

Library of Congress transcript of recorded interview
(Typos in original transcript)

Interview with Arthur Clayton [June 23 2003]

Thomas Swope:

This is the oral history of World War Two veteran Arthur Joseph Clayton. Mr. Clayton served in the U.S. Army with the 103^d Infantry Division, 409th Regiment, Company B. Arthur's highest rank was PFC and he served in the European Theater. I'm Tom Swope and this telephone interview was recorded on June 23, 2003. Art was 85 at the time of this recording.

Thomas Swope:

Art, where were you living in 1941?

Arthur Clayton:

I was living in Brunswick, Missouri.

Thomas Swope:

How old were you at the time?

Arthur Clayton:

I would say about 23.

Thomas Swope:

23. So you were working then?

Arthur Clayton:

Yes.

Thomas Swope:

What kind of job at that point?

Arthur Clayton:

I was editing the family weekly newspaper in Brunswick, Missouri.

Thomas Swope:

So at that age, were you early on the list to be called for draft or not?

Arthur Clayton:

I was married and had a baby daughter. That put me in 3-A, I guess it was.

Thomas Swope:

So, when did they call you?

Arthur Clayton:

I got my notice from the President in January, 1944. At that time, I was living in Prescott, Arizona. I was treated down there, getting away from hay fever and asthma in Missouri. I got a job as editor of the daily newspaper in Prescott, Arizona. I think I had some other kind of deferment because I was in what they call the public communications.

Thomas Swope:

So you were called in early '44 then?

Arthur Clayton:

Yes, I got the notice in January of 1944, and I was called to go to in-service in May of 1944.

Thomas Swope:

What was it like when you went into training and you were thrown into situations with guys all across the country?

Arthur Clayton:

It was interesting. It wasn't remarkable or anything like that. It seemed to me there were more 3-A people like myself and a little bit older than normal, maybe. Some had families. It was getting down to that point of the war where they were scraping the bottom of the barrel, I guess.

Thomas Swope:

{Laughs}.

Arthur Clayton:

There were some young men in our group; you know, 19, 20 years old.

Thomas Swope:

So what can you tell me about your training?

Arthur Clayton:

Well, we were shipped out to Camp Roberts, California. I got out there and saw the wild oats and the dust and heat, and I knew that I was going to die within two weeks of hay fever or asthma, but nothing happened. I chugged right along. The training was -- it was just kind of passive. We went through all kinds of training, going on hikes, gas mask

drills, rifle shooting, but it was just sort of a get-acquainted with the material, not really knowing it like, you know, maybe the guys in the 101st Airborne, they were together for, what, five or six years, and we were in it together for 17 weeks. And, you know, you find your own buddies and stuff like that. I was glad, when it was over with, we were headed somewhere. We didn't know where it was going to be.

Thomas Swope:

You trained for 17 weeks and then shipped overseas?

Arthur Clayton:

Yes.

Thomas Swope:

What was that crossing like?

Arthur Clayton:

We were on a ship. I think it was called the Wakefield. It was a liberty ship that held a couple of thousand of men, I believe, bunk beds down below, stacked four high. I read somewhere in my journal here that the guys shot for the top bunk so, when they would throw up, they would throw up on them down below. There was a lot of that. Our ship was alone and it went straight. In other words, no zigzagging or anything like that. I guess the German submarine threat was over. It took seven days and we were, of course, under blackout conditions all the time. We had things to read and we would go up on deck and smoke and, at night, of course, it was all blacked out. It was kind of spooky, but after we got going, most of us settled down and we made it okay.

Thomas Swope:

Now, at that point, were you a replacement and not assigned to an outfit?

Arthur Clayton:

We were not.

Thomas Swope:

Anything else you want to tell me that you remember about that trip overseas?

