



Albert A. Aronson

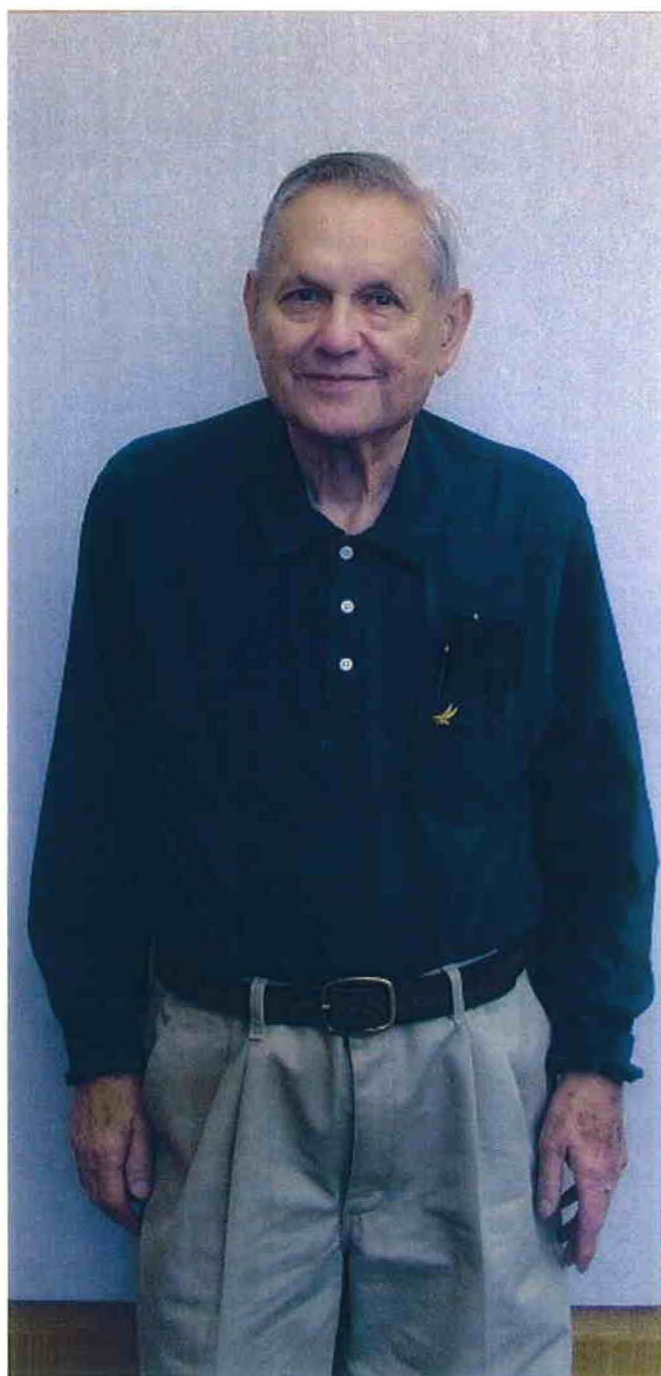
U.S. Army
World War II, Europe
Medical Corps (103rd Battalion)
28th Division

Albert A. Aronson

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
November 22, 2005**

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Niles, Illinois



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Veterans History Project Transcript

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Branch of Service: **U.S. Army**

Theater: **World War II, Europe**

Unit: **Medical Corps (103rd Battalion), 28th Division** Rank: **Private First Class**

Interview Date: November 22, 2005

Place: Large Meeting Room B

Interview length: 73 minutes

Equipment: Panasonic Standard Cassette Transcriber

Interviewer/Transcriber: Neil O'Shea

Al was born on January the 11th of 1925, and he now lives in Niles, Illinois. And he has kindly consented to be interviewed for this Veterans History Project. Here is his story. Al, when did you enter the Service? (Interviewer's words)

April 13th, 1943. (Veteran's words)

And what were you doing when you-- before you joined?

I was a college student at Wright Junior College.

tape counter mark: 007- drafted, choice of service

So, were you'drafted, or did you enlist?

I was selected by my friends and neighbors, (chuckle) that's what it says on the drafting form.

Yeah.

Another fellow and I, oh, we were very friendly in high school, went into Service at the same time. I went into the Army. He went into the Navy since that—he's passed away several years back. Now, I was discharged in October 23 of '45 on the point system.

So, why did you choose the Army?

Hell, I couldn't swim. I didn't want the Navy. And another thing is I was in the ROTC in high school for four years, and I did have a basic knowledge of the military.

Where did you attend high school, if I may ask?

Roosevelt High School in Chicago.

Oh, a Rough Rider.

Right. I even have a sweatshirt with that on.

Wow. Yeah, that's over there on, what is that, that's on Wilson, and is it

Pardon?

Wilson and Kimball. It looks better now than when I went there. Oh, matter of fact, this Hy Ray (another Niles veteran) was the first graduate corps of his high school, Roosevelt.

Wow, that will be interesting when I interview Mr. Ray.

He's about ninety-three now. Very nice fellow. You'll like him.

Yeah. So, you were inducted in Chicago, then?

