

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

MARK NAGAN

Gliderman, Army, World War II

2001

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Nagan, Mark (1913-2007) Oral History Interview, 2001.

User: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 60 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips.

Master: 1 video recording (ca. 60 min.); sd., col.; 1/2 in.

Abstract:

Mark Nagan, a Kaukauna, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the US Army with the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division in the European theatre of World War II from Normandy to Holland and Germany, his return to work after discharge, and his membership in veterans organizations. Discussing the 1941 surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Nagan references a recent terrorist incident. Despite fatherhood, he was drafted in November 1942. Nagan discusses his training at Fort Bragg (North Carolina), his ‘volunteering’ for the airborne, and the difference between American and British gliders. He shares memories of his time spent in England prior to “the Jump” at Normandy (France), and the ‘jump’ itself (June 7, 1944, D-Day plus one). He copiloted a glider on his regiment’s next mission into Holland (Operation Market Garden). He remembers the friendliness of the Dutch people he encountered. Nagan touches briefly on his outfit’s movements during the time of the Battle of the Bulge. Nagan remarks on the reception, once in Germany, of the German people, and the behavior of German prisoners. He expresses wonderment that during his service he did not need to fire his gun but once. Nagan registers his dissatisfaction with the American decision to await Soviet troops before entering Berlin. He recalls that while in Berlin for the early occupation he is assigned to an honor guard at the Tempelhof airport receiving dignitaries. He ends his service as a first sergeant. Back in the US and discharged, Nagan resumed his old job at the hardware store in Kaukauna. He reflects on his disappointment that a promised pension for World War II vets was not forthcoming. Nagan joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars while still overseas, and the American Legion stateside.

Biographical Sketch:

Nagan (1913-2007) served in the US Army, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division during World War II. He was involved in the European theatre from the invasion at Normandy to the early occupation of Berlin. In his postwar years Nagan became manager of a local hardware store and was a lifelong member of his local VFW post.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001

Transcribed by Elizabeth Hackett, 2009

Corrected by Channing Welch, 2015

Abstract written by Jeff Javid, 2015

Interview Transcript

McIntosh: Are you comfortable there?

Nagan: Sure, all set.

McIntosh: Okay, talking to Nagan, and it's the 20th of July, year 2001. Where were you born, sir?

Nagan: In Kaukauna [Wisconsin].

McIntosh: Okay, and when was that?

Nagan: 26th of July, 1913.

McIntosh: July 1913?

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: What were you doing when Pearl Harbor was announced? Everybody remembers that. Like when someone—

Nagan: I was at home. I know that, but—

McIntosh: Probably about 1:00 o'clock or 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon is when it came on the radio that I recall.

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: You don't remember where you were sittin'?

Nagan: No [laughs]. Just was at home doing what you normally would be doing around the house.

McIntosh: What did you think about that?

Nagan: Well, I was kind of shocked, I guess. I don't know what else you'd call it.

McIntosh: Surprised.

Nagan: I think it was terrible, yeah.

McIntosh: But of course, at the time nobody knew what damage was done.

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: I mean, they didn't find out, you know, the extent until a year; how many ships were sunk and all that.

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Most people say they couldn't believe that a dinky little country like Japan would be attacking the United States.

Nagan: [Laughs].

McIntosh: It seemed unfathomable—

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: That they would do that.

Nagan: Of course, it was unfathomable that they let 'em get in there and do that. Somebody was asleep at the switch.

McIntosh: What do you think about that?

Nagan: Well, that always pissed me off when I stopped to realize that, but that's the trouble with military. I mean, you got too much of that.

McIntosh: You mean they're too fixed in their thinking?

Nagan: Well, yeah, they, ah, they think it can't happen here, you know, but it does.

McIntosh: Right. We seem to have to learn that over and over and over again, doesn't it?

Nagan: Right. Just with that ship now, what was it?

McIntosh: The [USS] *Cole* [US navy destroyer; attacked on October 12, 2000, killing 17 sailors, injuring 39].

Nagan: Yeah, yeah, that almost got blew up there.

McIntosh: Right.

Nagan: Where they let that boat come right up next to it, and they should have saw that. They should have known what was going on.

McIntosh: Right. They're in a danger zone.

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: And the standing orders on any of our ships that I was ever involved with—that you never let anybody come—you know, approach your ship.

Nagan: That's right. That never should have happened.

McIntosh: And, you know, it just—they should have had the fire hose on that when those boats, you know, these small boats come they usually shoot a fire hose at them to keep them away.

Nagan: Keep them away, right.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Nagan: Yeah, that was—

McIntosh: Well, as I say, we have to learn these things over and over.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: [laughs] Doesn't seem we're getting' very smart about these things.

Nagan: [Laughs] Yeah, right.

McIntosh: [Laughs] So were you inspired—what were you doing at the time? You were in the retail hardware business then?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay.

Nagan: But I was home. I think I was home for lunch, probably.

McIntosh: Right.

Nagan: Yeah, then I went back to work, of course. I checked to see if anybody else had heard the news.

McIntosh: Right. But you—by this time you had a draft card.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Well, why hadn't they called your number? That 1913, you were older than the average—

Nagan: Well, that's right.

McIntosh: Soldier.

Nagan: I never should have been drafted. I had a baby at that time, and they weren't supposed to be drafting anybody with children, but I got drafted, and I didn't fight it. I was one of these guys that thought, "Well, I'll go and do my duty, and—"

McIntosh: Yeah. That's a surprise because they didn't get into drafting fathers until about the third year of the war.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Until we started runnin' out of people.

Nagan: Yeah. I know when they picked me up, they weren't supposed to be drafting fathers.

McIntosh: Well, most of your friends and neighbors sort of selected you. Somebody must really not have liked you.

Nagan: Apparently! [both laugh]. I suppose, yeah [laughs]. I didn't think so at the time, but—

McIntosh: Well, I mean, that's the draft board—

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Or your neighbors, you know.

Nagan: Oh, yeah, a very good friend of mine, the one that drafted me.

McIntosh: He wanted your job, maybe, at the hardware store.

Nagan: It could be! [Both laugh]. Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. So, they up—so you're just a buck private into the Army, is that right?

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: Where did they send you?

Nagan: Went to [Camp] McCoy [Sparta, Wisconsin] first, and then we went from there to [Fort] Bragg [Fayetteville, North Carolina], and it was the middle of the night. They brought us into this big room, and they said, “You’re now Airborne,” and Airborne was supposed to be strictly—

McIntosh: Volunteer.

Nagan: Volunteers, here they said we’re Airborne, and I didn’t know too much Airborne. What I felt like—I wanted to fall through the floor because I was worried about what Airborne amounted to, you know.

McIntosh: You were right to worry.

Nagan: I didn’t expect that, yeah.

McIntosh: So without your [laughs] permission they put you in the Army, and then they put you in the Airborne also without your permission?

Nagan: That’s right, that’s right.

McIntosh: I think you have some people that are really been after you.

Nagan: [Both laugh] I never looked at it that way, but I think you’re right.

McIntosh: So at Fort—you took your training and your jump school at Fort Bragg?

Nagan: Fort Bragg, yeah.

McIntosh: How long was that school, three months?

Nagan: Of course, I didn’t have jump school. See, I was in—

McIntosh: Oh, in the gliders.

Nagan: Gliders, yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: Right. I misspoke.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: So, what was this like?

Nagan: Well, you learned what it was all about and how to load ‘em, and all that kind of stuff.

McIntosh: But they must have given you extra training, physical training, than the average G.I.

Nagan: Oh yeah.

McIntosh: Because of being—

Nagan: Your training was the same as, you might say, the paratroopers, outside of we weren't jumpin'. I mean, we did a lot of running and—

McIntosh: Right.

Nagan: A lot of—

McIntosh: A little five-mile trot before breakfast.

Nagan: Right, right [laughs].

McIntosh: Just to get the juices going.

Nagan: Right [laughs].

McIntosh: You do a lot of that?

Nagan: Oh yeah.

