

GEORGE SNYDER

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FISHER: It's July 20th, 2004. This is an interview for the Veterans History Project. We're talking to Mr. George H. Snyder, Junior, 1046 Michigan Avenue, Maumee, Ohio 43537. Telephone 419-893-6368. Mr. Snyder was in the U. S. Army in World War II.

Mr. Snyder, before we begin with your military service, let's talk about where you were born, were raised, went to school, and how you got in the service.

SNYDER: Okay, I was born on Wall Street in Maumee in 1922. Now where I went to school?

Q. Um-hm. (Affirmative response).

A. I went to forth Miami School until the 8th grade. From the 8th grade I went to Maumee High School. I was drafted in the Army in 1942. November.

Q. And where did you go for basic training?

A. Went to Camp Polk, Louisiana. Had basic training down there. It was rough and hot.

Q. Yes.

A. And snakes and wild pigs.

Q. And how did you enjoy the change from being a private citizen to being one of thousands in a training camp?

A. It was rough. It was real rough. Couldn't get used to that getting up at five o'clock in the morning.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)

A. It was rough.

Q. And standing in line to have breakfast?

A. Yeah. And then them 25-mile hikes. We had a lot of them.

Q. And what -- what kind of training did you -- specialized training did you undergo?

A. Well, I was in the rifle and then in the mortar supply. I had training there.

Q. And how long were you in Camp Polk?

A. I don't remember.

Q. So you must have been there eight to ten weeks, or thereabouts?

A. Yeah, I think it was, sir.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) Where did you go from there?

A. Went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and had a little training there. And then we shipped out from there to --

Q. Africa-Algiers?

A. To Algiers-Africa.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) And the Americans had already landed there for the invasion of Africa?

A. They had already taken Africa when we got there. We went there for amphibious training. We thought we were going on a Normandy landing, but we -- but that's what we

went there for.

Q. So you trained on the beaches in Africa, right?

A. Right.

Q. And how long did you stay in Africa, do you remember?

A. A month or so. Maybe longer. I don't remember.

Q. Just training to learn how to do amphibious landings?

A. Right.

Q. And did you put that training to use?

A. Well, we didn't have to.

Q. Okay.

A. We were all on land fighting.

Q. And where did you go from --

A. From Africa we went to Italy, or from Italy to Naples. We landed in Naples.

Q. So that was -- that's a port, so it was not an amphibious landing?

A. Right. Right. It was a port. And we went up to the front line on April 14th, I think it was.

Q. What was Naples like at that time?

A. What was Naples like? Oh, a lot of sunken boats, and they had a lot of balloons up there so planes couldn't come in.

Q. And then when you arrived, the Germans had

evacuated Naples?

A. Yeah, they were out of Naples.

Q. And they were now being pushed up the Italian Peninsula?

A. Right. Right.

Q. And so you -- then you joined a convoy outfit?

A. No, our outfit moved right in.

Q. Oh, your whole army position --

A. Moved right in.

Q. I see. What unit was that?

A. Company G337. The 85th Division.

Q. 85th Infantry Division?

A. Right.

Q. And so you joined as a -- you joined the battle as a division?

A. Yes, as a division.

Q. As a whole division?

A. Yes.

Q. Had you shipped over as a division?

A. Yes. The one 330 went over before us, but the rest of us all went on the Andes, which was christened, and it was a luxury liner.

Q. Oh, it was?

A. Yeah.

Q. How was that?

A. It was really nice, but with all the soldiers on them, and all of them throwing up from going over on the ocean, it wasn't very nice.

Q. So you --

A. They covered everything in plywood. You couldn't see what the boat looked like hardly at all.

Q. So you did not have a private state room?

A. No, no. (Laughing) We were in the hole.

Q. And how long did it take you to get over?

A. Five days.

Q. Five days?

A. Yeah.

Q. Now that's pretty fast.

A. Yeah.

Q. And obviously if you were going that fast, you couldn't go in convoy?

A. Right. Right.

Q. Because I understand that a convoy goes as fast as the slowest ship?

A. Yes.

Q. And you would have been faster than anything?

A. Twenty-eight knots back then.

Q. Did you encounter any submarines in the oceans?

A. Yes, several times. They had to zigzag. They said there was no problem because they could outrun any of

them, so. So I guess, you know, they knew. I don't know what their speed is, but it was slow.

Q. And there were -- no submarines shot at you?

A. No. No.

Q. I mean, torpedos?

A. No, nothing shot at us. They just zigzagged and away we went.

Q. Okay, so you landed then in Africa. From Africa -- there was no fighting in Africa at the time?

A. Right.

Q. You went into Naples. Naples had been freed of the --

A. Right.

Q. Of the Nazis, or the Germans?

A. Right.

Q. And now you were going to join a combat?

A. Right.

Q. And where was that? North of Naples?

A. Yeah.

Q. South of Rome?

A. Yeah. Oh, way south of Rome, yeah.

Q. And how was that? Let's talk about that --

A. Well, it was rough. While we were there, I think for about four months, I think, until they started the push. So, when they started the push, you know, for the

invasion, or to push the Germans back, then it was really rough. First day in combat, man, you see some of your buddies get killed. It's -- kind of upset me.

