

Recorded Interview

San Antonio 2010

---

Pat N. Nash, Co L 410th

I was born in Cleveland, Texas in 1922. When the war started I was a student at Stephen F. Austin College in Nacogdoches, Texas, majoring in physical education, with a minor in math. I remember hearing the news of Pearl Harbor, riding in the car with the radio on. My first response was the shock of the reality of war, and it took a few days to lose that first shock and fear.

In the spring of 1943, at the age of 19, I volunteered for the Army Reserve and was called into active service. After basic training at Camp Maxey in Paris, Texas, I was selected for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) in engineering.

My parents were a bit concerned; I was the last of eight kids, six of them boys. Four of us went into the service. One brother, Jake, was a senior in college and he entered the Army Air Corps, flying P38s (even though he was 6'4" in height) also spending a year training cadets to do the same. Jake flew many combat missions in Italy, and the honor of escorting President Franklin D. Roosevelt's plane for his meeting with Churchill and Stalin at Malta. Another brother, a principal of a school, and father of four, was drafted in the latter part of the war and served in El Paso, Texas. When the war ended he was immediately discharged without seeing any combat. The fourth brother to serve was an enlisted man stationed in Paris, France servicing airplanes.

I entered ASTP (Army Specialize Training Program) at Camp Maxi for three months of basic training in Paris, Texas. We were then sent to Texas A&I in Kingsville to

study engineering. However, the need for engineers was not as great as first thought. About a month before we left for Camp Howze they called me up to the office to ask me to practice shooting the bazooka because I had received the medal for accuracy in Rifleman; I think the criterion was 10 out of 10. I had not shot a lot before then except for a few quail. They did give me three hours of instruction and after Marseilles they gave me an assistant named Schultz. He was a little guy about five feet tall and I was six foot four. I had to stoop down so he could load it! We carried the bazooka or at other times it was loaded on a truck. Schultz was my foxhole buddy and I was mad at him because he did not have to dig as deep as I did. They also gave me a machine pistol which was heavy and two 10 pound magazines; later on they considered the burden of the extra weight and gave me a .45 pistol instead. I had to practice on it a couple of hours.

One of my roommates at Texas A&I (we had four to a room) was Bill Stewart who became a dear friend even though we had a short time together. We had a basketball team and of course I played basketball, mainly a forward, and a little in the key. Bill had played some basketball. I liked to shoot the ball from outside. We beat every team that we played. Phil Harris and another young man from Texas, Bud Hopkins, whom I had played basketball against the year before, were in that group. I entered the 103d Division in the middle of March. We had been given a short furlough and told when to show up at a certain time. I got off of a bus in Gainesville, TX at 2:30 AM not knowing where the hell I was. I walked into the camp, found the barracks and experienced coal heating that really smelled. I finally found the office and had to

disturb the guy at the desk who was sleeping. I knocked at the window, asked for information and he told me how to get to the bunkhouse and take the empty bunk. I was feeling pretty low at that point having left the ASTP. There were two or three guys at that camp that were in my company.

We left Camp Howze the latter part of October and traveled by train to New York to Fort Shanks. I had never ridden on a train and thought the trip was great. We played cards a lot: poker and gin rummy. Edwin Snickerson, a guy that I know a lot about, ended up in my squad. He was a good poker player, a quiet, slender man, generally talked to you if he had to and beat the hell out of me in poker. I found out in the Trail of the Cactus that he had won the Silver Star, and I think he ended up being a sergeant. After I had read about him in the Trail of the Cactus, I wanted to call him but found out he had died. He was not necessarily a real close friend but I admired him; he had a good head on his shoulders and was the type of person who would win a Silver Star. He was very intelligent and was able to handle reality. You might say he was “cool.”

I was on one of 14 ships in a convoy accompanied by an aircraft carrier and a destroyer. I think one of the regiments was all on one ship, an Italian luxury liner. We embarked from New York out of Camp Shanks. We were treated wonderfully in New York. It was like having your last dinner before you were hanged. The food was out of sight, all you wanted to eat at anytime. They gave us transport from the camp into town. I was only in New York City one time. We went to Jack Dempsey’s as did a hundred other soldiers. We went to a nightclub enjoyed an orchestra conducted by Louie Prima and he and his wife, Kiely Smith, were singers. We stayed there about an

hour and a half. We dragged back to the camp about two o'clock in the morning. We were feeling the effects of drinking boiler makers.

