



Briton McConkie

United States Army

Tank Commander

European Theater

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Interviewer:
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THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Geoff: Can you give us your name and spell it?

Brit: My name is F. Briton B-R-I-T-O-N, McConkie M-C-C-O-N-K-I-E.

Geoff: Where were you born?

Brit: I was born in Salt Lake City at LDS Hospital.

Geoff: What year were you born?

Brit: May 13, 1918.

Geoff: Where did you go to high school?

Brit: Well let me tell you about my birth a little. We were living in Monticello Utah when my father was worried about me being born out in a coral or somewhere that didn't have any hospitals and so he went 300 miles to Salt Lake City to the LDS Hospital for me to be born. I have a very good friend my same age that was born within a week of me and he lived within two blocks of the LDS Hospital but he was born at home. It was the time of the Flu and his doctor wouldn't go into the hospital. My father went 300 miles to take me into that hospital that my friend wouldn't even go into. Anyway that was my birth and then we went back and I lived in Monticello for my first eight years and that was a very rich part of my life. I enjoyed living down in Monticello. It was just a pioneer country town and I went to my first grade school in Monticello but I had a year in Michigan. My father was an attorney and he went out to Michigan for a year to do some studying at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and he took the family with him and so I spent a year in Michigan as a youngster. Then we returned and instead of living in Monticello we moved to Salt Lake and so we came into Salt Lake in the summer of 1926. From that time until I got into the army I lived in Salt Lake.

Geoff: Where did you go to high school?

Brit: I went to high school at East High School and I enjoyed my stay at East High School. I was there during the years that they only had two years of high school in Salt Lake.

Geoff: Did you go to the university before you went off to war?

Brit: Yes, when I graduated from East High School I enrolled at the University of Utah and at that time I entered into the ROTC Program and so I was in the ROTC Program and I graduated from that but during two years that I was at the University I went on a Church mission back to the eastern states. Then when I returned from the Eastern States Mission I had one more year to go to graduate from the University of Utah so I went into law school. In those days they let us go into law school with only three years of training at the University and so at the same time I was a fourth year at the ROTC Program.

Geoff: Was it infantry?

Brit: It was in field artillery, we had horses and they pulled the guns around. It was quite an experience to be in the artillery in those days. Then when I graduated from the University I also received my commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Field Artillery.

Geoff: What year was that?

Brit: That was in 1941.

Geoff: This is before Pearl Harbor?

Brit: That was just before Pearl Harbor and I went into the field artillery and my first duty was down in Camp Roberts in California and they were going to send me over to the Philippines but the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and they also attacked the Philippines

the day after they got Pearl Harbor they attacked the Philippines and that changed my calling from the Philippines so that I went to a field artillery school.

Geoff: Where were you on Pearl Harbor Day?

Brit: On Pearl Harbor Day I was in church in Los Angeles, they had a Stake Conference there and I went to it and it was during that Stake Conference that they announced that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. That was on December 7th in 1941.

Geoff: What went through your head?

Brit: Well I'll tell you it was quite an excitement down in Los Angeles when the war broke out. Of course you have a lot of Japanese around down there and they had a lot of Japanese in Utah and it was a real exciting time. Anyway I went to church dressed up with a suit on (not my army clothes) but I was wearing civilian clothes when I go out on leave. But it was very interesting the minute I came out of the church you can't believe how many hundreds of soldiers were there in Los Angeles, they'd come from lots of areas and the people didn't know the soldiers from the others and they didn't know that I was a soldier but I didn't get out on the street any sooner than someone came along and said "*where are you going?*" And I said "*I'm going back to Camp Roberts*" and he said, "*I'll take you.*" So he drove me back to Camp Roberts and I stayed in Camp Roberts for several months and then about January they sent me to the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill Oklahoma and I graduated from the Field Artillery School. But in the meantime the army decided to have Tank Destroyer Units. Nobody had ever heard of a Tank Destroyer Unit and so anyway I was chosen.

Geoff: What is a Tank Destroyer Unit?