Q. A question I have asked a lot is, how do you deal with day in and day out fear for your life?

A. You get kind of numb to it. You just pray every day. That's all you can do.

Q. And so you saw your friend or your buddies? You have been together with this outfit from the beginning?

A. Yes.

Q. So you knew these fellows pretty well?

A. I knew them real well.

Q. Yes. And you saw some of them killed?

A. Yeah, some of them -- one of them stepped on a mine -- one of them stepped on a mine, and a couple of them were shot. And they just stuck the bayonet in the ground with the rifle and their helmet on top.

Q. Um-hm. (Affirmative response). And you were not wounded at all?

A. No. No. I was one in the few of the outfit that wasn't wounded.

Q. Is that so?

A. One of very few. I think there was only 12 in our outfit, Company G., that wasn't wounded, one way or the other.

- Q. Were you entirely in mortar company?
- A. No, I was in the infantry attached mortar squad.
- Q. Mortar squad?
- A. Yeah. Yeah.
- Q. I see. So there were ten of you, whatever?
- A. We had three rifle companies and one mortar squad and a machine squad. Machine gun squad.
- Q. And what was your job in the mortar squad?
- A. I was gunnery for the mortar. I'm the one that set the sites and --
- Q. As I recall from short experience in wars is, you had a forward observer, didn't you?
- A. Yes. Yes, we did.
- Q. He had the tough job, didn't he?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. He had to go up there and --
- A. Right.
- Q. And give you directions?
- A. Right. Where to fire. What the range.
- Q. Yes. Yes. When you -- as I recall, you bracketed --
- A. Right. And he'd say right or left or short.
- Q. Yes, uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)
- A. He did all that with hand signals.
- Q. Oh, he did? Oh, so he had to be within your

sight?

A. Yeah.

Q. Nowadays I suppose they would do that all with walkie-talkies, or whatever they are?

A. I would imagine, yeah. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)

Q. But you were pretty close?

A. Yeah.

Q. And you were getting mortar fire in return?

A. And machine gun and rifle fire, the whole works.

Q. Yeah. And because you had a heavy weapon, you were targeted, weren't you?

A. Yeah.

Q. And so --

A. And them mortar shells aren't like the rifle shells and machine gun. You can't hear them come in. They just -- whew, boom, and that's it.

Q. Oh?

A. It is not like hearing the other shells. Artillery and that, you can hear it zoom, and then go boom, you know. Not the mortar.

Q. So as you are firing mortar shells at the enemy, they are trying to fire on you with their mortars?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you come up against the famous German 88

millimeters?

A. Yes.

Q. I understand that was the premiere weapon of the war?

A. Oh, yeah. Yeah. They also had -- the Germans had what they called a zipper pistol.

Q. A zipper?

A. Like a Tommy gun. It really shot a bunch of shells. I don't know how many, but it -- just like pulling up a zipper. All the shells coming out of there. It might not have been too accurate.

Q. What kind of shells -- like a mortar round?

A. No, no, no, bullets.

Q. Oh, I see?

A. Yeah.

Q. I had never heard that expression.

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. And so that was dangerous, too?

A. Well, they weren't too accurate, but it scared the devil out of you. Anything scared the devil out of you back then.

Q. It will make our (?grease gun?)?

A. Right.

Q. Not accurate, but rapid?

A. Right. Right.

Q. So how long were you on the line there in the first --

A. Oh, I'd say a week. Week and a half.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)

A. Before I got captured. I got captured early.

Q. And how did you get captured?

A. That's a good question. I was (_____) called and needed somebody to go on patrol. And most normally they took the people that carried the ammunition for patrol. And this one kid, he was a lot older than me, and I felt sorry for him. And I says, "I'll take his place." You never volunteer. (Laughing) That was a poor mistake.

Q. I see.

A. And so him and one of my ammunition carriers, Ernest Cole, we went out on patrol. And it was right at dusk. And this Highway 7, and we walked right into a tank. Right close to a tank. Um-hm. (Affirmative response) and I says to Ernest -- I had my .45, and I says, "Should I shoot him?" The guy that stopped us, he says, "Just look below the tank is pointing a big gun at us." He said, "Don't even raise your hand. Just put them over your head." So that's -- we caught --

Q. And were they killing prisoners of war at the time?

A. No. No, they took us -- they took our guns, they took our watches and candy and cigarettes. Anything we had. Which, I mean, they treated us pretty good.

Q. They did?

A. I was really surprised, yeah. And we were probably three or four days before they got us to a prison camp. And we had the same guard, and they treated us good.

Q. Where did they keep you?

A. They took us in a prison camp in Rome, and it was -- at one time, it was a movie studio. But they had P-O-W painted up on the top of it so the airplanes didn't bomb it and all that. And that's where they took us.

