

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

JOSEPH J. ZADRA

Intelligence and Communications, Army, World War II

2040

OH
2040

**OH
2040**

Zadra, Joseph, J., (b.1922). Oral History Interview, 2015.

Approximate length: 1 hour 30 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Joseph Zadra, a Schofield, Wisconsin native, describes his service as a staff sergeant working in the intelligence division of the 19th Tank Battalion, 9th Armored Division during the Battle of the Bulge, he details the movements of his unit to different towns in the Ardennes, his civilian career after the war and working with various veteran groups to maintain a historical record of the war. Zadra enlisted in the Army on October 2, 1942 and trained for two years with the 19th Tank Battalion before they embarked for Europe. He details the movements of the 19th Tank Battalion embarking on the *Queen Mary*, training in London and throughout France, Luxembourg and Belgium. Zadra provides many anecdotes describing combat during the Battle of the Bulge, treatment of prisoners of war, the loss of fellow soldiers and relations with the civilian population. He reflects on the harsh conditions, the amount of casualties and the sheer amount of fighting that took place. Zadra received the Meritorious Bronze Star for delivering maps and information about troop movements during the Battle of the Bulge. After being discharged on January 6, 1946 Zadra had a successful career as an accountant. He attributes his success to the discipline he learned early on in life and during his military service. Zadra travelled back to Europe with his family and participated in the memorialization of George Mergenthaler in Eschweiler (Belgium). Zadra and his family have visited sites in the Ardennes and have kept records of place names and events. He is an active member of the American Legion, has continued to keep in touch with other soldiers from his unit and has contributed to publication *Bulge Bugle*. Other stories/topics of note in the interview include: Leipzig prisoner of war camp, Joe Demler, mentions Malmedy Massacre, Army of Occupation, Catholic Church, Hürtgen Forest, Bastogne, German Focke-Wulf plane, Remagen bridge

Biographical Sketch:

Zadra (b.1922) served with the 19th Tank Battalion, 9th Armored Division during WWII. He was awarded the Meritorious Bronze Star for delivering maps during the Battle of the Bulge. He achieved the rank of Master Sergeant before being discharged in 1946.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Ellen Brooks, 2015.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2015.

Reviewed by Rachelle Halaska, 2017.

Abstract written by Rachelle Halaska, 2017.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of OH2040.Zadra]

Brooks: Today is Monday, November 30, 2015. This is an interview with Joseph Zadra, who served with the Army, the 19th Tank Battalion, 9th Armored Division, during World War II from 1942 to 1946. This interview is being conducted at Mr. Zadra's home in West Bend, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Ellen Brooks, and the interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program. Okay, so we can start at the beginning, and you can tell me when and where you were born.

Zadra: Okay. I was born in [inaudible], Michigan—that's up near Ironwood, Michigan—July 22, 1922.

Brooks: And did you grow up, up there?

Zadra: I grew up about, until age seven, then moved to Schofield, Wisconsin, which is near Wausau, mid-central Wisconsin, on a little farm. My father was a miner, and the mines were closed, so then he went and moved down south next to my grandma's large farm.

Brooks: And did you have any siblings?

Zadra: Yes, I have a brother and two sisters, a brother and a sister still living.

Brooks: And where did you fall in the line of siblings?

Zadra: Pardon?

Brooks: Where did you fall in the line of siblings?

Zadra: Oh, I was number one.

Mrs. Zadra: No, you weren't.

Zadra: Huh?

Mrs. Zadra: Your sister, Lena [sp??], was number one. [Laughs]

Zadra: [Laughs]. She was.

Brooks: You thought like you were number one.

Zadra: Yeah, she's one year older, yeah, my sister. I'm number two.

Brooks: Okay. So you had one older sister and two younger siblings.

Zadra: Yeah, right.

Brooks: Okay. And what kind of kid were you growing up?

Zadra: Very disciplined kid, because my father and mother were immigrants, and it was close family tie, a very close family. Father was a rather industrious type individual and commanded a lot of effort on the part of his children. So I was assigned a lot of tasks. Didn't have too much freedom to become mischievous. [Laughs]

Brooks: And where were your parents immigrated from?

Zadra: From Tyrol, Austria. Today it's Italy, near Trento, top of the mountains. It's a very lovely area. We were just there several years ago.

Brooks: Oh, that's great. So then what were you doing before you went into service?

Zadra: I graduated from high school in 1940, then enrolled in the University of Wisconsin, without financial support from my parents. My father entered a filling station and tavern business, and he thought I should be staying home and assisting in the business. And then I entered the University of Wisconsin in 1941. I got my first taste of military by joining the Reserve Officers Training, ROTC. Since I had financing my own way, I stayed out another year and worked in a defense factory. Thereafter I enlisted in 1943, yes.

Mrs. Zadra: Forty-two, Joe.

Zadra: In 1942—I should have written that down—in October, and went to Fort Sheridan, and from there—should I go on?

Brooks: Well, tell me why did you decide to enlist?

Zadra: To enlist? Well, I wanted to be a pilot. One of my friends at the university was from my hometown, Ramtel Diggins [sp??], and he was accepted in Air Corps. I was a rather thin boy, about 145, 150 pounds. I fitted all the requirements, but failed the physical, because I had arrhythmia. So then they decided I—my brother preceded me, enlisting in the Navy, so I thought I would enlist also, in October 2, I believe it was, and went to Fort Sheridan.

Brooks: Can you tell me what you remember from December 7, 1941, and hearing about Pearl Harbor?

Zadra: What was the last thing?

Brooks: About Pearl Harbor.

Zadra: Oh, about Pearl Harbor.

Brooks: Do you remember hearing about that?

Zadra: Yes. Yes, I do remember that. The feeling was that I certainly wanted to defend my country, because we were invaded, so to speak, in Hawaii, and yet I, as a soldier I would not like to fight in the Pacific area. I just, that was a strong feeling I had, cause I had a lot of the old feelings at that time at the Japanese, just a strong ill feeling.

[00:05:05]

Brooks: So then you enlisted in 1942.

Zadra: Yes.

Brooks: Went to Fort Sheridan, and that was for basic training?

Zadra: [inaudible] Fort Riley, and then at that time the unit was a cavalry unit, dating back to the 7th Cavalry, it was General Custer, of years back. That was converted to an armored unit, and I was assigned to the 19th Tank Battalion. I trained as a tank driver, and I loved driving a tank. It's interesting, and it came back into maintenance area. The sergeant gave me a toothbrush. It was very windy out in Kansas. There's a lot of—he gave me a toothbrush, he said, "Brush out the dust." The colonel came by, Colonel Karstetter. He was just reviewing the area. He said, "Young man, what are you doing?" And I said, "The sergeant told me to do this," and he said, "Can you do other things beside that?" just conversation and so forth. But then they continued training. I think sometime later we were transferred to Camp Ibis, California—that's near Needles, California—for desert warfare training.