McIntosh: A lot of climbing and that sort of stuff?

Nagan: Yeah. Right.

McIntosh: They didn't ever consider putting you into a parachute?

Nagan: No, they didn't at that time because they needed glidermen. See, that was the first crack at gliders.

McIntosh: What outfit did you end up in that moved [??] gliders?

Nagan: Ah, the 3-2-5.

McIntosh: 3-2-5?

Nagan: Was it? Yeah, that was it was, wasn't it? Yeah.

McIntosh: I can check that in your stuff there.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: The 325th Regiment.

Nagan: Regiment, yeah.

McIntosh: And what was your first glider ride? That's what I think—was that a surprise?

Nagan: Yeah, because—and of course it was awful quiet.

McIntosh: That'd make me nervous, not having a propeller up there in front.

Nagan: Yeah, but at the same time you don't think that much about it, I guess [both laugh]. We thought more about it when we went across the [English] Channel into Normandy. Like I said, I think the flak was so thick we could've walked out on it. We were lucky to get across. I don't know how we got across the Channel.

McIntosh: Don't get ahead now.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: I don't want to miss anything here.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: How many practice flights did you have when you were at Fort Bragg?

Nagan: God, not too many.

McIntosh: Three, four, five?

Nagan: Three, four. Three, four is about all.

McIntosh: What'd ya sit on?

Nagan: I guess whatever we could find. There wasn't anything—

McIntosh: Well, there were no seats.

Nagan: They didn't have any seats in there, yeah. And of course—

McIntosh: This was one of those Waco gliders, right?

Nagan: No, this was—oh, yeah, it was the American glider.

McIntosh: That was the Waco. The Horsa was the British glider.

Nagan: The Horsa, that was, boy, that [James laughs] was like a bunch of matchsticks. That was all wood. Boy, when that baby landed, I mean, that was a pile of—

McIntosh: You had a chance to ride in one of those?

Nagan: No [laughs]. I didn't want to, either. Yeah, no, I—

McIntosh: Yeah, just the Brits used those.

Nagan: G-4A, I think we called them, those gliders.

McIntosh: The one you were in?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, that was a Waco.

Nagan: And then I ended up being in an antitank company. So actually we would have two gliders, one for the anti-tank gun and one for the jeep.

McIntosh: One gun?

Nagan: One gun.

McIntosh: And that was the only thing in that glider was that gun?

Nagan: Well, the gun and a few, a couple of the men.

McIntosh: Ammunition?

Nagan: And then—

McIntosh: For the—the shells were there? [??]

Nagan: Yeah, we did have ammunition and—

McIntosh: What was that gun, a 105?

Nagan: It was, but you know, the funny thing about it, we trained on the American gun, and just before we went in they changed it to an English 8-pounder. Why, I don't know, whether it was easier to handle in a glider or what. Well, here we trained all the while on the American gun.

McIntosh: Was that harder to use?

Nagan: No, it was about the same.

McIntosh: And the shell was about the same?

Nagan: About the same.

McIntosh: Show me about the size of the shell with your hands.

Nagan: Oh, maybe about yay, I guess.

McIntosh: Okay, about like that?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Weighing how much? Eight pounds, ten pounds?

Nagan: Oh. I don't think it weighed that much even.

McIntosh: Okay.

Nagan: Five, maybe five—

McIntosh: Five pounds.

Nagan: Six pounds. Yeah. Yeah.

McIntosh: And those had to be loaded individually?

Nagan: Right. Yeah, you uncocked the thing and—

McIntosh: Right.

Nagan: Threw the shells in, closed the—

McIntosh: So it's usually operated by three men?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: So, when the glider came down, when you were instructed then to race back to where that weapon was and get it unleashed and start draggin' to wherever you were supposed to drag it, I assume.

Nagan: Right, right.

McIntosh: Was it on rubber wheels?

Nagan: In fact, I went in with the gun.

McIntosh: Oh, you did?

Nagan: I went in with the glider with the gun, and then my jeep was in the other one.

McIntosh: Oh, a jeep.

Nagan: Yeah, for pulling the gun.

McIntosh: Okay, all right. And was it hard to get organized and you gettin' used to that gun when you were in training with it? Or was it fairly easy?

Nagan: Not really. It wasn't too bad.

McIntosh: Mm-hm. What was the hardest part of your training, do you recall?

Nagan: Diggin' foxholes, I guess, with your helmet [laughs]. Good training!

McIntosh: Where was your entrenching tool?

Nagan: Yeah [laughs], they taught you to use your helmet 'cause you didn't always have a tool, yeah. So a lot of times we dug a foxhole with a helmet.

McIntosh: Okay.

Nagan: If you think that was fun, try it sometime [laughs].

McIntosh: No, no, I—[laughs] this doesn't look like it'd work out. And did you gain weight in your training?

Nagan: Oh, I did. I did towards the end of the war because we got into places where they had a lot of beer, and we drank a lot of beer. Then we put on—that's the only time in my life I ever put any weight on. Otherwise, I always stayed—

McIntosh: Well, beer will do it.

Nagan: About the same, yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, 325 calories a glass.

Nagan: Yeah [both laugh].

McIntosh: Okay. Tell me this, um, was a—well, you lived in a barracks with, what, for fifty guys at Fort Bragg?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Somethin' like that?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you know any of those people?

Nagan: At the time, no.

McIntosh: You didn't--nobody else from Wisconsin?

Nagan: No. When we went in, apparently we didn't end up together. We kind of got split up.

McIntosh: After Fort Bragg?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: But everybody was in gliders, though?

Nagan: Ah, far as I know, yeah, where they ended up.

McIntosh: So there's no one that you went to training till the end of the war with then?

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: Okay, all right. And how long were you—when did you go to England? I guess that's what I mean.

Nagan: Hm.

McIntosh: Early '44?

Nagan: I would say, yeah.

McIntosh: January or February?

Nagan: Yeah, we went—

McIntosh: Do you remember how cold was it or—

Nagan: And we landed in Reading [England]. It wasn't cold when we went over.

McIntosh: Well, maybe it was more like March then.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: And you trained there—well, do you look back, you can think how long you trained before the real McCoy happened.

Nagan: But you know what happened going across? We went across in an English ship that was manned by blacks, and the food wasn't too good. And going across, we went in a convoy, of course, but apparently some kind of a shot went off near us, and it sprung a leak in the ship so we had to pull out of the group and ended up in Newfoundland, and we laid there for a month.

McIntosh: Fixin' the hole in the ship?

Nagan: On that ship. That was terrible. I mean, the food wasn't any good. And when we got rescued with an American ship, that was heaven. We got some good food then. Otherwise, we didn't get much to eat on that English ship.

McIntosh: Okay, and when you got to England, was the—hold it.

Nagan: [inaudible] an old school building.

McIntosh: How big was your outfit, this 325th? 250 guys, or is that—

Nagan: About that, yeah. There was three platoons.

McIntosh: Three platoons. That'd be about right then.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: And you were in a school building?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: But they just put cots?

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Where'd they feed you?

Nagan: It was all right. We got fed good. I don't remember just what—

McIntosh: Where'd they feed you, out in the tent, or—

Nagan: Out in the other building there where they had the mess.

McIntosh: Now, what was your practice training in England? How was that different than at Fort Bragg?

Nagan: Find that hard to remember this, so we didn't do too much there.

McIntosh: But you did some gliding, though, didn't you?

Nagan: Very little, very little.

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Nagan: It was surprising, yeah. We had very little glider training.

McIntosh: So it was just physical therapy then all the time.

Nagan: [Laughs] Yeah.

McIntosh: Getting you ready for the—

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: The jump across.

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: Did you know anything was going to happen?

Nagan: Like—

McIntosh: When you were in England?

Nagan: Like what, you mean?

McIntosh: Like attacking Europe.

Nagan: No, we didn't at the time.

McIntosh: Everybody must have been talking about it.

Nagan: Yeah, course, they kept a lot of it hush-hush. They didn't want—

McIntosh: [Laughs] Well, I'd say!