Arthur Clayton:

Well, it was not a pleasant trip, because it was so much sea sickness, and we worried about where we were going. But it passed without too much difficulty. You could get up on the deck and you could see the horizon and things like that. Your stomach settled

down a little bit but it was pretty crude. The food was served down below on steel tables. I don't think we could sit down. We had to eat standing up. The ship was rolling and here comes somebody's tray, probably been thrown up in. I think we went through maybe a couple of drills, but it was just a matter of looking at that endless, endless sea. The weather was pretty good, as I recall. We went to Southampton, I guess it was, went through London. We saw the London skyline from our training in Liverpool -- I guess it was Liverpool where we landed. We pulled through London and I stopped in, I think, Southampton. There was an army depot over there and it was raining and raining and raining and raining. We didn't have any floors, you know, like having wooden floors. I don't believe we had any. It was pretty damp. I forget how long it was, maybe two or three or four days. At first, we were delayed because the weather was too choppy in the Channel and we waited a couple of days until we went aboard a -- I don't know if it was just a Channel boarder or not. We went over across the Channel on that and, again, it was too rough for us to be offloaded. We landed, I think, in Le Havre. I think it was the next day that we -- I don't even remember. We surely didn't climb down the ladder, you know, the rope ladder. What the heck -- I know when we got ashore, we didn't even get our feet wet. You can see the pictures of these guys jumping in the water overhead. Of course, there was nobody shooting at the crewmen either. They pulled up much closer ashore. I can't remember how we -- I think we went just down a real steep ramp into the landing boats.

Thomas Swope:

Just got close enough, right. You got close enough to put your ramp down and not get your feet wet?

Arthur Clayton:

Yes, something like that. We went from the -- when we landed -- I was just curious as to how we got from the ship down to the landing boat, because they are quite a bit lower, you know, than the normal ship.

Thomas Swope:

Right. Well, yes, I guess it might have been a rope ladder or something like that, right, or the netting on the side perhaps?

Arthur Clayton:

I just don't remember that. I got my book here. I don't think it would tell me.

Thomas Swope:

So you were in France. You said you only spent about, what, four days in England then, right?

Arthur Clayton:

Yes.

Thomas Swope:

You didn't get much of a time to see much of England at that time?

Arthur Clayton:

We didn't see anything at all in that miserable camp. It was raining all the time. It was just an adventure to go to that miserable bathroom.

Thomas Swope:

So what happened after you landed in France?

Arthur Clayton:

Well, it was a kind of remarkable thing. We loaded down in our gear and we were told to throw most of it away, extra shoes and extra socks, clothing, and French people would just, of course, swarm on to it. It went into a big pile in the middle of this field. I think we were supposed to -- I don't think we were supposed to keep our gas mask. But most of us threw those away just after using those as extra ditty bags, strapped them around our waist. Then the miserable part started and these miserable trains, 40 in eight cars. We went from one supply depot to another one, kept jumping around, sleeping in the fields, in the normal pup tents that you hear about. One of the amusing things that happened there is it was raining. Seems like it was always raining. Four of us, if you can imagine, crawled into one little pup tent and the sergeant patrolling up and down saw four pairs of boots sticking out of the tent, out of the little tent. He tapped on the boots and said, what the hell is going on here? So we had to crawl out and do guard duty. Otherwise, it was just getting pushed around. The supply, they were disrespectful or misunderstanding people who were going out there. The supply people, they had a pretty safe job. They were not getting shot at but they herded us around like a bunch of elk platoons. We went to several overnight depots in Epagnol, France, inside of France.

We were shipped out in these trucks, I believe, to a little town -- I can't think of it. That's where we came. We were assigned to it. We were bunking in the store of a schoolhouse and we were told that we were going to join the 103rd Infantry Division, the 409th Regiment and Company B of that regiment, of that battalion. And up there in this attic, we met our sergeant, a new sergeant, a nice guy. He had seen battles before, I believe, maybe in the Pacific, I'm not sure. But fortunately, there were about four of us guys trained in Camp Roberts still together. We had to go start on getting acquainted with people. And then there were two other boys that were from Missouri that we didn't know were also assigned to our squad. So we went out together as pretty much partially acquainted, but things moved so darn fast and we were called into going into action immediately. I want to go back a little bit. We were replacing most of Company B because most of the company had been captured just a couple of nights before in a little town called Selestat on the Rhine River. They didn't have any officers or anybody until they got the replacements in. And then we took off east, I guess it would be, towards the Rhine River. And that's where we got in. That's where we got our first combat.

Thomas Swope:

Did you have memory of that first day in combat?

Arthur Clayton:

To this day.