That is correct. I was given about a week leave to settle my affairs which weren't that extensive and then went into Camp Grant (an induction center Rockford, Illinois) and then was shipped to a camp outside of Salt Lake City for basic training. Basic training was Air Corps basic training.

029- Medical Corps

Then I was placed in the Medical Corps, which I wanted, and went to surgical tech school at Fitzgerald Hospital in Denver. And that was a two and a half month course where I was taught anatomy and physiology, first aid, different injections like hypo etc., etc., and clerical work. And then I worked a couple of weeks in the hospital.

Next I was assigned to a B-17 bomb group that went over to England in October of '43, and I was with them, oh, God, how long? A good, oh, not quite a year, and then the war in Europe, which was on the continent, needed medical personnel. And I was volunteered by my commanding officer since I was the youngest, and had no responsibilities, so they shipped me out.

050- reassignment to Army ground forces in France

I joined the 103rd medical battalion which was attached to the 28th division. The 28th division had just finished the victory march through Paris. With them, we went through France, and part of Luxemburg, and Belgium, and then we were classified in the quiet sector.

Then, in December of '44, the SS troopers' armor unit led the way for the German Army. The armored group did not take prisoners. They wiped them out, that was including medics. The medical corps are noncombatant. Due to the Geneva Convention, there was an agreement with all the European countries that they were noncombatant, except Japan, which had withdrawn from the League of Nations.

I was very fortunate to be assigned to the 103rd medical battalion. Because we were a clearing station for injured and wounded individuals, we served very little in the front lines. I had to take my hat off to the medics who were attached to the combat engineers. They took a tremendous beating.

Now the worst-- we classified wounds or injuries in three categories: abrasions, which breaks out of the skin, you know, like, oh, something similar maybe like that; puncture wounds where a bullet would pierce into-- and then a laceration, which is normally done by shrapnel, which tears out an area. Those are the worst types of wounds to service.

You don't realize until you're in the middle of the Corps what happens to a human body when it's wounded or tears out areas, etc. Now, when the Bulge was halted and we started reclaiming area, what was heartbreaking was when we looked at the corpses. They were at different positions, and so on, but what the saddest part was, a corpse with minor injuries or wound up frozen to death. They were not serviced, and it hurt to see that. The dead were distorted, sitting up, lying down, many different positions. To some extent, you get immune to some of this, though, not a hundred percent. And I was-- I think around-- I was about nineteen or twenty, so it was sometimes hard to absorb, especially being sheltered, you know, in your early life.

We had a good team of medical people. The doctors and the enlisted men functioned very well as a team. Now, when we were overworked, the people that we could not help, they had to wait. We tried to make them as comfortable as possible with morphine etc., and we would take the people that had a fighting change, and then we would disperse them to hospitals for further service.

It was a very, oh, quite an experience. I was overseas twenty-one months. And when I came back I was quite disillusioned with the people of the United States. Because many of them were making very good money, they were spending their money for amusements and etc., although there were some people that were suffering because of their dead, but being in Europe and seeing children go into your garbage can for food, and people living in the open, or in the basement, and things like that, and then you come home and you see complete reversal, it doesn't set too well for a twenty-year-old to see that.

Yeah.

I was very fortunate to be discharged at the age of twenty. I did make a mistake by going to college too quick in January of '46. I should have stayed out, worked, and so on. I was not adjusted for college at that time. I do have a college degree. I wanted to be a doctor. I had the experience in the field, but as to sit down and study, etc., I didn't have the capabilities for that. I got a degree in commerce at Roosevelt University. At that time, it was Roosevelt College. It was small.

Was that on the GI bill?

That is correct. That is one of the greatest things they came out with, because it produced many good personnel for government and for business, etc.

Do you have any questions, or I--

Oh, sure. Why did you choose the Medical Corps?

I wanted to be a doctor.

You wanted to be a doctor.

I wanted to take after my uncle, who was a doctor, and he was a captain in the Air Force. I had the practical experience. There were only two times I got sick in the Army about—when I saw my first surgery in Colorado, and the second, when we opened up a burned-out tank to take out the dead soldiers. And as a burned-out tank, that sweet burning odor from human beings hit me in the face. And I got-- I didn't throw up, but I got sick, and I had to get into the wind to wash it out of my face. That's really the only two times I felt pretty beat up.

Going into the Army, was that the first time you were ever away from home for a long period of time?

That is correct.

But you adjusted pretty well at the age of eighteen to shift around the country and meeting all kinds of different people and types.

You mature very quickly. You learn to survive on your own, but you do get clothing, food, and medical attention. No one played nursemaid to you. And if you didn't have money, you did without it. You couldn't come to your parents and borrow money like you had when you were younger.

So you drafted in April of-- April 13?

I was selected.

Selected on April 13, 1943.

Yeah.

142-traveling to England on the Queen Mary

And then you, after the training in America, you get to England in-- toward the end of '43 or the beginning

October of '43.

Was that-- did you get to England by flying or by ship?

No. Oh, by the Queen Mary.

Wow.

Wow. Let me tell you about the Queen Mary. You had two meals a day. The evening meal was mutton, English mutton. And the breakfast was eggs, not fresh eggs, powdered eggs. You had to line up for the meals. It took you approximately a couple of hours to get to the food. And by that time, the odor of the food-- you weren't hungry. Good thing they had a PX aboard! And you lived on candy and cookies. The Queen Mary, it left New York Harbor and cut down to, what was it again? B, it's an island that starts with B.