Nagan: They didn't want [laughs] us to know.

McIntosh: They didn't want anyone to know.

Nagan: Yeah, 'cause they didn't want word to get out, of course.

McIntosh: Of course not.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you visit any of the English pubs while you were in training there?

Nagan: Oh yeah.

McIntosh: What'd you have? [??] You like that warm beer?

Nagan: Not really, no [laughs].

McIntosh: Nobody does. You had a lot of girls hanging around, waitin' to trade favors for chocolate?

Nagan: There was always girls, yeah, but it wasn't as bad as some of them say.

McIntosh: Bad?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's not the—

Nagan: I mean—

McIntosh: That's not the adjective or adverb I would be thinking of.

Nagan: I mean there wasn't that many of them, I mean.

McIntosh: Oh [both laugh]. Well, you had cigarettes to offer 'em, and you had candy.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: And even fruit was a prized possession in England in those days 'cause they didn't have any fresh fruit.

Nagan: Right, and meat, of course, they—

McIntosh: Meat was nonexistent, except for mutton.

Nagan: We could give ‘em a little Spam once in a while, and that was a treat for ‘em. I stayed at—I stayed at one family there. I’ve been trying to think of their name, but the address, I think, was 31 Portway, or something like that.

McIntosh: In Reading?

Nagan: Yeah, and I can’t remember the name of those people, but they were real nice to us.

McIntosh: Sure. How many bunked in their home with them? Just you or other guys, too?

Nagan: I was the only one there, yeah. They kind of split up different people.

McIntosh: Well, I hope you kept bringing ‘em some food from the camp that’s—

Nagan: Oh yeah, oh yeah, I’d bring ‘em a little Spam, and, boy, that was—

McIntosh: Yeah, right.

Nagan: That was like money.

McIntosh: That’s hard to believe, isn’t it?

Nagan: Yeah [both laugh].

McIntosh: Anybody who’s eaten Spam never become entranced with it [both laugh]. Okay.

Nagan: But it’s surprising. A lot of people still buy it, I guess.

McIntosh: Sure.

Nagan: They still like it.

McIntosh: I never minded the taste.

Nagan: I don’t like it. I—

McIntosh: Okay. You didn’t have any trouble getting food there, though?

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: You had plenty.

Nagan: Yeah. Well, they saw that we got fed. They'd give it to us rather than eat it themselves. They were very, very good to us. So when we could bring 'em anything, we did.

McIntosh: Good. Okay. Did you go out with—you didn't get involved with any of the ladies there? You stayed away from all those?

Nagan: Well, yeah, as far as contact—

McIntosh: Or should we send the boys [possibly Mark's sons] out of the room, and we can talk about it a little more?

Nagan: Yeah [both laugh], well, that was all right, but—

McIntosh: No, it wasn't? Or it was?

Nagan: No, I didn't get involved deeply with any of 'em, yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, you stayed away from all those problems. Well, you see, small-town boy from Kaukauna he's taught, well, you know, stay away from those wild city girls, right?

Nagan: Yeah, right [both laugh].

McIntosh: Okay. Did they give you any indoctrination about Europe?

Nagan: Not too much.

McIntosh: You didn't know what kind of territory you were going to land in?

Nagan: Well, yeah, we thought we were going to land in nice, open spaces and that—

McIntosh: Downtown Paris?

Nagan: Which, of course, we really got beat up on that deal. There wasn't any landing when we got over there.

McIntosh: Right.

Nagan: 'Cause most of your gliders crash.

McIntosh: Right.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: They didn't discuss that possibility with you, though?

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: What were your instructions when you got on that glider the night before D-Day? When you get out, when we land, wherever we land—what were you supposed to do?

Nagan: Well, we're supposed to, of course, try to get together.

McIntosh: How many gliders were in your group?

Nagan: That I'd be lying if I said. I really don't know.

McIntosh: Well, roughly.

Nagan: It was quite a few.

McIntosh: Well, I mean, you're talking about a few. You mean twenty?

Nagan: Yeah, maybe between ten and twenty probably.

McIntosh: And that would comprise the 325th Regiment?

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: Okay. So theoretically you're supposed to set up a perimeter?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: How many guns?

Nagan: Uh, I think we only had two.

McIntosh: Two for the regiment?

Nagan: Yeah, I think so.

McIntosh: How about machine guns?

Nagan: Well, that I don't know, because we didn't have nothin' to do with them.

McIntosh: Yeah, but they must have had something to protect you. These—

Nagan: Well, yeah, of course, your average soldier, I mean, had machine guns and sidearms and so on which we didn't.

McIntosh: He had an M1 rifle, though?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: But he didn't have a machine gun?

Nagan: Yeah. no.

McIntosh: Right. And your—your rank at this time was a PFC?

Nagan: Yeah, PFC and then I went to corporal and then to sergeant.

McIntosh: Right. I understand.

Nagan: And so on.

McIntosh: Right. Okay. So, and you take off at what, about ten o'clock at night from England on the night before D-Day?

Nagan: I'd say about that, yeah.

McIntosh: And how was the flight over?

Nagan: Well, like I said, the flak was awful early on, yeah.

McIntosh: Right. Now we can talk about the flak. Tell me about that now.

Nagan: Yeah, well, you'd look outside, I mean, and it was just like a cloud out there, the flak. You could see the puff-puff. Like I said, I—

McIntosh: It was light enough.

Nagan: I think I could've walked out on it. I mean [laughs], if you could've walked on flak. But anybody that got across was very lucky. You look down in the water, and you'd see C-47s. You'd see gliders got shot down. I don't know how many of them out of the group, but we had an awful lot of casualties.

McIntosh: In your regiment?

Nagan: Yeah. All the Airborne did, I mean.

McIntosh: Yes, I know.

Nagan: Of course, yeah.

McIntosh: But not as many as they anticipated, though. Was your landing okay in this field?

Nagan: Well, most of the landing—and I say most of the gliders busted up.

McIntosh: Your landing, that's what I'm interested in.

Nagan: Uh, we weren't too bad in the gondola. We piled up, but we didn't get hurt.

McIntosh: Tail up?

Nagan: But after we left our glider, we went to look for our jeep. And at first we couldn't find our glider, and when we did find the glider, it was all busted up, and the jeep was swayback, like a swayback horse. And believe it or not, I don't know where we found it, but we found a lot of burlap, and we plugged the transmission with it to keep oil in there, got oil back in there. And my driver was missing. I don't know what happened to him. So I drove that thing all through combat.

McIntosh: Oh, it worked.

Nagan: Up railroad tracks there, we got it to work. We, like I say, we plugged it with burlap to hold the oil in the transmission. [McIntosh laughs]. They always talked—

McIntosh: Where did you find the burlap?

Nagan: I don't know, but we did [both laugh]. I don't know where we ever found the oil either, but we did [both laugh].

McIntosh: Maybe you ran into another crashed jeep that wasn't working. You could have nipped it from there.

Nagan: Yeah, there weren't that many of them laying around [laughs].

McIntosh: So, did you know what—

Nagan: But, anyway, that was a good vehicle, and boy, that could take a lot of punishment, and it lasted all through the war.

McIntosh: The same vehicle?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you know where you were when you hit the ground?

Nagan: Not really.

McIntosh: Your lieutenant was supposed to—

Nagan: So we just—

McIntosh: Figure it out?

Nagan: Tried to get together so that—

McIntosh: Right. Who was in charge of your group? And what was his rank? I don't remember his name.

Nagan: I can't remember. I can't remember.

McIntosh: A captain or—

Nagan: I can't remember names anymore.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Nagan: Yeah, we had a captain, and I had a couple lieutenants.

McIntosh: They all made it down okay?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: So how long did it take to get organized here? Hour?

Nagan: Oh, it took—

McIntosh: Two hours?

Nagan: Took quite a while 'cause they were split up. And, of course, a lot of them, like I say, never did come out alive out of it.

McIntosh: When you were split up, you were split up over what, a mile?

Nagan: Probably.