Thomas Swope:

Yeah. Let's hear it.

Arthur Clayton:

Well, it was an unbelievable -- we had been going on and maybe hearing a shot once in a while from a sniper. All of a sudden, we heard the rat-tat-tat-tat in this little town which we later learned was Rott, R-O-T-T. The Germans had dug in. We were down in a part of town, on the edge of town. We had to go up a hill to get to it. It was just a miserable situation. We had to stay there all night. We were on the top of a little hill and we started digging our foxholes and we had not gotten more than eight inches down when the water began to come in. I mean, it was wet. We slept in the water most of the night. We didn't sleep but we laid in the water. I was a BAR man. I don't know why I was chosen as a BAR, maybe because I had two pairs of underwear or stuff. My BAR sat on

the edge of the foxhole. It was out of the water. Next morning, real early, early, I think the sergeant came by and gave each of us a pay raise. Then it was time to move out and we started to get out and hurry toward this little town and we had to go down this hill to get to -- or the bottom of the hill. There is a little stream. I think they probably call it a river but to us it was just a little creek. But the Germans were in this little town and opened up on us with machine guns and mortars, and most of us just hit the ground which they say we shouldn't have done but we did. A little battle ensued there. I was shooting the BAR. I could not see anything except for a piece there in that little town. They were digging their holes there. Finally, it let up enough so that our people could cross the bridge and get into the little town and they continued to send mortar fire into it. We later learned that our company medic, a guy by the name of Fred Lacey, had been killed instantly by mortar shells. And I forget how many were killed that day. I had it written out here. Let's see. It was on the 15th of November. We had four people killed, I guess.

Thomas Swope:

15th of November that was?

Arthur Clayton:

No, December.

Thomas Swope:

December, yeah, because Company B was December 2, I believe, when they were captured.

Arthur Clayton:

Yes. That was on the 15th. One medic was killed and four GIs -- the medic was the only one I had even passing knowledge of. I think our platoon leader was killed. It was pretty grim. One guy got the back of his pack shaved by bullets. Another had his raincoat ripped by bullets. Another one had his raincoat ripped by bullets. It was pretty hairy. We went into a little town and still one of our people went to the door of this house on the edge of town, opened the door, looked in the door and there was a rifle. There was a German soldier just 30 feet away aiming right at the door and the shot went through his head. That was the first casualty that I had seen in our short time over. It's less than two weeks. We were assigned to this thing and we were in a battle just like that. And long,

long story, Catanzano was the soldier's name as I found out. He was the first American I had seen. I saw it, just terrible, the back of his head was blown off and big dribble of blood. Ah! Anyway, we moved to the edge of town and stayed there in the little pillbox. Next morning, we took off again and our Scouts relay signaled the squad leader up. The Germans were in the woods. We kept going over there and the Germans kept jumping up. There were about 20, I guess, shooting at us and we were shooting at them. I remember there was a German soldier -- I suddenly realized I was looking right down at the barrel of his rifle. I stepped behind the tree and looked straight down, looked the other side with my BAR. He was running away on the other side of the tree. I pulled the trigger of my BAR but nothing happened. It was wet or got dirt or something like that. That was the end of that story. I could go back to my book here. There was a lot of marching, a lot of going into little towns; people would come out and yell, "Mish-mosh, mish-mosh". I think we were pulled back, went into the reserve for a while. I forgot. We went over the Siegfried Line, I believe it was. We got that far. That was into Germany. And we were up -- there weren't really mountains there but there were pretty good size hills. A lot of trenches there as well as just the pillboxes that fell and so we were out in the trenches most of the time. The Germans were shelling us, mortar fire and maybe tanks. We were lying there in the dirt. At least it was dry. We were there for a couple of days, I think days and nights. You asked me what my most fearsome part was. I think this is where it was.

Thomas Swope:

Yeah, let's hear that.

Arthur Clayton:

We were going up the hill, watching it, running as hard as you can. You are just on adrenaline, you know. You are not really afraid or scared or thinking about it. You know, we were on the Siegfried Line, we were in the trenches. There was a dead soldier lined up. (Pause.)

Thomas Swope:

Uh-huh.