I was fortunate, I rarely felt queasy but I did not get seasick on the transport over. I did have trouble trying to sleep; the bunks were stacked so close to each other you had to get out of bed to turn over. Most of us had duties. I spent one day, during pretty bad weather, on my duty down in the front of the ship "guarding supplies". This was not part of basic training! They had a lot of goods stored and during bad weather they would fall down. I felt pretty vulnerable when I considered coming under attack down in that area. It would be "Bye, Bye!" They had other duty stations at prohibited areas that were off limits to certain personnel. The food on the ship was pretty good. Growing up one of eight children I was used to eating what was put before me; we ate to stay alive.

We passed through the Strait of Gibraltar in the evening as the sun was going down. The next day we pulled into Marseilles after passing a ship that was half-sunk during the battle to take the town. In order to get off our ship we climbed down rope ladders with our rifle on and our pack, which made it really tough. You could get the butt of your gun tangled up with the rope, but I found it easy to manage. I know we had everything on our back as we climbed down, as if we were going into battle. I was reading this morning that I even had a tie in my pack; I had forgotten that. I know I never used the tie. We went down into a bivouac area and lived in a tent which was fine except when it rained. I was so tall my feet stuck out of the tent; I thought they should pay me more because of my size.

After arriving in Marseilles we took off for the north, climbing in elevation; then we were put into a line where we dug our foxholes. We had traveled on foot three or four days to get to this area. The first combat I experienced occurred around November 16<sup>th</sup>. We were online there for about two or three weeks. (Later Schultz and I became foxhole diggers).

Prior to our first day of combat we knew a lot was going on. I remember that we moved out and were traveling in some forestry, but not thick. There was a little valley and our position was very close to the enemy position. We had to stop and wait for something and I was sitting between two soldiers. All of a sudden I heard these buzzing sounds. I said, "Are those bees?" My buddies said, "No, they are bullets!" The bullets were hitting the ground three yards in front of us. When we realized it, boy did we haul! They started throwing the little mortars which looked relatively harmless but made a loud noise. We thanked God that they were not landing closer. That was the first time I realized that they were shooting back. It was a moment of fear and the realization that you were going to have to take care of yourself. You knew all the time that it just might happen.

When I got my Trail of the Cactus, I read Luke Martin's bio; he had written about an incident that you could tell had really shocked him. I realized we had a similar experience. I met him during the reunion and said, "I don't know you but there is something we share." We talked about seeing frozen bodies in the snow actually in the position that they died. It was one of those life changing experiences that you will never get out of your mind. My company was still on line and it had snowed so much

the trucks could not get in to bring us supplies. They sent my squad back to bring up some supplies until the snow lightened up. I was at the field headquarters about half a mile back from the line. We were waiting for them to give us what we were supposed to carry. One of my buddies told me to go over and look into a shallow trailer that was attached to a jeep. It was the kind of day you hate, cloudy, snowy, and dismal. I looked over the edge and saw the frozen bodies of three of our guys and I just went to pieces. It was shockingly horrible and I walked away. I immediately thought of the three mothers back in the states that did not know their sons were dead. I did not cry but I felt like it. The stark realization that those men died so far from home, away their loved ones, gripped me. I would have wanted to die near my loved ones. I wasn't feeling fearful; I was feeling lonesome. I took that experience with me a long, long way but it did not interfere with my performance as a soldier. When I read Luke Martin's similar experience, I knew how he felt. Those men died two thousand miles away from home in such a terrible fashion. It was just the horribleness of that realization that affected me, then and now. I am sure many other people had the same reaction.