In that period of time there, my company commander, Captain Birada [sp??], said to me, "Joe, the qualifications you have, having some college education, some ROTC training, and so forth," he said, "what would you like to do as a soldier?" And I said, "I would like to somehow learn to drive a tank," and he said, "No, that's why I'm asking you. I think you can do other things than driving a tank." And he said, "I would like for you to join our office staff. It's the duties of a draftsman," he said, "draw maps and all these kind of things." I said, "Fine, I'll do that." It was near the end of the training. Colonel Karstetter said to Captain Birada, he said, "This young man I met sometime earlier." He said, "I would like to think that we would elevate him to the intelligence division." So I became a staff sergeant in no time. From unit training, as the African war wound down, we were transferred to Camp Ibis—not Camp Ibis—Camp Polk, Louisiana, for training for overseas. And that weather there, didn't have winter weather, but we trained under very adverse conditions, a lot of rain, swamps, and training and so forth, more fitting to the European warfare. After training at Camp Polk we were sent to embarkation, Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. It was in, let's see now, October, yeah, it was October 1943.

Brooks: Right.

Zadra: Good. Boy, my memory.

Brooks: Yeah, that makes sense.

Zadra: Yeah, 1943 or '44. Let's see here. I know I wrote it down.

Brooks?: I'm sure they'll check.

Mrs. Zadra: Yeah, I don't, it doesn't look like I have it.

Zadra: August 1944 we embarked. Yeah, it was Camp Kilmer, right.

Brooks: So you were training for almost two years then.

Zadra: Yeah, that's right.

Brooks: Yeah, because you went around a few places.

Zadra: Yes. We were well training for warfare, there's no question about it. There were a few armored divisions before us—that fought in Africa and so forth. From there we went on the Queen Mary. That was about 20,000 people, about 16,000 soldiers. There were other units on there, plus, and naturally the large crew. We went to Greenock, Scotland, unescorted, because the Queen Mary could outrun any submarine. I thought it was five days and something, but I looked it up, and it was near seven days. But it's still a very short trip over there— seven, eight. Greenock, Scotland, and from there we went south to England and the train, to Tidworth Barracks.

[00:10:01]

That was the equivalent of our training sites for armored divisions and for a period of time could be equipped for overseas battle. I was sent to London for two weeks for training in German warfare, identifications and so forth, and chemical warfare. When I came back I was assigned those duties, along with intelligence, of training our troops on chemical warfare I know, so—and communications, and another part of it was communications and orientation as to the progress of the war and that kind of thing.

We boarded—the last part of the September we boarded nineteen ship tanks for Utah Beach, and we landed in Utah Beach. The name of the town, Saint, Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, D-U-M-A-O-T [*sic*]. There we march. We were there for a couple of days and bivouacked, and then marched down through France, bypassing Paris, so to speak. We were there momentarily. We went down to the route World War I, the site of the Verdun. Then from there we went to Mersch. That's that point I made on the map there, and they cornered—that was an initial area, station. We were put in the reserve with the 9th Army, with the 1st Army initially, and then before we got into battle we were assigned to the 9th Army.

Our assignment there was protecting the southern flank of Luxembourg and Belgium, on that ninety-mile front, three Divisions and our only armored Division was protecting that front. We didn't have much— incidents, except after being there several days maybe, a good week or so. I was preparing situation maps with those two unit for initial engagement, but it would be north, along the German borderline. By the way, that's right along the German borderline, and the initial engagement was more or less harassment firing at Scheidgen, S-[C]-H-E-I-D-[G]-E-N, the town of Scheidgen, which was vacated,

but the troops were along that area. Eventually we moved up into Scheidgen, and we were housed—fortunately, it was the first housing, otherwise we were outdoors—and built it, a sitting area there.

My first involvement in war, I thought it was being a patrol man, guarding and patrolling at night. Even though I was a staff sergeant, and looking for the enemy, where they were situated, trying to find that. I wasn't alone, [I] was with a group of course. I headed the group. In that area we began to have some engagements, sporadic engagements, and I delivered some maps. The colonel had an interpreter who was fluent in German. Naturally he was always along with me, because I didn't speak German. We were in an American jeep, and he told the driver we had to turn right. He was wrong, and he came upon a German sentry, sentinel. Usually you use a password, you know, but the German, he talked to the German quite a bit, and he got—kept the attention, so we drove up there, in an American jeep naturally, we were Americans, but they already had captured some American jeeps earlier, and so we took the sentinel prisoner, and we went back the right way and then dropped him off, telling him that he better not say anything, because they would probably do something with him. [Laughs] So anyway, that's my first engagement with an enemy. [Laughs]

[00:15:20]

Then the sixteenth of December, hell broke loose up in the Hürtgen Forest area, up further. That's when the three infantry Divisions were practically annihilated. Of course, then the Germans advanced very rapidly. Not as rapidly as they wanted to, because it was winter and a lot of snow. When they went through the Hürtgen Forest years ago, 1939, 1940, and captured the whole area to the English Channel, they didn't encounter winter conditions, so that impeded their advance. But on the other hand, just telling you briefly, I was not involved, just telling briefly, I'm sure it's been said already that what really caused the Americans not to be able to retaliate or defend was the fact that overnight they had sent a lot of artillery fire. They changed signs, and soldiers were completely lost, as I understand. Of course, then as they started progressing, then we began to enter into Germany, into the center of Luxembourg, in towns of Medernach—what's the other town? Oh, let's see. I think then. Maybe I wrote it down here. Yeah, in Medernach, Ermsdorf, and Eppeldorf. There were a lot of engagements there with our tank units.

We were assigned to combat A. The 9th Armored Division broke them down into three combats, A, B, and R, and we were assigned to combat A. And a lot of our units, tank companies, were assigned to R. They were engaged in a lot of activities around these two towns, there are three towns. Christmas Eve, this is [phone rings] advancing quite quickly up to—a lot of engagements were involved before that, but we were not as engaged as a lot of other units that were fighting Germans up through the Hürtgen Forest. But our engagement there was that we had to repel any thrusts of the Germans to Bastogne, which was a key town to besiege because they had tremendous roadwork going to the English Channel through Bastogne. Of course, their goal was to reach Antwerp upon the English Channel, because that was a distribution point. All our supplies came through Antwerp, and they would cut us off.

Christmas Eve— Major Philbeck—I didn't report directly to him, but I did work with him, he was the chief executive officer outside the commander, Colonel Karstetter—was going to take a position that evening so they could advance beyond Eppeldorf, I know that's the furthest, the town north, to engage the Germans and to repel them so that these other areas would be protected. The Colonel begged him not to go that evening, he should wait till morning. But Tommy was a very aggressive young, West Point graduate, in his thirties, but a tremendous individual. He mounted a tank with a crew, and they went along the street up there, along the road. Nobody knows for sure. The driver didn't remember himself what happened. But the commander sits up in the turret of the tank. He gives the command by his foot, and the driver, what he should be doing, supposedly he, instead of turning right, he commanded left, and there's a creek running there, and the tank overturned. He was in a position that all the explosive shells, thirty of them, they were mounted along the side, inside the tank, they came upon him, and he was wedged. Where the others could escape through the escape hatch, that was down under water, only six or eight inches of water, but enough to water—his head was down there and he drowned. They couldn't evacuate him.

