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Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Audrey Rudolph Walters

Interviewer: Chad Daniels

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time/Counter</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1 of 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:01:01.1</td>
<td>Personal history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:02:41.7</td>
<td>Brother joins the Marines; medically discharged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:03:12.3</td>
<td>Other brother makes career of Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:05:03.3</td>
<td>Working as a teenager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:06:49.3</td>
<td>High school ROTC, 36th Infantry Division Tank Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:09:15.3</td>
<td>Joining the Army, 9th Infantry Regiment I Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:10:33.4</td>
<td>Basic training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:12:09.8</td>
<td>Recalcitrant recruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:15:10.2</td>
<td>Infantry training, Camp Shelby, Mississippi, 1940s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:23:07.9</td>
<td>Christmas carolers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:26:33.7</td>
<td>Importance of soldiers’ feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:29:13.3</td>
<td>Shipping overseas on the USS General J.R. Brook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:30:48.1</td>
<td>Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:33:10.1</td>
<td>Journey on high seas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:33:42.1</td>
<td>Arrival in Marseilles, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:35:15.7</td>
<td>Leaving Marseilles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:35:35.5</td>
<td>Retreating Germans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:37:47.5</td>
<td>First firefight with Germans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:39:38.9;</td>
<td>Fatalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:43:29.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:41:17.4</td>
<td>Encounter with tiger tank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:42:45.0</td>
<td>Sabotaging German phone lines in the battlefield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:44:34.2</td>
<td>“Friendly” grenade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:45:26.4</td>
<td>Lieutenant taken out by burp gun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:49:06.0</td>
<td>Tank support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:53:40.4</td>
<td>Young Russian soldier taken by Germans, surrenders to U.S. GIs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:54:39.2</td>
<td>Fighting the SS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:57:57.5</td>
<td>Action in the Vosges Mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:01:43.2</td>
<td>Restoring an old man’s wartime losses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:03:31.2</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:07:36.4</td>
<td>Memorable soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10:06.2;</td>
<td>Encounter with SS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:12:02.2</td>
<td>Nazis impersonate U.S. soldiers by wearing U.S. uniforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15:25.0</td>
<td>Wounded Nazi soldier killed because he’s bleeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:16:31.7</td>
<td>Nicknamed Bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:18:54.2</td>
<td>Most comfortable bunks aboard ship in the brig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:22:01.7</td>
<td>Decision to make the Army his lifelong career; decision to marry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

- Personal history ................................................................. 1-2
- Siblings ................................................................................ 2
- Education .............................................................................. 2
- Working before military service ........................................... 2
- Joining ROTC ........................................................................ 3
- Joining the National Guard, tank company ......................... 3-4
- Joining the Army, 9th Infantry ............................................... 4
- Training recruits ................................................................... 5-7, 10-11
- Camp Claiborne ..................................................................... 7, 9-10
- Promotions, demotions ....................................................... 8
- Shipping overseas in World War II ........................................ 11-13
- Red Cross ............................................................................. 12
- Landing at Marseilles .......................................................... 13
- German evacuees killed, bulldozed ....................................... 14
- Taking fire ............................................................................. 14-15
- Fatalities ................................................................................ 15-19
- Encounter with a tiger tank ................................................... 16
- Identifying, sabotaging German telephone wires ................ 16
- Friendly grenade .................................................................... 17
- Tank support ......................................................................... 19
- Issues regarding atomic bomb ............................................. 20
- German POWs ....................................................................... 20
- Young, Russian soldier ......................................................... 21
- Encounter with SS troops ....................................................... 21-22
- Alps, Vosges Mountains ....................................................... 22
- Brenner Pass ......................................................................... 23-24
- Interpreter gets second chance at war’s end ....................... 23-24
- Money ..................................................................................... 24
- Occupation duty ................................................................. 24-25
- Curfew .................................................................................. 25
- Memorable recruit ............................................................... 26
- SS officer in Allied uniform taken prisoner ......................... 28
- German POW killed by soldier ............................................. 28
- Earning nickname of Bear, Korea ......................................... 28-29
- Coming home from World War II ........................................ 29
- Under fire from the French ................................................... 29
- Military point system ........................................................... 29
- Military career ....................................................................... 30
- Fort Sam Houston ............................................................... 30
- Indian scout .......................................................................... 30-31
AN ORAL HISTORY

with

AUDREY RUDOLPH WALTERS

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Audrey Rudolph Walters and is taking place on October 8, 2015. The interviewer is Chad Daniels. Also present is David Gilbert.

Time stamps are recorded in the manuscript and the recording log using Express Scribe.

Daniels: All right. This interview is for the University of Southern Mississippi Oral History Program. The interview is with Audrey Rudolph Walters, also known as Bear, and is taking place on the eighth of October, 2015. The interviewer is Chad Daniels. First I’d like to thank you, Bear, for taking time to talk with me today. And I’ll ask you to record for the record, rather, to state your name and spell it.

Walters: My name is Audrey R. Walters, W-A-L-T-E-R-S.

Daniels: Thank you very much. All right. Let’s start with some questions, just on your background. So where were born? Where’d you grow up?

Walters: I was born in Nacogdoches County, in the state of Texas. I grew up mostly in that area, but most of it was in that area and central Texas, and then South Texas. My dad worked in the oil fields there for a while. Then we went on a farm, and lived in a farm for several years.

Daniels: What kind of farming did your family do? What kind of farming?

Walters: In east Texas you grow cotton and corn and pigs, and that’s about it. (laughter)

Daniels: Was your dad a veteran of the military or anybody in your family?

Walters: His folks has thirteen children. Two of them died at birth. One died of pneumonia when he was thirty-four years old. The other ten grew past sixty years of age. Several of them had some military service. My dad did not have military service.

Daniels: Did you have brothers and sisters?
Walters: My dad?

Daniels: No. Did you? Did you have brothers and sisters?

Walters: Two brothers, two brothers, no sisters. One of them had—well, I was the oldest. The middle one was Thomas Edison Walters and was named after my dad. After I had joined the Army, he thought and they thought that he should join the Marines. So he went in basic training down in San Diego. And when they got to jumping off the tower with that pack on your back and all that stuff, he didn’t want to do it, and this Marine sergeant throwed him in the water, and he went nuts. So he got medical discharges, which he lived on the rest of his life. The youngest one is nineteen years, I think, younger than me. He joined the Air Force; he retired as a colonel. He lives in Florida in—

Gilbert: Tallahassee.

Walters: —Tallahassee. Got this procedure down right. (laughter) That takes care of my immediate family.

Daniels: OK. Did you finish high school? Did you finish high school?

Walters: No. I finished the ninth grade. I have GED(?) [General Educational Development diploma] thing, or whatever those were, that they gave me. I never asked for it; they just gave it to me. I guess they figured I was dumb enough to do it. And since then I have taken courses with the University of California in law and contract law and neurology, and I don’t know how many. And I have about 400 hours of Great Courses. You know about Great Courses?

Daniels: Yeah. I do. Those are excellent.

Walters: I’ve covered a multitude from them. I’d hate to even try to tell you how many.

Daniels: Did you work before you went into the service? Beyond just the family farm, did you work before you went into the service? Did you have a job before you went into the Army?

Walters: Yes.

Daniels: What’d you do?

Walters: Well, in addition to working on the farm, when I was sixteen and seventeen years old, I made ornamental iron (inaudible). 0:05:03.3

Daniels: That’s something I’m familiar with. My dad does that.
**Walters:** Does he?

**Daniels:** Sure does, Daniels’ Ironworks. (laughter) So that’s interesting.

**Walters:** (Inaudible) set it in.

**Daniels:** No. Well, the decorative stuff he does is for like fences and stuff. He uses plasma carvers and stuff like that and makes real (inaudible) stuff.