Bermuda?

Yes, cut down to Bermuda and then cut up to Scotland in one of their coves there. It took approximately five days. There was roughly about 15,000 troops aboard. And in the room that we had, our stateroom was actually to accommodate two people, there were sixteen of us. But what was good about it was we had a porthole to look through. We waved good-bye at the Queen Mary, not the Queen Mary, the Statue of Liberty, and we went on our trip. Now, the Queen traveled by itself, because of its speed, and it could outrun any submarine, except if the submarine came head on.

It had Ack-Ack guns on it, and a six inch gun in the swimming pool. I'll tell you very honestly the Ack-Ack were lousy shots. They would shoot up balloons and couldn't hit them. And I would do better with my syringe and needle than they could do there. But the crew, the medical crew, was American. Matter of fact, I helped run through about three or four hundred people with shots. And their needles, oh, were horrible. Some had burs. You hit the person, and you pull it out, and blood would come out with it. But we worked out very well there.

Did you have medical duties while you were on the ship?

For shots and for-- you're going-- I don't think you would want to put this on the tape, what we called a short arm inspection (note: a physical examination for evidence of gonorrhea). We were called into duty inspecting the-- our troops of our outfit and, though, that's about all. I don't know what the medical detachment on the boat did. It was good duty for them, but I don't know.

So when you landed in Scotland then

Yeah.

You went by train or

We went by train down to the Midlands of England. And we were put on our base. If I remember, the first night there was an air raid warning, and we all went into air raid shelters. But it didn't amount to anything. Our outfit, I don't know how long it took to activate it.

And to give you a little rundown on the servicing of the Air Corps, when the aircraft returned from a mission, if a red flare from one of the aircraft was shot, that meant they had wounded aboard. And they would land, and we would go to, with an ambulance, to the wounded area where the wounded were. We divided the wounded into three categories. If the man was severely wounded, he would go with the ambulance with a doctor and a medical man to the nearest hospital; the second, if he was not too seriously wounded, we would service him at our infirmary; the third one, the person was dead. We would take him to our morgue where he would be picked up. Now, our layout of the infirmary was set up as such: a morgue, two wards, an emergency room, a sick call area, and an administrative area. I was in the sick call area. We would handle the sick call or injuries, etc., in that area. I think it was in July, in July of '44, where they needed people, medical people in the continent, and that's where I got attached to the 103rd medical battalion which was part of the 28th division.

The 28th division was a National Guard outfit out of Pennsylvania. Their shape of their --it doesn't show on here on my photo, is a keystone patch.

Like the state, yeah.

In ancient times, rather medieval times, they didn't have concrete, and they used to insert keystones into that area. The reason for that emblem for Pennsylvania, it was located in the middle of the original thirteen colonies, and the Continental Congress held their meetings there..

Yeah.

And it was known as the "Keystone state." I don't think the division is still in service. I think they broke it down into a different setup. The medical, rather, the Army setup is so much different than when I was in.

230-Battle of the Bulge

When the German SS tank or whatever was spearheaded, that was the Bulge offensive, right?

That is correct.

How close did they get to where your headquarters were or your camp?

Really, I'll tell you something funny. When you're in a unit, you're in that specific area; you do not know where the other units are.

Now, we had a 106th division. It had just come over from the states two weeks before. They were ill- equipped, didn't have any training, and that's where the Germans came through. In the first week of combat, they lost 7500 men, which is about a regiment, because there is approximately 15,000 soldiers in a division, and there are three regiments there, plus attached units like our medical unit. And, so, the armor went through, they couldn't take prisoners, to be honest, they were on a time schedule, and they just wiped them out, medic, or not, they wiped you out. Let me put it this way, we returned the hospitality.

It’s the animal that comes out. Now, when the war was near the end, we went on occupational duty. Being a medic, we supervised a PW camp which was for German prisoners. They separated the SS from the regular German Army. The German prisoners dug into the ground for shelter, and they used whatever they could above it. We did not help them at all. My division was on guard duty, and they had no love for the SS. In the compound, you had an eight foot wire fence, and then approximately three feet from there, you had a, oh, about two and a half, three feet high fence. If you touched this fence, there, a guard would yell halt three times, and, if you didn’t halt, you’re dead. Practically every morning, we would find a couple dead prisoners, mostly SS. When you’re in the Armed Forces, you turn into an animal.

And, now, I have a buddy-- he and I used to lecture in my daughter’s class, he was with the Third Army. And he, being Jewish like I am, he could speak it. His outfit called for Jewish soldiers to go into a concentration camp. The Jewish concentration camp, matter of fact, an SS trooper was going to shoot him, but he let him have it first and wiped him out. He has souvenirs from this person. He went into the Service, oh, at seventeen with the okay of his parents, and on the second day of D-Day, he landed. And he was attached to the Third Army, and he was up on the Bulge when they relieved Bastogne.