[00:20:50]

So he came back in a jeep that night. This was early, maybe four or five o'clock in the afternoon. And naturally, I never saw the Colonel cry before, but this was early. But we lost a very key officer, and particularly when he gave him the command to stay till morning. But anyway, that same evening, Christmas Eve, we had just passed Medernach, which was maybe 300, 300-400 yards south of the little town of Ermsdorf. There's a lot of little towns, little community, farming communities. Being Christmas Eve our chaplain was assigned to one of the other combat commands, so I said I'd like to—we saw that little church we went by, "I'd like to go to that church." I was very religious. I was a Catholic, brought up as a Catholic. I took eleven soldiers and went to this little church. The minister was difficult to understand. I think he spoke Flemish, which is Belgium, Luxembourg, whatever it is. But there were very few persons there because I'm sure fear of the war. At the end, we kneeled down at the end of the, back of the church—a very small church. He patted us on the head and so forth and gave us his blessing, and we got outside. I knelt down and talked to my comrades and said that "I hope we all will be home for next Christmas." It was kind of emotional and so forth.

Then from there we were—this is Christmas Eve, 24th, and the 25th we didn't have a Christmas dinner. We just ate rations. We'd go—we were moving then, and we had orders to move to a town called Arlon, Neufchâteau, and Arlon was between the two towns. We were all in a column, and orders were that no one should turn any lights on. It's interesting, I found that when we went this time, on this trip, it's interesting that the topography was such that—here's the road going here, and all trees alongside, in this open area, and it's still that today, when I saw that.

Brooks: Just all trees to one side and then open on the other?

Zadra: Yeah. Yeah. Then near Arlon, a German plane, German planes were out at that time, and the weather was such that it could still move all right. And a German plane attacked the rear column and injured a few, and the kitchen trucks were the last ones always. The

commander said that “He’ll be back a second time, that’s for sure.” He said, “Every—” I was in the half-track. I manned a .30 caliber machine gun, and the captain and a driver, in the half-track. I think we had about twelve, fourteen half-tracks in that whole column. He said, “Everybody in the half-tracks, move out in an open area, because he’ll be coming in.” Lead the half-tracks over here. I forget his name. Huntziger, a guy by the name of Huntziger. There were two Huntzigers, but I don’t know which one it is. But anyway, he was the furthest out, and as the plane approached all these—they made sure they didn’t fire into each other. There was dispersal, that everybody would be firing except I, with the position, I couldn’t be firing. But anyway, he knocked that plane down. It was a German Focke-Wulf plane. Just think about—they wouldn’t be in that position, how many could have been killed, you know, in that German sortie, just that one fight.

[00:25:16]

Brooks: Where did that plane end up, the German plane?

Zadra: It ended up falling in an open area, just beyond where we were located. Then from there we moved to Arlon. Bastogne—was really being besieged, encircled, completely encircled. The thought was that we should be attacking rather than just guarding at this point, because you're attacking, because we had to dislodge so they could free up the 101st Infantry Parachute Division that was occupying the area.

Brooks: So you say that was the thought. Was that the thought among yourself and the other men, or was that the thought coming from—

Zadra: Pardon?

Brooks: Was the thought that you should be on the offensive?

Zadra: Yes, right, at this point we should be on the offensive, right.

Brooks: And was that what you were thinking and the other men?

Zadra: Yeah. The 4th Armored Division under General Patton. We weren’t under General Patton. The General came up to Arlon and met us. I never saw General Patton, but it’s Colonel Karstetter that met with him and they laid out a situation. The 19th Tank Battalion would go to Neufchâteau. That name of the town. I think I got the spelling down here someplace, the spelling is N-E-U-F-C-H-A-T-E-A-U. That’s Belgium, near the Belgium borderline. The 19th Tank Battalion, the three tank companies, and our light tank company, D, were told to attack, which they did. Of course, I was not in the attacking group naturally, but I was moving up along the road from Neufchâteau up in the area. As we took prisoners to question them, had an interpreter all the time interpret, interview them as to what other strength could we probably encounter with reserves. With the thrust of the Germans in not a real rapid thrust, not the rapid thrust they expected, but to us it was too rapid, they were being reinforced by a lot of divisions from the Russian front. Because Hitler realized that he wasn’t accomplishing his goal, as he had expected, and maybe some defeated as a matter, his word was that they were

really concerned that since they couldn't capture—if they wouldn't be able to capture Bastogne, they wouldn't be able to advance any further.

But our units were thrust into battles at three or four towns. One called Sibret. This is only a couple of miles outside the perimeter of Bastogne, Sibret, Senonchamps [??], and Villroux. The light tank company would sit right. This was the period of December 27th to January 5th, but mostly the three or four days there, the 27th, in to January first, we attacked. We had bad weather up to that point, and the skies cleared, and the planes came in and just demolished the Germans. Then we were supported by a lot of other artillery also, who were firing into the Germans. We relieved Bastogne on the southern flank and at the same time, other units were relieving Bastogne in the northern—in the eastern and also the northern area. The captain and I took a half-track. We drove into Bastogne itself. It's interesting. The church was completely demolished except the frontal part facing into the Bastogne city itself. When we were there two years ago I said to my son, I said, "I hope that is there yet," and sure as heck it was there. We could vision that—that one memory of just that little incident and so forth.

[00:30:17]

I came down with pneumonia about that time. I hadn't had much sleep or anything for a few days. I was evacuated, but before I was evacuated, and we had driven up there, coming back. Then the ambulances and trucks and so forth were coming from Neufchâteau, not a large town, but all the way from Luxembourg City, just convoys, to pick up all the wounded in Bastogne. There were I think 15,000 troops in that area, and most of them were underground. We have a picture of it. But the city itself, a large area that's vacant, like roadways, but on each side tall, tall buildings, and all the wounded were taken downstairs. Fortunately they had basements, and they had medical attention. Otherwise it would have been more serious type casualties. They were evacuated as we saw. In the same time, the Germans, of course, they were completely—they weren't all killed, but they had trucks picking up the dead already. You'd look at the back end of the truck, it looked like cordwood, you know, the legs hanging out there and so forth. It was very distressing to see that. That's what I remember of the Battle of the Bulge. We were sent—I went to a temporary field hospital. Then my fear was that I would not be able to join my unit. Fortunately my unit and the whole Armored Division at that time was put in a rest area in France for reorganization, rehabilitation, and so forth, and I was able to join my unit. The Battle of the Bulge did not end until a month later, along the German borderline. They just shoved the Germans back. We were in an area just outside of Germany, naturally in France, but then we moved up near the Remagen bridge area. You want me to tell you more about the Battle of the Bulge?

