what you're lookin for."

Jim: Who are you talking to?

Norbert: A lieutenant colonel.

Jim: Oh so you had to argue with him?

Norbert: I had to argue with him. Right, well how the hell would I get back to— He says, "I don't care." So I made um [my troops] do a big detour and come back on the highway, and the darn Colonel again was there again. [Both laugh] He says, "Look man, get the hell outta here." So then we made a big loop, and then I run into one of our Platoons. The first Platoons, and I says, "Where the hell is the second Platoon and the third Platoon?" "Oh

they're down in a little town called Marigny." I said, "Well that town wasn't taken yet." Well, "Oh yeah, they're in there."

Well meantime, we made a big loop, then we drove into town. I forgot the name of the town, anyhow drove into town about the size of Rippon--Like maybe 5000 or so—we drove up into town. And we didn't see a soul. I says, "This gosh darn town isn't taken yet," I says, "Let's get the hell outta here." So we drove outta town, and then I run into a line of our tanks—they were all lined up—then I got up to the front of the tanks, and they says, "Where the hell you goin'?" I says, "I'm goin' down to Marigny." They says, "Well that town isn't taken yet." I says, "Oh yes, I got word that my Platoon is supposed to be down in that town." So I passed up the line. I took off in our jeep, and the tanks, they started following us. And we came past the farm house, and they shot at us.

Jim: Who?

Norbert: The Germans—

Jim: So there were soldiers, absconded from the farm house—

Norbert: Yeah, they shot at us in the Jeep. And they missed. So we jumped off. The driver pulled in to the ditch, we jumped out. Looked. Waited. Nothin happened. We jumped back in the jeep, and took off. Took—got into the back end of Marigny, the town. The town was more or less in a hollow, and the tanks, they were just comin over the hill. And the first three tanks that come up over the hill, they got clobbered by the Germans. I never saw the German artillery, the god darn, when I went by um. But they got the first three tanks, blew um up.

Jim: And the artillery was like what, a couple miles away?

Norbert: Oh, I think they must've been 88s, in camouflage. Right closer, cause those that shot at us, they made the mistake—by shootin at us—I suppose they got the order at the them. The tanks, get the tanks—

Jim: A little somethin bigger than your jeep?

Norbert: [laughs] Yeah, somethin better than those guys in the jeep. So those three tanks come over the hill—

Jim: They take um out.

Norbert: So when I got into town, first thing—one of our armored half tracks, that's really armed, I don't know who it was—I told the other three guys, "I'll walk ahead, and I will find out what has taken place." Then I run into one

of our Platoons. And I was gonna make a radio call to see where the hell my Platoon was. And while I was makin the radio call, I got shot in the head.

Jim: And you were outside?

Norbert: I was outside, I had the phone in my hand. Makin a call, standin next to my armored car. And that's when I got shot.

Jim: Just crease ya.

Norbert: Just creased me, the bullet came out of the middle of my helmet in back. And that was the end of me.

Jim: So that took ya out?

Norbert: Yeah that took me out. So—

Jim: Did it knock you unconscious?

Norbert: Ya I was out. Next—but I came to—I was one kid on a jeep, they had me on a stretcher on a jeep, and they took me to a first aid station. And when I come to the first aid station, that's when I came to, they were workin on me then. They had me up on a gurney like, workin on me. And when I was laying on the gurney, god darn mortar shells were coming in from enemies. So they stopped, and they all ducked, I said, "Hey what the hell, I'm up here." They left me up on the gurney. [both laugh] Just creased. I got a groove all the way around here.

Jim: I'd hate to get a wound like that.

Norbert: So, then I got into the ambulance, and I went back to the hospital. So close to Omaha beach. And the next day they flew me to England. And then—well maybe I got ahead of myself—there was a first Lieutenant, I was assigned to my Platoon just a couple days before. But I got to the first aid station, and the next morning, I look. We were on the plane there, and I look around, and there's my second lieutenant, he got shot in the throat. So we both were on the same plane going to England, first lieutenant and me. We landed in Swindon in England is where we landed, then of course, we separated. The officers, they have the separate stations

Jim: Bet you were in the hospital for long?