Brit: A Tank Destroyer is a small tank but it's built so they could be fast and speedy so they could move around and their primary mission was to destroy German tanks. At that time the Germans had a big Tiger Tank that just seemed to roam at will. It would just

roam around and nobody could do much about it and that was why Tank Destroyers were born. This Tank Destroyer had what we called a three-inch gun on a 76-millimeter cannon and moved around. It was attached to this tank and it was called a Tank Destroyer. Now in that Tank Destroyer it had a radio and the people in that destroyer could talk to other tanks. It was very interesting because just being a member of a Tank Destroyer Battalion you don't know what it's all about because when we got into the Army, you know, into battle they would take one tank out of our Tank Destroyer Battalion and put it in someplace, then they'd take another tank and sometimes they would take a platoon. In our battalion we had three companies – A, B and C-Company.

Geoff: And you were in charge of 12 of them?

Brit: I was in charge of Company B and we had 12 Tank Destroyers. These Tank Destroyers would be in different outfits, for example when I got over to Luxembourg they took our battalion and took two of our companies (B, A and C) and sent them up to Belgium. I don't know how many hundreds of miles they were away from us, they weren't 100 miles but they were up at the north end of the Ardennes Forest. They were detached and I never saw them again during the war. I never saw those people that were in the other two companies; they were off with the 9th Armored Division up in northern Belgium. Well my company remained under the supervision of our Battalion Commander and I was the only one from his outfit of all the Tank Destroyers that remained under his command.

Geoff: What was his name?

Brit: His name was Brownfield; he was a Lieutenant Colonel – Albert R. Brownfield, he was a very fine Lieutenant Colonel. We thought he was the best Lieutenant Colonel in the army and I felt very fortunate that they kept me under his direction. Well when this battle started, two of his companies were up in Belgium attached to the 9th Armored Division and I was retained in Company B under his supervision and I was a Captain at the time. We stayed in a little village that they called '*Consdorf*'. Consdorf was right on

the Siegfried Line, right on the south end of the Battle of the Bulge. That was the German – Luxembourg border and it was in the south end of the Battle of the Bulge. There was no one south of them and that's where we started out.

Geoff: How many years did you train stateside and how did you get to Europe?

Brit: Well I trained with the Tank Destroyers from '42 to '44. You see we were the first battalion to come directly from the states. There's no way that they could use us over there at that landing [Normandy]. They weren't taking Tank Destroyers to the landing in June when they invaded Normandy in France, but we were the first outfit to come directly from the states and we were on two ships. The Colonel was in charge of one ship and I was in charge of the other ship, not because of my brains but because of my rank. And so I was in charge of this ship with our company, we had three Tank Destroyer Company's on that ship so we had 36 Tank Destroyers on this ship. I happened to be privileged to command that ship.

Geoff: How long did that voyage take?

Brit: Oh it took about 10 days as I remember but I'm not sure how long it took.

Geoff: Did you have any problems with U-Boats?

Brit: Yeah, well on the way over we stopped and they dropped these bombs underwater. They thought that there were U-Boats under there but nobody came up so I don't know whether they hit anything but they dropped these bombs on them. But anyway we weren't fired upon by anyone while getting to Paris but we were the first ones from the states to come and land in Normandy.

Geoff: So you came straight from the United States to Normandy?

Brit: Yeah, we came straight from the United States. We were in Boston and we left there and that took us right to Normandy. When we got to Normandy, which is on the coast of France, they put the Battalion in charge of controlling the work there in Normandy because there were still Germans around. There were still Germans and they still had problems and so that was our first experience.

Geoff: So you were patrolling?

Brit: Yeah, we were there to protect. In case any Germans came around we were there to protect the people and it was our responsibility to guard Normandy. But we didn't ever see anyone; I think one man got killed in our outfit when he drove over a bomb that exploded.

Geoff: What month did you get to Normandy?

Brit: We got to Normandy on the 15th of September in 1944 and we stayed in Normandy for a couple of months. In fact we stayed in Normandy until we moved into Luxembourg and we moved into Luxembourg on the 23rd of November.

Geoff: When you got to Luxembourg you mentioned something about the town that was quite remarkable when you got to that town.