**Walters:** (Inaudible) when you make a porch railing, and you set it in the concrete. How does he set it in concrete?

**Daniels:** I don’t know.

**Walters:** No shit? (laughter)

**Daniels:** You know, he started doing that after I was married and gone, so I really don’t know. I’ve just seen his work at the end of it, so. But I think they use a lot of aluminum now, too, because it doesn’t rust and stuff like that. Whatever. We got to get back on topic. (laughter)

**Walters:** (Inaudible) tell you the answer to the question?

**Daniels:** How?

**Walters:** You can set it in three things. You can set it in concrete, which is very poor because it gets loose. You can set it in lead, which you have to melt and pour in there, or you can set it in sulphur, which you have to be very careful of because if you melt sulphur it’ll kill you. I’ve set it in all three. OK? And I ain’t dead yet. I stand up when. (laughter)

**Daniels:** Well, I knew concrete wasn’t the good answer, so.

**Walters:** OK.

**Daniels:** All right. Well, what led you to volunteer for the Army?

**Walters:** I had no experience. When I was young I was very bashful. God knows where that went, but when I started high school, I joined the ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps]. 0:06:49.3 And I liked the camaraderie between the people, and the people were talking about a National Guard unit that was in Houston. We lived in Houston at that time. And I went down there on Saturday a couple of times, and this commander of the National Guard outfit asked me if I’d like to join the National Guard. And I said, “Yeah.” So I liked that. It was a tank company, 36th Tank Company, 36th Infantry Division Tank Company. And I liked that.
Daniels: About what year was that?

Walters: That would have been in 1938.

Daniels: What kind of tanks did they have?

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: Do you remember what kind of tanks they had?

Walters: Yeah, I know what kind of tanks they had. (laughter) (Inaudible) in a tank company. I could at least identify the tanks. (laughter)

Daniels: Well, I wasn’t there. I was just asking. I’m curious.

Walters: OK. It was an old World War I tank they had, and I liked, again, the cleanliness and the camaraderie between the people, and I thought—and they were talking about the Army and so forth. So I went down to see the recruiting officer in December of 1938, and the recruiting sergeant said, “We can’t take you now because we don’t have a slot.” The Army was only 150,000 troops, and they didn’t have a slot. He said, “When I get a vacancy, you’ll get a letter.” In January of 1939, he sent me a letter. I went down to see him. He said, “What do you want to be in the Army?” And I said, “Well, I’ve had some experience on a farm with horses and stuff. Maybe the cavalry.” He said, “You got to have three years of service.” I said, “Well, I belong to the 36th Tank Company so I know a little bit about tanks; can identify them.” He said, “You have to have three years of service.” I said, “Well, what the hell can I get in?” He said, “Infantry.” And I said, “I don’t know nothing about infantry, but it sounds all right.” So I went in the infantry, and I said, “I don’t know anything about the infantry.” And he said, “They’ll train you. Don’t worry about it.” So on the ninth of February I reported, and they called me into Fort Sam Houston and swore me in. I went into the 9th Infantry Regiment I Company. And I stayed there for—I don’t know—through the war. Well, no, not through the war. In 1942, the first part of 1942, they started breaking it up to send to other units, and they cut each unit into three parts, and that was three different categories. They left one category there, the 9th, and they sent one to [Camp] Shelby, here [Hattiesburg]. And they sent one somewhere else. I don’t know where.

Daniels: So you were part of the cadre that formed the 85th Division?

Walters: They formed the 85th Division here. And I went into—what was the regiment?

Gilbert: 338th.
Walters: 338th, OK. See, I tell you; (inaudible). But I was in there for a little while, and we just trained troops for a while. 0:10:33.4 I think every dumb son of a bitch in the country trained there, but anyhow. (laughter)

Daniels: That’s what the country does.

Walters: And then they come up with this thing. I was not married and didn’t even know any girl’s name and didn’t give a damn whether I knew one name or not. This 100 percent time: a lot of tales about training recruits, but then you’re not interested in that bullshit, but—

Daniels: Well, one or two stories wouldn’t hurt.

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: One or two stories wouldn’t hurt if you could, if any of them really stick in your mind.

Walters: Well, I told you one earlier, didn’t I?

Daniels: Well, I didn’t get it on tape. (laughter)

Walters: Oh, my God! (laughter)

Daniels: You want it on the record about kicking that recruit? (laughter)

Walters: Well, that was kind of a funny one. I had this guy; his name was Booth(?).

Gilbert: That was in the 103rd.

Walters: No, no. That’s another Booth. (laughter)

Gilbert: A different one.

Walters: That one was a good one. This one wasn’t a good one.

Daniels: So this is the 85th Booth.

Walters: He was the 85th Booth.

Gilbert: That’s new to you, right?

Walters: He would get out of step every time. If he found himself in step, he would get out. He would get up and urinate on the floor. I didn’t tell you this part of it. At night he’d just get up in his bunk and urinate on the floor, and I would put him in a [shower], give him a GI brush with that lye soap and put him in the shower and have
two guys stand there with bayonets and tell them, “If you let him out, you’re going in there.”  0:12:09.8 He would scrape his skin off. The doctor would want to know, “What happened to you?” And he’d tell them the platoon sergeant made him take a bath. Well, that was partly true, but anyhow one—I guess it was Monday morning we were going out on a drill field; I, in my usual drunkenness over the weekend, didn’t feel too good. I was behind Booth. We had him to where he didn’t carry a rifle like everybody else; he’d sling it over his shoulder. And we had a sign that had I Company on it, and we’d put that out in the field so people could tell who was drilling there. We let him carry the sign. And he got out of step, and I raised my foot a little too high, and he went flying all over the goddamn place.

**Gilbert:** Did that mean a good kick?

**Walters:** Huh?

**Gilbert:** Did that mean a good kick?

**Walters:** And I saw people running over there, and I thought, “Oh, God.” A little bit the company commander come running back, and he said, “Sergeant, if you ever do that again, I’m going to court-martial your (inaudible).” “Yes, sir.” He went on. And about two weeks later I saw the regimental commander on a street, and he stopped, and he went over, and he said, “Sergeant, why did you kick that man?” And I told him about it. And he listened very patiently, and then he said, “I know that you have to do them things, but not on a parade ground.” (laughter)

**Gilbert:** There were plenty of opportunities on those trail hikes.

**Walters:** Well, I got rid of Booth. I'll give you another part of Booth, OK, if you want to hear stories about Booth. They had, in the kitchen they had four stoves, big stoves, two back to back and about that much space between them. I decided that those stoves needed cleaning, and they’d cooked the meal, evening meal, and it was hot back there in between them stoves. So I took Booth up there, and I gave him a bucket and some brushes and soap and told him, “Clean between the stoves.” They were almost still red-hot. And I got two soldiers with bayonets and put them at each end of this stove and told them, “If you let him out, you’re going to be in there.” He would pass out. They would drag him out and throw water on him and push him back in there. (laughter) The son of a bitch went crazy. He actually went crazy, and I got rid of him. But it was a session, yeah.

**Daniels:** So you spent pretty much first part of your time at Camp Shelby training up the fillers.

**Walters:** That’s all I did, yeah.  0:15:10.2

**Daniels:** Well, once they got to where you had your division formed up and relatively trained, you did exercises at Camp Shelby? Maneuvers?
Walters: No. We went a little bit out in the field, out in the pine field. Stupidity again, 120 degrees out there in them tall pines, and they didn’t have enough water for these kids. I mean, unless you’ve taken infantry training, you don’t know what it is. OK. They didn’t have these kids trained on how to get along without water. We carried these kids out in the, back somewhere out there in them tall pine trees in 120 degrees, and they run out of water. The regimental commander was having his Jeep haul water out there to keep them from dying from no goddamn water, and I guess I don’t remember any died from it. There’s some went to the hospital from it. But it was one of those command decisions at regimental level, “Get water out there.” Don’t run into them damn woods out there unless they know how to live in the woods. It didn’t bother me because I knew how to get along without water, but anyhow. But we’d train up a bunch, and then they’d ship them out, and we’d train some more. I don’t know how many bunches; maybe one or two bunches we trained there like that. Then they come up with a category to go to 103rd Division down in Shelby. I was supposed to go down there as a first sergeant, but there was one of the sergeants that came with me from the 9th Infantry Regiment, who outranked me. In those days, all the people, from the corporals on up, when they cut the orders on you, they put your date of rank after it. And if somebody else outranked you, even though they were the same rank, if their date of rank or before—

Daniels: Right.