McIntosh: Did you get everybody back together that was alive?

Nagan: Pretty much, pretty much.

McIntosh: And how many jeeps were working then?

Nagan: Not too many.

McIntosh: Three? Four?

Nagan: Two, three, or four. Somethin' like that.

McIntosh: Well, enough to move some guns.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: So, what are—where were we heading then? Somebody must have figured out which way to go.

Nagan: Well, we were told when you're a buck private or just a private or PFC there—

McIntosh: They don't discuss it [laughs].

Nagan: You just do what you're told [both laugh]. I mean, you go in—

McIntosh: I understand.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: But, I thought maybe you'd have some idea where the—if the captain says, "Now we're goin' this way, because that town is over there."

Nagan: No, they wouldn't tell you. They'd just say, "We're goin'."

McIntosh: Shut up and move.

Nagan: Just shut up and move [McIntosh laughs], yeah. Right.

McIntosh: But you went to Sainte-Mère-Église [in Normandy in France?]

Nagan: Yeah, that was supposed to be our landing zone, and that's what we did land, and we took it over, of course.

McIntosh: When you got to Sainte-Mère-Église, had the droppers already been there?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: So they were somewhat organized 'cause they got organized, that 101st.

Nagan: Yeah, but see, they got dropped in a lot of bad zones, too. They dropped a lot of them where they weren't supposed to drop 'em—

McIntosh: Well, most of them—

Nagan: I mean, yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, that turned out to be an advantage, of course. You understand that, don't you?

Nagan: Yeah, yeah. Right. Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, and then the Germans didn't know where to look for anybody—

Nagan: [laughs] That's right.

McIntosh: 'Cause they're all over.

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: They kept getting' reports here, there and everywhere so they could never organize any—well anyway, blah-blah. So you ran into these—the paratroopers that were already there.

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Now you formed a larger group.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you stay there, or did you move on?

Nagan: No, we moved.

McIntosh: Towards what?

Nagan: That I don't know. I don't know just what you would call it, or—all I know—

McIntosh: Well, it was my understanding that—

Nagan: All I know is that we moved. Yeah.

McIntosh: One of the drops in this area that you went was to connect with the 4th Division that landed on Utah Beach.

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: And theoretically you guys were supposed to come up behind them and protect their—

Nagan: Yeah, we were supposed to catch ‘em. Yeah.

McIntosh: Right, and I was wondering whether you remembered heading towards the coast to find those people from the 4th Division.

Nagan: We most likely did, yeah.

McIntosh: Well, you must have run into some German opposition by the time—

Nagan: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: You got to Sainte-Mère-Église.

Nagan: Right after we landed we ran into opposition.

McIntosh: What kind, machine gun fire?

Nagan: Oh, yeah, and then those nice 88s that they talk about, you know [.88 mm flak artillery cannons were used extensively by German Army forces in WWII]. By the time that sound went off, the shell had landed already. They were—they were fast. Those guns were faster than the rifle.

McIntosh: That’d take out that jeep of yours in a hurry.

Nagan: Oh yeah [both laugh].

McIntosh: Those 88s were mighty effective.

Nagan: Yes, they were.

McIntosh: Did you—there was canals around there. Do you recall going in and out around those canals in that area that you were in?

Nagan: Not really too much, no.

McIntosh: Well, when did you first get shot at? You must remember that.

Nagan: Wasn't too long after we landed, I know that. All I know is that I didn't get hit.

McIntosh: Did you shoot your gun right away, that—your 8-pounder?

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: You weren't in the position to shoot at anything with that.

Nagan: See, the only thing we were supposed to do was whoever was in charge was supposed to position us like at a crossroads or something where they thought maybe that the German tanks were gonna come—

McIntosh: Counterattack.

Nagan: Yeah, so we just went wherever they—

McIntosh: Right, so you secured an intersection?

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: And set up the gun there?

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: But nobody came.

Nagan: No, we didn't have to fire. No tanks came.

McIntosh: So then how long were you there, a day or two, or—

Nagan: Yeah, a couple days, probably.

McIntosh: Then you moved towards Carentan?

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: Carentan was—there was a lot of activity there. That took a while before they reduced that city.

Nagan: Yeah, that was—

McIntosh: Do you remember being there?

Nagan: No, I don't, no.

McIntosh: Did you head towards Cherbourg from this—from that point?

Nagan: Yeah, I think we did.

McIntosh: Okay, by this time you had—how many men were you together with? You know, you must have been a division size by this time?

Nagan: I wouldn't say a division, though. Regiment, probably.

McIntosh: Okay. And did they bring you food all right or not? Were you still on the K-rations?

Nagan: Yeah, the only food I remember is—I don't remember now if it was Thanksgiving or Christmas. They sent up—we were supposed to—and they told 'em back home they were giving us turkey. And the turkey they gave us was a frozen turkey, and that was supposed to be our meal.

McIntosh: Well, you could—you could thaw it out.

Nagan: Yeah, we found a big iron kettle in a farmyard there. And we found a can of butter, homemade butter. And we melted that in there and put the turkey in there and thawed it and fixed it. Then we fed our—we fed our guys then with it. It worked out all right, but what were you going to do with that frozen turkey?

McIntosh: Well you could always kill one of the horses. There were a lot of horses that were [Nagan laughs] killed from all the bombing and all that. I know a lot of guys did that.

Nagan: Yeah, they probably did. We didn't. Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. By this time you had many casualties in your group?

Nagan: From—from firing, you mean?

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Nagan: From firing, no, not too many.

McIntosh: So you more or less moved along towards Cherbourg really without trouble?

Nagan: Pretty much so.

McIntosh: Is that where you stopped? And from Cherbourg they picked you up and took you back to England?

Nagan: I think so, yeah.

McIntosh: What, in a day? Or a week or so?

Nagan: As much as I can remember, yeah. It was at least a week or so. Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, it's about a week, the most the guys stayed there.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: They flew you back, or they put you on a boat?

Nagan: Went on a boat, I think.

McIntosh: Did they take you back to Reading?

Nagan: No, we didn't go back to Reading. I don't remember where we went. Like I say, most of that's kind of cloudy right now.

McIntosh: Sure, and—but you did get back to another British town and so forth then. It was essentially the same. They all look alike, anyway.

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: Okay. Then you had nothing to do for a while?

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: Did they let you get into London? Were you allowed to do that?

Nagan: Uh, let me see—I didn't go into London. You could've, I guess.

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Nagan: Yeah, I didn't go in.

McIntosh: Well, you're really in a rest situation there.

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Did they reform your group?

Nagan: Pretty much.

McIntosh: Then you could tell how many—what—about what percentage were not there anymore.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Do you know?

Nagan: ‘Course, being on the tailend, you know, I mean, on the low end of the—being just a common soldier [laughs], I mean, you didn’t get in on all of that stuff. You didn’t—

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

McIntosh: No, but when you get into barracks you can see that the people you were jumping with a week before are not there.

Nagan: Yeah, of course, you weren’t in the barracks. You were in a little of everything, I mean, wherever they could put you up.

McIntosh: I see.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: But you had no formations in your—

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: Did they resume your training with your gun?

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: Any more glider hops before you moved on to the next event in September?

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: None?

Nagan: None.

McIntosh: You had no duty at all?

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: Not even a little five mile hike a couple times?

Nagan: Oh, once in a while you did that, but it didn't amount to too much.

McIntosh: Well, they gotta keep you in shape, you see.

Nagan: Yeah [laughs]. Right, 'cause they didn't—they didn't want to march any more than we did.

McIntosh: I understand.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. So when did you find out about going to Holland?

Nagan: Well, that was another deal. That was—that was on that last moment, too, that we found that out. And then when we did go to this airfield and loaded our gliders and so on, then the glider I was in was in—all of us must have a pilot and a copilot. And they found out on this one they didn't have a copilot. So they made me the copilot going in there.

McIntosh: Something else you didn't volunteer for [laughs].