Brooks: If there's more to tell, yeah. I mean, if you have any more kind of details about what you were doing and what you experienced, that would be great.

Zadra: Yeah. Then from there the 27th Infantry Unit, 2nd Tank Battalion, 9th Armored Division, captured Remagen bridge. We went over on a—the bridge had collapsed, and we went on what they called a treadmill, treadmill bridge, or something like that. It's fabricated by engineers. We went in, across the area, met a lot of resistance in an area called Limburg. Fortunately, we were not directly with the unit, but our company B was

encircled. I think it was called Rhône River. We finally were able to dislodge them.

Brooks: Is there anything else about the Battle of the Bulge era that you wanted to comment on?

Zadra: Oh, I just want to say this about living conditions. When we talked about Camp Polk, you'd be waiting for it [??]. Weather was mostly ten degrees above, one or two days, sixteen solid days below zero, and maybe eight, ten, twelve inches of snow. What was more bothersome is that a lot of times we're not billeted in any building or anything, and we just slept in the snow. Fortunately I was in the half-track. I could sleep in the half-track, but nonetheless it was very, very cold. And not only, sometime later, I don't know where it was, but it was across a farm field, and I noticed something protruding into the snow. I said to the captain, I said, "You know, that could be our tarp or something," so we picked up a tarp after that. We were covered with a tarp at least. But a lot of soldiers were frostbitten feet, of course.

[00:35:29]

The tanks, at least, with the heat that was running and so forth, they had opportunity to dry up on the hoods, and so it would dry out some of the clothes. But what we did as protection for the frost foot, we always put newspaper inside the shoes. That helped to draw the moisture, the less likely you'd have frozen feet. Otherwise we were dressed with a lot of wool clothes, and you could stand it. When you're twenty years old, you can. Today I couldn't do that, [laughs] by comparison. But food generally was quite ample. We had C rations, and we had K rations. We hadn't had a shower for about six weeks, something like that. We had an open type shower, a field open shower, but at least water. It was available.

It's interesting, as far as I had been awarded the Meritorious Bronze Star. I felt that—I had a lot of responsibility, and then I probably was a clearer type oriented soldier. In fact, a colonel said to me, he left when they broke up, he said, "Joe, I think you may become a tremendous officer someday if you stay in the Army." And decided to, when I came back not to do that. But I found any reward for what we did there was the citizens. They just endeared us. They were just tremendous. They just loved us. Anytime we came up to one they'd throw their arms around you and so forth. But also, in my work you saw very few civilians, but they had relatives naturally across the whole border. So you could get some information by making sure you seek out in civilian, if you could do it. Of course, I always had a German interpreter with me. Then that—it was a rewarding experience, because death was imminent anytime, regardless of where you were located, even though you were not a tank man up in the front, because you had artillery fire, air fire, and you was always in danger. I'd keep recounting, as we left Bastogne, that maybe the worst part is over with, because there were one million soldiers in that small area, 500,000—8,100 [??], and 600,000 Germans, 2,000 thousand tanks. We lost 500 tanks, and the Germans lost 600 tanks. A hundred and ninety casualties, of which 19,000 were killed, and 15,000 taken prisoners. So, you know, if you think of from here to Green Bay, in area, maybe lesser than that area, but tremendous fighting was confined into a thirty-mile range along that ninety-mile front really, the Hürtgen Forest. I went through there, but they had to go—you don't know how anybody could have survived in those conditions. It got icy and so forth. Your equipment would be stalled in mud, and

foxholes, trying to dig a foxhole along trees with all the roots is almost impossible. But you had to do it. I only dug one, one time. But it's unbelievable.

[00:40:04]

Brooks: Was there anything you did for morale to kind of keep—

Zadra: Yes. Yeah, I'm sorry. I'm glad you mentioned that, because my communications responsibility, every time we had any respite, any short period of time, make sure I got the news, and tell them we're making progress and so forth. I think it helps the soldiers, when they got the news. It certainly helped my morale, that's for sure, that we were making progress. But I often wondered, if I were to continue, if we weren't discharged of our duties, if I had to continue to fight from January 5th to the end of the month, when they finally got the Germans back to their borderline, I'm just wondering how treacherous that would have been, with continuing cold weather and so forth. How these soldiers survived. It's unbelievable, winter conditions. At least I was from Wisconsin [laughs], with some of us, envision, one soldier was from Louisiana [laughs], and he said, "Man, oh, man, why did they send me up here?"

Brooks: Different.

Zadra: But then after we—I mentioned the Limburg. That's an interesting, there's a personal experience, was that we had some of our prisoners being hospitalized in the hospital, and my good friend Captain Bates Hughes [sp??], our communications officer, he traveled with me after our reunions and so forth. Officers usually don't travel with noncommissioned officers [laughs], but he's a very good friend. He was in some—a soldier and so forth. As we advanced, continued to advance, towards Leipzig, there was a prisoner of war camp just out of Limburg, a stalag[?]. Another unit and our unit liberated that unit, more or less. If our duty wasn't—if we deliberated, that we make sure we left some of our medical people, give them attention and so forth. I never knew this until a *Stars and Stripes* trip. I was called down to Port Washington, and here was a Joe Demler, who was a soldier in a unit, an infantry division about five miles from us, not knowing him at that time. But he became a prisoner of war, and when he was liberated. I didn't liberate him personally, but he was liberated by our unit there and this other outfit. That night I met him. What an experience, finding that one of our soldiers, one of the soldiers in the battle, was liberated by us. That was interesting, and then to meet him in Port Washington. He's written up in this *Honor Flight* book. Have you seen that book?

Brooks: I've heard of him, yeah. I don't if—

Zadra: He's written up. It shows this skeleton. Yeah.

Brooks: Yeah, that was on the cover of a magazine, right

Mrs. Zadra: [inaudible].

Zadra: Yeah. We keep in contact with him all the time.

Brooks: I'm not sure.

Zadra: Yeah. Then from there we raced across, I say "raced across." Met very little resistance along the way, all the way to Leipzig. We found abandoned tanks and all vehicles for the lack of fuel, and maybe resistance. We saw fourteen and fifteen-year-old boys out there with guns. Of course, as we approached, of course, they had flags under the, this is what—hands went up or white flags. But I don't know, understand what they were trying to accomplish with fourteen and fifteen-year-old boys, unarmed—I mean, armed but without support or anything. But anyway, from there we went near Leipzig. Company B, a tank company—a company has twenty tanks, and there was one platoon down the road, and another platoon, and we were traveling, and we shouldn't be up there, but we were traveling, more or less, up there with them.

[00:44:56]

They came upon Captain Bamford, who was leading one of the platoons. Company B was fired upon, and there was anti-aircraft guns on the railroad, behind the berm of the railroad. Fortunately, the other platoon was coming down this road, and they could see what was happening, and they put them—they bombed them and then they shot them out. Otherwise maybe we could have been the next. They were trying to get the tanks rather than the half-tracks. There was more than half-tracks there. Then Captain Bamford dismounted from his tank to aid soldiers, and sure was shrapnel kept coming in. He lost a leg. He tied a tourniquet upon himself to save his life, and the communications, Captain Bates, moved back of us, just a short period back, and tried to communicate. Nobody answered, so he rushed up and he found Captain Bamford. Then he was evacuated.