Walters: Well, this sergeant—they had me on the cadre to go to Claiborne as a first sergeant, and this guy went and told the adjutant he outranked me, and he wanted to go as first sergeant and all this bullshit. The adjutant called me over and said, “He wants to go.” I said, “I don’t care.” I mean, in those days, unmarried, plenty of liquor, enough activity going on to keep you straight. Who gives a damn whether the world turns right or left? So they sent him as first sergeant and me as a platoon sergeant again, which was all right. I didn’t care. But we got over to Camp Claiborne, and Metcalf(?) had not done his homework, and I had because when I started in, I loved the Army, and I would keep track of it and this kind of stuff and make out the forms and papers and all this stuff. He didn’t know how. He lasted about three months, and this little guy, a captain by name of McKeebin(?) he got killed in Normandy; McKeebin did. He was about five feet tall. He wore a scarf in the cold weather, around his neck, and the officers used to joke that his wife would stand him up in the morning and spin him and gave him a spin, and she’d hold that (laughter) (inaudible) out of here.

Gilbert: (Inaudible)

Walters: McKeebin was a pretty straight guy. And this morning, I guess about two or three months, wasn’t it?

Gilbert: Um-hm. That was in March.
**Walters:** Huh?

**Gilbert:** It’s in March when you were—you came to (inaudible).

**Walters:** It’s been about three months. One morning it was cold and all that stuff. And of course they lined up out there for drill and this kind of thing. And Metcalf(?) he took the report from the attendance sergeant, you know, all accounted for and things. He reported to the captain: all accounted for. McKebben (inaudible), they keep standing there. “Keep your post.” And he hollered, “Walters, come up here.” I came up and saluted and so forth. He said, “Can you be first sergeant?” And I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Metcalf, you’re platoon sergeant. Walters, you’re first sergeant.” So of course now it takes Congressional Honor thing to get promoted and demoted, and it was done right there in the ranks with that (inaudible). Metcalf stayed with us as a platoon sergeant, and he (inaudible). Let’s see; that would have been 103rd, wouldn’t it?

**Gilbert:** Um-hm.

**Walters:** Yeah. We got into—he stayed as a platoon sergeant till we went overseas. And the first day we went online, Captain Thompson(?) told Metcalf to take a squad of his men and go over to the right line and make contact with that next unit. Well, he didn’t do it. He went out in the bushes there somewhere and hid for a little bit and come back and told the captain he’d made contact and everything was good, yakety, yakety, yak, all this bullshit. One of the boys come around and told me, “Sergeant, we didn’t go over there.” And I told Thompson; Thompson said, “Have him come up here with his gear.” And he told him, said, “I don’t want you in the company. You lied to me. You didn’t do what I told you. Hit the road.” Metcalf said, “Where am I supposed to go?” Thompson said, “I don’t give a shit. Go wherever you want to go. Just take off. Don’t come back in the company no more.” So he went back; got a mail job, delivering mail somewhere. I don’t know. I never heard any more from him then.

**Daniels:** Well, what regiment were you in, in the 103rd?

**Walters:** Huh?

**Daniels:** What regiment were you assigned to in the 103rd?

**Walters:** In the 103rd.

**Daniels:** Um-hm.

**Walters:** 410th.

**Daniels:** 410th, OK. You were first sergeant of a company?
Walters: Yeah.

Daniels: OK. Which company?

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: Which company?

Walters: I Company, 410th Infantry, yeah.

Daniels: OK. So you went from I Company, 338th to I Company in the 410th.

Walters: I Company in the 9th Infantry, I Company in the 85th, I Company in the (inaudible).

Daniels: Well, that’s a coincidence, huh?

Walters: There’s a little gap somewhere down the way there where I was assigned to K Company, the 9th Infantry, at one time for a little while, and that’s the Dog Company, the called it, the Canine Corps. But I didn’t last in there too long; I mean, I lasted all right. It’s another big event that you wouldn’t be interested in (inaudible).

Daniels: You’d be surprised. Well, let me ask you on the 103rd: is there anything else about training at Camp Claiborne that stands out that you’d want to talk about? From Camp Claiborne?

Walters: Do you want to ask the question, or do you want me to?

Daniels: Well, you ask it, then. (laughter)

Walters: Well, snakes and the woods and all the other stuff is interesting. I mean.

Daniels: About like Camp Shelby as far as that goes?

Walters: Well, let’s see. The cadre was formed here. We went to Claiborne, right? Yeah, OK. It’s more snakes and ditches and yakety yak down there. We trained two or three units there before we actually started. The only good event I guess I could tell you was—(laughter) I guess it was a good event. I don’t know. I don’t know what’s good and bad anymore. But on Christmas Eve I heard this noise. I had my headquarters outfit, and we was all sleeping in a thing here, and I was first sergeant. And I was getting medicated a little bit, you know, and I heard this goddamn noise outside the tent. And I went and looked, and there was this bunch of people, singing and carrying on. “What the hell is all that noise out there?” And I asked them; I said, “What the hell are you people doing?” “We’re singing Christmas carols.” I said, “Go sing the son of a bitches somewhere else. I don’t want to hear no
Christmas carols.” (laughter) Well, it so happens that the regimental chaplain was out with them. You know? So he run over and told the regimental commander that I run them out of the place when they were singing carols, and the regimental commander listened to him. And he said, “Did you leave?” (laughter) But that was a Christmas carol deal. I had—let’s see—the 103rd. OK. That would’ve had to be in Shelby.

Gilbert: Well, that’d be Claiborne.

Walters: Huh?

Gilbert: 103rd would be Claiborne.

Walters: Yeah. They sent all them Yankees, I think, out of New York City and Chicago down to me. And it took some time because the government gave clothes at that time, too. And we hadn’t started our training; time to getting everything in and all of them in and getting them to where they not crying on their shoulder and all that bullshit, but hm. Oh! I lost track of what I was thinking about. It was before they started and still had their civilian clothes and shoes and stuff. So I decided one day that, “Why we set around here like that?” So I told them, “Line up.” They didn’t know how to march or anything. I’d just tell them; I’d tell them, “Get in front of one another and stay behind and don’t worry about being in step and so forth. And I’m going to walk you around the post and show you where everything is.” Good first sergeant, you know; you always want to know where everything is. And we walked about five miles, I guess. And we got back, and I think every one of them had sore feet, blisters on their feet, and they’re goddamn crying and moaning and carrying on about sick and so forth. And we had a medic had just been assigned to us, and I told him, “Take care of their feet.” And I told them, “That’s your first lesson. Take care of your feet. Make damn sure your shoes fit, and take care of your feet.” And I never had no more problem. All the time I trained them from then on, I didn’t have no more feet problems, but they thought it was terrible. 0:26:33.7

Daniels: When did y’all get the notice to ship out? 0:26:36.9

Walters: Do what?

Daniels: When did y’all get the notice to ship out of Camp Claiborne to leave and head for overseas? Or additional training, I should say. Y’all went from Camp Claiborne; you went to train out at camp—is it Howze?

Walters: Um-hm.

Daniels: Yeah, in Texas?

Walters: Do what?

Daniels: Y’all went from Camp Claiborne to Camp Howze in Texas?
Gilbert: After the Louisiana maneuvers.

Daniels: Oh, you went to Louisiana maneuvers first?

Walters: I know the question. I just don’t understand why you’d ask a stupid question like that. (laughter) We closed up at Claiborne, turned in everything, packed our bags and went out in the field for three months, and lived out in the goddamn field for three months, eating snakes and dogs and whatever we could find. Even didn’t have any place to wash your clothes, a very interesting point. (laughter) The boys finally, three old colored gals out there in the woods, washing clothes; they had them pans heating and that stuff, you know. And one of the boys asked them, said, “Would you wash our clothes.” Said, “Yeah, honey, I’ll wash your clothes.” Everybody stripped their clothes off, stark naked, and them old gals washed the clothes. We put the clothes back on wet and went on our way. (laughter) I don’t know. But from there we didn’t know where we were going. While we were there, why, then they decided to go to Fort whatever it was, Hood or Shelby or whatever.