Q. Oh, that's right. They talked about that, (?Cheeta-Cheetta?)?

A. Right. I couldn't pronounce the name of the town, but that's it.

Q. Yeah, it is today a movie area studio, I guess?

A. Yeah. Yes.

Q. And?

A. And I guess after the War then, then they had refugees -- Jewish refugees in there, as high as 1300, from what I have heard. I don't know.

Q. So now you are captured and taken behind the lines, and are you fearing for your life at this time?

A. Not in the prison camp.

Q. No, I mean as you were captured and saw the tank?

A. Oh, yeah. Very, very much so. When they walked us from a prison camp to Rome, why, we went by a convoy of German soldiers that were still burning. The Americans had come in and sprayed the convoy, probably ten or 15 trucks and soldiers were still on them trucks. And they were -- some of them were still burning. And I thought: This is it. They are going to kill us. They didn't. I can't believe it. So --

Q. Of course at this time do you think that they thought that they had better treat you well because it looked like they weren't -- maybe weren't going to win?

A. That, I don't know. I know in the prison camp the food -- we got one cup of soup a day. And after you're in there for a while -- there was some people that was captured in Africa that was in the same prison camp, and they used to get up real slow out of bed in the mornings. And I laughed at them. And they says, "After a week here, you ain't going to laugh." It was about a week, and I got up one morning real quick. Boom, right down on my fanny. I fell right over. The blood rushes to your head, and that food that you had wasn't enough to keep you going. So after that, I learned how to get up real slow until your circulation got to your head.

Q. Did they require you to do anything?

A. No. No. They just took our Army serial number and wanted to know what outfit we were in, and that's all we could give them is our serial number, you know?

Q. And did you see any brutality?

A. No, not while I was in there.

Q. And so you didn't have to do anything?

A. No.

Q. Of course you probably didn't have the energy to do anything anyway because of the low calories they gave you?

A. Right. Right.

Q. And how long were you --

A. I was in there ten days.

Q. Ten days?

A. Yeah. And then they started moving the whole prison camp out of there to Florence, Italy. We were going to another prison camp. And we were, I think, four or five days on the road walking.

Q. Walking?

A. They walked and trucked. They take so many and walk the rest, and then they would come back and pick up some more. And that's the way they were doing it. And they kept telling us, "Anybody makes a break for it, we're going to shoot you." So, nobody made a break for it.

Q. Did they speak English?

A. Some of them did, yeah. Yeah, in fact, my name was Snyder, the first thing they said in the prison camp, they said, "You speak a the Dutch." I said, "No, no, no. My mother did, but I don't. I don't. (Laughing)

Q. Did they say since (?zi Dutch?)? So while you're walking, or in the convoy, were you attacked?

A. We were attacked by American planes once, and we had to run in the field and hide under stacks of hay. And that's when they: "We count everybody, and if you ain't in there, we're going to find you." They never -- nobody ever tried to escape at that time.

Q. And the Americans' overpowering air superiority allowed them --

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. -- to just bomb and spray at will?

A. Right. Right.

Q. And was your convoy ever destroyed?

A. No. No.

Q. Did you move during the day?

A. Yes. Yeah. Walking during the day.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) And did you have -- did you have the German army with you, like tanks?

A. Nope, just had guards. We had 12 guards for 200 -- right around 259 prisoners.

Q. Oh?

A. They cleaned out the whole prison camp there at that time. They were taking everybody. And we were going to a prison camp in Florence, which I never got there.

Q. Why -- wonder why they would bother to take you north? Tie up their people to take you north -- I guess they didn't want you to go back and start shooting at them again?

A. Right. Right. That's what I couldn't figure. Well, they just thought they would get us to another prison camp. Maybe we were taken as permanently Germany, we don't know. I don't know, anyway.

Q. There was a thing called the Geneva Convention, the rules that you were familiar when you were in the service. And they didn't violate any of those rules?

A. No, they didn't. No. I was real pleased, you know, the way they treated us. They didn't beat us or anything like that. Other than food, which they didn't have food.

Q. They didn't either, yeah.

A. You know, you can expect that.

Q. I guess it was a far different story in the Japanese prison camps?

A. Oh, yes. Yes, from what I have read and heard, yes. Yes. I'm sure glad I wasn't involved in that.

Q. And so you are moving north now, the first convoy, 259 prisoners?

A. Um-hm. (Affirmative response.)

Q. And you said you escaped?

A. Right. Right.

Q. How did that happen?

A. That happened right around dusk. I would say around six or seven o'clock, somewhere.

Q. How long had you been moving?

A. At least four days. And most of us walking. I think we rode on the truck once in all that time. So --

Q. And how did the escape take place?

A. Somebody -- they were putting us in a railroad station there, and somebody made a run for it. Who or why, I don't know. All we heard was shots, and so we got out of there, too. And they were shooting at everybody. So how many got killed or --.