Nagan: Sure, so just before taking off the guy told me what to do if he got hit. I [laughs] don't know what would have happened when—anyway, I went in as copilot into Holland. Yeah.

McIntosh: And how did that land? Better?

Nagan: It landed better there, yeah.

McIntosh: I talked to a guy that lives—a guy in—up in Adams-Friendship [Wisconsin], in Friendship, just north of here. You know where that is?

Nagan: No, I don't know.

McIntosh: It's about the middle of the state. He was sittin' behind the pilot in the glider.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: And the pilot and the copilot were both killed. And he reached over the body of the pilot and landed this [Nagan laughs] stupid glider all by himself.

Nagan: Yeah [laughs].

McIntosh: He never had his hands on anything.

Nagan: Yeah [laughs].

McIntosh: He said that they got killed about 300 feet off the ground—

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: And all of a sudden we're headin' south. And he reached over, and pulled that front of that glider up a little bit—

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: So he could get a decent landing.

Nagan: Well, that's one thing they taught you in service, to improvise, you know, see, and—

McIntosh: Well, that's what the Americans have been good at—or better than—everyone at.

Nagan: Right, right.

McIntosh: Okay. Where did you land in Holland? Do you know?

Nagan: Uh—

McIntosh: Near Odoorn? Or where?

Nagan: I should know where I did—I can't think of it now.

McIntosh: I don't know if it said where you were in Holland. I don't think so.

Nagan: Didn't it say in there or not?

McIntosh: Well, anyway, did you look for a city that you were supposed to attach yourself to?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's what most of 'em did.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you get to that city okay?

Nagan: And we—we ended up in foxholes. And one thing I can remember is this one old lady came around in the morning, “Tasse Kaffee. Tasse Kaffee” [German for “cup of coffee”]. She’d bring a pot of coffee around—

McIntosh: Boy, that was nice.

Nagan: Treat us coffee in the foxholes.

McIntosh: Well, you finally met somebody that’s on our side.

Nagan: Yeah [laughs].

McIntosh: Yeah, I’m sure they were happy to see the Americans.

Nagan: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

McIntosh: You never had a chance to go to Paris?

Nagan: Yeah, I went to Paris once.

McIntosh: Later?

Nagan: Yeah, later.

McIntosh: Okay. How long before you became—got in contact with the Germans when you landed in Holland? Right away, or was that a day or so?

Nagan: Oh, I think that might have been a day or so before we—we had contact.

McIntosh: Everybody got down there okay?

Nagan: Yeah, pretty much.

McIntosh: Got your gun down, your jeep?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Your favorite jeep by this time.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: You had that transmission fixed before you got—

Nagan: Yeah, right [laughs].

McIntosh: I'm surprised you got that jeep back. I'm surprised they took that back to England.

Nagan: Well, they probably didn't have too many [laughs] of 'em. They had to—they had to repair it.

McIntosh: But you're sure it was the same jeep.

Nagan: I'm pretty sure it was. I wouldn't swear on the Bible that it was, but—

McIntosh: I would just be surprised if they dragged that thing back to England.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Americans are great for using somethin' and throwin' it away.

Nagan: Oh, yeah. See, they were going to pick up the gliders, too, but there wasn't too many of 'em whole that they could pick up. See, they were going to drop a line over, you know, and hook the glider and—

McIntosh: Mm-hm. Take 'em back.

Nagan: Bring 'em back, but there wasn't enough of them to—it didn't pay.

McIntosh: Yeah, those gliders weren't built for second trips.

Nagan: No. Well, if we could've landed without running into obstacles, I mean, we could've landed in one piece. Sure, they could've picked 'em up.

McIntosh: How many men were on your glider?

Nagan: Five, I think.

McIntosh: Oh, that's right, you're with the gun.

Nagan: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, I think otherwise there I think—

Nagan: See, we split—

McIntosh: There's usually about thirteen.

Nagan: Yeah, we split the guys up between—between the gun and the jeep.

McIntosh: Okay. All right, and you got the ammo and all that down in Holland with no problem?

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: And you set up around this city or in the city?

Nagan: Around the city, I think, mostly. Yeah.

McIntosh: Now the Germans must have started attacking rather soon after that.

Nagan: Yeah, they did.

McIntosh: They get in through—did they get through you into the city or not?

Nagan: No, they didn't. Not that I recall, anyway.

McIntosh: Did you—this is the first time you saw a German?

Nagan: Yeah, it probably was.

McIntosh: Probably.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you shoot him?

Nagan: No [both laugh].

McIntosh: Was he a prisoner?

Nagan: I think the first one I saw was a prisoner, yeah. We picked up a lot of—

McIntosh: How about the German tanks? You must have encountered them.

Nagan: We didn't encounter any that we had to shoot at.

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Nagan: Yeah, it was—it was really strange that way. Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah, that 8-pounder I was—it would be interesting to see how well that did—

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Against the German armor.

Nagan: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I was too, but we—

McIntosh: Never had the opportunity.

Nagan: We never had the opportunity.

McIntosh: You're lucky. I think whatever you did would not compare to what they would do to you.

Nagan: Right, right.

McIntosh: So how long did you stay in Holland? Did you keep moving on to the front then and become regular frontline troops?

Nagan: I think so.

McIntosh: Yeah, because they wouldn't bring you back to England after that.

Nagan: No, no.

McIntosh: Do you remember which unit you were attached to? What Army or what division they attached you to? Or do you not?

Nagan: No, all I know is that we were in the 82nd. I don't know what else we were hooked up with.

McIntosh: Okay, and you marched in through Holland and into Germany from there?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Well, now this attack on Holland, you know, was a strategic failure, 'cause they couldn't take that bridge [at Arnhem; Battle of Arnhem, Operation Market Garden].

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: So they must have moved you in a different direction, you know, so you couldn't get across that river. Do you recall that?

Nagan: Not too much.

McIntosh: Okay.

Nagan: It's a little hazy there.

McIntosh: Mm-hm. What did you seem to be doing most of the time when you were in Holland?

Nagan: Wondering mostly, I guess, when we were going to be attacked, which really didn't happen to us.

McIntosh: But you had to keep moving.

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Sooner or later you would come to the Siegfried Line and—

Nagan: We went up through the Siegfried Line [the line of German fortifications opposite the Maginot line in France]. That was—that was a joke, that Siegfried Line.

McIntosh: Oh, why is that?

Nagan: That was supposed to hold off the Germans, you know, but we went right up through there.

McIntosh: You remember those dragon teeth [square pyramidal concrete fortifications]?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's what the Germans had there to prevent the tanks coming through.

Nagan: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: You crossed over those?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: You had to blow up somethin' to get that gun through there.

Nagan: Right. But anyway we went up through.

McIntosh: Okay. Well, you certainly—sooner or later you're gonna come to a point whether—you can't go any further without making a mass attack here 'cause the Germans drew the line there somewhere.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: You remember that?

Nagan: Just where, I don't know.

McIntosh: Because everything must have come to a screeching halt here.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: After a little bit.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: You remember being pinned down there for any length of time?

Nagan: Not too long, but we were pretty much on the move once eventually we got going.

McIntosh: Now—now that you're a land force, they move you in six-bys?

Nagan: Did they what?

McIntosh: Move you in six-bys? Six-by-sixes, trucks, the two-and-a-half ton trucks.

Nagan: Yeah, I know. The only time I rode in one of them was in the Battle of the Bulge when they took—they hauled us up there in trucks. At that time we were in Pepinster, Belgium. In fact, I was staying in somebody's house. They put us—put a—gave us a bed up in the third story, and at night you could hear those buzz bombs [V-1 rockets] going over and shakin' the house.

McIntosh: On the way to England.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah. Or Amsterdam. They—

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: They bombed Amsterdam the most.

Nagan: Yeah. Yeah, a sound just like a tractor going through the air. As long as you could hear 'em, it was all right, but when it stopped then you knew it was going to come down.

McIntosh: Yeah, but they didn't—they weren't bombing where you were.

Nagan: No, no. They flew over us.

McIntosh: Right.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay, how long did you stay in that house?