Arthur Clayton:

It's kind of bad. When you stick your head up a little bit of that trench, you were exposed when you do that. We had to do it. We were there for a couple of days and nights, I think. Another soldier and I were detailed to go to pillbox nearby where a couple of GIs were holding a couple of prisoners and they were going for interrogation. Another man by the name of Harader and I got up to the pillbox okay and went to the front of it. I looked down below me and, my God, there was a German tank there. There were some people milling around. There was a pillbox where they held prisoners. We took a couple of prisoners with us. All of a sudden, there was a big kablam. The German tank was firing at us into that pillbox. They fired about three rounds and then let there be a pause. The second or third time, there was a pause, Harader and I grabbed the soldiers and said, let's get out of here. We ran back to the trenches by the time the next round of tank fire came in. I could feel it. I said it blew me down the road but it really didn't do that. Just scared the hell out of me. By then Harader was back in the ditch. I was running as fast as I could and the two Germans were carrying their wounded buddies. They were having a hell of a time but we all got back to the trench. That was just the day before Christmas, I believe. And we were finally relieved by the 45th Division. They came up to give us some relief. We were hauled out and we ate all the K rations. We were so damn hungry. There was no water. We -- the guys would give us a cracker or something like that. We tried not to be too obvious about that but we were pretty grateful for it. We left, started coming back down the hill, got down. There was a Jeep with corn syrup or corn soup or something like that. The syrup tasted good. That's where we got some dry socks and got back to the little town. We were put up in a second floor of this old school building. They talked about pulling off. I think there were maybe six of us in a room with double bunk beds. It was the day before Christmas. Christmas day, we had turkey à la king. The next day, we knew we made a mistake, because all we had eaten was dry K rations. And when the chicken -- turkey -- what do you call it? I said it, I know.

Thomas Swope:

What's that? The turkey ala king?

Arthur Clayton:

The turkey ala king, it didn't settle well in our stomach and we had a severe case of diarrhea. And there was a trench out by the school building. Sometimes, we just didn't have time to get there, so we wound up on the top up, on the third floor where the roof had been blown off. And we relieved ourselves. And we thought, it would just have been better to burn it because it would have been intolerable. I forget from time to time what we were talking about. What else can I talk about?

Thomas Swope:

Let's talk about buddies. You had those buddies from Camp Roberts. Did you have any other close buddies from the outfit?

Arthur Clayton:

We finally got acquainted with -- his name was Easter. You may have met him at the reunion.

Thomas Swope:

I think I did.

Arthur Clayton:

Tall, nice looking guy. He was a squad leader, same platoon. For a while, he was the only one in his squad. There is an interesting little sidebar in the army. His name is William Edward Easter. For all of us, he was known as Ed. The army insisted his name was William. We were supposed to call him Bill over there. His preference for a short name was Ed. So, that's the way it went. I didn't have many close friends, just pretty close squad. There wasn't much time for fraternizing or anything else.

Thomas Swope:

Yeah. So what happened next then after December there? Was your unit considered -- was that action considered part of the Battle of the Bulge?

Arthur Clayton:

I don't really think so.

Thomas Swope:

It was somewhere in the southern flank area, right?

Arthur Clayton:

Yes. I don't know if you have ever read the book, I think Whiting is the name, the story of the battle of the bulge?

Thomas Swope:

No, I haven't.

Arthur Clayton:

His research showed that the Germans had planned this other sweep down through Strasbourg and across above -- I don't Huertgen Forest or somewhere up there, a big pinch up the middle. They thought they could sweep through and we were kind of right in the middle of that, too, big upside down horseshoe, and we were up in the upper section of that curve. We were very fortunate that we didn't catch anything worse than we did. But that didn't pan out. I remember Eddy Murphy was down with the 3rd Army down in the Strasbourg -- Culmore, I think it was. We didn't know it at the time but that's where he was. The Germans were repulsed and regrouped, I guess. I'm trying to check with my little book here. Incidentally, I took my family back over there in 1967, my wife and two boys, and rented a German VW bug in Paris and I revisit some of these places a lot, like Weurth and other little places like Weurth. We stopped. That was on the edge of town. There were some people working there. I got out of the car and walked up to them. One of them came over to see what he could do for me. I didn't speak German and this German didn't speak English, but we managed to get it all sorted out. I had a regimental history book and I showed a picture of Weurth and the story and everything in that book. His concern was, I was an American soldier and driving a German car? That didn't quite set right. And I couldn't possibly have explained Avis or Hertz, or whoever it was, had rented the car. It was disturbing to him. We went to many places. Again, it was raining and to get out and to go into any of these fields, well, with one pair of shoes, I wouldn't have made it very far. It was the second time, I guess, that we did it. We didn't go to Rott. That was later in March that we started out again. The Germans were defending that at that time. And we had another big battle there, climbing the hill to get up on to the top of the hill where the Germans were. They were shooting their machine guns over us and we just wondered why in the hell they didn't lower their sights a little bit because we heard bing, bing, bing, right over our head. We kept running. Our