Gilbert: Camp Howze.

Walters: Huh?

Gilbert: Camp Howze.

Walters: Camp Howze, yeah.

Daniels: And from there, from Camp Howze is where you, like, left to ship overseas?

Walters: Right.

Daniels: OK. Did you go up to New York City, or did you go out of the Gulf? When you went to get on your ships and everything like that, did you go up to New Jersey?

Walters: We got on trains and rode up to New York City, and they had us get all new towels, white towels and stuff, and we got to New York, they said, “You can’t have white towels. You got to have other.” So everybody had to bundle all their towels up and throw them out and get black towels or grey towels or whatever (inaudible) color towels. And we loaded from down in New York or somewhere.

Daniels: Do you remember what ship you went over on?

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: Do you remember what the name of the ship was, that you went over on?

Walters: I don’t know.
Gilbert: [USS General] J.R. Brook. 0:29:13.3

Walters: Huh?

Gilbert: The J.R. Brook.

Walters: There you go. They carried us by train from Camp—there’s a camp there, around New York somewhere, and we rode a train in, and we unloaded from the train and went in this warehouse, and a ship was setting there. The stairs look like Jesus Christ was standing at the top of them. And everybody had your bag and all your stuff, not only just your ninety-pound pack, but you had a Valpak and all this other, and it was a goddam mess. And I helped some kid; I don’t remember who it was. I think he was the mailman at one—what was the mailman’s name?

Gilbert: Sherwood(?)

Walters: Huh?

Gilbert: Sherwood, Robert Sherwood.

Walters: Yeah. He was a really short guy. He was the only guy I would let have a moustache. He was a mailman. Nobody else could have a moustache; he could. And no reason, just, you know.

Gilbert: So you could find out who the mailman was. (laughter)

Walters: But anyhow, he was having trouble because he was short, and I helped him up the stairs. And we got up the stairs, and these Red Cross people are up there, you know, all fancy, giving you donuts and coffee and all this kind of stuff. 0:30:48.1 And this gal come by with some donuts and coffee, and I took them, and I gave them to Sherwood. Right, Sherwood?

Gilbert: Sherwood, yeah.

Walters: Give them to him. And I went and made sure everybody else got up the stairs, and then I thought, “Well, I’ll go and get my coffee.” And this little, old gal read me the riot act, “Just because you’re a first sergeant, you don’t get extra privileges. You get just so many donuts and so much coffee and all that.” And I said, “OK. Fine.” And I walked away, and some of the guys went over and told her, “He was helping this guy up the stairs.” She come over, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it.” “Shove them damn donuts up where the sun don’t shine.” And (laughter) overseas, consequently, every time they’d come around them donut things, I’d run them out of the area (laughter) because they wanted us to give them flour to cook donuts for us. Hell, I could’ve had them cook donuts there, and they didn’t have to barter with them. But I guess them women thought because they were Red Cross or
something, it was going to boost our morale and things like that; didn’t work that way. What else do you need to know?

**Daniels:** Well, I just basically, what I want to do is just kind of go through your service experience with the 103rd. So we got you on the ship, sending you overseas. You go to England, first? You go straight to France?

**Walters:** Well, do you know the war condition at the time? You knew the submarines down in the Gulf and all that stuff?

**Daniels:** You’d have to convoy and zigzag.

**Walters:** We got on that ship, and we went south, and then we went straight for the—what’s them two holes in the wall over there in England?

**Gilbert:** Straits of Gibraltar?

**Walters:** Huh?

**Gilbert:** Straits of Gibraltar?

**Walters:** Yeah, Gibraltar, Straits of Gibraltar, yeah. It wasn’t a bad trip except we run into a storm, and everybody got sick, and they washed the goddam things down with firehoses because everybody’d puked all over it. 0:33:10.1 It was five bunks high, and everybody’d puke on each other and go down. But we got over that and got in the Straits of Gibraltar, and we went through the Straits, and we stayed right up by South America there till we got over to, oh, I guess about the Red Canal, and then we cut up to Marseilles. And Marseilles was closed except to ammunition ships. 0:33:42.1 So we loaded down the cargo nets on the thing, and it was right at the evening hour sometime, five o’clock or somewhere in that ballpark. Well, are you familiar with Marseilles?

**Daniels:** The city in Southern France? I’ve never been there, but I know geographically where it is.

**Walters:** Well, on the east side of Marseilles, there’s a hill there; it’s the old Marseilles. They had a gun out there that would fire when the Germans would leave Italy. Well, we were coming down that net, and the gun fired, and there was a light on the ship. You’ve heard this before, obviously.

**Daniels:** Go ahead. I think I know where it’s going. (laughter)

**Walters:** And it was shining right down on us. All the other lights in the whole goddam Atlantic Ocean was out, except that one light, shining down on us, and I kept hollering, “Turn the son of a bitch off.” And them sailors, “We can’t find the switch,” or something and something. One of the buys in I Company took a rifle butt and
knocked the son of a bitch out. And, “Oh, you broke our light.” (laughter) We got off and had about a ten-mile march up to a swamp area north of Marseilles, mud and everything for—I don’t know. We were there two or three weeks, I guess. 0:35:15.7 But the line out of Marseilles, going north, the 25th Division, I think it was the 25th Division. No, no. No, I have to get this straight. The Germans were evacuating, and they got on that road with horses and men and everything else. 0:35:35.5 And the Air Force caught them on there and did both ends of them, and they literally had that road stacked up with horse-drawn equipment and horses and bodies and everything else, and we couldn’t go north to our place. So they called bulldozers in there, and they just bulldozed everything off. So when we went through there, there was bodies and horses and crap, hanging up under—and going up north where we went to St. Die. Yeah. But—

Daniels: Did that affect your men any?

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: Did your men get affected by that any, seeing all that? Just off the—

Walters: It didn’t bother them there.

Daniels: Didn’t bother them?

Walters: No. When we went online, and that was Metcalf(?) and his deal, that same little, bitty thing there. We went online, and the trail went down past where our CP [command post] was, about fifty yards or so. About halfway down was a German officer’s body, laying there, and he had his hand—laying with his hand like this over his head, and sticking out almost in the driveway, you know. So what? But I’d watched that because he had a diamond ring on, you see. About the third day we were there, his finger was gone; so was the diamond ring. I told Captain Thompson(?), “We ready now. We ready. We ready.” But some of the guys joked about that, cutting that ring off of that guy’s hand.

Daniels: When y’all went in up at the line at this point, when’d you first have an encounter with the Germans?

Walters: Do what?

Daniels: When did you first have a combat encounter? You get up to the line. You got this going, and you moved up from southern, in Southern France. Where’d you first make contact with the enemy? You remember that, your first contact?

Walters: We made it right there—

Daniels: Right there.
Walters: —because when we went online, the enemy was firing at us, and we were firing at them. We relieved those people, and they left, and they just kept firing at us. Calfee(?) set his mortars up. He saw four or five Germans over there, and he shot them with the mortar. I guess they was the first ones we killed. But I don’t know nothing else; I don’t think. I mean, he knows more about everything else. He’s hunted every hill down, every trail. He’s got everybody’s name that was hurt, cried, or anything else; he knows.

Daniels: Well, that’s identify him.

Walters: I really couldn’t put it together too much. I mean, there’s incidents in there I can tell you about, but I’m not sure where they fit into the category of—

Daniels: Could you state your name, since you’re helping to narrate a little bit?

Gilbert: David Gilbert.

Daniels: David Gilbert, OK. Who’s here kind of assisting—

Gilbert: Yes.

Daniels: —and getting this thing. OK. Well, your 500-mile march, I guess, is what they talk about; the 103rd having a 500-mile march and fight through France into Germany and then to Austria. On that, you know, you got I Company; you’re the first sergeant of I Company, the whole time.

Walters: Yeah.

Daniels: And were there any particular towns that stood out or any particular actions that really stand out in your mind? We may place them, you know, with his help, a little bit. But what we’re here for is to kind of, you know, encapsulate, you know, what you saw and how that—what you think about it.