Q. They were about to put you on trains?

A. We don't know.

Q. Oh, I see. But were you at the train station?

A. We were at the train station, so I don't know.

Q. Were you in a town?

A. Yes, and I don't know the name of the town. It is somewhere between Florence and -- Rome and Florence.

Q. Yeah, I see.

A. So they had -- one of the guards told us that we were going to a camp in Florence. So that's all I know. But I do know we stopped at this railroad station, and whether they were going to put us on trains or move us there or what, I don't know.

Q. And so you're at the station?

A. Um-hm. (Affirmative response.)

Q. And somebody made a break?

A. Somebody made a break.

Q. A prisoner? A single prisoner?

A. We don't know. Just everybody is hollering, "Run. Run for your life." So that's what we did.

Q. And how far did you run?

A. Well, we run -- I don't know how far it was, but I know we run for an hour or so, it seemed like.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)

A. And they were shooting at people all the time. How many got killed or got away, I do not know.

Q. But these prisoners, these 259 prisoners, were from all different units?

A. Different units.

Q. These were not your buddies?

A. No, they were not.

Q. So you had no knowledge of them at all, huh?

A. The fellow I was captured with, Ernest Cole, we

were the only two in that unit that we knew. But later on when we got back to camp, there was some more from our division that was in there, too. But we didn't know it and never seen them before.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)

A. So --

Q. And so you all started running?

A. Right.

Q. Every different direction?

A. -- direction. Every different direction.

Q. And were you running through the town?

A. We run through the town, up the mountains. This is all in mountain country. It is not flat. It is mountain country. And we were running up the road, and somebody shot, and they hit this Italian girl right in the leg. And me and Cole, we both had our First Aid packs. That's one thing they didn't take our First Aid pack. So we bandaged her leg, and so they hid us that night. And they hid us in big wine vats. Big ones. I mean, these were big ones. And they told us we had to get out as soon as it got dark. It was still light out, you know? I mean, you could see. And --

Q. So the Italians were friendly to you?

A. Yeah. Yeah, they were really friendly to us.

They -- they wanted us to move on after dark because they

didn't want no --

Q. They would have been shot for harboring prisoners?

A. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)

Q. And I guess by this time, had Italy formally surrendered to the allies?

A. That I don't know.

Q. I'm guessing that they had surrendered, but I don't know the time frame. But now the Germans were on their own?

A. Yeah, I think so.

Q. So you hid in this wine vat?

A. Yeah, until it got real good and dark out, and then come -- and at that point and say, Now you got to go.

Q. How do you get in the wine vat?

A. They had the end of it open.

Q. Oh, I see. So this was a winery you were at?

A. No, it was a farmer.

Q. A farm?

A. And he had big wine vats in his farm there.

Q. And did he give you any food?

A. No. No, we didn't get no food.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) And did anyone come to the farm looking for prisoners?

A. We don't know.

Q. You don't know?

A. I just don't know. When it got dark, well, they come and told us we had to move, and we moved on. And --

Q. Where did you go?

A. We thought we were heading south. We didn't know which way we were going, but we did find a cave and we got in that cave, and we were there for a couple of days. And we'd sneak out at night. And they had -- the farmers had their gardens down there, and we'd get potatoes. We ate raw potatoes, and that's how we existed. Anything we could steal out of the farmer's garden. And we darned near got caught.

Q. By?

A. By the Germans. The Germans would still their tank pool up above us on the mountain, and they had a little dog, like a little Terrier. He come wandering, sniffing down there, and we were scared to death. And they called him back, and then the tank left. But, we thought we were done right there because they said any prisoner that escaped, they would shoot if they ever caught you. So -- but lucky they moved on. But that was one of the real experiences I had over there that --

Q. So they were trying to set up a battle line?

A. Well, they could have been.

Q. But they moved on. So they were moving maybe too

fast to spend a lot of time looking?

A. Right. Well, I don't think they were looking for us. I just think they would set up, and just in case the Americans -- they were going to shoot at them. I don't know.

Q. So you lived in a cave?

A. We lived in a cave.

Q. And stole --

A. For three days.

Q. -- from the farmer's vegetable garden?

A. Yeah, anything we could go down there and steal. We had tomatoes and we had potatoes. We had a lot of potatoes. We ate raw potatoes. But when you're hungry, I'll eat anything.

Q. And so how did you get out of there?

A. How did we get out of there? Well, after I think about four days, we decided it was time to move on and find our way back to the American lines. So we moved on and --

Q. Did you move during the day or night?

A. We moved at night. We knew better than to move in the daytime. And we never encountered no more Germans. From the time we left that cave, we didn't see none until we run into American lines. And that probably was -- it took us a week, I know.