The Bulge was a real mess. It was crazy. It was heavy fog and very cold, misty, and you could get no air support because of the cloudiness. It was a strange thing. You would hear German in back of you and in front of you, or English, the same thing. They were as screwed up as we were. It was a total mess. They say the Bulge was the biggest loss of personnel that we ever suffered. The Germans suffered more. They claim that-- I think it was our losses were about 80,000 wounded, killed, and captured. The Germans, they claim, was about 120,000. I was reading a report on it, no, I saw it on the History Channel that the German schedules were behind, because they were going through woods in flat areas. It’s different, and they ran out of petrol and so on. We were getting reinforcements who were cooks, clerical help, and they didn’t know which end of the rifle to use.

309-combating trench foot

We treated many cases of trench foot. They would bring them back into our area, and we would take the shoe off, and the foot would swell into a redness or a bluish appearance, and all you could do was wash them, and so on. Then, we would ship them back to a different area for servicing. There must have been a hell of a lot of amputations because when gangrene sets in, it’s hard to control except through amputation. After a while, we didn’t take the shoe off. We just shipped them right back, because it was superfluous to do it. And there was more important things to do. It was a shame, especially, many of these people that didn’t know how to take care of it. Now, myself, I used to carry two pairs of socks in my helmet and try to change my socks every other day or stuff like that, then try and wash out the other ones, and then put them out to freeze. And, then, eventually, you were able to wear them again.

But being in the medical battalion was much easier than being up in front in the combat area. And it was quite gruesome, the wounded, etc., but, up in front, it was much worse, much worse.

And one thing about the German army, when they brought in reinforcements, they would pull out the whole group and form a unit. American troops, you learn on-the-job training and the casualties were such a --were larger that way.

Did you-- were you able to stay in touch with the people at home with mail or

330 – v-mail

Yeah, V-mail, where you wrote out and they made photostats and mailed-- sent it back to the States. They were -- I'm sorry, I should have brought one. They're about that big when they're reproduced, but the film is about that long. And I used to write as well as I could to keep up the morale at home.

That was V-mail?

V-mail, right.

Yeah, Yeah.

If you wrote a letter, if you were lucky, they would get it at home maybe in a month. With this V-mail, within a week. I don't know, yeah, that's all I know about it. I don't know whether they went by mail or were transmitted. I don't know the process, but it was very handy. We had to have it okayed by an officer, censored by-- but our officers, they didn't give a damn. They just okayed it,

Yeah

and it went through.

So when you crossed into Germany

Yeah

and you were there for some of the occupation, right?

Yeah.

Where did you-- where were you stationed in Germany?

We were stationed in an occupational area near Essen, Germany. Later on, oh, I'd say a month or two months after the war, no, less than that, the war ended in May. I'd say a month before the war ended, this area was going to be occupied by the British. And the British moved down. We went to a resort area, which was a rehabilitation area for the Germans, and we put out-- we stayed there for the remainder of the time.

360-the victory celebration

A day before the surrender, we were notified that it was going to occur. We sent out our vehicles for all kinds of liquor, and they brought them back. And, funny thing about it, the following day, I had KP, so we got lit pretty well the night before, and the Germans could have taken the town without any trouble, so I showed up around 11 o'clock for KP, and one of the cooks came down about the same time. We looked at each other, nobody around, we went back to sleep. Then, was it June or July? Wait, June or July, our division was moved to France to be sent back home for rehabilitation, recuperation leave, then to be trained for the Pacific. I was home in August when they dropped the two bombs in Japan and they, Japan, surrendered. And, then, when I was called back after my leave, I went back to the base. And the point system went into effect, and I had ample points for discharge.

390 – discharge from Camp Johnston

So you were discharged from

Down in Florida. Originally, I went back to the base in Hattiesburg, Mississippi which-- Camp Shelby, which held about four divisions, and, at that time, they could not service us with the points. And they sent us to Florida. I think it was Camp Johnston which was an amphibious training area. And we were discharged from there. Funny thing about it, back in '51, when I was a salesman on the road, I went back to Mississippi to the Hattiesburg area, and the area where we were stationed was strictly fields - no indication of a military base at all. And it was quite strange.

Yeah.

And

Did you ever go back to Europe after the war?

In 1978 I went to England with the entire family. In July, 1980, I won a free trip to the Riviera as a salesman. Oh, I'm sorry. Prior to that, in June of 1980 we sent my daughters when my older daughter graduated from college, we sent her and my youngest daughter, pre-college age, a gift for going to Europe. They went as students, and they had a ball for a month, and I think it cost us about 2000 dollars for both of them for a month. Can you visualize that?

Yeah. Not today, huh.

And they were at camps and hostels and so on. In 1982, my wife and I went back to England, and we went to where I was stationed.

In the Midlands.

In England.

Was that in the Midlands where you were stationed, you were saying?

Yes.

390-returning later as a civilian

Yeah, to where you had been stationed?

Yeah, and around that area. Then, when my wife and I, went to England and Scotland and toured where I went through. And, then, I think, about six years ago, we went to Paris. The only time I saw Paris when I was in the Service was from the outskirts when I waved at the Eiffel Tower in the distance. And we spent some time there. And we went over to Normandy. What impressed me at Normandy, where the Rangers went up this cliff, and we were on top of the cliff, and we looked down, I couldn't visualize them coming up that cliff. They took hell with casualties. The reason they went up that cliff was that the Germans were supposed to put on large cannons on it, but they never did. They just had a fighting group up there. Now, they did not do anything to this area. You could see the bomb shelters and so on. Most of Normandy was pretty well cleaned up except Utah Beach, which they kept it like it was at invasion time. We never did get up there. That was south of Cherbourg.