And then, and the captain—no, Lieutenant Hits [??] was in another tank, and he was injured badly, and Captain Bates said, "Let's—I'll throw my coat down on him," and he said, "Go on and tend to others." Of course, he was still conscious, I guess, because they went over, Army reunions—had Army reunion every year, and Captain—Lieutenant Bates [sic] said to Captain Bates, he said, "Captain, you remember when you threw the coat on me? I was severely injured, you said, and here I am today." [laughs] That's interesting though. It seems that can happen. But Captain Bamford and Lieutenant Hits both met again in England in a hospital. We were told to meet the Russians in the Mulde River, as we were going along, Leipzig and then, that order was rescinded, because another unit north of Leipzig was going to meet the Russians.

Then we went southward toward Czechoslovakia. I never—I thought it was in Czechoslovakia. My son says the history shows that it wasn't in Czechoslovakia. I thought it was. But they had a brewery there at Hof, and I think that's why, the beer came from Hof. [people enter and talk in background] I didn't have enough points. They did it by points. Oh, the war was over at May seventh. Some of our troops, not our troops, but other troops, got to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, but I was stationed out of Czechoslovakia. People were being returned, soldiers were being returned to stateside. I didn't have enough points, so to speak, so I was assigned to Army of Occupation in southern Germany. What we did is loaded homeless civilians that were traveling back to the country and even soldiers that were discharged or just left, because the war was over,

on May 7th.

Brooks: Can I ask, what was your reaction to hearing that the war was officially over? Do you kind of remember that day?

Zadra: Yeah. [Laughs] I said, “Can I go home tomorrow?” [Laughs] That was the first thought, “Can I go home tomorrow?” and the sad news was no. I said goodbye to some of my friends, and I was really sick about it naturally. But then when I was assigned these duties and so forth, I thought I was—at least they recognized and they made me a master sergeant, and I was a staff sergeant, tech sergeant. They made me a master sergeant at that time, and they said, “You have this reward coming,” and they said—I was surprised that I was recognized that well. I have a copy of it here. Then working with the—oh, I still had some fear though, because these soldiers that just left the units, maybe one would be armed or something, you know, and would probably try to injure me. Of course, we had a couple other soldiers there with us, too, at the same time, to help boarding these people.

[00:50:15]

In, like, early, late November I think it was, I was assigned to the 4th Armored Division at that time. The 9th Armored was being disbanded. I was told that I’d be going home, and I boarded a jeep with a lieutenant and a driver. That was down near—I was in a hospital at Regensburg. I don’t remember the town, but it was going down the hill. Of course, this is winter, and a little bit icy, and a stalled German truck, a big heavy truck, and a lot of pedestrians are on the truck. Excuse me. Our driver slid into the truck. Fortunately the windshield was down, and I had heavy boots with laces and so forth. The driver was killed, I was told later. I didn’t know that, I was unconscious, of course. I landed on top of the hood of the truck. I had a ruptured spleen and head injuries. I laid in the hospital for a period of time, and then I was told I could go home. I boarded a Liberty ship, and we were on the water for thirteen days in rough seas in December, real rough seas. I ended up at Fort Sheridan. They were going to put me in the hospital down there for additional [inaudible] operation. I said no, I told the hospital that our family frequented with St. Mary’s in Wausau. I said, “I would like to go home.” So they put me on a train and got home and was discharged. I was discharged before that actually, on December—no, January 6, 1946. I went in a hospital for a period of time. The second semester started January twentieth at Wisconsin, so I finally was able to be readmitted about the 25th or 26th and started my education under the GI Bill of Rights. Of course, I had saved money also. I had worked, say, one year. And then Edna, I dated Edna for a period of years. We met in high school. She came to Madison in—I continued my education through the summer months so I could graduate earlier. In fact, the last semester I carried twenty credits.

Brooks: Wow.

Zadra: That’s a lot of credits. And then we were married in 1947, in May. Last year—she worked with an accounting firm, and of course we had sufficient income to at least enjoy life, I guess, [inaudible], but with twenty credits, and didn’t have too much leisure time. Then from there I joined the Bascom Hill Society, censusing [??]. I only joined

it—there was a \$10,000 fee to join it. And over a two-year period, you could pay it. I tell this to a lot of my American Legion people. I said, “To be that risky, to make sure I honored it,” but on the board was a fellow, this was, a public accounting firm, and so on that basis I said, “Would there be an opportunity?” and he said, “We don’t have an opportunity in our firm, but there’s a firm called Smith, Elnis, Schulich Company [??] of Green Bay is looking for people.” So I joined them, and I stayed with them four years. I traveled the Upper Peninsula as an auditor. That was winter conditions also. [laughter] Then I decided that—we wanted to start a family—decided that I wanted to leave public accounting and get with an industrial firm. On a Sunday night I picked up the *Milwaukee Journal* and the ad’s there, Gehl Company, farm machinery. Of course, there’s a little farm background. I answered it. He said, “Can you be down here on a Monday?” He said, “We’d like to interview you.” I came down. I interviewed four brothers, and I got the job and been with the company for forty-three years.

[00:55:20]

Brooks: Wow.

Zadra: I later became president, 1973, and then chairman of the board until 1985, which I then retired. So it’s been a rewarding experience.

Brooks: And what did you get your degree in?

Zadra: Pardon?

Brooks: What did you get your degree in, at UW?

Zadra: The degree? Accounting.

Brooks: Accounting, okay. I thought I might have missed that.

Zadra: Yeah. And took a lot of tax courses also. I was very, I thought, proficient in taxes, which helped me, because in fact I think why I got the job is that I, my accounting firm had a tax case in Madison, peculiarly, and all the accounts receivable reserves or something like that. But anyway, Gehl Company had the same problem at the same time. In the interview I mentioned what I did, I guess, so that was a real plus I think to getting the job.

Brooks: So why did you decide to get out of the Army? Were you thinking about staying in at all?

Zadra: Yes, I did. In fact, I thought about joining the National Guard. Of course, this was just before Korea, of course, and not too [inaudible]. I would have been commissioned as a second lieutenant very shortly afterwards, because of my master [sergeant rank] and my training and so forth. But then I felt that with my accounting responsibilities, you know, the new job and so forth, that it might be very demanding, because the training would have to be mostly on the weekends, initially. So then that’s the reason I chose not to join. Otherwise I probably would have joined and I probably would have been in Korea also

afterwards. I could have been. Who knows? So, I'm fortunate in that regard. But I enjoyed the interfacing with a lot of young men, particularly, and really, of all cultures. I like the discipline. I was a very disciplined boy. Outside of my date with Edna, I never dated—yeah, I dated a girl once I guess. I was not much for socializing. I liked to do things. I just often wonder. It would be good if a lot of our young people today had at least one year of military service, to know, to be more responsible, and disciplined. It's a different way of life. I didn't mind. I think you call it entrenchment, whatever you want to call it. I didn't mind it at all. The only thing I disliked is that in sleeping arrangements you always had somebody either above you or below you in bunks. That I didn't care for very much [laughs], other than that. You also run into a few weirdos once in a while.