Q. A week of walking south through the country?

A. Well, we probably walking both ways. (Laughing)
It is not country. It is mountains. There's mountains
over there.

Q. And you had no compass and you had only the sun
to direct you?

A. That's right.

Q. And what did you do in that week? Where did you
sleep and hide out during the day?

A. Anywhere we could find a spot to hide, we hid.
And anything we could find to steal to eat, we stole.

Q. And did you -- were you seen by any farmers?

A. Not that we know of. We tried, you know, like
moving at night, you know? We knew better than to move in
the daytime.

Q. You didn't have any more encounters with dogs
causing an alarm?

A. No. No more encounters with Germans or anybody
until we heard --

Q. And you didn't run into any other American
prisoners?

A. No. Nope.

Q. Just the two of you?

A. Just the two of us. We don't know whatever
happened to the rest of them, but us two we knew got

away.

Q. That had to be -- maybe this is an understatement, but that had to be a very scary experience?

A. It was.

Q. For a 20-year-old guy?

A. Right.

Q. To go through for all that time?

A. It was.

Q. And so you just kept moving south?

A. Right, until we run into American outfit. And I don't even remember what one -- American it was. What division it was. It wasn't our division? We were clean over in another division, and they took us back to Angio. From Angio they shipped us up to our company, which was on the other side of Rome at this time. They were in a rest area.

Q. I see. And what -- do you think -- have any idea at all where were you picked up by the Americans?

A. No, but it had to be somewhere close to Angio. Over in that direction.

Q. So were you actually heading maybe southwest?

A. Yeah.

Q. You didn't know?

A. We didn't know. It was completely different

outfit than our outfit.

Q. And so they didn't shoot at you or anything?

A. No. No, we heard them talking, and we hollered at them, and we're Americans, and don't shoot.

Q. Yeah.

A. Yeah. And that was --

Q. And they wondered: Where have you been?

A. Yeah.

Q. That's amazing. And so they sent you back to your unit?

A. Yeah. Yeah, we were in a place there in Angio.

Q. So you went back to your unit at Angio?

A. They were in a rest area at the time, and we probably spent a couple weeks there. They had already been on the line for 60 days. They had been on the line for 60 days, my outfit, when we joined them in the rest area.

Q. Now, did you go back to your platoon.

A. Went back to my platoon and took over my mortar squad that I had. And the fellow that relieved me while I was prisoner of war was killed by artillery coming in the Fox hole and killed him. So, and I felt horrible about that. (Crying)

Q. But you would have --

A. (Crying.)

Q. So actually the fact that were you captured and were a prisoner of war during that time may really have saved your life?

A. It did save my life, yes.

Q. Because your replacement then was killed?

A. Right. Right. Had a shell come right in his fox hole.

Q. It is a difficult to bring back these memories, I realize.

A. Yeah.

Q. But most everyone we have interviewed said, "I'm glad we did it. I'm glad I talked about it again."

A. Yeah.

Q. And got it said. So now you're back with your outfit, and you're back with your mortar?

A. Right. Right.

Q. And then what happened?

A. Well, then we moved up to the Po Valley. We took two more lines after that. And from my discharge there. And I don't remember the name of them.

Q. I saw somewhere here that you were in the Po Valley?

A. Right.

Q. So you were in the river valley moving north?

A. Right. Right.

Q. How far did you go?

A. I don't remember how far we went, but we were -- we went north until the weather got real bad, and we were overnight in Italy the winter. I had a fur coat with a white parka. Didn't move in the winter time. They just sent out patrols.

Q. You were -- sounds like you were above Florence?

A. Oh, yeah, we were way above Florence.

Q. And you are now up in the Italian Alps?

A. Right. Right.

Q. Now you're getting up very close to the border, or along the border of Italy?

A. Right.

Q. Into the mountains?

A. Right.

Q. And were you getting into the mountain area?

A. Right. So they didn't move in the winter time. We spent the winter in the fox hole.

Q. Oh, you did?

A. Oh, yeah. I have pictures there of Christmas card I sent my dad for Christmas dinner where we were in the fox hole. And at this time, they brought all our meals up on meal trays. Was the only way they could get anything up to us to eat.

Q. So you were up in the mountains?

A. Oh, we were in the mountains. Oh, yeah. We spent -- they didn't move in the winter time. They just sent out patrols. And when I was out on patrol again with another fellow, and of course they had holes dug, you know, where you sleep, and we were supposed to be two hours on and two hours off for each of us, and we're supposed to watch while the other one took a break and sleep. Well, I woke up, and here this fellow who was supposed to be with me was sleeping. And I told him if he did that anymore, I'd shoot him. He wouldn't have to worry about the Germans shooting him. I'd shoot I am.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)

A. But, luck happened, why I didn't have to shoot him.

Q. And you -- could you see the Germans?

A. Well, we'd hear a patrol walk past us, and we'd -- we didn't do nothing.

Q. Just the two of you?

A. Yeah.

Q. You weren't supposed to encounter?

A. No. No.

Q. And so you spent the whole winter that way?

A. We spent the whole winter, yes, before they moved off again.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)

A. Because they couldn't move in the snow and the mud.

Q. Yes. Yes.

A. And it got cold. And in the fox hole it was mighty cold. Of course, you are dug down in the dirt, you know. You're in there. It is warmer than you think in there. We had -- the Army furnished us good clothes. We had fur coats.