Norbert: Well it wasn't hospital for about, oh, 12 days. Then they send me back, and I go, well how am I gonna, I can't wear no damn helmet, and I had a

hell of a sore head. So then they took me to—well anyways they held me there for several weeks. Then I joined my outfit in Belgium.

Jim: You found the same outfit?

Norbert: The same outfit, yeah. Then we got into the Siegfried line. We were the first ones to go through the Siegfried line. The way it happened you know, we were way ahead, the Germans never expected us to get that far in yet. But we made a lot of mileage in that short a time you know. There were farmers out there workin the fields. And a course they had a castle between the Siegfried line and the pillbox. We found the farmers, the farmers too, the pillbox. So we hand an easygoing at that time. But then, when we got through, then the Germans knew we were coming. Then we had quite a fight. One guy, I know, he was from Chicago, he just came back the day before, he was in a scout, he was in charge of the mortars [??] His lieutenant told him, he says, “Keep those boarded up from Germans.” And the German shells were comin in, he didn’t wanna do it. “Well they’re just gonna shoot right back.” “You don’t get it, we are out in the open.” Sure enough they got em, and he lost a leg

Jim: So where have you been while he lost his leg?

Norbert: I was back, the scouts, they went ahead of us. So then we went into Stolberg. Our battalion, no our division commander was in Stolberg.

Jim: And that was you first German town?

Norbert: Our first German town was, it was something like Eureka, but it wasn’t Eureka. Eupen the name of the town. Eupen, E-U-P-E-N. Yeah then, we had quite a time cleanin that town out. But then, after a while then—

Jim: Well, how did ya clean the town out? Did ya go door to door?

Norbert: More or less yeah, door to door. The Germans they were— you know, when we were in Belgium, the people come really glad they got the Americans. But when we got to Germany, it was just, a different deal. They’d spit at us you know.

Jim: They’d spit at you?

Norbert: Oh yeah. The Germans, they were mad. They didn’t like us—

Jim: The civilians?

Norbert: The civilians, yeah.

Jim: They might be hiding soldiers in there.

Norbert: Yeah, that's right.

Jim: Did you have to crash into every house along the way?

Norbert: Yeah, just about.

Jim: And, where would they usually hide? Upstairs, or in attic, someplace like that?

Norbert: Well, now most of the civilians, they hid in the basements.

Jim: The civilians?

Norbert: Yeah.

Jim: Now did they leave the house open too?

Norbert: No, not too much. Well they usually they weren't in houses, church steeples. The first thing they went.

Jim: They hid there?

Norbert: Hide there yeah. Well then we got into Stolberg, and the division commander— And then we took care of the Garbahdt, his an outpost or whatever you might call it, his headquarters. He was in a castle, out of Stolberg. Stolberg wasn't taken, taken at that time. We went about half-way. Well first we were guarding the General, oh I'd say about a week. Then we headed, we went into Stolberg to relieve the infantry. At Stolberg, they had taken half the town. We were on one side of Main Street, the Germans were on the other side of Main Street. And every night, we sent out patrols, and they couldn't go very far.

Jim: Well they go patrol, and they see you.

Norbert; Yah [laughs] those gosh darn assholes, were in the open. And course, well you know, they couldn't help but make noise. Every night we'd lose a couple of men. But still we had them on the patrol.

Jim: Did the Germans send out patrols too?

Norbert: They did the same.

Jim: Same problems?