We went to where the British landed and the town that the British took was eighty percent destroyed and had to be rebuilt. Now, they also had, I think, sometime in June, late June, the weather was horrible, and they had to put in breakers. And they still had those breakers in the British section where they brought in their supplies. They expected to pick up Cherbourg, but they held out longer than they expected. The beachhead, from what I gather, was about fifty miles long. As I was saying, the British and American Normandy beachhead was straight west, and Utah was sort of south, and I heard that was quite a messy engagement there.

460 – medals and citations

You received a number of medals and citations for your service.

Oh, I have about five medals, five battle stars, that's about it, oh, and a unit citation.

Yeah, I think that's important, if you could point those out, yeah.

There's a unit citation. There's my discharge, my, all ribbons, I have a couple more that's been added, infantry, a medic combat badge, and the PFC. You know, what that stands for, PFC?

Private First Class?

No, no. Poor Frightened Civilians.

Very good. Very good.

That's about all.

So, you have a silver-- what is it, a silver

I was far from being a hero.

But you have a silver star, is that right?

No, five battle stars which is

Five battle stars which constitutes a silver

Silver star, yeah.

Yeah.

I have no purple hearts. One fellow in our outfit, we were in an artillery barrage, and he was sitting on a fence at that time, and he fell off the fence, he got a purple heart. We were very envious of him, because that was five points towards discharge.

481 – earning points for discharge

How many points did you need for discharge?

76.

76.

What it is, 21 months overseas counted as two points, and then my battle stars each counted for five, and the length of service, and the service in the States. I was in the States for about six months and that was one point per month there. I think I was one of the youngest to be discharged from service, not being twenty-one.

Did you gain weight while you were in the Service or lose weight?

I tell you, want me to tell you something? When I went into service, I was 145 pounds, five eight in height. When I got discharged, I was 175 pounds, 6 foot.

Wow, you had a growth spurt in there, huh?

Oh, I was a slow grower.

Yeah.

But you want me to tell you something strange? Right now, I am at 163 pounds

Wow

and I think about five eleven, shrunk about an inch.

So, when you came back stateside--

Yeah?

You mentioned that you were slightly disillusioned with

Very much

other civilians.

Not slightly. Quite a bit.

511 – adjusting to other civilians and college

Yeah. But you adjusted to that and went to college.

No, I'll be very honest with you. Adjustment took from six months to a year. As I said earlier, I had no business going to college. I was not ready for it. I should have taken a job and matured more. It's-- certain things are imprinted in your head over, as I say, twenty-one months, and seeing things that the majority of people in the United States have never seen, and I hope they never will, except up in New York that one time and in Washington (9/11). But, sometimes, it brings people back to reality to have a certain amount of hardship. I just hope that our people are not too soft. You know, when you sit back and you think about what's going to be with generations to come, will we become complacent with what we have?

550- snipers targeting medics

Do we—now, the people who are in Service right now who are in combat they know what they're in. And I tell you, this guerrilla warfare is rough stuff. We had a little bit of it, our outfit, when they went into towns, to take over towns and villages. And you had snipers, and you had hand grenades flying around. We were very fortunate. Our unit was in the outskirts of these towns and didn't really get involved. Actually, we only lost one medic, and that was due to a sniper. We wore helmets which had a round white background with red crosses. I don't know whether you've seen movies with it, but this sniper hit the center of the red cross and wiped a man out. That was about the only casualty we had. We were a little leery about wearing those helmets again, because they stood out.

Stood out and gave a target.

Oh, man, a beautiful target. From what I gather, the medics with the combat engineers did not wear those helmets, because they would give away positions to the enemy. And we had arm bands, too, and they didn't wear those either.

When you came back to the States, did you maintain any friendships with people you'd met in the Service?

Not very much.

Did you join any veterans' groups?

I joined the American Legion, the VFW, I went to some of their meetings, and they wound up playing poker. Five minutes a meeting, and two hours of poker, and that wasn't for me. Also, I stayed in those, VFW, American Legion, because it was beneficial to my sales job, because I used to call on clubs. I later joined the Jewish War Veterans, and I got disillusioned with them too. But they were a little more active in the welfare of the American soldier and etc.

589-encountering anti-semitism

Maybe this is a sensitive question, and maybe I shouldn't ask you.

Go ahead.

Did you encounter any anti-Semitism when you were in the Army?

Oh, I had a couple fights. Matter of fact, I'm very fortunate. I won them both.

Very good.

Yes. One fellow was the-- this is odd as hell. I hate to say, nationality was Polish descent, and we went out, and we started fighting. And he said to me, "You can't hurt me in the stomach." I said, "No?" So, I went for the face. I got his face bloody. And when it got bloody, it was time for him to quit. And the other one was a wrestling match. It was when I was going to tech school, and that was broken up by the people around there.

That was in the States then.