Nagan: God, I don't think that was over a week, if it was that.

McIntosh: Where did you feed—where did you get something to eat there?

Nagan: Right there, they fed us.

McIntosh: Who, the family that you were stayin' with?

Nagan: The family that we were staying with, yeah.

McIntosh: I mean, the Army gave 'em food to feed you with. They didn't have any food for you.

Nagan: Ah, see, actually what happened—a lot of those people came down to where we were and invited us to stay with them while we were there. And that's how I happened to end up there in that—

McIntosh: Well, the Dutch are very nice.

Nagan: Yeah. They were, they were very nice.

McIntosh: Did they speak English?

Nagan: Like I say—oh yeah, and then the gal that like I said, the woman came around with the coffee in the morning, and [laughs], "Tasse Kaffee! Tasse Kaffee!" Said and gave us a cup of coffee in the foxhole [laughs].

McIntosh: You couldn't bring her any cigarettes or—

Nagan: We didn't have anything out there.

McIntosh: You didn't have anything to trade with there.

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: Not like England.

Nagan: They were very nice people.

McIntosh: I guess so.

Nagan: Actually—‘course actually the Germans, I mean, the people themselves were almost like our own, and the country was almost like ours when we got in there. I mean—

McIntosh: In Holland.

Nagan: No, in Germany, too. I mean, in Germany, too.

McIntosh: Well, it’s a lot like Wisconsin.

Nagan: Yeah, it was surprising.

McIntosh: Well, all the Germans from Wisconsin came from that area, too.

Nagan: Yeah [laughs].

McIntosh: So it’s no mystery.

Nagan: Yeah [laughs].

McIntosh: Okay. So did you have a—you must have gotten into some type of conflict here pretty soon if you kept going east.

Nagan: Well, that was what—that was—

McIntosh: You got a chance to use that gun of yours, see.

Nagan: That was—we never had to use our gun.

McIntosh: What kind of business is this?

Nagan: Ain’t that somethin’?

McIntosh: Yeah.

Nagan: I say we were very fortunate. I mean, we—we didn’t get shot at, and we didn’t have to use the gun where we were set up.

McIntosh: You just had to drag the stupid thing around.

Nagan: Right, right. The only thing—the only—I’ll take that back. We shot once. There was a tower some distance away, and they thought the Germans were up there directing fire. So they had us go over there and take a potshot at it. I don’t know if we even if we—

McIntosh: I was going to say, how many times did ya—

Nagan: I don't—I don't even know if we hit it, I mean, but we did fire our [inaudible]. But that's the only time we fired the gun [both laugh]. That was really something [laughs].

McIntosh: Tell me about going into Germany, now. What was the difference there? Now you're into the land of the enemy. There must have been some difference in the people.

Nagan: Well, the people themselves, like I say, they were very nice. I mean, it was the soldiers that were the bandits, I mean, that—

McIntosh: Yeah, I know, but these were German families.

Nagan: Yeah—

McIntosh: It was their country that you're—

Nagan: Yeah, but it was—

McIntosh: Stomping on.

Nagan: But it was surprising, I mean, they were fairly decent. I mean—

McIntosh: You didn't stay in their homes.

Nagan: And of course—and of course we—when the heck was this? We ended up in Ludwigslust. That was where the whole German Army surrendered to us, you know. That was when the time that Roosevelt died, while we were in Ludwigslust.

McIntosh: April 12th.

Nagan: That's when we heard, yeah. That's when we—

McIntosh: '45.

Nagan: That's when we heard he died.

McIntosh: Well, that's getting near the end of the war.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Now the—and the end of the war was only about three weeks away.

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: From that point.

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: Okay.

Nagan: But this whole—that was funny that—in fact, we were out—I was out with a jeep driver and myself, and when we got lost somewhere or other from our bunch. And when we came back here's a German in the street directing traffic. And I said, "Oh my God, what a—what did we run into?" [both laugh] And here were—these guys were prisoners. They had surrendered—the whole army had surrendered, and they were directing traffic out there [laughs]. They scared the hell out of us here, two of us in a jeep, and here's a German directing traffic. I thought we were running right into the German Army.

McIntosh: You thought you were going to be the prisoner.

Nagan: Yeah! [Laughs] So that turned out all right.

McIntosh: Sure. Well, then—now tell me about—at the Bulge, when did you get called up in that direction? Did that change your direction?

Nagan: Well, yeah. Well, see, that's when we were in Pepinster, Belgium, on a break. We were supposed to be on a rest break there, and—

McIntosh: That was after Holland.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay.

Nagan: And then the Bulge happened, and of course they wanted everybody that could handle a gun, bakers, and everybody else, cooks. And they hauled people up there—some of the guys didn't even have a uniform.

McIntosh: You had a truck ride up there.

Nagan: Yeah, we had a truck ride up there, yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. They took everybody that could—they could spare?

Nagan: Everybody that they could spare, that wasn't laid up or anything. They hauled us all up there.

McIntosh: So tell me about that truck ride. That was—it was the dead of winter then.

Nagan: Yeah, like I say, we had—we didn't have much on outside of our uniform.

McIntosh: You had your summer uniform.

Nagan: Those that did—did have uniforms on and then, like I say, some of them didn't even have their uniforms on, and they—"Come on, you got to go." They just loaded 'em up anyway.

McIntosh: Most everybody was in their summer uniforms.

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Another boo-boo. So—hold it. [Approx. 5 sec. pause in recording] So what was that like, the trip to Bastogne? Crowded? Was it stacked with vehicles as far as you could see or—

Nagan: Yeah, pretty much. Pretty much.

McIntosh: Most of 'em trucks?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Some tanks?

Nagan: Tanks. Farm implements, some of 'em, and like when the German Army surrendered, Christ, they came in, on everything—anything that would move they rode in on.

McIntosh: So when you got to Bastogne, what did they do with you?

Nagan: Well, actually, what happened there—we were supposed to take up position in Bastogne, the 82nd was. And the 101st was behind us. When we got to Bastogne they figured the Germans were far enough away yet so they told us to keep going, and the 101st ended up in Bastogne. They're the ones that got caught in there.

McIntosh: Mm-hm. So then, you didn't stay in Bastogne. You kept on going north?

Nagan: That's right.

McIntosh: Where to?

Nagan: I—that I don't remember.

McIntosh: Oh. Okay, well, what did you do?

Nagan: I know that we were supposed to stay at Bastogne, and we didn't.

McIntosh: And they changed the orders.

Nagan: And then that's how the 101st got caught in there 'cause they were behind us, and they thought, "Well, as long as the Germans aren't here yet, you guys keep on goin' and bring the 101st in there." So where we went from there, I just can't remember. All I know is that we moved on.

McIntosh: Okay, you went back to—you had to recapture some of the territory that you had already gone through.

Nagan: Right.

McIntosh: So, tell me what happened. Tell me, when the war was ending, what was that like? Tell me about that. In Europe, I mean.

Nagan: Well, of course everybody was jubilant about it, of course.

McIntosh: How did you hear about it?

+Nagan: And I think we heard it over the wire.

McIntosh: The wire?

Nagan: Yeah, the radio, and so on. I think we heard it—

McIntosh: They didn't assemble the group, and—

Nagan: No, not that I know of. I don't recall that.

McIntosh: Uh-huh. Were you surprised that the Germans quit?

Nagan: Well, yeah. Especially—especially after that one army surrendered there. I mean, we figured that was the end of it. That was about the time that—that it ended. That's when Roosevelt died.

McIntosh: Yeah, but that was on the 12th.

Nagan: You say that was the 12th—that was the 12th, right?

McIntosh: You see the war in Europe wasn't over till the 8th of May.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: See, that's almost a month later.

Nagan: Yeah, yeah. But some of these—some of the Germans had already surrendered—

McIntosh: Sure.

Nagan: Before then, yeah.

McIntosh: What did you do with all of those guys?