mortar fire was catching up with us. There were some explosions. I don't think that anybody was hurt by that. The Germans gave up when we got close enough. Put their hands up. We got up on top of the hill. I don't know where the German came from. He had been one of the men who had been captured. He just turned and started walking towards us, through us, just getting away from the crowd up there. And I guess our company sergeant, master sergeant or whatever he was, lifted up his gun and shot the German right in the shoulder. He stopped him. We started going down the hill into the town. The Germans opened up on us again from in front of us. And our platoon leader, Sergeant Wards who I think you met at the reunion, he was shot at in the left shoulder, to the left of the heart. He never came back to the service. He was sent back. He was the one standing there at the door of that barn at the sawmill. They started shelling us. I never could tell the difference between a tank shelling and a mortar shelling, other than the tank shelling made a whining and the mortar made a whisper. The one shell, we were lined up shooting back towards the woods and a shell came in and hit that pit of trees right over our heads but didn't explode. It showered us with bark and tree limbs and stuff like but didn't explode. I think if it had, we would have all been taken care of then. We realized they were getting pretty damn close so we ran into some of the houses that were behind us where, incidentally, two Germans came out with their hands over their head yelling "surrender", "surrender" or something like that. To get to the house, we had to run over those logs. Boy, if there is anything that reminded you of an obstacle course in training, that was it. It was just the same thing. But we were in the basement of that house until things quieted down. So that's pretty much my story. Let's see. We got up to the Siegfried Line later on again. I didn't get in, I guess. I was wounded, I guess. I was wounded on March the 17th, I think. I was -- Wards was wounded on March the 17th, I guess, and I was wounded on the 19th.

Thomas Swope:

Yeah, tell me about when you were wounded.

Arthur Clayton:

We had been marching in single file along this little road, setting up our little bluff, getting set to cross the road, cross the stream and going into the woods and start forward again. We went, oh, about 100 yards. The Germans started shelling us again.

The shell landed in the trees and exploded and the tree fragment or shell fragment hit me in the left leg, on my thigh, on the knee and it hit Crabtree in the knees and there was another guy who caught it in both legs, I think. But we were out of action then. They took us back to -- medics took us back, waited for ambulances and Jerry O'Connell commented in my book that the medics just would not give me any attention at all. When I was heaving, coughing, freezing, they gave me a couple of pills but that didn't help. But I was lying on the stretcher, in the streets -- but here we were lying on the stretchers on the street and they would stop and gave us cigarettes. They couldn't do nothing for us. The Germans were still shelling that area. The guys started rolling off the cot towards a little stream, and we didn't get into the water. But that was it for my combat experience. They took us back to -- I don't know what they call it, the evacuation hospital or hospital first. I remember waking up there and they gave me morphine and seeing -- I never did see my two friends, Crabtree and Compton, but another friend, a close friend -- his name was Black -- he was sitting up in the cot. His face was all bandaged up. A shrapnel had hit him. That was probably the next shot after they got me. And I didn't even know that, of course. I remember seeing Crabtree sitting up on the couch -- on the cot, twisting and writhing. We went to a decent well-equipped hospital which had been a hotel, I think. The nurse or somebody came and said, you don't eat breakfast in the morning. They tell you that right away. I guess they went into -- I get mixed up as to whether it was there or the prior place that they operated on my leg. But the thing is they could not find any metal in it. But when I looked at the wound, there was a hole like a dime in my pants leg. It didn't bleed a whole lot. When I looked at the wound, it was about a foot long and had about -- later on, I counted there were 11 stitches in it. They weren't delicate ones. They were about 3/4 inches apart. It was kind of a shock. I was in the hospital for a quite a while. I got back out on the 1st of May. I got back out. That was on March 19th. I had quite a bit of rest there. But I was reassigned into my company to Innsbruck, Austria. When I got back to Germany, I saw our platoon leader, first and second lieutenant and asked him, I went over to him and found out he had been hit by -- the next day, he had been hit in the foot by what is called a tumbling bullet. It went right through it, made a hole. He was leaving and going back to Austria, too. I was later on -- we got acquainted back home at our reunion. I