Gilbert: I think (inaudible).

Walters: I know of a whole bunch of them in there. We didn’t have anybody captured in I Company. We had twelve people killed, which is almost—I think there was one outfit in the 2nd Battalion had twelve killed. Most of the others had more than that. We didn’t have any AWOLs [away without leave] or none of that stuff. And it’s hard sometimes to identify. We had one guy, I guess, or two guys killed when we first got online. I don’t remember the names. He can tell you. This one dumb shit sat up on the side of his foxhole, and this artillery shell was coming in, and it killed him. I mean, that’s dumb, you know. That’s just dumb, dumb, but I don’t remember. Who was that? Do you remember?

Gilbert: That was Richard Lloyd(?).
Walters: Lloyd?

Gilbert: Lloyd, yeah.

Walters: Lloyd, OK. The next one we lost, I don’t know where the next one we lost.

Gilbert: The next man killed was killed down in 2nd Platoon, Postupak(?). And they were, 2nd Platoon was positioned in a little town called Les Mode Tresses(?) at the base of hill 621, and he was killed by artillery, also.

Walters: Artillery, yeah. Well, that wasn’t a big event. I mean, you walking along, and a guy got killed. I guess the next one is Hawthorne(?

Gilbert: Hobarth(?).

Daniels: What happened at Hobarth. 0:41:17.4

Walters: Well, we were told to advance in the line, and we went through this town, Hawthorne, or whatever it was. And outside the town was a wooded area. And Thompson, Captain Thompson, the leader of the clan, was up ahead, and he had the two platoons scattered out here, and one platoon behind. And they got down to the woods, probably 200 yards deep. There was a tiger tank setting down there, and he started firing into the woods, and the shells were cutting off the trees and hitting us and everything. And somebody—and I don’t know who; Thompson thought I did, first—give the order to withdraw, but it was one of the lieutenants. I don’t know; probably killed him down there. I don’t know. But anyhow we had a lot of people that got hurt there, and we had several, as they were coming back into the town, we discovered that they had an observation post up in the church. 0:42:45.0 And the German was still up there. And I guess we shot the building down or something; then we heard something. I don’t remember now. But we learned something, and that was that the Americans had to have two wires for the telephones; the Germans used one. They used the ground for the other one. So when you’re going out, and you see a one-strand wire somewhere, you better cut the son of a bitch because somebody’s behind you giving the words out. You know. But we killed that guy in the tower. 0:43:29.8 And Voss(?) got killed there; that made me feel very bad. He just was a good, old, country boy. The shell hit between his legs and tore his body apart. And so I told them to put his body parts on a shelter (inaudible) and take him back to the rear. And we had several guys that was wounded, but I don’t think anybody else was killed there. Were they?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah, they were.

Walters: Who?

Gilbert: Howard Shwendon(?) was killed. Carl Menare(?) was killed.
Walters: Yeah, OK.

Gilbert: Who was the gentleman that threw himself on a grenade to save the others around him?

Walters: Yeah. That was a later deal.

Gilbert: Wise.

Walters: That was Wise, wasn’t it?

Gilbert: Gene Wise.

Daniels: Well, let’s talk about that one. What happened in that situation?

Walters: A guy rolled over on a grenade, yeah.

Daniels: Y’all were in pretty close contact, then?

Walters: Pulled the pin on it, and he just rolled over on it.

Gilbert: Friendly grenade.

Daniels: Oh, friendly, I see.

Walters: That’s pretty simple. There ain’t nothing much you can do about it.

Daniels: That’s true.

Walters: He had three seconds to make a decision. 0:44:34.2 I don’t remember where it was in respect to that particular thing in there. It was after (inaudible).

Gilbert: It was later; it was later, up around Weissenburg.

Walters: Did that other town, Menin or Kenin or whatever the town was down there—

Gilbert: Which one is that?

Walters: Where that lieutenant got killed.

Gilbert: Oh, that was Urweiler. You talking about—

Walters: Before town, that other town. In the map it’s up here. Where’s back here?
**Gilbert:** Neifern, you’re talking about Neifern?

**Walters:** Neifern, Neifern, yeah.

**Gilbert:** Yeah. That was later. That was in January of [19]45.

**Walters:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Gilbert:** Or March of [19]45 is when Pisara(?) was killed in Urweiler.

**Walters:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That was─we got this lieutenant in. 0:45:26.4 And he was held in Italy with a group that was supposed to be for paratroops. They jump out of a plane, you know. They get a whole new rating and this other bullshit. But anyhow, they decided they didn’t need all these people, so they sent this lieutenant up to us, and he was really one of the gung-ho kind, you know. I mean, he was going to─“You guys are dickin’ around. We’ll whip this thing right now; get it over with.” And the company commander told him, he said, “Now, if you”—said, “I’m not giving you the platoon. You follow the platoon sergeant. He’s in charge, and if you’re there seven days from now, I’ll give you the platoon.” Well, the next day he come in and this lieutenant wanted to borrow my field jacket because we were going to jump off and move forward, you know. And I didn’t want to let the little bastard have my jacket because I had, you know—I was accustomed to my jacket. And he had a heavy coat that he had been wearing down there somewhere. He was going to let me wear his coat, and he was going to take my field jacket. And I told him, “OK. But don’t screw up my field jacket. I want my field jacket back.” You know? Well, he gets down in this town, and there’s a little firefighting going on; I guess somebody got shot down there besides him, too. And then we lost one or two people (inaudible).

**Gilbert:** Savory(?)

**Walters:** Huh?

**Gilbert:** Robert Savory was killed, also.

**Walters:** But anyhow the platoon sergeant is standing in the building here, looking around, and this lieutenant decided he’d run across the street to that building, and the sergeant told him, “I don’t think that’s a good idea.” He stepped out of the door, and as soon as he stepped around that building, a burp gun just cleaned him up; about twenty rounds tore my field jacket all to hell and everything else, you know. But we lost him there. That was stupidity on his part. I kept that part for a long time even after the war, till just a few years ago. I couldn’t find any relatives or anything, and I’d kept the coat packed away, and David come up and found his son. Well, I had given that coat about six months or so before to my youngest son, and I called him and told him about this guy’s youngest son. I said, “Why don’t you call him if you want to give him the coat?” And my son, and (inaudible) and they had a big deal over it, but
anyhow it was a stupid thing. But I can’t think of anything else. We had the guy fell on a mine; there ain’t no story to that. He just—

Daniels: Were y’all ever assigned any tank support, directly?

Walters: Do what?

Daniels: Were you ever assigned any tank support directly to your company? Tank support? I mean, did you operate with—

Gilbert: Tank support.

Daniels: Tank support.

Gilbert: Tanks. Did tanks support the Company I in combat? Tanks, did you get any armored tank support in combat? 0:49:06.0

Walters: Oh, I don’t know. They sent us tanks one time, and we had to ride the tanks to keep the German infantry off of them, but I don’t know whether they were supporting us. We were riding outside the tanks, and them son of a bitches set inside the tanks. (laughter) One night the goddam tanks pulled in a little ahead of this town, and our boys had to stay with the tanks on the outside. And Thompson and I and had a two-story building here, and the headquarter platoon. And they had four bedrooms upstairs. Well, I told Thompson, said, “I’m going up and getting in bed. I’m just tired, and I ain’t putting up with it. If they want to blow the goddam building up, blow it up.” But the next morning we wake up, and he took a backroom, too, but the two front ones had been shelled, and the whole thing fell down there, and we were setting up there in these bedrooms and never even wake up when they tore it up. All our boys was down in the damn basement down there, scared to death, wanting to know. They thought we got blowed up, too, you know, but the guys out there on them tanks; we never had a tank that did a damn thing, nothing.

Daniels: So you felt like you were supporting the tanks versus them supporting you.