Q. You did?

A. With a white and a tan parka.

Q. Oh, yes. Reversible?

A. Yeah. We put the white on with the snow was all around, and the other was a brownish color. And -- but we had the fur coats. And heavy boots.

Q. I wore one of those fur coats that were left that you guys left over.

A. Oh, did you?

Q. In occupation duty, and I was just above you in Austria.

A. Oh, were you?

Q. Yes. Yeah.

A. So that's where we ended up.

Q. Oh, did you? So you spent the whole winter?

A. Yes, the whole winter before they moved off a bit.

Q. Essentially doing nothing but holding the lines?

A. Well, holding all the way across. That's the way they did.

Q. Yeah. And so now you're narrowing down to the Brenner Pass?

A. Right.

Q. And if you are going to go through, you're probably going to go through the Brenner Pass. Now that must have been heavily guarded by the Germans?

A. That's right where they surrendered.

Q. Oh, they did?

A. That's where they surrendered. And we were riding tanks going through this pass. And I looked at them mountains up there, and I says: Oh, God, how are we ever going to get up there? They were the most wickedest mountains I ever seen.

Q. Oh, yes. Yes.

A. I never seen -- climbed mountains, but I had never seen any as rough and rugged as them. And I thought -- and we were riding tanks, and two of the fellows in our outfit got shot off the tanks just before they says: Cease fire. Put your guns up. And they said: The war is over. And, of course, a lot of us didn't want to give up our guns, but they come around and says you have to give up your guns.

Q. Oh?

A. But just before they had to surrender, the Germans had a lot of horses and their stuff. A lot of it was -- their guns was pulled by horses.

Q. Yes.

A. And they sent them horses after us. Just before the cease fire ended, a whole pack of horses. (Laughing) We had to shoot horses. And you ought to see the (?Alcadians?) coming up and slaughtering them for meat.

Q. Oh, yes.

A. Yes. It was unbelievable.

Q. It was said that the Germans had a half a million horses.

A. I believe that. They had a lot of machinery that was -- their guns and that was all pulled by horses.

Q. Horses and bicycles, they expected to win the war with.

A. Yeah.

Q. So you then went through the Brenner Pass?

A. Well, we stopped right there in the pass itself. We didn't go up in the mountains. And then after the war was over, I went -- I was transferred to the 88th and guarding prisoners of war.

Q. Where was that?

A. That was in Austria. But where, I don't know.

- Q. Probably somewhere near Innsbruck?
- A. Yeah, it was in Austria.
- Q. Yeah.
- A. I know them people. They hated the Germans.
- Q. And so the war ended for you?
- A. In the past. There? Yeah.
- Q. And so then you were on occupation duty, so to speak?
- A. Right. Right. And I had enough points to come home. And of course at that time, they were going to send us over to Japan.
- Q. Yes.
- A. Even with the points you had.
- Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)
- A. And they were going to take the one that had the most points and send them home, but the rest of us they were going to send on to Japan. And then they dropped the bomb, and so we guarded prisoners and then sent back home.
- Q. Um-hm. (Affirmative response). The German prisoners were not hard to guard, were they?
- A. No.
- Q. They didn't want to go anywhere?
- A. No, no, no. We didn't have no trouble with them at all. Most of them were taken out every day. Things like that.

Q. They were happy not to be prisoners of the Russians?

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. And happy to be alive?

A. Right.

Q. And so after the prisoner of war duty, what did you do?

A. After the prisoner of war, I was put on a liberty ship.

Q. How did you get to -- what port did you leave from?

A. I think it was Naples. I'm not sure.

Q. From Italy?

A. Yeah.

Q. I'm trying to think --

A. I know we went back to Naples, and we were shipped out there. They put us on a liberty ship. It took me 31 days to get back home.

Q. Now, why did it take 31 days?

A. Because Apparently(_____) the liberty ship.

Q. Where were you at, at the time?

A. The ocean. And they let the fellows get off if they wanted to and swim in the ocean if they wanted to.

Q. I see.

A. And I said, "No way am I getting off."

Q. And did you encounter any bad weather while you're sitting there?

A. No, it was calm. And it was unbelievable.

Q. Well, now you got out of the service in November of '45. The war was over in Europe in May?

A. Right.

Q. So you must have been on the ocean in the fall or winter?

A. No.

Q. No?

A. No, no, no. It was still --

Q. Still summertime?

A. Yeah. And I went to camp -- I can't think of the name of the camp now.

Q. In the states you mean?

A. Yeah.

Q. Well, let's go back to this ship that's sitting in the ocean. You can't move?

A. Right.

Q. And -- but you didn't encounter any bad weather, which would have been very dangerous?

A. Right.

Q. So what did you do? How long were you there?

A. A week, from what I remember?

Q. And how did you get rescued?

A. Well, they brought parts and they fixed the liberty ship and they sailed on. That's what they did.

Q. And how do you change a (_____)?

A. I haven't the slightest idea. We were up on the deck. I don't know how they did it or anything. But --

Q. They must have had divers along. And was it a war ship that came?

A. It looked like another liberty ship.

Q. Oh, I see. So then you continued on?

A. Until we got in port in the United States.

Q. Where did you land, do you remember?

A. New York. Because I went by the Statue of Liberty.

Q. You were in New York harbor.

A. Yes. So -- and from there we went to camp in Pennsylvania. And it was overcrowded, so they shipped us to Arkansas.

Q. You went to Indiantown Gap?

A. Right. And there was too many people, and so they sent us home for 30 days. Then I got a telegram extending it for another 15 days. And then I went to camp in Arkansas. And I don't remember -- that's where I was discharged.