Mrs. Zadra: Would you like a cup of coffee?

Zadra: No. Other than that, it's been a great life. I look back and I do think my success is attributed to my war experience, I really do. I met great—I worked with—well, one advantage is, in my position, I worked with an executive staff, so I was very comfortable with the colonel. You had Tommy Field Baker [sp??] was executive director. Captain Bates was communications. Captain Paul Moyers [??], the head of our surgery, medical. All of them, I got to know all these people. They were great. And unfortunately, of my company headquarters, company, battalion headquarters company, all the officers are dead. My closest friend, Captain Bates, in Iowa, which [inaudible]. In fact, he and I went to the battle, to the memorial, some ten, eleven years ago. We drove out there. Edna went along, because his wife didn't travel. He just died last April. And then I think there were thirty-seven in our headquarters company. I'm the only one that's still living. That's strange, isn't it?

[01:00:35]

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Zadra: Yeah. Of course, our officers naturally would be older. You know, maybe if I was twenty years old, they'd have been at least twenty-seven, thirty, thirty-five years old, much older. Just a difference. I enjoyed relating my experience to the high school students, various clubs, and have done a lot of speaking. American Legion, the Legionnaire, the ward [??]. About six, seven years ago I headed a fund drive of 175,000 to raise funds for developing a memorial in our Veterans Plaza for the Afghan and Iraqi soldiers that were killed from our county. It's gratifying and makes me feel real good.

Brooks: What's the best question you ever got from a high school student?

Zadra: Pardon?

Brooks: What's the best question you ever got from a high school student?

Zadra: I haven't— Yeah. I think, in fact, there's quite a few. "Were you ever fearful?" You mean?

Brooks: Yeah.

Zadra: Yeah. That was interesting. “Were you ever fearful?” And actually, I had to be very honest with them, tell them yes, every day. In fact, my mother gave me a Saint Christopher cross that I wore around my neck. I said a prayer daily, more often than just daily. It makes me think of my mother. She visited us, my brother and I both, at our camps. Imagine that. Out at Fort Reily. My brother was in Air Corps, and he got the Distinguished Flying Cross. She went out to Alameda, California, when he was awarded. My mother was very close to Alex. She was happy that none of us were killed. It would have been devastating for her. She lived to eighty-six. I really honored my parents. I told my father, who didn’t want to support me in college, that—I attribute that to the fact that they were brought up in Italy, Austria at that time. If you meet as a family, my brother—[laughs] that’s true. His father had an orchard. He came over at age twenty or twenty-one, I believe, to work in the mines. His father helped in the orchard and tended sheep and stuff like that. A little different than today, right.

Mrs. Zadra: You neglected to tell her about your trip to Belgium, with Mergenthaler.

Zadra: Pardon—oh, yes. Just two years ago, yeah, in August. The 84th Division fought to the right of us, and this fellow killed by—Mergenthaler, a Princeton graduate.

Mrs. Zadra: Of Princeton.

Zadra: Huh?

Mrs. Zadra: Princeton.

Zadra: Yeah. From a very, very wealthy family who invented a printing press—German, they were Germans, and Mergenthaler. He was killed on December 16th. He was endeared [to the—he was in just Reserve [??] for maybe one or two, two weeks or sometime after the brunt of the line, the initial days. What was it? December 16th. See, the war started—this is the 16th.

[01:05:16]

Mrs. Zadra: No, it was the year—it was later, because he was—the war was winding down.

Zadra: On December 26th I think it was, yeah, not 16th.

Mrs. Zadra: No, no, it wasn’t. It was in—

Zadra: Yeah, 26th. Anyway, outside of Bastogne was [??] called a town Eschweiler, a town of a hundred people. In a lot of little towns there are a hundred people. Each has a Catholic church. [Laughs] He got endeared to the people and milked their cows and spent time with the priests and so forth. He was killed in a battle right out of Eschweiler. The guy was giving us a bit of detail. Somebody buried him along the road, and a woman was doing her gardening, and she unearthed dog tags, and there the body was. The church was destroyed at the time he was killed probably, completely destroyed. They were going to honor this individual—instead [??] of a memorial. My son had hired a guide at

Deekirk [??], that's where a lot of the heavy battles were fought in the Hürtgen Forest. They have a museum there and all. The guide got a letter from the mayor of Eschweiler. He said, "You're now going to—it would be nice if we had a military man, US military man, lay the wreath on this tomb." He said, "Well, we can get a guy out of Stuttgart, a soldier out of Stuttgart, but we would like somebody that fought there." He said to my son, he said, "You have a son coming on this trip, aren't you?" He said, "Would he be willing to do that?" Can you imagine that. I said? "Sure. I'd be honored to do that." So we did go over there. We were over there already on the trip. We eventually got over there. But anyway, we laid the wreath and so forth. What a memory that was. Then they have a—

Mrs. Zadra: The family has rebuilt the church.

Zadra: Yeah. I think I might have [inaudible].

Mrs. Zadra: [inaudible].

Zadra: After the procession we had a church service, and his face is mounted up beside of Jesus in that church. And the endearment of these people, it was un—this is a group of my Meritorious Award.

Mrs. Zadra: I have these.

Zadra: You do, I know. [going through papers] I'm going to give it to you, [inaudible] do whatever you want with it. [inaudible]. Better from the mirror [??]. Now what did I do with it?

Brooks: We can take a look maybe after. We can look it up.

Zadra: Give me a finger maybe, yeah. Here it is, I guess. Yeah, here's the letter that came and then shows the photo and so forth. So there's a little treat.

Brooks: Wow. That's great, and there's the whole agenda.

Zadra: You know what I think about? You think about going to Arlington to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier? In this case, an unknown soldier to me. [Laughs]

Mrs. Zadra: We were about six miles in front at the time, you said. My son figured it out from the information.

Brooks: So you went back? How many times have you been back to Europe then?

Mrs. Zadra: Three times? Oh, we've gone to Europe many times—

Zadra: Twice.

Brooks: But three times I think for the war, regarding the war, three times.