About the beginning of January we had been online five days. We had a very large foxhole called an outpost. I was about a quarter of a mile away from the line. In other words, I was there to be the first one killed, but I didn't know that. But I had to serve on guard duty. There were two of us there. There was a rifle that was kept in the hole in case it was needed. I was just sitting there on the top of a hill looking down. Snow was knee deep and we looked down and saw two white coated Nazis looking at us through glasses. It appeared that they were having trouble making out exactly what

they were seeing because they were moving around to get different angles. So, finally I picked up the phone, called the battalion, and told them what I saw and asked what I should do. They said they were going to send me up to the next level. I told the next person I spoke to what happened and he also sent me to the next level. The last guy that I talked to had to have been a general but he did not share his name. We found out later that my information was very important. My last contact finally said I tell you what; I want you to go ahead and shoot at the target. I got the rifle, feeling that I was a pretty good shot, but I went right over their heads I think. I scared the hell out of them because they turned and ran. The whole line opened up fire, even with .50 cal. shots, for about a quarter of a mile after that to make the Germans think that we had a whole lot of men there. Two hours later trucks picked us up and took us someplace. Some of the guys remember this and some of them don't: "That I probably made the decision!"  
Not really-Joking!

Once, we had been hiking a couple of hours and came to an average size town and stopped to wait for orders. I was sitting, leaning up against a brick building, next to a guy who had a twin brother. He started to get up, put his one hand over the end of the barrel of the gun and accidentally pulled the trigger with the other hand. It blew a part of his hand off. He screamed and screamed. The medic was called and they took him away. These incidents such as this do not help our morale.

One morning the Nazis started giving us a lot of action. We were on the side of the hill and they started throwing those little ones over. And the kid next to me literally

lost it; he could hardly speak. He said, "I can't stand it anymore!" He may have been assigned another job, maybe in the kitchen. I may have felt that way sometimes myself.

We had gone into this little village where most of the people had left.

It was a little agrarian town like most of the towns. One of the guys in our platoon was from a reservation in Oklahoma. One day he wanted some wine. He went up to a house and a woman came to the door. He said, "You gotum wine, huh?" I thought our squad leader would die laughing.

Another time we found a chicken in a town, killed it and picked the feathers. We went into a house, found the stove, floured the chicken and fried it. We were ready for some good fried chicken. It started to smell funny. When we tasted it the "flour" was powdered soap! No chicken – back to C Rations!

It was close to the end of the war and we came across a lone house suspected of having Germans in it. Someone had come along before us and had lost three men. The three soldiers' bodies were in the yard with their rifles sticking up beside them, marking where they were. We were going to have to run across a wide open field devoid of trees, risking being shot by anyone in that house. We were sitting at the edge of the forest thinking that "we have to do it anyway." Pretty soon we heard a shot and one of our young men had shot his foot. He made up his mind that he would be killed if he crossed that field. This kind of thing happened quite a bit in the whole area. The kid made up his mind that he would rather have a crippled foot than die. We did run across the field and not one bullet was fired.

The worst situation I had was early one day when the dawn was breaking but it was still dark. We were told about midnight that we were going to attack this place at dawn and we went out to do it. We got within fifty or sixty yards of it. They must have had five Nazis shooting machine guns. You have to hit the snow covered ground; you can't just stand there. The firing continued on our flank. We were completely covered with snow, it was zero degrees and you realized that you could freeze to death. I called out, "What are we going to do?" Men were saying, "I don't know." Then one kid got up and started running. And that started it; we didn't have a chance. They killed five guys out of the forty to fifty men in the company. I talked to some men who were in another platoon who lost a lot of men also. That really hurt us. One of the guys who died had a brother in another company and he took it hard. Our squad at least didn't have any injuries. We went back up a pretty steep hill where we could look down where we had been, and the Nazis were still there. We saw a tank in the middle of that little village and two Mustangs (planes) came in and destroyed that tank. It was like being in a theatre watching it burn and smoke; we started cheering. They dropped about three bombs. The next day the Nazis left and I got some good news! I was in the foxhole and the squad leader said to get myself back to the command post. He said you are going to Paris. I said, "And you are going to hell, too." He said I better go. I ended up going to Paris for three days; I was in the first group to be picked in the whole division. Sometimes I am lucky. They put me on a truck and gave me two cartons of cigarettes and a dozen chocolate bars and told me that I wouldn't need anything else. That was the truth; money meant nothing to the people. One of the most pleasant moments of

my life happened. When I got there they had clean clothes for me and a room in a great hotel with an oversize bathtub which I filled it with warm water. I had a bar of soap and I lay in that warm tub of water for two hours. It was the first time I had bathed in a month and in addition I had a roof over my head. Downtown Paris looked like a ghost town; all the big departments stores were empty. That area was really depressing but I went into a smaller store and bought a small trinket for my wife to be. I enjoyed walking and found the people to be very pleasant. I was propositioned several times but I did not pursue those invitations. I went into a bar, ordered a drink and put my francs down but the bartender asked for a cigarette instead. Any bar would have welcomed me to come in and drink all I wanted in gratitude for our part in the war. They were overly nice. I did not speak French, but I was good at sign language. All good things come to an end, and I really hated to go back into combat.