Walters: I asked the boys one time that crawled about a half a mile with a can of gasoline, and threwed over on one of the damn things and set it afire and burned it up and the tanks in there, people in there can’t do nothing. And I had them one time; they crawled, and they had a two-by-four or a big piece of railroad crosstie, and they threwed it in the track and broke the track on the tank, but I don’t think you could call that support from them. I mean, they—I tell people: “If you train the infantry right, tanks is worthless, worthless.” But they still think they need money to make the damn things and that stuff. We don’t have an army anymore. It’s a welfare organization, and they send these kids over now, and they wait till they get over there, and then they said, “We’re supposed to kill somebody.” What the hell did they think they was supposed to do? Huh? They go nuts when they find out they got to kill somebody. I
would blow every building in New York City down before I would have one of my men’s life lost.

Daniels: Yeah. I think that’s one of the calculations for using the atomic bomb, too, is—

Gilbert: Yes, it was.

Walters: Yeah.

Daniels: —how many Americans it saved.

Walters: I mean, these kids now, I know one that’s in there now in one of these special forces things. He says if the guy’s down the street, and he shoots at you, and he drops the gun, you can’t shoot at him. Well, I mean, my boys’d shoot the son of a bitch when they saw he had a gun. I mean, he’d better have his hands up here, or his hands on his head like that or something.

Daniels: Well, did you take a number of prisoners?

Walters: Oh, I don’t know. How many prisoners did we take?

Gilbert: I don’t know. Toward the end there were like twenty, thirty, forty a day in the (inaudible).

Walters: I couldn’t even count them. I didn’t even try to count them.

Daniels: Did you see some of the kids?

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: Did you see some of the kids the Germans were using, too, the Hitler Youth and boys that they had put out there, or were they pretty much regular, German soldiers?

Walters: Did what?

Daniels: Were the Germans down to using the little boys? Did you capture little boys, too, that were trying to fight?

Walters: Not so much the Germans. One time I was by a tree, here, and I knew there was something in a tree down about twenty yards away. And I just set there and take it easy, and I see this little head stick around a tree. And I couldn’t understand because it looked like he was scared of something. And I sit there and watched him a minute, and he kept looking around the tree like that, you know. And eventually I motioned to him like that to come up. 0:53:40.4 And he got up and through his gun
down and came over. And he was in a Russian uniform, and through our idiocy; if I could speak English, I’m sure we got all right, but what he told me was that they captured his battalion; they killed all the officers, and they put German officers in charge of these Russian troops, and of course that kid was just happy to give up and get it over with. I mean, he didn’t know what he was doing, anyway, but far as little kids, I don’t think we ever—I don’t ever run into any kids, anything. I probably wouldn’t know. I mean, if somebody’s shooting at you from a building, you tear the damn building down. It may be a kid in it, a pregnant woman, or babies. I don’t know. I don’t give a damn. You know?

**Gilbert:** Tell them about Neifern in January of [19]45, and the SS Division.
0:54:39.2

**Walters:** Do what?

**Gilbert:** Neifern, January of [19]45 when the SS attacked.

**Walters:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, that might be of interest to somebody. I don’t know who the hell’d be interested in it but—

**Daniels:** I’m interested in it.

**Walters:** Huh?

**Daniels:** I’m interested. (laughter)

**Walters:** You had your pint of liquor before we started. (laughter) You heard of Bastogne and Nuts(?) and all that stuff. Well, I don’t understand how an Airborne—this is an Airborne Division with a regimental combat team in there; 222nd I think it was. And they were surrounded and couldn’t get out. I mean, how in the hell? We been surrounded with just the company, and we get out. You know? I mean, you kill enough of the bastards, and then you walk out, but here’s a division and a half (inaudible), and that little idiot says, “Nuts.” Well, anyway, after that little episode, the ones that made that attack was SS troops, and all the time during our training, everybody would say, “Boy, these SS troops are terrible. They just toughest there is.” And all that stuff. They brought them down into the Haguenau Forest, was it?

**Gilbert:** Um-hm.

**Walters:** Haguenau Forest, and they made an attack on us, and I can always kind of joke that Hitler didn’t have it planned that I Company was the one they were attacking through because we were at Neifern, and the road run up, and that was their road; they were going to come up the road. And somebody went and looked in the German records and said we killed 560 SS troops in that episode there.

**Daniels:** Is that right?
Walters: I don’t know who looked it up, and I never could find it, again. But they went over and looked in the German record; said we killed 560 of them. They didn’t get through; we killed a bunch of them. But I don’t know; just little tidbit stories through the thing. We could talk the rest of the day about it. I don’t know how much you’d be interested in or what you’re interested in. I can’t imagine anybody setting for hours, listening to this.

Daniels: That’s what I do. (laughter)

Walters: You ever go to the neurologist? (laughter)

Daniels: Not yet. (laughter) Well, you know, some of the terrain you go over, you go over mountains, river crossings. Anything like that stand out? Because you went into the Alps, right? You go into Austria?

Walters: We were at the edge of the Alps. 0:57:57.5 During World War I, they said the Alps, the mountains, the Haguenau Forest, isn’t it?

Gilbert: The Vosges Mountains.

Walters: Huh?

Gilbert: The Vosges Mountains.

Walters: Vosges Mountains, in World War I they said they were impregnable. Nobody asked us. We just go up there and do it. I mean, stupid. And I can’t—there probably were things. We found, when, after the war was over, we were sent up in Austria, in this particular valley because the Germans were evacuating through there, going over into Switzerland, and we caught some of them. And those airplanes they had made out of plywood, you’ve heard of those, I guess, the rocket planes. We got some of those out of there where they had them.

Daniels: Was this around Innsbruck?

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: Around Innsbruck, Austria, the city of Innsbruck in Austria?

Walters: Innsbruck?

Daniels: Innsbruck, um-hm.

Walters: We were just out of Innsbruck, yeah, getting down from Germany into Austria. In Germany, almost on the line, they had a officer’s school there, kind of like West Point. And when we got on that, we were supposed to clean that road and go
down there into Innsbruck. (Inaudible) the line was here, and I guess the German and whatever that line is down there, was about halfway down the hill. Some little idiot in that school took his class and was going to form a unit to fight us. 0:59:38.9 And he lasted about twenty yards, I think, with that mess. But we fought down the hill. You get down the hill, and you turn left to go into Innsbruck. And for some reason around, we had to go back up over there and clean something up and then come back on that road. And we didn’t stay in Innsbruck; we went through Innsbruck. There was a lot of people stayed in Innsbruck and around that area. We went about halfway up the Brenner Pass. Are you familiar with that area?

Daniels: I am. I think it goes to Italy.

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: Yeah. The Brenner Pass goes to Italy.

Walters: Um-hm. You been there?

Daniels: I have.

Walters: Well, you know where it is.

Daniels: I do.

Walters: On the left hand side about halfway up, there’s a rest area there, and—

Daniels: Is there a monastery?

Walters: —a little house where you can get a room and stuff. Wife and I stayed in there. Matter of fact, (laughter) they had a colored doll made out of cardboard, not cardboard but straw or something, and she thought—and there’s a girl that works in there. We was teasing her about getting married. (laughter) But we had a great time. But the company, we got about halfway up there and quit. There was a girls’ school a little further back down the road, off to the left hand side, and we had the headquarters and I think one platoon in that. And there was a couple other towns there we had platoons in. In that particular one, there was an old man in there. And he had a horse farm in Austria, those like the brewery people got.

Daniels: Clydesdales.

Walters: Them kind of horses, yeah.

Daniels: Draft horses.

Walters: Yeah. Well, they took his farm and everything, and because he was too old, they sent him up there, and that was a girls’ school for teenage girls so these German
officers could come down and spend a weekend with them. 1:01:43.2 And they had
that old man in there. Of course he knew he was safe and this kind of—well, when we
took over, everything was gone except that old man, and he spoke a lot of languages,
English and most German dialects and that stuff. And I kept him with me as an
interpreter from then on because he could—when we’d go in a town, we’d find—if the
boys found a bank or something, they’d take all the money out of it and give it to me,
and I’d put it in a footlocker, and we had a footlocker full of money when we left.
And I gave it all to Pop, and he cried like a baby. He said, “That’s more than enough
to last me the rest of my life.” But he used to write to my wife, and he’d send her—he
sent her Edelweisses. You know about Edelweiss? Yeah. He’d send her Edelweiss,
and they had a good relation. But I don’t know a hell of a lot more. I mean, we could
tell little, two-bit icky-icks the rest of the day, but I don’t know if it’s going to help
anybody.