[01:09:42]

Zadra: Yeah. With the 9th Armored Division. It's more detailed then with my son, because we had gone up to Deekirk [sp??]. Oh, yes, we did with Nolan [Zader's son] also, Malmedy, you know, where those prisoners were shot, near St. Vith. I didn't mention that. Lieutenant Hits, when I mentioned his name before, was with Company B at that time. They were assigned at, as I say, we were broken up into three units. The CCR, and they fought up in that area. So it was interesting to be able to go and saw the memorial along the wall, the names of soldiers. And also, I almost completely forgot that in the ensuing years here, a couple years, that—what's his name? Oh, Joe Demer [sp??], the head of *Stars and Stripes*, and our trips and so forth. My son was involved and I was—I have autographed quite a few books like this. So his bank and Wisconsin Energy's CO, Prada [??] provided funds and so forth, and they get a hundred dollars. Joe Demer and I sat one day at the [inaudible] bank at noon hour, autographed eighty books, they got eighty dollars and a raffle and so forth. Then another Saturday we, down in southern Milwaukee, southern, South Milwaukee, along the street there there's a Christian book, and we autographed books. And I said to the lady afterwards, I said, "We didn't have that kind of attendance. I'm disappointed." She said, "Don't worry about it. We'll get \$500 for some of these books someplace else." So Joe Demer was sent down to Naples, Florida, to autograph books. I never did find out, but I'm sure there's a lot of wealthy people down there. They do it well. My memory goes off. Another time about this—

Mrs. Zadra: You were trying to—were you trying to talk about when we were in Europe with Nolan, in Belgium? And we stopped at the side of the road to ask a farmer which way we would go to get to the museum, and this farmer immediately was—he couldn't speak English. He quickly showed you the bullet holes from the war. When he mentioned that he was a World War II vet—

Zadra: Sonenchamps[??], the little town of Sonenchamps[??], mile and a quarter outside—that's the last town we captured. Then finally someone came by and spoke English, and then he said, well, museums will be closing. They insisted, people that insisted we eat dinner with them. And then finally he said, "I have a cell phone. I'll phone in and tell them to keep the museum open." Then we got into the museum, and the first thing is staff sergeant, Belgium staff sergeant—this is in Belgium—greeted me. He said, "Oh, wow," he said, "What an experience." A number of visitors came through with another guide. He said, "This guy can tell you all about the war and the Battle of the Bulge." And so I did that. Then he said, "I'm going to take you down in the war room where the Germans sent a message to the 101st Parachute Division."

Mrs. Zadra: Colonel McCall?

Zadra: General McAuliffe

Mrs. Zadra: Was it General McAuliffe?

Zadra: Yeah, he said to surrender, and then he—of course then he sent a message back, "Oh, nuts!" Remember that? That was his message he sent back. So I'm sitting in it, down in that room where these guys met. What an experience. Then they put my name up on the

wall. [Laughs] That was interesting.

Mrs. Zadra: He said, “If your children come back here and visit one day,” any veteran that came to that area, they took a picture and put it on the wall.

Brooks: That’s great. What museum was this?

Mrs. Zadra: It’s in Belgium, right in Bastogne.

Zadra: Yeah, in Bastogne, yeah.

Brooks: Okay. So it’s like a memorial to the Battle of the Bulge?

Zadra: Yeah. What’s interesting though, going back, when we went with the 9th Armored Division, right in the Hürtgen Forest, I could envision how these soldiers fought there—dragging teeth and all that kind of stuff, which we didn’t see with no one—can you imagine that? When we sat down in Mersch [sp??] we got the word that they were amassing, just before December 16th, maybe we’d come the day before, they were amassing all these soldiers in Hürtgen Forest, undetected by anybody, you know, on the equipment and everything else. How they could do that?

[01:15:25]

Mrs. Zadra: Are you talking about Malmedy?

Zadra: No, I’m talking about Hürtgen Forest, but Malmedy, yeah. Oh, yes. I have a tape that was provided by a northwest Milwaukee historical group of the survivors, the one survivor of Malmedy. He talks about his—he’s a farm boy. He was a farm boy up from near Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He died two years ago. But they had taped him just before that, and I have the tape. I’m going to be showing that to various veteran groups. He laid down, and he’s one body, wasn’t it?

Mrs. Zadra: I think somebody fell over him, and he pretended to be dead.

Zadra: Yeah, [inaudible] and they landed him up in this [inaudible; overlapping dialogue]—

Mrs. Zadra: But they went back and shot everybody a second time to be sure they were dead, and if he, see, escaped. Four of them escaped, I guess.

Zadra: Yeah. It’s interesting, because it’s out, by my experiences—

Mrs. Zadra: Eighty-eight of them.

Zadra: —in interviewing quite a few prisoners and so forth, I’m happy I never had to make a decision. I wouldn’t have made a decision. An officer would have made the decision to kill some of their German prisoners, because these were Hitler’s SS troops, Panzer SS troops that did this, and they paid a penalty afterwards. But the word was out that we’re not going to take any German prisoners up in that area. I suspect they didn’t, neither. I

don't know for sure. But that's what the word is out. That's unbelievable, that they would do something like that.

Brooks: Can you tell me a little bit more about liberating the POW camp?

Zadra: Yeah. In fact, as we came upon it, they knew they were coming. The Germans, whoever were in charge, took off. [Laughs] It was—for a period of time, maybe hours, I don't know, because we made a rapid advance. They knew that, of course. It was vacated, except just the patients and I guess a few women were there and so forth, attending, but otherwise what we did see is emaciated—you could see, we didn't spend the time there, we're moving up, but left about one medical people there, some emaciated people. Joe Demer must have been one of them, but it's surprising that he was not put in the hospital. Then when Captain Bates found one of his people in the hospital—

Mrs. Zadra: They must have put him in the hospital.

Zadra: No, no.

Mrs. Zadra: I think he said he was eventually. He eventually was put in the hospital. I remember that.

Zadra: I don't remember that. Well, maybe. I don't remember that anymore.

Brooks: Now what was your conversation with him like when you finally met him?

Mrs. Zadra: He said that he was—I can remember what he said, if you don't mind my saying it. He said that he was—

Brooks: If you—you might want to get a little closer to our microphone.

Zadra: When we meet him in Port Washington? Yeah. The first thing he said, he said, "Joe, you'll see these shirts have been printed for our *Stars and Stripes*. 'Every day is a bonus.'" And he said this, he said, yeah, now I remember, he said this, "Joe, our fear was after being captives that long and just surviving, that Hitler was going to give the orders"—that they were practically defeated—"Kill every prisoner of war." That was his fear. That was something, thinking about what's going through his mind, you know, what the man had suffered.

Mrs. Zadra: But you have to tell them—

Zadra: And the other thing, what he did say, as a prisoner though, how he had to work bread and water, more or less, and work eight and nine-hour shifts in the factory, hard labor, making war munitions.

Mrs. Zadra: And when his next door neighbor, in the cot, died he had to bury him.

Zadra: Yeah, he had to bury him. Yeah, I do remember that, yeah, that he had to bury him, he says.

[01:20:00]

Mrs. Zadra: He said, "I was about ready to go myself, because I knew I didn't have much time left," when they found him. But he knew that, also, from the news, from other prisoners, he knew that the Americans were advancing, so they were hopeful.

Zadra: Yeah. Yeah, that picture. You have a picture of [inaudible], huh?

Brooks: No.

Zadra: I don't know if you need it or not.