Q. That's probably Camp Chaffee?

A. Yes, it was Camp Chaffee, Arkansas.

Q. And then they gave you that discharge?

A. Right. And that was on November 11th. I remember that because they said: We can't do it. That's a holiday and I said: I'm getting my discharge and going home.

Q. So how did you get home? Did they pay you to --

A. Yes, they paid us and put us on a train and we went home.

Q. And it was over?

A. It was over, yeah.

Q. Back to Ohio?

A. Yes.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) And happy to be alive?

A. Yeah.

Q. But can you say that somehow you missed the camaraderie of being with fellows that you had known for so long?

A. Oh, yes. Yes. And I got back home and got married. And I used to wake up at night with nightmares.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.)

A. And my wife said: You got to stop it.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) A lot of G.I.s had nightmares.

A. I used to jump out of bed.

Q. Loud noises?

A. She'd say: You got to do something. So, that was probably five or six years after that, and the outfit kept sending me that they were having reunions. And I wouldn't go. My wife says: Go.

Q. She wanted you to go, get it talked about, get it maybe out of your system?

A. Out of my system.

Q. Yeah. Yeah, that's good.

A. So finally I said yes. We went. So they had one in Akron, Ohio. So we went to the first one in Akron, Ohio, and got to talking to all the guys and that. And that relieved all the pressure. Went back home, and I don't think I ever had nightmares after that. It just -- because we all talked about it, you know. How horrible it was and how many was lost.

Q. And you found that the other guys were having nightmares, too?

A. Yes. So that brought the end of that.

Q. Well, that's wonderful, isn't it?

A. So now I'm going to the 50th reunion, and I think I went to darned near every one of them. (Laughing)

Q. Where is this one being held?

A. This one is going to be in Washington D.C.. It is going to be the last one.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) And you decided that the group is now too small?

A. Yeah.

Q. You're talking about the 855th Division?

A. Yeah, the 855th, the 337 Infantry Division, Company G.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response) How many people will be there, would you guess?

A. Well, I'd say 150 at the most.

Q. Oh?

A. That's husband and wife.

Q. Oh, I see.

A. That's all of the division.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) And will you see people there that you were with?

A. Yeah.

Q. I see.

A. There will be six that I know that went over with me. And two of the last one is left, and some of them is in pretty bad shape.

Q. That's what was your platoon?

A. Yeah, company -- the 4th Platoon.

Q. Yes.

A. But they were in the rifle section. The rest of them were all in rifle. I was the only one in the mortar

squad. And one of them, I think, was from the machine gun squad. But the rest of them were R. men, or rifle men.

Q. But you're fortunate to be able to go to a reunion and have old friends there?

A. Oh, yeah. Real fortunate. It is great. Great.

Q. But the last one there, this is the last one they are going to do?

A. Yeah, unless they get somebody to take over and do it. But I don't think nobody wants it. It is just too much work at one time. They had over 500 that attended these reunions.

Q. Do you belong to any other organizations?

A. I belong to the VFW, American Legion, and the Odd Fellows Lodge. Very involved with the Odd Fellows Lodge.

Q. You are?

A. Been in it for 59 years.

Q. And what VFW do you belong to?

A. I belong to Maumee 11115. Four ones and a five.

Q. Are they pretty active?

A. They are real active.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) And do they get involved in talking to the schools?

A. We talk to the schools and go to the schools and do talks. And we go also to -- they go to one of the rest homes and talk to some of the soldiers that's still in

there. And they also contributed a couple thousand dollars every year up to Michigan to their home. And the one in --

Q. Sandusky?

A. Sandusky. And they get the money from that from the poppy sales. They sell poppies. I sell poppies for them. And --

Q. It has been said, or maybe I'm the one who said it, I don't remember, that the veterans organizations today are our historians.

A. Right, yeah.

Q. I don't believe that there are a lot of details taught in the school.

A. No. They are the ones that --

Q. It is up to you to tell the kids about war.

A. Right. I think --

Q. The reality of war.

A. I think we have spoke to all four of the Maumee schools. And I have been involved in three of them.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) Yeah, that's a wonderful service that the veterans organizations are doing. And I think they are doing more of it now as there seems to be a renewed interest, particularly in World War II.

A. Right, right. They try not to talk the bloody

stuff.