said, when I came up to you, did I salute you? He said, Art, that's something -- something that I don't want to talk about. After the war wound down, we were in a house in Innsbruck, little house, nice furniture. We had very limited guard duty. I think one was at animal dump and scattered around were a whole bunch of German uniforms. We -- and I imagine other people -- stayed clear because we were afraid of booby traps. We went to another little town to guard the reservoir. And we'd say -- a couple of those would stay inside the door and another was standing outside and in, say, two or four hours or something like that and in the daytime, we would go swimming in the lake, in the water. It was ice cold. One time, we were on the edge of the reservoir and there was big fish down there. I don't know what they were, but they were about a foot and a half long, I guess. We had to hit -- we had nothing to fish with except with our rifle. We had to hit one or two and knock them out, wrestle them out. The bad thing, when we had to wade into that water to get them out, it was just ice cold. We finally got -- I think it was -- four that we got out, took them home. The lady where we staying, she fried them for us. I'm sure it tasted like hell but to us it was a real treat. We bounced around in several different places, but it was just about -- we were getting on board trucks to head back to -- head home, went to work. The Japanese had surrendered. That was August 6th?

Thomas Swope:

Right. When the bomb had been dropped.

Arthur Clayton:

So the war was over and we were stuck with the army of occupation, which was a pretty good deal. I turned up my file card, my IBM card and I had a degree in journalism and so they said for me to come in and interview for newspaper editor and that was a real fine job. And I enjoyed it. We did real well. Headquarters company -- this is the 47th Infantry Regiment, Ninth Division. And we drove into town every day to Munich to -- it was a printing plant we went to. This is where our newspaper was published. And later, our regimental history book, which I helped put together. And dealing with them, the German printers and bookkeepers, was a real challenge. But there was a lot of arms waving and examples. I had worked growing up in a newspaper shop. So I could speak the language even though it was not the same language, you know what I mean.

Thomas Swope:

Right.

Arthur Clayton:

We got on very well. That was August until January, the next year, I forgot. It was pretty good duty. I eventually went down to Vienna, went down there with the regimental football team to play somebody. I don't know who the hell it was. I didn't know much about football, but my story apparently went over very well. Where are we?

Thomas Swope:

I guess you were getting close to coming home then, right?

Arthur Clayton:

Yes, I called -- yes, I finally just called, called back into the department. It was postponed and the colonel extended for a while until we were all going home. He said there is one more job to do and that turned out to be going into a Russian -- Russian P.O.W. camp, Russians who had fought with the Germans. Since Russia was our ally, we were supposed to take these Russian soldiers and put them on box carts and send them home. They knew that was the end of their life. And we did, too. This is -- must have been March. It was cold as hell. The ground was -- the ground was frozen. There was snow on the ground. We were supposed to raid this P.O.W. camp. Getting there about 6:00 in the morning. I think it was a whole regiment. It was surrounded by barbed wire, zipped the wire, get to them before they start killing each other. It was a grim possibility. We did it and they were caught by surprise and some of them were in their underwear and some of them dressed. It was freezing, freezing cold. Some of the officers would not relent, wanted to get back into the warm stalls but ours would not let them go in. We took a couple of them on the side where the GIs had a big fire going near one of the barracks that they had been in. That was the end of my combat career right there, raiding the Russian P.O.W. camp.

Thomas Swope:

You said that was March of '46?

Arthur Clayton:

Yes. I was discharged April of '46.