I still had my tonsils, and every year I had tonsillitis. When I got it overseas, they treated me at a field hospital as well as five other guys in my squad. Two of the guys had severe trench foot which was common among all of us, some with less severity. The doctor looked in my ears and said, "What are you doing in the army with those ears?" I had perforated ear drums that I didn't know I had. It may have been caused by the sounds of battle or because of the cold. I always had a little problem with my ears prior to that diagnosis. The doctor said he would write a letter for me and I would be out of the war. I turned him down and had forgotten that conversation until after the war. I asked myself, "Why didn't you take the doctor up on that?" One of the guys with trench foot had to go; his feet were in bad shape. I didn't want to do that before my friends

could. That is what shaped my feelings even though I had the right to do it. I still wondered about the decision later on. When I got back to the states, I was in the rehab center at Brooke Army Medical Hospital in San Antonio for about a month because I had poor hearing and infection. As my arm was healing, I was worried that I would have to go to Japan. I would have hated to go back into the war. I feel for the guys in Iraq because they go and come back and return to combat again; I could not stand that. My wife, her cousin and I had gone into downtown San Antonio, but we were not together when, at about 11 o'clock in the morning, I heard someone say that we had dropped a bomb on Japan. I didn't believe it but suddenly we all realized that we were going to win and I knew that I would not have to go back. That evening we went down into the middle of town and all you could see were people who acted like they were drunk whether they were or not. It was a great feeling.

My wife had lived in Nacogdoches, Texas and I was raised and lived in Silsbee, which is close to Beaumont. When I got home I felt like I did my job but in my older age I can appreciate what I did. I did not have any problems as far as I know. I was so glad when I got back to marry the person that I loved and be back playing basketball. I got my first job as a physical education teacher in an elementary school. I thought I was a jock back then and I wanted to coach football and basketball but I could not get a job. I walked into a barber shop one day and there was the superintendent of schools in Nacogdoches who was going to be the new superintendant in Tyler, Texas. I had done a little work in the high school in Nacogdoches and he liked who I was and what I did. He asked me if I would like to be a PE teacher in Tyler. I really wasn't interested in an

elementary school but I said, "Okay." I found out later that it was the best thing I ever did. I worked there for four and one-half years. I got a lot of praise for working with kids and found out that I could do the best job with those kids. I went on to get a Master's Degree in Administration and became an elementary school principal and then a junior high principal. A teaching fellowship and the G.I. Bill paid for me to get my Doctorate at North Texas State University. I was at University of North Texas, and the Dean of University of Arizona at Tucson was the son of my superintendent back in Tyler and I got lucky again. So he knew whom he was hiring. I thoroughly enjoyed my work at the University of Arizona; it was a wonderful experience. Some of the people working with the Space Program are on the faculty there. All in all I am glad and other veterans say it was a great experience but we never want to do it again. I am a better person for having the experience and more sensitive to the experiences of other people.

The first month we were attacking I could have told you where we spent every night; over the years I lost that. March 15th, 1945 we started the drive to the Rhine River. "Beware the Ides of March," were words credited to Shakespeare, but lost on me during the war. It was the biggest battle that the 103d had. The night before ended a two week rest period and they called us in at 8 o'clock that night and told us what we were going to do the next day. That morning at dawn the artillery started pounding. It never stopped for thirty minutes and when it did we took off. Some of the companies were designed to go straight; we were to clean out the middle. They always had a few Germans in the villages. We ran into a little village about two o'clock in the afternoon. The Germans usually left one to three soldiers back just to hold us up. They can hold up