Q. No.

A. But just more patriotic to your country.

Q. Yes. Yes.

A. And things like that.

Q. So you are a part of that?

A. Yes, I am, and very proud to be.

Q. Oh, yeah, I would think so. Yes. Well, this has been very interesting. And as I said earlier, I have talked to veterans who have been prisoners of war, but never ever talked to one who escaped. And so this is a unique interview. And I appreciate you bringing back all of these memories. And I appreciate your being so candid about it. So, I have enjoyed it, and I'm sure that in the future people that listen to this interview will also enjoy it and learn from it.

A. I hope --

Q. Thank --

A. And be proud of their country.

Q. Thanks.

(Audio was paused; whereupon audio resumed:)

Q. This is a post script to the tape. We originally closed it, but completely forgot that we need to talk about the Bronze Star Medal that Private First Class George H. Snyder, Junior, earned. Let's talk about the

Bronze Star and how you earned it and when you finally received it.

A. I got the Bronze Star for taking out a machine gun with mortars. I was a mortar -- in mortars, and they spotted a machine gun, and they asked me to take it out, and I took it out. And that's how I got the Bronze Star.

Q. It says -- I'll read it: "For meritorious achievement in ground combat against the armed enemy during World War II in the European-African-Middle Eastern Theater of Operations." And so you were given the Bronze Star. It is -- the certificate is signed by the Secretary of the Army, but why is it dated the 4th day of January, 2002?

A. That's how long it took the Army to get it to me. (Laughing)

Q. Now apparently there was a record that you had earned it?

A. Oh, yes. Yes, there's a record, and it is on my discharge that I earned this. And I kept inquiring about it, and finally the Army finally sent it to me. And I got the medals.

Q. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) Well, of all your service achievements, you're probably proudest of the Bronze Star?

A. Yes, I am. It is a Bronze Star with a cluster.

Q. With a cluster? I see what does that mean?

A. Well, it means in action. Taking out that machine gun.

Q. I see. Uh-huh. (Affirmative response.) And so your family had to be very proud of it when they learned about it back then?

A. Yeah.

Q. We couldn't end this tape without making reference to your Bronze Star?

A. Well, thank you very much.

Q. And so -- but while we're still talking, I'm looking at an article -- quite a long article in The Mirror. Is that in?

A. That's Maumee paper.

Q. Maumee paper, May 14, 1998. And it says: "The Mirror's salute to area veterans. George Snyder battled the Germans in Italy, later escaped from prisoner of war camp.

A. Right.

Q. And here is a picture of George Snyder of today and George Snyder in 1944. And so you were honored by your local paper?

A. Right.

Q. In this very long article about being a prisoner of war and escaping, as we discussed earlier?

A. Right.

Q. Also you talked about having reunions. And as with a lot of reunions, they are getting smaller and smaller these days?

A. Right.

Q. Did we mention earlier that you are going to your 50th this year?

A. I think we did

Q. We did.

A. 50th and the last one.

Q. 50th and last?

A. And it is going to be in Washington D.C. And I have already made my reservations and hope to see everything in there. The World War II Memorial, I hope to see that.

Q. Yes.

A. That should have been done 60 years ago, and it is a crying shame that we never had one.

Q. Yes. The big crowds, of course, are gone?

A. Right.

Q. But there will be crowds all this year at the Memorial?

A. Yeah.

Q. Because people from all over the country are going to want to see it. I'm planning to go myself, and

I'm wondering how I'm going to get this done. Where do you park and where do you stay?

A. Yeah.

Q. So, your military service is long over with?

A. Right.

Q. But the memories of those times stayed with you forever?

A. Oh, forever. That's for sure, yeah. I never forget them.

Q. Never forget?

A. All the good buddies I had.

Q. Your old friends, you never forget them. You never forget your serial number.

A. No, I can tell you that, 39359850. Don't ask me what my Social Security number is. I don't remember. But I can tell you what that number is because you had to have that morning, noon and night. You never knew when they would say: What's Your Social Security number(sic) and you had to have that.

Q. 5529360?

A. Your -- yours, too.

Q. We'll try closing again, but it has been very interesting. And we have done a little laughing about this, but that's from many years having passed?

A. Right.

Q. There was no laughing back then?

A. No. No, there was a lot of praying.

Q. A lot of praying. And you have mentioned that in your article in The Mirror that you prayed a lot, and that's important.

A. Yeah.

Q. So thank you very much, again.

A. And I thank you.

Q. And we'll be making a copy of this to send to you. And I think your children and grandchildren will enjoy hearing it.

A. Yeah. My one granddaughter has my Army jacket yet. And I give it to her, and she is so proud of that. I have twin granddaughters.

Q. Oh?

A. And I give her -- she just thinks the world of her granddad, and so --

Q. Well, this memorabilia that you saved, and you saved a lot of it, is going to be more and more important as the years pass. And your great, great, grandchildren will thank you for saving all this and putting it in notebooks and so on. Well, thank you again. I have enjoyed it.

A. Thank you.

(End of interview.)