Thomas Swope:

When you were in the army of occupation, what was the attitude of the German civilians towards the Americans?

Arthur Clayton:

I didn't have any -- I traveled on the train, hitchhiked once -- actually, I hitchhiked with other GIs. They were -- I didn't see any animosity. If there was any, they didn't show it to us. They were pretty friendly.

Thomas Swope:

When did you finally get home?

Arthur Clayton:

I got back to the States the 1st of April, back in Jefferson barracks and discharged by the 6th of April. That was a relief.

Thomas Swope:

What was your reunion with your wife like?

Arthur Clayton:

Well, I skipped that part. When we were in Le Havre coming home, I had divorce papers to sign. That didn't surprise me. It was emerging. I had those signed by a lieutenant and a captain at headquarters or somewhere. They had shipped them out and had been sent back home before I even got back home. That was the end of the story.

Thomas Swope:

Did you get a dear John letter when you were over there or what?

Arthur Clayton:

I didn't even get that but I knew it was coming.

Thomas Swope:

You knew it.

Arthur Clayton:

I knew it. I wasn't surprised. I didn't get a dear John but I knew. I spent some time in Dachau.

Thomas Swope:

Did you liberate the camp at Dachau?

Arthur Clayton:

No, I didn't. Part of a regiment, I think the Fort Lewis regiment went into Landsberg, I think it was called, one of the big prison camps and helped free people there. When we were in Dachau, all the people were gone. And a lot of barracks, I think, had burned down. There were still plenty of signs around of the torture that went on, the gas chambers, the places where things had been stacked in there, three feet. Just from the look of it, it was unbelievable what they did. Still trying -- little town nearby where the prisoner camp was, the name was Deggendorf. We stayed there. Went to town once in a while and talked to the Red Cross out there, but it was a mile or two into town. We didn't go there very often. But I had a letter from a young man about a month or so ago now. He had read my book and I had talked about Deggendorf. He was born and grew up in Deggendorf, I think he said, in 1934. He had been doing some research on the area, his hometown's participation and experiences in the war. He asked me to add my two bits to it which I didn't have much to add because I didn't go into town -- we hardly ever went into town. Our target was the Russian camp and we just went -- we trained for that, you know, some field where they laid out the camp on stakes or whatever the hell they did then. But when the raid finally came off on February 25th -- this was not March --

Thomas Swope:

Okay.

Arthur Clayton:

I was getting back after that. It was an experience. The only time -- I don't know when this came about but I kept these little bits of notes in a notebook that I carried around my breast pocket. They don't show anything. If the Germans would capture, they wouldn't get anything. They knew a hell of a lot more of where I was than I did. I kept the notes. When I got back to the Public Relations in Dachau, the newspaper had access to the typewriter and I started writing my memoirs in Dachau, did most of them there, finished the rest when I got back home. But oh, I know as a result of me having written this down these - sometimes, when I read it in later years, it's hard to believe that we really did that, you know. Just ordinary guys and families, ordinary jobs, doing it the way we did and somebody was going to shoot at us. Life was hell, being in the camps

and mud. We were lucky we didn't burn half the barns in France because we had candles, little K ration, tin cans, that would have burned the barn. It's a wonder we didn't burn something out. I thought later on, looking back at it; it was almost as if I were an observer rather than a participant. I kind of held things off a little distant, maybe. I don't know why, but that's the way I felt about it. I was an observer.

Thomas Swope:

When you think about your experiences during World War II, does one particularly vivid memory come to mind?

Arthur Clayton:

That one I mentioned, I guess, in my book. I say there was a smell about the place. Powder has kind of a sweet smell about it. And, of course, gunpowder just fills the air. And the American soldiers land behind it. That smell, it clung to me for a long, long time. It doesn't anymore. I don't think that there is hardly a night -- I don't have nightmares about it. But I think about it. And different experiences like up there in the Siegfried Line, sharing our K ration. The shells would hit outside. We weren't worried too much about that. They threw dirt all over our lunch. And there was powdered orange juice that we tried to drink. Without enough water, that didn't work at all. Those things are particularly vivid. Some of those, I don't review some of that. It's been a long, long time ago. So that's my story. (END OF INTERVIEW.)