Nagan: We let 'em—we let 'em set up their own area. They had fields out there. That's one thing they were good at. They—they took their own men out there and lined them up, got their own camp lined up and took care of their own, whatchacall it. All we had to do was feed 'em so they had somethin' to eat. But outside of that they—we didn't have to worry. They were prisoners, but *we* could have been prisoners the way they were—but I said, their whole army set up in the fields there. They ran the thing themselves out there. But of course they gave up their weapons and so on.

McIntosh: Did you talk to any of those folks?

Nagan: Ah, yeah, I talked to one of 'em. I don't remember what—just what it was. He was a little surprised for some reason or other. I don't know why, but—

McIntosh: Surprised you talked to him?

Nagan: Yeah. And of course he could talk English. He could speak English. Otherwise I wouldn't have been—

McIntosh: How was your German?

Nagan: Not very good [both laugh]. I learned a little later on, but I didn't know much at the time.

McIntosh: Okay.

Nagan: Yeah. But talking about that—he offered me a drink out of his canteen, and they had—they had some kind of a drink in there that was thick enough, you could—you could—instead of drinkin' it you could have ate

it with a spoon. It was terrible [laughs]. I mean, it was in his canteen [both laugh]. I sampled it, but—it was somethin’.

McIntosh: So then from—what was the next move then from that point towards Germany? You kept goin’ till the end of the war, and you ended up where? Where were you at the—you know, when the war was declared over?

Nagan: I’m just trying to think where the devil we were when it ended.

McIntosh: How close to Berlin?

Nagan: We were pretty close. In fact, we were supposed to take Berlin. And, you know, that’s what always irked me. We could have took it alone. They made us wait for over a week till the Russians caught up with us so that the Russians could say they helped take Berlin. So the both of us went in to Berlin together.

McIntosh: That was a decision made outside the battlefield.

Nagan: That peeved me off but good. I—

McIntosh: Yeah, everybody felt that way.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: So they headed you down toward Czechoslovakia? That’s where the 101st went [inaudible].

Nagan: I don’t think that’s where we went. I don’t—I couldn’t swear that they—

McIntosh: So do you recall where you were when you left Germany?

Nagan: Well, I was in Berlin, of course.

McIntosh: But not right away.

Nagan: No, but see, then when they decided [??] to set up this Honor Guard thing—

McIntosh: When was that?

Nagan: Well, that was right after the end of the war, of course.

McIntosh: You mean the end in—the end in the summer end of the war?

Nagan: It was in the summer.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Nagan: And they had three platoons of guys. They picked all the—and they were supposed to be the elite from the 82nd. And they were all supposed to be over six foot tall.

McIntosh: How the hell did you get in there?

Nagan: And like I say to this day, I don't know who the hell picked [both laugh] me and why. But then we—they assigned me as first sergeant to that outfit here with all these big guys. They used to say I had to get out there on a soapbox [McIntosh laughs] to address 'em out to--[??] Here I got three platoons of guys, all over six foot tall, and little me. I'm the first sergeant out there.

McIntosh: Make 'em drill?

Nagan: Yeah. I used to love that, that drill business. I had—I had one of those—one of the guys—the platoon sergeant. He came up to me a couple times. He says, "Why don't you let me be the—the drill—drill first guy?" I says, "I like that myself." I said [laughs], "I get out in trouble - - [??]"

McIntosh: Get 'em out to march?

Nagan: "I go out there and drill 'em myself!" See, and then they—

McIntosh: Then you got some—

Nagan: Which ordinarily the first sergeant didn't do, but I—

McIntosh: But you got a special uniform now.

Nagan: Yeah, we had those—

McIntosh: Tell me about that.

Nagan: We had those Eisenhower jackets and—

McIntosh: Right.

Nagan: And we—

McIntosh: And the white—

Nagan: Used white laces in our boots and white—

McIntosh: White scarf.

Nagan: White parachute scarf and our cartridge belts. We had them painted white.

McIntosh: White?

Nagan: Yeah, I still got mine home.

McIntosh: Do ya? Well, you looked kinda pretty dressed up like that.

Nagan: Yeah. White gloves, and—so that's all I had to do was—

McIntosh: What was your duty, now that you got all dressed up like this? What was your job?

Nagan: To greet all the hotshots when they came in there.

McIntosh: And this was in Berlin?

Nagan: Yeah, Tempelhof Airport.

McIntosh: At the American—in the American zone. You were stationed at the airport?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: You were essentially guard duty? Doing guard duty there?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: With all the guys in your—this fancy outfit, were they all in the 82nd?

Nagan: Yeah. As far as I know, I think they were. Well, I know they were. They were all from the 82nd, yeah.

McIntosh: And where did you stay? Where was—what kind of quarters did they have for you there? A hangar?

Nagan: We had—I think we—probably was, yeah.

McIntosh: Probably—I would guess that. Yeah. How big was that outfit, that dress parade outfit of yours?

Nagan: Well, see, we had three platoons.

McIntosh: Right, so—

Nagan: Yeah—

McIntosh: 35 in a platoon?

Nagan: Yeah, at least. Yeah, we had over 100—between 100 and 200 men, I think, in the outfit. Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay.

Nagan: Yeah.

[Approx. 25 seconds of dialogue between a woman and McIntosh regarding his next appointment]

McIntosh: Anyway—did you—this—this dress outfit of yours, those folks, did you have activity almost every day, welcoming people, or—

Nagan: Well, no, not necessarily. But we did go out and train and drill every day. And then, of course—

McIntosh: You're showing off for the natives or—

Nagan: Well, mostly for all the hotshots from America that—

McIntosh: Right, that's what I thought.

Nagan: The officers and people from the government, you know, would come over. Then, of course, you had to—

McIntosh: All the suits came.

Nagan: Show off for 'em a little bit, you know. Yeah, see, we had our own tailor over there. We had all our—

McIntosh: A tailor!

Nagan: Yeah, our Eisenhower jackets were tailored. That's why I say I couldn't begin to get mine on now. I got—on the jacket. That's why I got all this stuff on my shirt, rather than—

McIntosh: Sure, on the shirt.

Nagan: I used to wear a jacket. Yeah, they had them all made form-fit. And of course, we had all the white stuff. Pretty snotty outfit.

McIntosh: Yeah, I was going to say—

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: But everybody was pleased - - [??]

Nagan: But I still never could find out how the hell I ended up there.

McIntosh: They get you better food?

Nagan: Oh, yeah, we ate good. Yeah.

McIntosh: Didn't get any special privileges?

Nagan: Uh—

McIntosh: You didn't have to do any duty other than drill?

Nagan: No, just—just the airport duties.

McIntosh: No grunt drill or any of that?

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: No. Well, that's pretty nice.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's a cushy job.

Nagan: Yeah, it was a cushy job, and that's where they—and then what teed me off, my time was up, and they said I was set to go home, and then I heard that the 82nd was gonna go home, was set to go home. And I tried to get out of going by myself with a strange outfit, but they wouldn't rescind my orders. I had orders to leave, and I had to leave. I—

McIntosh: Well, you'd been there long enough.

Nagan: So I didn't get to New York with the outfit when they got back there. I got back before they did.

McIntosh: Oh, in New York. You mean the parade.

Nagan: Yeah, the parade.

McIntosh: You're talking about missin' the parade.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, I couldn't understand what you were getting at.

Nagan: Yeah, yeah. I wanted to get home with my own outfit, you know.

McIntosh: Right, but not possible.

Nagan: No. They wouldn't rescind my orders. I mean, once they cut them, that's it. I mean, that's—

McIntosh: Yeah. Okay, so—

Nagan: And we even had heard that if the war kept on with Japan that they were going to send us over to Japan, but—

McIntosh: Of course.

Nagan: I wanted to stay anyway, but they wouldn't take me.

McIntosh: How did you come home? By ship?

Nagan: By ship.

McIntosh: And you went directly from New York back to Wisconsin? Or Illinois?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: And you were discharged right away?

Nagan: Right away, yeah.

McIntosh: Essentially it just moved right along

Nagan: Right along, yeah.