a whole company all day because you don't know where they are. Our squad was in a big barn where a shell had knocked a big wall down; we still had a roof over our heads so we were pretty well covered. The centers of the towns had park squares in the center. We looked around for about an hour and a half and didn't find a thing. My commander told me to put a bazooka shell in the wall. I stood where I was protected and knocked a hole in the wall. Unfortunately, the commander was standing pretty close to the spot. He yelled back some very colorful words, following with, "Do it again." I was foolish and, on my own, walked out into a clearing, feeling sure it was safe. No one told me to do it. Shultz had already loaded the bazooka and gone back into the barn. I was aiming it in the area of a two story brick building and I was hit right in my upper arm and fell down in a hole that a shell had made. I lay there and felt blood running down my arm. I may have lain there a half minute; my back was still showing. I got up and started running back to the barn. The German started firing his burp gun as I turned the corner to get into the barn; none of the bullets hit me, Thank God! That injury meant the end of the war for me. The medic put some sulfa on my arm and wrapped it. There was one medic for every platoon so I was very lucky he just happened to be close by and came quickly. My commander found me and came over only to say, "What did you do with your bazooka?" That angered me and I lost some respect for him. On March 15, 1945 we started the drive to the Rhine. You have heard of the Ides of March, from the Shakespearean play. I was not aware at that time but it turned out later that it was the biggest battle that the 103d fought. By this time it was about four or five in the evening and beginning to get a little dark. They laid me on a

stretcher and put it on the hood of jeep. They took me back to a little town which served as a place for casualties including German soldiers. They gave me a shot and I did not wake up until the next morning about daylight. A young German, about 18 years old, was lying on cot beside me. We sort of nodded at each other and surprisingly I was glad to see him. They had put him there after I had gone to sleep. As I recall they transferred me back to a field hospital and I only spent one day there. They still had not treated my arm except to immobilize it. Then they took me to Nancy, France which was a famous city known for making glass. I was there for five days until I was sent to a hospital in Paris; my arm was still untreated. An officer gave me my Purple Heart while in Paris. After two days in Paris, I was flown to Bournemouth, England, to a resort city on the coast. My bone wasn't broken but the x-ray showed that it had been cracked; they finally put a cast on my arm. The bullet had gone clear through. After I was operated on we bought boxed matches, lacking chips, and played a lot of poker. I did a lot of reading, especially mysteries, some by James M. Cain. I still have the field jacket that I was wearing when I was shot. I wasn't supposed to take it when I left England but I slipped it in my belongings as a souvenir. It has a hole in the right sleeve and my grandchildren love seeing it; one of my grandchildren has already spoken for the jacket. It is still not very presentable; it has been washed a few times.

My mother, father, and sisters and I exchanged letters often. I wrote letters to my girlfriend whom I married ten days after I returned. She was a very faithful letter writer. I got more letters than anyone in the company. My family told me later that the army sent a telegram to my mother saying that I had been wounded. My sister-in-law,

the wife of one of my brothers, who was in the army, picked up the Western Union message about me. She walked into the house with the telegram; my mother saw her and started screaming, "Is it Pat?" My sister-in-law said, "Yes, it is Pat, but he is still living." It was an emotional moment because I was her "baby" boy, the last.

The day the Nazis surrendered, May 8th, I got on a hospital ship to come home. When we neared New York and as we went into the harbor with the Statue of Liberty on our right there were tons of people in small boats running along side of our boats with signs saying, "You are so wonderful," and "Thank you." When I saw the skyline I had tears in my eyes and thought to myself, "By God, I am patriotic!" I had a real feeling of pride that I had never felt before: that "we live in a darn good country!" It was such a pleasure knowing it was all behind you. They put me in Halloran Hospital for about three or four days, gave me a haircut then sent me on a train to Nacogdoches, Texas, where my girl friend lived. She met me at the train and ten days later we were married. We had asked her father if we could get married before I went overseas; thank God he said

no. He did say we could get married as soon as I got back--and we did!



*Pat & <sup>Madeleine</sup> Madeline in  
downtown San Antonio,  
August '45.*

*Summer of 1945 -  
Pat & ~~my~~ wife Madeline  
in downtown San Antonio, TX  
during my recovery and  
rehabilitation at Brooke  
General Hospital following  
battle wound March 15, 1945,  
en route to the Philippines,  
Germany.*