- Norbert: [laughs] Same problems.
- Jim: They got shot?
- Norbert: They got shot too. One time, a guy got out, by the name of Adgridge, got shot right on the street, in front of our building. And we didn't get him back, till about the third day. There he was laying, and we couldn't get him back.
- Jim: Layin out in the street?
- Norbert: Layin out in the street, and we couldn't get him back. As soon as we'd show ourselves, we'd get shot at. We'd look out, we'd see a curtain move or somethin, and we knew damn well there was a German up in there you know. But finally we got –the grenade, or the incendiaries, and burned them out. So we start a fire across the street, and burned um out. There were quite a less few.
- But then, during that time, then I got bleeding ulcers. I got sick. I reported into sick hall, and Dr Puter—he was with us since Louisiana—he says, “Lenz, I'm gonna send you to the hospital in Paris. Get the hell outta here.” So I went to the hospital in Paris.
- Jim: So that was the last time your outfit--?
- Norbert: That was the last time I saw my outfit, yeah.
- Jim: How long were you in the hospital in Paris?
- Norbert: Oh, about two weeks. I think. It was a German-built hospital. They still had German signs in the hospital. “*Rauchen wird verboten,*” no smoking. And stuff like that. But through the window, in my room, I could see the Eiffel Tower.
- Jim: So how'd they treat your ulcers? They give you milk?
- Norbert: That's about it yeah.
- Jim: So these were combat stress related?
- Norbert: Ya, that's it, I was down.
- Jim: You were in trouble after that.
- Norbert: Oh, I had ulcers for a long time. I still get 10% disability from my ulcers. They cleared up, but I had them a long time. When I got back to the

States, I got a really bleeding ulcers—I hemorrhaged. One time, I hemorrhaged out of my mouth, damn near died. I was in Green Lake already then. Then, later on, a couple years later, I hemorrhaged out of the other end.

But now, my ulcers are pretty well healed up—

Jim: You haven't had any trouble in about how long?

Norbert: Oh, in a couple of years.

Jim: Two?

Norbert: Yeah, two.

Jim: So you've had trouble for a long time?

Norbert: Oh yeah. I had trouble a long time.

Jim: Now you didn't have any troubles like this before your service?

Norbert: No. I never smoked, and I kinda blame it on that. You know, I never smoked till I made it over to England. Everybody, we were given a carton of cigarettes a week. Everybody wanted my cigarettes always. They'd say, oh, "I'll give you coffee for cigarettes." And you know what they did with those cigarettes, they took them to town, and they gave them to the girls.

Jim: So you were really doin favors for um?

Norbert: [laughs] Yeah so, why not smoke my own damn cigarettes? So that's when I started smoking.

Jim: So how long did you smoke?

Norbert: Till 1950. Then I had my ulcers back, and I thought well that must be it.

Jim: Well that certainly is a no-no with ulcers. Smoking makes it worse.

Norbert: Yeah, so—

Jim: Well that certainly ended your chances of becoming an officer.

Norbert: Yeah, then at that point, and when I got shot that time that was different. Then after a while, I got outta the hospital, I got relocation a couple times.

Jim: From Paris you went to?

- Norbert: Recreational efforts. And then from there they reassigned me to a prisoner of war camp in Cherbourg, where we took care of—
- Jim: Now what are we talking about here, was this after the European theatre was over?
- Norbert: No, this was. I got to my prisoner of war camp in Cherbourg two days before the Battle of the Bulge started.
- Jim: Okay, now we're in December of 44.
- Norbert: December of 44, yeah.
- Jim: So now you're in Cherbourg. Workin in the prison.
- Norbert: In the prison. So my first job was, I could talk German—
- Jim: Oh you were valuable—
- Norbert: I was in charge of one "cage" they call um. That was about 250 prisoners in a cage. And they had it set up, they had the German prisoners in charge. They had their own kitchen and stuff for themselves. All the cookin was done—they were in charge of the cooking, the prisoners, in the cage.
- Jim: So you brought them the food and they would have to—
- Norbert: They'd have to heat it up. They made soup most of the time. Then all their stuff was heated with wood. We'd have to go out into the woods, and get wood for the stove. The prisoners, they did all the work. In fact, the prisoners, they did rkp. When I first got there, my officers they asked, I had a choice, chicken or pork chops, for supper. And I goes, "Boy, what outfit did I come to?" You know. Then when we had supper, we had a German officer sing music for us.
- Jim: Like officers?
- Norbert: Just like officers. Boy, I really got it quiet out there. Beats the front anytime. Then, I was in a cage, and oh, I took care of that for quite a while—
- Jim: You were in a cage, now what does that mean?
- Norbert: Well that means, I had about 250 prisoners. And they had a fence all the way around it—