McIntosh: So did someone meet you in—when you got home, in Chicago? You were married then.

Nagan: Yeah. You know that? I can't even remember that way.

McIntosh: Don't remember the wife seeing you?

Nagan: Yeah, I got—

McIntosh: You remember—

Nagan: That's my baby there, that little one, when I was in the war.

McIntosh: [Laughs] But you don't remember him and his mother greeting you—

Nagan: Not—

McIntosh: In Chicago or—

Nagan: No.

McIntosh: Anywhere but Kaukauna?

Nagan: Not till I got home, yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. You went—you were out of the service. Did you join any veterans organizations?

Nagan: I joined the VFW when I was overseas already. The guy that was on the draft board—

McIntosh: [Laughs] Your friend.

Nagan: He sent [laughs] me an application for the VFW so I joined them. So I'm a life member of the VFW. I joined already when I was overseas [laughs].

McIntosh: [Laughs] Okay.

Nagan: And then after a while I went back to work at the hardware store. And then one of the guys Oudenhoven, he was the head of Oudenhoven Construction. He come in the store one day, and he says, "Hey," he said, "You're joining the Legion." [laughs] So I had to belong to both of them.

McIntosh: Everybody's been telling you what to do all these years.

Nagan: Yeah, so he was a good business, good for our business. He did a lot of business with us. So I had to join the Legion, too, so—

McIntosh: You didn't have any trouble getting your job back then.

Nagan: No, no. They were glad to have me come back. Maybe that was the dumbest thing I did. I don't know.

McIntosh: Why?

Nagan: Well, for one thing, being in a store like that, you don't end up with a pension or anything.

McIntosh: No.

Nagan: In other words, all [**End of Tape 1, Side B**] I got, and that's all I got today, is my Social Security.

McIntosh: No watch? They didn't give you a gold watch?

Nagan: No, no [laughs].

McIntosh: None of that?

Nagan: No. I'd have been better off working for some big company and gettin' a pension, you know, like these guys that got a pension and that, and then their Social Security on top of it. They got it made with the—

McIntosh: Yeah, in Wisconsin, you know, the first of the year, they got a big boost in that pension.

Nagan: Yeah, and then we had a big boost in what they were going to give us, too, then a bonus. I never forgive them for that. They were supposed to give us a bonus—

McIntosh: Yeah, you never saw it.

Nagan: We never saw it.

McIntosh: Nor will you.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Well, the First World War guys didn't get it either, so—

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Remember, they marched on Washington, you know.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: And then all they did was burn down their shacks and send 'em all home.

Nagan: Yeah, ain't that something?

McIntosh: MacArthur, you know, did that.

Nagan: Yeah, they promised us a bonus when we came back from World War II, but we didn't see that either. Yeah.

McIntosh: Promises are like—

Nagan: Dirt?

McIntosh: Pie Crust.

Nagan: Dirt to be broken.

McIntosh: Easily broken.

Nagan: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Okay. And so you went back to work, and you did that until they sold the store, right?

Nagan: Of course, that was a while after.

McIntosh: I understand.

Nagan: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. Did they give you any medals for doing all these things?

Nagan: No. The only thing I got is what's on that. I don't remember what was—I never took any medals. I mean, I got like—I don't know what the devil all them are on there.

McIntosh: Well, you got all the regional stuff.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: But I mean, you didn't get any special awards then?

Nagan: No, nothin' special, no.

McIntosh: Okay. And you didn't use your GI Bill then?

Nagan: No, I didn't.

McIntosh: You didn't care to, or did you think about that?

Nagan: I didn't even think about it. I just went through high school. I graduated in '31. That's as far as I went.

McIntosh: That was another question I didn't ask you. You must have been at least three or four years older than all the rest of the guys.

Nagan: Right, I was one of the oldest guys.

McIntosh: I'm sure. Born in '13.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: So, the—

Nagan: See, I was about twenty-six, I think.

McIntosh: Right, and the rest of those guys are nineteen and twenty.

Nagan: Yeah. So [laughs]—

McIntosh: They called you "The Old Man."?

Nagan: Yeah [laughs].

McIntosh: Huh?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: I'll bet.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: [Laughs] That's good. Have you joined any of the veteran—of the 82nd Division?

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Must have had an organization that you can belong to.

Nagan: Yeah, what's that one we go to, Mark? There's my guy there. [probably referring to his son, Mark, who apparently just came into the room] There's a cap there at 3-2-5.

McIntosh: Where does that—

Nagan: That's the one I belong to.

McIntosh: Where is that centered? Where is the headquarters?

Nagan: Uh, where the devil did they say that was? I forgot now, but anyway, we went to their last—that's the first time [laughs] we—

McIntosh: First time you been to one of 'em?

Nagan: Yeah, he, Mark, dragged me—

McIntosh: Well, I'm sure they have 'em every year or every other year.

Nagan: Yeah, this one. Yeah, and we're going down—where are we going this fall, in October?

Nagan Jr.: New Orleans.

Nagan: New Orleans. And they just built a museum and that down there, I guess.

McIntosh: Yeah, Steve Ambrose, yeah.

Nagan: So we're going down there.

McIntosh: He's been here several times, you know.

Nagan: Yeah, has he?

McIntosh: This museum [Wisconsin Veterans Museum], sure.

Nagan: Oh.

McIntosh: He's a big friend of the guy who runs the museum.

Nagan: Oh, I see.

McIntosh: Yeah. Matter of fact, yeah, Steve Ambrose's father and I were good friends.

Nagan: Oh, I see.

McIntosh: Matter of fact, I operated on him.

Nagan: I see [both laugh].

McIntosh: He's my patient.

Nagan: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: But—

Nagan: Oh, then you are a doctor!

McIntosh: Yeah.

Nagan: How about that!

McIntosh: How about that. So, tell me this, did you get along with everybody in your unit? Was there ever a problem? Everybody seemed to be—

Nagan: Well, we got along pretty good. Outside of when you get to be first sergeant, I mean, you got to be a little careful. Then you're not the best-liked person—

McIntosh: No, you have to delegate—

Nagan: In there, yeah.

McIntosh: A little authority here.

Nagan: Yeah, you're not the best-liked for that reason, but otherwise, yeah, even with all the noncoms even, I got along good with them.

McIntosh: Good.

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's fine.

Nagan: That was a surprise, too, when I made first sergeant. I had no idea, of course. During the war you move up fast because the guys that get killed and so on, but I got appointed first sergeant over some of the other sergeants that were in there, sergeants that were higher than me and—

McIntosh: Why was that?

Nagan: I don't know. That's another thing I didn't know, see.

McIntosh: You seemed to wander through the whole war—

Nagan: Yeah, I must—

McIntosh: When there was somebody—

Nagan: Yeah.

McIntosh: Making a decision for you [laughs].

Nagan: Yeah. I guess that's just 'cause I was miserable, I guess [laughs]

McIntosh: Well, I figure it was probably because you were doing a good job.

Nagan: Yeah. [laughs] I don't know how it went—

McIntosh: Well, you must have been doin'—

Nagan: Yeah [laughs]

McIntosh: I don't think they would have given you that after—

Nagan: I still would have liked to know who [laughs] gave me that job. But I never did find out any of it [both laugh].

McIntosh: Okay, all right. I can't think of anything else to ask you.

Nagan: Okay.

McIntosh: Do you have any stories to tell me that I didn't ask you about?

Nagan: No. I told you about the turkey, and I told you about the jeep. I'm trying to think if there was somethin' else. No, the big thing, of course, was the Honor Guard. I mean, that was—

McIntosh: Sure.

Nagan: The big deal.

McIntosh: Right. Okay. I can't think of any more to ask you. I've run out of—

Nagan: All right, well, thank you for having me.

McIntosh: Well, thank you for coming down. That's our benefit.

Nagan: You got to thank my sons for that. They promote all this stuff for me. I don't know to expect, but I ain't got too much to leave them, but—

McIntosh: Well, you didn't—it's the memories—that's what they got.

Nagan: [Laughs]

[End of Interview]