Yeah, that was in the States. One was in the States. One was in Germany. Two GIs fighting was not good morale for the German people to see. But that was it.

616-distressing war sights

What was a very, very sad thing is to see a truck drive by with mattress covers and, in the mattress covers, was corpses, and they were filled.

Side two

And it was a very sad situation. That was when the war was over and they were moving there.

007-Normandy, 50 years later

Going way ahead, when we were in Normandy, my wife and another couple, we visited a Normandy cemetery, American cemetery, which has close to ten thousand graves in it. And we went into this area and we saw these gravestones, all different angles, perfect in any angle you look, and there was a heavy quietness there. And people did not talk loudly. They whispered. They had a building which I went into, and it was a computer area, and if you wanted some history about anybody, you could ask about it.

We lost one fellow. He was taken prisoner during the Bulge, and he was in a camp, and Germans normally put the camps near a military installation or an industrial installation. And they felt that the Americans would not bomb the group. Well, they sent in a group of precision bombers, and it so happened they hit the camp, also. And he was killed. They never recovered his body. So, about fifty years later, I went into this building to get a printout on him. And they gave me the printout, and I looked at it. You believe it, I choked up when I read that printout about him. And, matter of fact, they gave out a book of all the graves around the world-- cemeteries around the world-- and I was reviewing it, and, do you know, that between World War I and II, there's over a million American graves in Europe.

No.

He-- getting back to this fellow, since they were unable to recover his body, they called him missing in combat, MIA. His name is engraved on a wall in a cemetery near the Battle of the Bulge. And when I got this printout, I made copies for my friends. There was a-- about fifteen of us that were in this high school club, plus him, and only about eight or nine of us got together. But I gave a printout to each one of them, and also a picture of where the cemetery was, and, you know, you could hear a pin drop when they looked at it. This group-- there is seven of us that played poker once a month.

Wow, is this the Roosevelt ROTC group?

No, just Roosevelt High School.

Just Roosevelt High School.

A matter of fact, we inherited one player from Von Steuben, and one from-- one of the fellow's younger brothers joined us, because we had a couple of casualties in our group. And here are guys, eighty, eighty-one, who don't act their age. I mean, we talk about things, but age is nothing, or health, and we don't play for large stakes. It is just the getting together. And, also, what's strange about this, is the only socializing we do-- we do not go out with wives and so on. At one time we did, and we-- Roosevelt High School has an annual paper and it tells the history of people that were active in there. And, matter of fact, we have an entry about our poker playing and about the couple of fellows that passed away. It's quite intriguing, that paper. This paper is put out by a former teacher of Roosevelt. God, and he has a staff of former Rooseveltites working with him. And he says it costs about three thousand dollars an issue. It's put out semiannually. And, so, we donate to keep it going and other little things to be entered into the paper. It's very remarkable. I would have brought it, but I let my sister read it, because she graduated before I did from Roosevelt, so it's--

*So, were there ever any reunions of your group, the medics, or the 103rd, that you attended?
Army reunions or*

From what I gather, there's meetings, but I don't get any information from them. They're active somewhat. Let's put it this way. I'm one of the youngest, so I imagine the majority of them would have passed away.

Yeah, so the last section here--some of the recommended questions

Oh, I'm sorry.

No, not at all! I think you touched upon this, about how your service and experiences affected your life like you--

Well--

062- effects of military service

Probably affected the decision about being a doctor or not, I would say.

Well, I found out that I have the physical character traits to be a doctor, but not the mental to book learn, etc. I could have been a-- some kind of a technician, but there was no money in it. So sales was-- I made a fair income. It taught me to be able to improvise. If you-- I would say the younger people are more intelligent than we were, but they don't know how to improvise.

070- our edge on the Germans

And though we learned to improvise on things, that's what we had over the Germans is, if their officers were dead, the troops could not improvise or command on their own. The average American can do that, even if the officers are, you know, not around.

Did your military experience, did it influence your thinking about war or about the military?

Well it, I'll be very honest with you. People will disagree with me. I feel that a person out of high school should donate a year of their time in the Reserves, so they become equipped in case of an emergency where we do not lose people through lack of training and etc, plus you're reinforcing our security. In this world today, as in the past, you have to be able to defend yourself. And a year of service by a person just out of high school would not interfere too much with a person's life, because you're not in college, you're not going to go into business etc., and it also gives a certain amount of discipline, which you must have to survive and to take care of yourself. And, also, passing on a certain discipline to your offspring and make them to try to be self-sufficient. I am very fortunate. I have two daughters, they are both college graduates, they have beautiful children. Oh, they're the best in the world.

All right!

You wouldn't say I'm partial.

And they both have vocations, if ever they need them. The older one is a-- her vocation being a teacher. Matter of fact, being a high school instructor, I mean a college instructor in history, she, when she got out of high school, she went to be an x-ray tech, then she got her degree in x-ray, and she started the radiologic technology program at Harper College, now she's in charge of it, so it has been beneficial to her. My youngest doesn't need yet to go out looking for a job, but she

has a vocation to fall back on, which every person should have. It should be instilled in their early life that they must. And that has been beneficial. (Sneeze) Excuse me.

Bless you.

Thank you. I need all I can get. Is there anything else can I help you with?