Daniels: Well, is the Brenner Pass where you linked up with Americans, coming out
of Italy?

Walters: Yeah, yeah, 88th Division I think it was; come up there.

Daniels: Did you do much in the Alps?

Walters: And I think the 88th trained here; I believe.

Daniels: No, not at Shelby. The 85th, the one you were in is the only one that went to
Italy from Camp Shelby, so.

Walters: I don’t remember. I—

Daniels: Yeah. Did you stay for occupation work, or were you able to come on back
on points?

Walters: Do what?

Daniels: Did you have to stay for the occupation duty?

Walters: Stayed some time for it, yeah.

Daniels: Did you mainly stay in Austria, or did you have to come back to Germany?
1:03:31.2

Walters: Went back to Germany; stayed out this side of Frankfurt I think (inaudible).
I captured a—I didn’t capture it. Had a boat down there, a ferry boat, about, oh, about
thirty or forty feet long; had a diesel engine in it, and I’d run up and down the river
with that and make them take me through those locks. That’d piss them off because
they’d have to raise you up about fifty feet, and all that water, you know; they like to
control the water better. We took over that town, and they had a bunch of stuff in the
offices there, around, about Hitler and all of that, and I had them take all that down. I had them name the main street Houston, I think, or Texas. (laughter) It’s still named that; we was over there later, and it’s still named that. (laughter) They had a room that was about maybe forty feet long, and about fifteen feet wide, and iron things in front of it, and that was their jail. And the first night I passed the word that curfew was six o’clock; nobody on the streets after six. Ignored it. They picked up—I told the boys, “Pick every son of a bitch up on the street: dogs, chickens, people, whatever you got; put them in the jail.” I went down in the morning; must have been 200 people down there, (laughter) women, crying with kids and all that stuff. And I told them, “Curfew: if you want to spend it here, be out tonight, and you’ll be in here again.” They had one little urine thing in there, and they was all trying to use that, and you can imagine what a mess that was. Mothers with their babies, crying, and couldn’t get milk for them. And sympathetic, just touched my heart right to the bone. But I don’t know a whole lot other. Is there anything I missed that’s worth telling?

Gilbert: The other Booth.

Walters: Huh?

Gilbert: The good Booth, the story about the good Booth in the 103rd, Clyde Booth(?), the guy from Okefenokee Swamp.

Walters: Oh! Well, that was before we left here.

Gilbert: Yeah, that was before.

Walters: Back in training.

Gilbert: Yeah.

Daniels: Well, we can run back if it’s a good story.

Walters: Well, it’d be out of sequence. You’d probably lose it.

Daniels: No. (laughter)

Walters: (Inaudible) (laughter) Of all the bullshit artists, you pretty good at it. (laughter) You got a degree in bullshit.

Daniels: Well, I do have a BS. (laughter) Actually it’s a BA.

Walters: I had this guy, Booth, come out of the Okefenokee Swamps, and he couldn’t read or write, and he was in the 85th, wasn’t he?

Gilbert: No. He was in the 103rd.
**Walters:** Yeah, 103rd, yeah. Well, I had one in the 85th, too. (Inaudible)

**Gilbert:** We already got that one.

**Walters:** The 103rd one, oh, that was the one I kicked in the butt. It was the one in the 103rd, the good one. Yeah. He came out of the Okefenokee Swamps. Quiet boy. He used to tell me; he said, “Sergeant, if you ever come down to see me, go to the post office and tell them, and they’ll get word to me, and I’ll send somebody up to guide you because,” he said, “we’re back in the swamps, and there’s alligators and snakes.” And said, “They’ll bother you.” And said, “I wouldn’t want to see you get hurt with that, you know.” 1:07:36.4 And when he left he told me he’s going to send me a bear paw. I imagine he would, and he probably did, and the post office wouldn’t take the damn thing. (laughter) But he was that way. The funny thing about Booth: he was over to PX [post exchange] one night. The PX would sell beer. OK? Had a little tent and some tables. And some of the guys from the company was there, too, over there, drinking beer and scooting, and Booth is sitting over, by himself, and I had a rule if the military police or a police officer or any law enforcement person at all even spoke to you, you’d tell me the next morning before reveille about it. I didn’t want somebody calling me on the phone, saying, “You had this man yakety yak.” I want to say, “Yeah, I know about it.” And the boys, they believed this, obviously. But anyhow, Booth come in the morning and told me he had a little trouble over at the PX. I said, “What’d you do, Booth?” And he said, “Well, these guys were sitting over there, drinking, just acting like they wanted to fight.” And said, “I was just sitting over here, minding my own business, and I just thought I ought to go whip their ass, and that’s what I did.” (laughter) MPs come out and everything else. But Booth, he couldn’t read or write. The postmaster would—his family would go up there, and the postmaster would write a letter to him and mail it. It got here; the guy in his squad would open the letter and read it to him, and they would answer the letter with whatever he wanted and mail it back, and the postmaster, and so this was a regular routine, you know, but I’d have liked to had him because he could have crawled up the rear end of them forever. Oh, I guess I could tell him about the SS I almost killed.

**Gilbert:** Yeah, you could tell him that, yeah.

**Walters:** Yeah, that might be interesting, too.

**Daniels:** About where and when was this?

**Gilbert:** This was after the war.

**Walters:** No. This was during the war.

**Gilbert:** Oh, I thought it was near the end. Right?

**Walters:** Yeah. Yeah, it was near the end. I guess we were behind the lines then. I don’t remember. 1:10:06.1 Seem to me like we might have been behind the lines
(inaudible) because sometimes we’d get behind the lines, and we’d just raise hell and kill everybody and do that stuff. But we stopped, and we sent a corporal who was replacement—he wasn’t one we trained—and two men down the road, past where we’d stopped, just to make sure there was nobody around there, you know. Well, they got down to a creek bed, and you know the signal for a scout when he sees an enemy like that. You know what it is?

Daniels: No. What is it?

Walters: You don’t?

Daniels: No.

Walters: Hold his rifle over his head like this, and that tells them behind he sees a scout. OK? So there’s always two scouts, one ahead and one behind and the other back here, so you just lose one man if you get in trouble. He sent the signal back, and this corporal went up there, and he looked over in the ditch, and there was two Germans, just easily walking down the creek bed, and he took his gun and shot them both, bam, bam. Went nuts immediately. Said, “There they were, two, and I just bam, bam, killed them both.” And the boy was trying to talk to him. He would listen to nothing. And they brought him back to me, and of course, I always carried a little medication and stuff, and I tried to give him some, and he didn’t want that. That’s all he ever said, “There they were, two of them. I just, bam, bam, killed them both.”

Well, about this time they’d captured a SS officer who had got him an American uniform as a lieutenant, and he was roaming around behind the lines. See? And he’d come up to your unit and say he was lieutenant so-and-so, and he spoke good English. And he told these guys, this so-and-so. Well, a little apprehension. They had a deal; they would ask what the ball scores were back here in the country and who was playing who. Well, the Germans couldn’t answer these questions. And if we asked an American lieutenant, he’d be able to answer them, but a German couldn’t answer them. So they brought this idiot to me, and we had him look under his arm because SS troops, they got their insignia under their arm; I mean their serial number tattooed under their arm. And sure enough, he had a serial number, so he knew then the game was up, and he started laughing, trying to give me a bad time, you know. And I had just got through with this corporal that was creating a problem, and here this dumb son of a bitch shows up. So it just made me kind of mad. I took my .45, and I pulled the trigger back on it and the hammer, and I put it right between his eyes, and I fully intended to kill him. I had fully intended to blow his damn head off, and suddenly I thought, “What the hell am I doing? Here’s a guy who’s surrendered, and he doesn’t have a weapon. I got a choice, but this is not right; this is murder. I mean, if I want to do this, then I give him a (inaudible) and tell him to go out there, and he and I will hunt each other in the woods for a while.” But cattle, anything else, at the moment they realize they’re going to die, their eyes change. His eyes changed. He knew, and I thought, “This ain’t right. This ain’t right.” And he quit smiling, and I let the hammer down, and put it there and told them to take him off, and he wasn’t joking no more. But—
Daniels: Well, if they’re captured in a uniform—

Walters: What?