Brooks: Who, this Demer? No.

Zadra: Yeah. Pardon?

Brooks: This is Demer?

Zadra: Sure [??]. This one thing about our unit, you know, I talked to a lot of people, all soldiers that fought in the Pacific or wherever they fought. The Battle of the Bulge was the greatest battle ever fought. That's why you have a separate unit, they published, and we donate to it. And the war stories, of course, there are less the number of stories now, because there are fewer to contribute. But there are families that contribute for the continuation of the publication. It's fantastic. I have one that shows the winter condition on the front page. [Laughs] I keep looking at that all the time, and I'm reminded. We meet at our cottage for Christmas, the families do, and I keep reminding them about how nice it is to be back with the family instead of being over there.

Brooks: And this is the *Bulge Bugle*, that's the name of this publication?

Zadra: Yeah, name's *Battle of the Bulge*, yeah. We visited with Captain Bates. We headed to headquarters out in Maryland I guess it was, someplace out there, yeah. It's quite a publication. It comes out quarterly.

Brooks: And have you contributed to it?

Zadra: Yes, I have, continue to do that, yeah. My son also contributes to it. He wants to make sure he keeps getting it. It's nice.

Mrs. Zadra: How many have you found, soldiers have you interviewed?

Zadra: Nice book on Bastogne.

Brooks: Yeah. That's great. Well, is there anything else that you want for the recording, to make sure you talk about, while we're still recording? I can take a look and see.

Zadra: I'd say, with my brain surgery, my wife supported me, and right now a few comments. Unless I write everything down, I—

Brooks: Well, if you want to take a look, this is the other experiences to include in the interview. So if there's anything here that kind of jogs your memory a little bit.

Zadra: Should I look at this, you say?

Brooks: Yeah, yeah. I don't know if you wrote this or who filled this out for you, but in case anything jogs your memory.

Zadra: Major Phil McCann [??]. Well, the first casualty loss, that was from our unit, and actually we always had casualties before that, in a lot of the tank companies, and so forth, but from our unit, see, battalion headquarters, yeah, he wasn't in headquarters company. Okay. I must admit, you follow that pretty much, yeah.

Brooks: Yeah, I think so.

Zadra: Yeah.

Brooks: I think we covered everything.

Zadra: Yeah. Okay.

Brooks: Okay. All right, well, if there's anything else you want to add, I can turn off the recorder.

Zadra: I can always send you something.

Brooks: Yeah, definitely. I can always come back.

Zadra: You know, I have things from, in fact, individuals. I was the head of the Battle of the Bulge—head of the Bugle book.

Brooks: The publication?

Zadra: Pamphlet, yeah. And send me lots of information, detailed, that he, on various companies' involvement. [phone rings] He sent me a lot of things. I just got it. I was going to read it. If there something, highlights there, I could send it to you.

Brooks: Yeah.

Zadra: But that's not my experience though.

Brooks: Right, yeah, and that's more what we're looking for [phone rings] is the personal.

Zadra: Yeah, what you wanted, my own personal experience, yeah.

Brooks: Is there anything that you'd specifically want someone, like a younger person listening to this, to know about World War II and your experience as a soldier?

Zadra: To go there, you say?

Brooks: No, your experience as a soldier. You said you talked to high school students a lot, so is there one kind of message that you really wanted them to take away from your conversations?

[01:25:00]

Zadra: Of course, a lot of questions. “Were you ever injured?” That was asked a lot of times, you know. I told them how close the shrapnel was, and thank the Lord I was in the half-track rather than being on the ground. That’s what I—a lot of soldiers suffered injuries because of the shrapnel, rather than being fired with a bullet. Those are more severe. Bullets sometimes just didn’t kill you, at least. Shrapnel just shredded you, shredded legs and so forth. A lot of them ask about [laughs] naturally, interesting, young people, about food. “Did you have ample food, and how did you heat it?” And one thing you’ve got to remember, the advantage people had in the tanks, they had a little portable cook unit that they could warm up their food, yeah, which we didn’t have.

Mrs. Zadra: He’d spend many holidays with C rations.

Zadra: Oh, the other thing about, yeah. They told me we had—I was never a smoker, but I began smoking. I thought it helped keep me warm. [Laughs] Free cigarettes. And earlier I used to exchange my cigarettes with other soldiers for chocolate, because I always—chocolate was very energizing. It makes a big difference, things like that, little things like that. Yeah.

Mrs. Zadra: What do you do with this information?

Zadra: Oh, yeah. A question to ask. Your personal hygiene. “Where did you go to the toilet?” [laughs]

Mrs. Zadra: School children. “When did you take a bath?” They can’t believe you go without taking a bath.

Zadra: Yeah, going to the toilet. Then they said, “Did you carry toilet paper with you?” Yeah, though, questions like that. It’s interesting. [Laughs] I think the boys would be asking that, of course.

Brooks: Was there any one takeaway you wanted to make sure they got from those conversations, like any one thing you wanted to make sure they learned?

Zadra: Yeah. Well, one thing is, I just wanted to make sure that they understood that discipline was number one. You followed orders, and if you didn’t follow orders you suffered for it. Very rigid about it. I said, “If you, for example, if you had a weekend, you went off, and you didn’t come back in time, if you had a rank you were demoted completely.” You lose everything, you know. Then you were not able—if stateside, you weren’t able to go anywhere. I never went except at Fort Riley, we were six or eight miles from Kansas State University, Manhattan; it was nearby. The USO club always supported

entertainment. For example, high school girls would be there to dance with you and so forth. Other than that, yeah.

Oh, yeah, the other thing is, personal hygiene, personal appearance. Shining shoes, you always shined shoes. [Laughs]

Brooks: It's important.

Zadra: Always.

Mrs. Zadra: What's going to become of all this information?

Brooks: Well, if you are done I can go ahead and turn off the recording, and then we can talk about that.

Zadra: Yeah. The other thing that—

Brooks: We'll wait till he's finished.

Zadra: The other thing would be that revelry, early in the morning, each morning, you had to be there right in line, not one minute late. You're going to be there, period. That other thing you got to see. I forget, my mind.

Brooks: Oh. No, that's all right. We were just talking about discipline, and you were telling the students how important that is. So that seems like the number one thing you wanted them to take away from your talks to them.

Zadra: Yeah.

Brooks: Yeah.

[01:29:53]

Zadra: The other thing is that I made it a point, made it a strong point, that I served my country with honor. If I had to do it again, I'd be glad to do it again. I [inaudible], told them that, that we should enjoy our freedom that we do have, and we soldiers continue to provide that, when you have a war. It's so important. And tell them if you're called upon to do it, don't evade it. You make that strong point about our freedom and our country.

Brooks: That's great. Well, I think that's a great part to end the interview on, okay.

Zadra: Yeah.

Brooks: All right. So I'll just go ahead and turn this off.

Zadra: Thank you.

Brooks: Thank you.

[End of OH2040.Zadra] [End of interview]