- Jim: That was the cage?
- Norbert: That was the cage, and I don't know, maybe it was about 400x400 feet. It was quite a big thing. A big tent.
- Jim: That's why they were separate at several locations?
- Norbert: Yeah, and then the officers, they were separate too.
- Jim: German officers?
- Norbert: German officers, and they were—the other guys, they were all pretty darn good, they were pretty neat, never had too much of a problem—but the officers, they were kinda— they were SS, you couldn't trust em one bit.
- Jim: Give me an example of a certain problem.
- Norbert: Well, I don't know exactly how to say it—Well, they never were satisfied with nothing. They didn't get enough treatment, they always complained. They weren't treated like officers, you know. That's about all I can say about that.
- Jim: So it was the food, it was anything. They'd complain about everything?
- Norbert: They'd complain about everything. Complained about the food. Complained about that there care, they didn't get enough exercise and stuff like that. So, then after a while I got out of the cage. I was put on the wood detail. To get out and get wood. That was quite a job you know, we had to get wood. The German prisoners, they had to cut the wood out in the field. Then they hauled it in. Big pieces, and then back in camp, we had German prisoners cut it down to stove size.
- One day we were out, and going out to the woods—Frenchmen are all our guards. We didn't pull no guards in that camp. The Frenchmen pull the guards, they guarded the whole vicinity. We were inside with them, one Frenchman was the guard on my truck, and I had two German prisoners on the truck. Then of course, our driver, he was American—and we drove out to get a load of wood. And going out to the woods, all of the sudden we saw a German prisoner run out into the field. I told the French guard, I says, "Go get him!" I says, "That's a German prisoner from our camp, most likely." The Frenchman says, "No, I'm not gonna get him." So the German says, "Give me the gun. I'll go get him." So he gives him the gun, and he runs after him, he can't believe the German prisoner, he-- [laughs]
- Jim: He got him?

Norbert: Oh he got him.

Jim:q He brought him back?

Norbert: Brought him back, took him back to camp. The Frenchman wouldn't take him. But the German prisoner says— **[End of Tape 1, Side 2]**

-- "Give me the gun, I'll go get him." [laughs] He could a just about run away with the German. But he, he was pretty good. [laughs]

Jim: Good ole' French

Norbert: [laughs] Well yeah.

Jim: Otherwise you got along well with the French guys pretty good.

Norbert: Yeah, we got along pretty good. I couldn't talk French, but most French could talk German. So I would talk German with the French.

Then I got a job one time, I had to take a load of prisoners on a LST over to England. I guess I had about 400 prisoners that we put in the whole LST. We took off in the evening, and we had we had nothing but spam. We were supposed to have two meals of spam. Each prisoner was supposed to get two packages of spam. So I asked one German that talks up, that talks English, I says, "What should I do, should I give each one the spam now and one in the morning, or should we give em both at one time?" So you know, spam, it's pretty rich stuff, they stuffed it by the can. So on the boat, you know, we were goin to England—this must've been about 2 o'clock in the morning—

Jim: Just crossing the channel?

Norbert: Just crossin the channel yeah, well it was about 90 miles across you know. So I was upstairs, I had a room upstairs. And all of the sudden, a guard came up, and he said, "Lenz, come here. We got problems down below." No toilets, all they had was 50 gallon drums. He said, "Them drums are all full. Full of shit." [Laughs] So, what the hell you gonna do? Well you gotta empty the damn drums. Well the only way the drums—there was two circle stairways going up. And the German prisoners had to take the drums up. [laughs] And it would spill out, oh that was a mess.

So then they wanted alms on the ship. I says, we better have a different arrangement. You gotta get the prisoners up on deck. Let the prisoners go up, and then hose it down.

Jim: Hose everything down huh?

Norbert: Hose everything down, right. So that's what we did. But that was quite a deal.

So then , we got to England. And turned over the prisoners, and I had a week in London, to pass in London.

