

Taped Interview

Dallas Reunion 2006

Robert Nolan, Hdqtrs. Co. 409th

My name is Robert Nolan. I am a product of “The” Brooklyn. Brooklyn, New York. I am now a resident of New Jersey in Redbank. I am there in a retirement community. And I guess I am supposed to say what I am doing with the 103^d. I know that I was among the first to replace somebody who was killed in the 103^d. Up to that time, I had been busy working as Second Lieutenant in the antiaircraft. I was sent to the infantry school because they didn’t need any more people that knew other things. They needed infantrymen.

When I entered the army, I was sent to Texas to join an antiaircraft unit that was being organized. I was inducted into the army in ’42. I was sent down to a National Guard Camp that had been given to the antiaircraft people. I had been doing work for the Bell Telephone Laboratories and the

job I was working on had to do with radar. So, I was early into radar. Not to be the boss of anything, but to do the work to build radar. And this radar was going to be big enough and small enough to be put into airplanes for the Navy. So, I had an “in” on what radar was all about right from the mouth. When nobody knew about radar, I knew about it. Eventually, they gave me tests and they decided that I should go into the antiaircraft school at Camp Davis in North Carolina, OCS. It was strictly, flying targets; they had tow targets, and everything about antiaircraft. I was there 13 months. They made me Second Lieutenant. Then I went down to join another outfit. The first thing I know is that I am in El Paso, Texas and I am in a crowd of officers. It must have been 300 men. There were even a couple of Lieutenant Colonels. There were a bunch of majors and a lot of captains and reams of Second Lieutenants. They were not needed for the work they do.

They no longer needed antiaircraft guys. Some people were sent off to the Field Artillery. Some people were sent to the new Transportation Corps, not to the Master Corp. I got sent over to the infantry school for a

special course that was given to us. Now I was Second Lieutenant, Infantry.

The Infantry School was at Fort Benning, Georgia. It was a six-week course. I took a test and they sent me to OCS in Carolina. At that time, it was 17 weeks. (Then I went to Benning.) This converted us to infantrymen.

Then I reported to the Infantry School. I was sent to Camp Joseph T.

Robinson in Arkansas. Then we started the regular routine of getting men ready to be shipped overseas. You are not going to be waiting long. Once you finished this course, you are going overseas. That was the litany that I was told to take and others were told to take.

When I was walking up the gangplank on the Queen Mary, somebody yelled "Lieutenant Nolan". He was being shipped on the Queen Mary with me and I never saw him after that because the Queen Mary was carrying something in the order of 20,000 guys. That was at least two months after D-Day because we crossed the sands there. The WACs debarked before we did. One girl put her foot in a hole and she was carried back and put on a ship that had carried us over there. She went back to England. We went

across Omaha Beach but nothing was going on there. We were loaded into trucks and were taken to Le Mans. The truck that I was in had a blowout. Therefore, we had to wait and they went on. They repaired this blowout and replaced a wheel. Then we proceeded again. Then there was another fault with the same truck. Then we were taken back to Le Mans. We lost all contact with where we were going. When we finally arrived after a replacement was made to the truck we were on our way. We were at some town named Epinal. We went to a Repple Depot that had a spinning wheel type of factory where they made threads and made cloth. They had barracks after barracks, 4 beds high in there. We enjoyed it because they had Broadway shows for the troops. Then we were waiting and finally my turn came. I was put on a deuce and a half (2 ½ ton) truck. We headed out. I didn't know where we were going. We ended up reporting into what was a rear echelon unit of some outfit (103^d Infantry Division). We were still in France.

We were your first repple people to be there. We were assigned to the 409th Regiment. I was not assigned to any company that I know of. But they said I would be in the Headquarters Company. I thought I would be out near the front.

It was Lieutenant Pederson from Minnesota came in and I was to assist him in handling prisoners. This group was also to be a force to protect Headquarters if and when it was needed.

The Colonel of the 409th Regiment was Claudius Lloyd. I do not know if I was assigned to Headquarters Company because later on I had someone tell me I should have been assigned to this company. I didn't know who the Captain was. *Was there interrogation of prisoners?* It was not my job to interrogate, but to process them on to a POW Camp.

There was a Capt. Woods who had a license to fly. He would fly a couple hours a week so he could collect the bonus for flying. He was the interrogator member of the interrogation squad. Also in the squad were about three or four men who were of German extraction who spoke German

really well. Captain Woods himself had been to Germany and spoke German well. He also had been a teacher in a private school, teaching German.