Daniels: If the enemy’s captured in your uniform, that usually is summarily shot; that’s fine.

Walters: Well, I mean, it wouldn’t have mattered. I could have blewed his damn head off, and it’d never been nothing because them boys would never say anything. I mean, they’d drag his body out there in a field.

Daniels: Well, what I’m saying is he probably knew that, too.

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: I said that prisoner probably knew that, too.

Walters: Yeah.

Daniels: Yeah, he knew what hot water he was in.

Walters: Yeah. This Jeep driver was a crazy, little son of a bitch. I had a German; I don’t remember where that was now. He was still alive, but he was bleeding some. So we put him on the canvas on top the trailer and told them to take him back to the aide station. OK? 1:15:25.0 Well, he come back in about five minutes or something, and I said, “You didn’t go to the aide station.” And he said, “Well, sergeant, I looked back there, and he was bleeding on my color top on my trailer top, and I just cut his throat and rolled him off in the goddam ditch.” And I said, “Is that right?” So he said, “Yeah.” And I said, “Well, damn it, you supposed to take him to the aide station.” (laughter) But he was bleeding on his trailer top.

Daniels: Before we just close up and get you back to the States, how’d you get the name Bear?

Gilbert: He’s a cuddly bear. Can’t you tell? (laughter)

Daniels: I was just going to check.

Walters: Huh?

Daniels: I was just going to check.

Walters: Well, I’ve been called a lot of things, but in Korea, in 1950, ’51, in that area, I had a hood, a big coat with a hood, with all that fur on the front of it. 1:16:31.7 And when I came back I was assigned to an outfit up in Wisconsin, and the battalion
commander, he saw me in that coat one day, and he said, “You look like a goddam bear.” And I said, “I’m a cuddly bear.” And he said, “Well, we can talk about the kind later.” So from then on everybody started calling me Bear.

Daniels: Well, how long did it take you to get back from the war, back to the States and—

Walters: And where?

Daniels: You get back in [19]46, or you were able to come back during [19]45?

Walters: From where?

Daniels: From Europe.

Walters: Forty-five I guess. We came back through the cigarette stations. I think we come through Chesterfield. We were on that French Coast. And you know, it’s a funny thing that everybody in that whole camp—and they’d get a whole shipload of people in that camp, and they’d bring them back. But the ship I come back on, the 45th Division with it, and all them would have stayed over there and whipped the French’s ass because the goddamn French in the little town outside the camp was shooting over into the camp. And it got to where the United States gave France so much money so that the French give us a twenty-five-dollar bond for servicing them, and it was money the United States give them to keep us from killing them damn Frenchmen before we got on the boat to come back.

Daniels: So you switched over to the 45th because they were coming, and you had the points to come on home. No?

Gilbert: No. He remained in the 103rd. They just went together.

Walters: Well, I was married and had a wife and kid, and the rest of them didn’t, and the point counts; you got some points for that. So I had enough to stay there, and they took most of the, come in the morning and took most of the people out, and I had, I don’t know, three or four that stayed, and they brought the people from 45th in. It was a kindly funny thing. They brought in five first sergeants. 1:18:54.2 The only thing: I outranked them all, so I got to keep the company. (laughter) And I’d tell them, “You’re a platoon sergeant. You may be a goddam first sergeant back there, but you’re a platoon sergeant now.” They had one that’d been on the ships when they’d put guns on the ships. He was a nut. He told me, said he wanted a safe bunk. And I said, “Yeah.” He said, “We go down to the brig in the bottom of the ship; it’s the bottom of the ship on the keel down there.” They got a nice jail in all those ships, good bunks and all that stuff in them. We’d go down there and sleep in it. It’s when the sailor chief told us, said, “How would you like to get a freshwater shower?” This guy told him, “Yeah, we’d like that.” And he said, “Well, just go to my cabin.” And said, “There’s a little cup on top of the shower there, just put a bill in that.” So he and
I went down and got a shower, and he reached up there and took the cup down. It had several bills in it, and he took them all and put in his pocket. And I said, “That guy’s going to be pissed off.” He said, “We’ll throw the son of a bitch overboard.”

(laughter)

Daniels: Just pragmatic on that one. (laughter)

Walters: Well, what else do you think you want to know? You’ve heard all the war stories.

Daniels: Yeah. I appreciate you telling me those. And you apparently stayed in the Army.

Walters: Um-hm.

Daniels: Did you make a career of it?

Walters: Yeah. When I first went in the Army and got down to San Antonio and was taking my recruit drill, there was a guy with a little, old donkey and one of them old brim hats. He would come walking up. Have you been to Fort Sam?

Daniels: Sam Houston?

Walters: Yeah.

Daniels: No. I haven’t been there.

Walters: Shit, you haven’t been in the Army or none of the Army posts. How do you figure out all this stuff? (laughter) The parade ground is an L-shape. The PX is here; there’s a flagpole there. And the PX is here. That flagpole, in 1939, I stood guard on that flagpole so dogs wouldn’t get on the concrete. That flagpole’s still there. But anyhow, we would drill in this part of the drill field, and this little, old man would come up to the drill field with that donkey, walking out in the middle of the field, and he’d go up there, and the hospital was up at the end, up there, the new hospital then. I don’t know what in the hell they got now, but it was a new hospital then. He’d tie his donkey up, and they’d take care of him, and if his donkey needed help, they had a veterinarian there to take care of his donkey, and he’d come back. And this’d happened about two or three times a week. And one morning I asked the sergeant; I said, “Who is that old man?” He said, “He’s an Indian scout.” Said, “He was a scout for whoever it was, went down into Mexico and all that.”

Daniels: Pershing.

Walters: Yeah, Pershing. Said, “He’s an Indian scout.” And he said, “The Army’s going to take care of him the rest of his life.” And at that day I would’ve signed up for a million years. I thought, “Goddam if this Army will do that for you,
that’s what I want to be.” And I never changed. When the wife and I, we decided to get married after I decided that women were essential for something, but I told her, “Two or three things we have to get organized here on. And the first thing is you don’t come between me and the Army. If you don’t like the Army, go home; I don’t want nothing to do with you.” And she said, “That’s OK.” It was all right with her. I said, “The next thing is you’ll go to Houston and live with my folks till I’m on maneuvers with the 103rd out here in that division, and that’ll give you a chance to see whether you want to get hung up with this family and me and whatever.” So they went home, and she liked them, and everything worked fine. And I said, “After we’re married, you don’t work outside the home. If you want to do volunteer work or something, that’s OK, but if we have kids, I want you there, taking care of the kids and me.” And she agreed to all this shit. And we finished the maneuvers in the 103rd, out and went up there. We didn’t know where we was going when she went to Houston to see my folks. And we come into the service station, Hattiesburg. No, this is up there, Hood. I (inaudible).

Daniels: Camp Howze?

Walters: But anyhow, we got in, and I guess this was in Christmas period, and I didn’t call her because I wanted the boys to get Christmas, and I’d stay there. And right after Christmas I went and called her down at the train station and told her; I said, “I checked the schedule. There’s a train leaves Houston tonight, and I’ll pick you up tomorrow if you want to get married.” And she said, “I’ll be there.” And she says, tells me later; she says she just had her clothes washed. Her and my mother went out and took all her wet clothes and put in her suitcases. She got on the train and come up there. I used to tease her about, “Goddam it. You had your choice. You’d got a ticket to New York, and I’d never know what happened to you.” (laughter) But anyhow, well, what time is it?

Gilbert: 3:25.

Walters: Huh?

Gilbert: 3:25.

Walters: 3:25. We’ve talked for an hour and twenty-five minutes.

Daniels: Well, I appreciate it. And I’ll go ahead and switch the thing off there.

Walters: Now, if you want to do this thing on Saturday—

(end of interview)