Jim: You get in trouble there?

Norbert: No, I had quite a nice time in London. I was in London quite a bit before too.

Jim: Did ya stay away from the girls?

Norbert: Ya, no no no. Girls—the girls there—I went to a dance one time with the girls. All English you know. And they didn't like that too much, I don't know, the English and the Americans. Owe a debt probably. The trouble is the Americans, they had too damn much money compared to what the Englishmen got.

Jim: And the girls they liked it, but the boys, the English boys, they were a little mad.

Norbert: Yes, that's right. So then I was there a week—Oh then another funny thing happened. Ya know when I checked in, I checked in a Red Cross station. I don't know what you call it, right downtown London anyhow. And they send me to—the English queen—

Jim: Buckingham?

Norbert: Buckingham, right next to Buckingham. I got in there, and boy what a place. The bathtubs were six foot bathtubs, and for a big guy like me, oh that was quite the deal. And then, during the night-- when was at the place—gosh darn, the last buzz bomb came in. That was the 25th of March. Last buzz bomb, or a B-2, a rocket. That was the was the last one that came in that night. The next morning I looked, and it took out a whole city block. And it wasn't too far from Buckingham palace. I'd say maybe, about, oh less than a mile. Pretty close, but oh did that bang.

So, then I was supposed to go back on the boat. But I went to the Air Force, the Army had the Air Force out in London, and I went to them. Said I wanted to go back to Cherbourg by plane. Instead of taking the damn boat back. It had been me, and two other guys, one sergeant and one corporal, we flew back by plane to Cherbourg. I was there—and one time, the first time I went back from England, was when I went back to my

outfit. In September of 44' I went back by English boat. And we slept in hammocks.

Jim: So you got back to Cherbourg, and then—

Norbert: I got back to Cherbourg. Then we stayed in that camp, then of course, then afterwards, the war ended. And uh—we turned our camp over to the French in the middle of August 1944, oh '45. The middle of August 1945, we turned it all over to the French. And we went down to St. Mere Eglise. There was another army camp. And from there, then I went home.

Jim: How'd ya get home?

Norbert: Ya know at that time there was the points. And when I got on the boat, they were taking guys that had 70 points. I already had over a hundred, I should've went a long time ago. But being in the prisoner of war camp, I had been there.

We went to Camp Lucky Strike, they call it. Then I sailed out of La Harve, in an LST. No, it was a victory ship, bigger than an LST, a victory ship.

Jim: Came back to New York then?

Norbert: I came back to Boston.

Jim: Boston—

Norbert: Took us just one week.

Jim: Did you go to Camp after?

Norbert: No, then when we got to Boston, then we had a free telephone call back home. That was a funny part too. So I called my aunt—I tried to call my brother. Cause he was home on the farm, my folks had sold the farm during the war to my brother— Then I called my aunt, and she lived about a mile from my brother. And of course she only talks in German. So here we are, standing in the open, and I talked to my aunt in German. [Laughs] Everybody looks, well what the hell is this. He just come back from overseas, here's a German coming back.

Jim: One of the prisoners got loose? [both laugh]

Norbert: Then I found out that my brother's wife was in the hospital. Had a baby.

Jim: And you weren't married then?

Norbert: No, I wasn't married then.

Jim: So you finally get home?

Norbert: No, not that night. No—

Jim: They didn't know you were on your way home. But they knew you were—

Norbert: No. I guess they just about knew, I must a wrote um.

And then I went to Camp McCoy, in Wisconsin. And then my brother, he had a plumbing shop in Green Lake, and they got me from McCoy. My parents, my brother, drove to McCoy and got me. I got out October the 10th of 1945.

Jim: So, when you got out, what was your plan then?

Norbert: Well, I didn't really know what the hell I was gonna do. I moped around a couple months. They I started working for Kohler Company.

Jim: You didn't plan on using the GI Bill?