We also handled displaced persons (DPs) and we had authority to stop trucks to provide transportation to DP camp. *Did you stay with that unit the whole time?* This is what happened afterwards. The displaced persons were beginning to interfere with traffic and therefore “get them off the roads” was our job. *Did you ever have any close contact with Colonel Lloyd?* He did not know me but I had been up close to him. He is a great old codger. I saw him in action. He was resting and the staff was in the Headquarters building discussing things between themselves; you could hear him say, “Now why are you going to put them in there for?” They were talking about someplace where they could be bivouacked; whether it was going to be wet or whether it was going to stay dry. He would say, “You won’t get them in there!” They would explain something else and he would say, “Well, we will see about that, but go ahead.” He was feisty. *I understand he was an ex.*

Cavalry officer in WWI. He had been in regular army for decades. I only saw him a couple of times.

What happened to your assignment here? There were a group of us here including Earl Roth (Captain Roth). He headed up the team. He had a jeep. Some other officers were assigned to do this; one was a Texan. There were enlisted men in there too. How did you handle the people on the road? It was to get them off the road to give them some food and that is about it. Later on, it got bigger and bigger and bigger until it was almost overwhelming with people on the roads. It became a job to transport them some place where they could at least survive. We did not have trucks to transport them. When we were in the town of Geisling, we had the authority to stop any truck going back for supplies. And, to take these people, whatever batch we had, back by orders of the General and we stopped them. That's the way we got them out. I think that Geisling was a jump off place because we were getting people off of the roads. After this, we were rounding up people and were given orders to get people out of the way. The

war was gearing down and basically, we were shipping people to different camps. Captain Roth was in charge at that point in time and we were working out of the town of Geisling. I went on and rode with Captain Roth and he reported to the Colonel. The Colonel used a little profanity in our talk in a leg-pulling mode. It became now to us no longer a military problem; it became civilian welfare problem. Basically, without them asking our permission we were now transferred from the division over to the Corps. That is where John Ray was; he is the one who led the troops up the Brenner Pass. And he got the job now. We were reporting to him. The war is over now. He, John Ray, was active in that. From that point on, we were setting up displaced persons centers, camps. After a few months welfare started coming. United Nations Rehabilitation came in and relieved us of that.

In Geisling, Captain Roth was asking for help from the local Germans and so they put him in charge of the town of Geisling. The military government people gave him the proper rubber stamps. He is the military

governor practically. We were processing people, getting them off the roads into places pertaining to handling these civilians. First thing you know we are doing that job and doing less and less involvement with the military.

Personally, with me, Roth needed some interpreters. We had taken over a house. We kept mom and pop in the kitchen and took food with them. Roth went up to get the military government to do something about these people.

The military governor gives him status and other things and said you make the decisions and use these stamps. They (the population) will obey them.

First thing, you know we are not soldiers, we are welfare officers and people are coming, going, and asking for this and that. We are taking care of them the best we could. Personally, I did not realize it at the time but some girl came in. She wanted to get a pass. She wanted to go to Bonn. She heard they were opening the University up there and she wanted to get a pass to go. Roth, with his rough attitude said, "You speak English quite well. What other languages do you speak?" She could speak a little French but English was her best. She could speak Finnish. She knows Swedish. He said,

“Well, you can’t go. We need interpreters so you are going to work here.

She didn’t want to stay. But when he told her, “You can have lunch with us on a daily basis,” she accepted the job.

Lieutenant Stanford was another Second Lieutenant. Roth says, “Here is your interpreter.” Roth says to the girl, “Before you go, you better go upstairs into my room.” She said, “Not no more of that!” Basically, “No, no, no!” He started saying, “I’ll stay here, and you go up there. You can leave the door open, but you have to wash you face.” Roth was very rough when he was talking to her. He had asked her, “Why do you want to do this?” The girl had started to cry and when she cried a little bit of tears came out. She had taken chimney soot to fix up her lashes because she was very blonde. Very blonde girls do not have dark lashes. She didn’t know that she had this stuff streaming down her face. It looked like a clown’s face.

Stanford says, in his best-broken German, “No, I’ll stay here and you go up there.” And she does that and comes down. So, that was the first one he

had. She was at Roth's elbow all the time. When he wants to talk to the Germans, he had her. I ended up marrying the girl.

When did you come back to the states? This is something else because of my career when the units now started to go back I was offered a job in the military government. So I joined there. Now I also knew another Lieutenant and he was a graduate of one of the colleges in upstate New York. He was running the hotels that the military government people had in Augsburg. There were two hotels. One hotel was for the enlisted men and one was for the officers. So, when a GI comes along in a vehicle with an officer, the officer goes to a hotel. And the GI goes to the hotel down the street. I got to know him. He comes to me one day he says, "I've got a good job for you," and he gives me this job. He recommends me to the military governor of Augsburg. I take over the two hotels. I had feelings for this girl. She became the interpreter. So lo and behold I married her and brought her to the good old U.S.A.