Well, you speak so clearly and so coherently, and everything is organized. You've covered a lot of ground.

Well, that's what happens when you lecture.

*Yeah, maybe that's it. Were there any particularly humorous, funny times?
Was it all--*

In the Service?

Were there any great laughs or

Oh....

Well, I thought that was funny the night when you were celebrating the victory in Europe. That was pretty good.

Yeah.

115 – returning on a smelly banana ship

Yeah. Yeah.

But I tell you something, we came home-- I mean we came to England on the Queen Mary, and we came home on a banana ship! And it rained every night, so my buddy and I, we were going to go down below deck and sleep there. The odor was overwhelming, so we slept on deck. And we had our bedrolls that didn't really protect against the rain.

Now, every morning, a minister used to have services where we were, my friend was Catholic, and I was Jewish, and the service was Protestant. So, if we moved from there, we would never get our spot back, because it was an ideal spot to get out of the rain. So, we were part of his congregation and I remember singing that song down "Come, come to the church in the wildwood"

Yes.

And I remember we used to sing that all the time! And then we were one day out of New York, and the rain was coming down heavy as hell, and there was an area that you weren't supposed to go into - where the life preservers were. So, the rain was coming down, we were getting wet, we said the hell with it! We slept that time in the life preserve area where it was dry.

So, you were singing hymns on a banana boat coming back.

And rain besides.

Rain.

130 – a “40 and 8”

Oh, it was something! There are, oh, this is we were coming from Germany back to France, which was 125 miles. And we were in the 40 and 8. You’ve heard of those, haven’t you, 40 men or 8 horses. And the Air Corps got to these things, and there was holes galore in it. And, guess what, it took us five days to go 125 miles. And most of the time, it was raining. And the rain would come through these holes, and we would have to use our sleeping bags, etc.

It was a truck?

No. no.

A plane?

A train.

A train, oh!

See, a 40-8 is a freight car. As they say, you put 8 horses, 40 human beings, or 8 horses in it. And I remember it was shot to hell where we were. This 40 and 8, and we had rain, and it took five days to go 125 miles. The tracks were pretty well shot to hell, and they had to go around. And I remember, we had our barracks bag with us, and every time we stopped, we would get French civilians, and they would buy anything we had. I had a pair of shoes that were two and a half years old, civilian shoes, and, boy, they bought those, and blankets, Army blankets, and underwear. When we hit our camp to go back home, we had very light bags. Oh, and there was many things that-- I had a cousin in Le Havre who was in service, and I went out there to visit him. I hitchhiked all the way there. That was a hundred and some odd miles, and what I forgot when I got there, I did not have his address where he was stationed. So, what I had to do was to go in reverse back to camp. And I didn’t have a pass to go there, so if I was picked up, it was something!

160 – “can I see your ID”

What was also very funny, I was on leave in Chicago, and the girl I was with, we went to the Aragon theater, the Aragon--

Was that a ballroom?

A ballroom, and we went upstairs to have refreshments. She ordered a highball, and I ordered a straight with a chaser. And the waitress said, “Can I see your ID card?” I showed her, and she said, “You’re not twenty-one. You cannot have liquor.” I said, “I cannot have-- here I spent

twenty-one months overseas. I drank everything under the sun, and I cannot have liquor!" She said, "That's the law." I said, "Give me a milkshake!"

So, and another thing, we were leaving the Aragon, and we were walking down the street, and it was warm, so I took off my jacket. And, sure enough, MPs stopped me and they said, "Put on your jacket!" And I said, "Put on my jacket! I'm hot!" "Put on your jacket!" So, I put on my jacket. And he said, "Now, button it up." I buttoned it up. "Where's your cap?" I put on my cap. He said, "Okay, you can go." And here I had "Hershey Bars," which indicate time overseas. I had my medals, etc., and bars, whatever. It meant nothing to the MPs, but it was funny.

But the Aragon was a kick. Oh, funny thing about it, another fellow and I, we were still on our leave, we went downtown, and we stopped at a bar, they didn't ask my age. They say, "What do you want to drink?" I said so and so (and was served). It was funny as hell.

Oh, yeah.

182 – separation from girlfriends

But, and that's a funny thing, you have a girlfriend when you go into service, you come back and you see that you're not adjusted to the same adjustments (she has made). She had two and a half years of college, and I didn't, and she was on her way, too, and I was just beginning. And college changes an individual. It matures them to a great extent. She-- we remained very good friends, but that was about it. And I, being twenty, who wants to get engaged or going steady, not at that age, not when you're not decided where you're going. If I went to medical school, four years of getting a bachelor's, four years of internship, no four years of medical, and then you had that. Well, actually, I didn't get married until I was thirty-two. And a lot of my friends, this fellow that I was telling you about that put in thirty-five missions, he told me something funny. He was going steady with this girl when he went into service, and he was corresponding with her. And what happens, he gets engaged, and his mother gives her a ring, and he didn't know about it until he got back to the States! And a year later, he was married. He was twenty-one, which was very foolish of him, because he was a very bright boy. And from when I talked to him years ago when we were in Europe, he wanted to be a doctor, but getting engaged and married, that put an end to it. And it's a shame, but that's all part of life. And then a good many of the fellows married in their twenties.