Norbert: No, I should've, but I didn't. I did after a while though. I worked at Kohler. I was grinding bath tubs. I made fairly good money. But that was piece work. The more you made, you had to grind about 80 tubs a night to make good overtime money. But I come home—take a so where at the plant before I come home— all my bed clothes would be a rusty color, even after the shower. So I thought, well this isn't good for me. And then my brother, just started his business. He asked me to work with him out in Green Lake. So I went under the GI Bill. And I got journeyman pay as an apprentice. And that was pretty good, course at that time journeyman pay was only about a dollar and a half an hour. So I got 85 cents an hour starting here, then the government picked up the rest.

Jim: So then you learned how to do what?

Norbert: I did plumbing.

Jim: So you were an apprentice plumber?

Norbert: Yes, an apprentice plumber, and that took 5 years. And I wrote, got my journeyman.

Jim: So then you stayed in the plumbing business then.

- Norbert: Yeah, I worked here in town there for close to forty years.
- Jim: Now, did you join any Veterans groups?
- Norbert: I belong to the legion, I didn't join right away, I didn't believe in that at first. I went a long quite a while. The Veterans of Foreign Wars, I didn't join, but I sent the money all the time. And the Disabled Veterans of America, I'm a life member of that.
- Jim: Tell me about the disability, how did you arrange that? The VA Hospital in Madison?
- Norbert: Yeah, when I was in Sheboygan yet. I was working. I got sick as hell. And I went to, a civilian doctor at that time. And they told me, "Boy you got ulcers, pretty damn bad." Then they sent me to Milwaukee. To the VA hospital in Milwaukee to get a check. And they didn't believe me, the VA, they didn't give me nothing. But then I got the ulcer attack, back home, when I threw up the blood. I came in from work one day, I threw up, and my brother, he called the doctor. And he told me to go to the hospital. And the nurse came, with a little dish, she says "if you have to vomit, use this." And I say, "You better get a pail, cause I think I'm gonna fill the pail up." I said, "Come on with the pail." I thought I was gonna die. The doctor wrote—
- Jim: That you did have an ulcer? You did X-rays, so-forth and all that?
- Norbert: Yeah, that's right.
- Jim: And it proved that.
- Norbert: Yeahs, it proved it after a while. Then I had to wait, I had to way to Chicago to do that. They wouldn't gimme that in Milwaukee. I had to go to Chicago.
- Jim: To get disability?
- Norbert: To get my disability that's right.
- Jim: Really?
- Norbert: Yeah.
- Jim: You were waiting for your 10%.
- Norbert: Yeah, at that time I got 20%.

- Jim: I was gonna say, ten percent is not very much, you were pretty young.
- Norbert: 20% but afterwards they cut it down to 10. Now I guess it's about \$94 a month now.
- Jim: \$94?
- Norbert: Yeah. But it goes up every year, with the cost of living. You know, like Social Security. I guess when I started, I got about 38, but now it's up.
- Jim: Now, I guess. Oh do you keep in touch with any of the guys from the 83rd?
- Norbert: Oh yes, we got reunion every year. I don't make every reunion no more, I missed the last one. First one was in Chicago, then we had it in New York. Last year we had it in Indianapolis. Well anyway, we had it all over the country. I went down, we had it in Chicago, just about 3 times. In New York, about 20, but then New York got too darn expensive. So we had it in Milwaukee, we had it a couple times. Had it in St. Paul, we had it twice in Detroit. Phoenix we had it twice, New Orleans we had it twice. We had it in Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Antonio, Kansas City. Oh, one year we had it in Orlando. St. Louis we had it twice. I already mentioned Detroit.
- Oh, but it's getting smaller, we used to have about 1500 at the reunion, the whole division. But now it's down to about, below 600 already.
- Jim: Oh my.
- Norbert: Yeah, so it's going down hill. First we always had it in July, now we always got it in September for some reason.
- Jim: Well that's much more than—Ya know, to stay together as long as that.
- Norbert: Yeah, that's right. Lot of divisions that have had reunions, are already quitting. Like the 6th Armored division.
- Jim: There just aren't enough guys.
- Norbert: Not enough guys, right
- Jim: Alright sir, terrific, thank you.

[End of Interview]