There was only one fellow, he and I were very close; he married when he was forty. It's a funny thing, we used to go out together, you know, go to weddings, you know, and crash weddings, and go to dances, and so on. And we used to kid around, you know, couple, two fellows, "This is my week to be the girl." And we used to have a lot of fun. And then the craziest thing is when I got engaged, he was on a vacation, and he came back, and I told him, "I'm engaged." And he said, "You're kidding me." I said, "No, I'll introduce you to the girl." And he was surprised. And when we got married, we had a visitor for supper every other week when he-- and he turned out to be a policeman. And, matter of fact, he's run the group that played poker, and it's—here's a man, eighty years old, and he had a forty hour a week job. He's a security guard at the airport, O'Hare. He says, "The reason I keep that job is to get away from my wife." And he's young! I said, "When in the hell are you going to retire?" "Ah, when they force me out." But he will not put in overtime, forty hours is enough. And he's a very severe diabetic, but he's a hell of a good

athlete, so playing golf keeps his diabetes down. And he watches his diabetes. I have a mild case of diabetes, knock wood, and he is very--

You both have great constitutions.

Oh, we—yes.

But I think that helped you in the Service, being a healthy person, yeah?

I tell you, very fortunate what the Service has done for me. My doctors call me a miracle man. I've had two bypasses operations. I've had a Whipple operation. I don't know whether you know what a Whipple is? They give you an insertion incision down here. They trimmed my pancreas. They took my, what's the name out—gall?

Gallbladder?

Gallbladder out. They trimmed-- they took a tumor out. And they took out part of my intestines and twenty-five percent survive that. Well, I was one of the twenty-five percent. And then I had that one bypass, and then, a month later, I had half of a colon removed. And these doctors didn't know how I survived at the age of seventy-eight. I'm eighty years old.

You got great genes and a constitution, yeah.

I think some of it, the outlook, has been through the Service too, come to think of it.

Yeah.

A survival area.

Yeah.

And how to adjust to what you got going. And I have a very good wife to tolerate me besides. And I have two gorgeous daughters, and, as I say, four outstanding grandchildren.

Congratulations, Al.

Yeah, I'm a very, very fortunate person. I've lived a good life and I cannot complain healthwise. I can't, because I have recovered. Looking at my family and what they have done gives me great satisfaction, then this relationship I have with these fellows, I am-- we have enough to survive financially.

And being a veteran is part of all that.

Yeah, it gives you, now, for instance, people are yelling about getting out of Iraq. I would like to see the troops out, but if you remove the troops, what do you get there, chaos, real chaos. You have too many groups fighting one another. And what you did originally, no satisfaction out of it, or satisfaction for the 2000 that are dead, they died in vain. It's going to cost major casualties to give them a stable government, but you just can't pull out. You learn that in the military that you just can't pull out of something just to pull out. You got to leave a firm foundation. I hate to see all the money that we are wasting there. I hate to see the death toll of our people. But you made a commitment. We had ill intelligent reports, and we were too eager beaver to get in there for oil. And when the first Bush went in, he should have done the job properly, even though his allies wanted him to stop instead. I don't know. Well, politics is politics. And then next election, I don't know what we're going to get as a president. I hope we have a person who is more knowledgeable and more, should we say, intelligent. Clinton, with all his defects, was a very sensible, intelligent individual. Why, was it, (the way) he outfought the Republican congress that time. And he brought in young personnel. You got to bring in young personnel. You can't rely on people that are my age or maybe a few years younger. You got to train the future, and the future is people who are my daughters' generation.

Yeah.

And the generation who come after that for survival.

Well, I hope the generations coming up are as effective as your generation was, you know, in serving this country.

298 – G.I.-Bill's effect

Well, you know why. A lot of that was the GI bill.

Yeah.

We were able to educate ourselves. We have got good statesmen out of it, we got good lawyers out, businessmen, and so on, because of the education. And that's very high in my priorities, education. When I get a questionnaire, that's very high on my agenda, very high. Well, I hope I didn't bore you too much.

No, not at all. But if there's anything you want to add--

Is there anything you want to add?

No, I think we've covered all the questions. And I feel like we got a pretty good sense of your service years. If there is anything you want to add later when I show you the transcript, we can do that, but I think we've probably got enough to go on, yeah.

I gave enough.

You gave enough. Yeah. Thanks a lot.

I'm sorry. I talk too much.

Not at all. Not at all. Not at all! It's all good. Thank you.

Oh, I see I gave you a label.

Yeah.

Yeah.

313 – duties in the 103rd

We're picking up again now and Al is going to be telling us, as he recalls, his duties in the 103rd.

With the 103rd battalion, the duty was first aid man, stretcher bearer, ambulance driver, jeep driver, clerical, and sometimes a chaplain. The chaplain part was very hard because you know the average person who wants a chaplain are on their last-- but that's where my duties were. In the Air Corps were similar as that, but not as extensive. The Air Corps was a nine-to-five job. But the battalion was sometimes twenty-four, forty-eight hour deal, where you used to feel pretty punchy after awhile. And there were periods of time where you had a hell of a break, too. The old Army saying is hurry up and wait! And that was it. That was about it, I think.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you for the addition.