Brit: Well let's talk a little earlier than that, when we got to Luxembourg that's when they took away these two A and C-Company's with the 9th Armored and they went off into Belgium and the Colonel kept my company under his command. I don't know whether he had the authority or somebody above him, I never found out why I stayed with him but it was a great blessing to me that I stayed with him because one of those Company's lost 24 men taken as prisoners. I counted them up, there were 24 prisoners taken from Company A and so I felt very grateful to be down there where I think I lost one officer as a Prisoner of War and three or four men with him and that's all that we lost.

Geoff: How many men were in your company?

Brit: We had 125 men and four officers. Now these officers commanded these three Platoons and we stayed there in Consdorf from the 23rd of November to the 16th of December until the Battle of the Bulge started. Now on the 15th of December I took my gun crews and we went up to a little village called *'Haller'* and that was on the Siegfried Line but it was a little north of us and we went up there and spent the day preparing our gun positions. We tried to put our gun positions in a situation where they were not seen by the enemy and we went up and spent the day on the 15th of December preparing these gun positions. Well the next morning was the Battle of the Bulge (we didn't know it was going to be a big battle) but we were awakened by shells landing in Consdorf.

Geoff: This means that you were probably one of the first American units to begin fighting at the Battle of the Bulge.

Brit: We were one of the first, that's right. We didn't even know we were fighting, in fact we were there in Consdorf...it's interesting there were three little villages there – one was Christnach, one was Consdorf and one was Waldbillig and they were called *'Little Switzerland'* – they were beautiful little villages and we were in all three of those little villages which the natives called *'Little Switzerland'*. But anyway we were in Haller the day before preparing to go the next morning when we were awakened by these shells. We were excited about that, it didn't bother us the fact that they were dropping a few shells in the town; we hadn't seen any enemy, we hadn't seen anybody, we hadn't shot at anybody and so we really weren't particularly excited. But the enemy started coming into the town and that excited us a little. But my tanks were all in line ready to move out, there's no way we could defend ourselves because we had to be in battle position and so we jumped in those tanks and we moved out that morning before it was hardly daylight. We moved out and the Germans moved in, but it was interesting, I didn't hear of a shot fired (we didn't shoot at anybody and nobody shot at us) but we left there and started up to Haller because that's where we were supposed to go. Well when we got to Waldbillig

we found out that Haller had been taken by the enemy. Haller was now under the direction of the Nazi's and so we were told to go into gun-position in this city of Waldbillig. Well we'd never been in Waldbillig before, we didn't know that Waldbillig had been under the domination of the Germans for four and a half years and that they knew every house, they knew every building, they knew every road and there couldn't have been a more dangerous city in all of Luxembourg or Belgium than Waldbillig. I've got with me pictures of that town because years later they had a celebration over in Waldbillig and they put up a monument and in that monument they put a dozen or so outfits that had protected them and I didn't see one of those people when I was there. I didn't see anyone; we didn't have any help from anybody. But anyway when we got into Waldbillig I had to go around and pick my gun positions. We usually had the Reconnaissance Company go in ahead and they'd tell you how many enemy were there, they'd say "*put your guns over here, put your guns over there*" and they would tell us what to do. But we got in there and our Reconnaissance Company – two of their platoons were with these people that had been sent up north and we had one platoon that was supposed to help us but they were in this little town back in Puchenau and they weren't any help to us. But see we still didn't know that we were in a battle, we saw some enemy but we didn't get too excited about the fact that we were chased out of Consdorf but anyway I had to go around and get these guns into position. As my driver and I drove down this country road shells started landing behind us and man alive...I was an Artillery Officer and I knew what happens when shells start landing around you that somebody is directing the fire. The people that are shooting the guns, they don't see you but they are being guided by someone who does see you and so I said to my driver "*if any shell lands in front of us, you stop and go backwards as fast as you can!*" The very next shell lit right in front of us. Well it hit quite a ways from us otherwise we'd have been killed because they have about a 50 yard to 75 yard area that they kill everything within that area. Anyway this shell lands right in front of us and I didn't have to tell him to go back. He went back as fast as he could. Well the next shell landed right where we would have been so I'm one of the few people (I think) that have ever been chased by a German 88 and lived to tell about it. We got back and that was my first experience. That's the first time I had ever been shot at, that was the first time that I had ever been in a battle

situation when I was going down this country road in Waldbillig when these shells started landing by me.

Geoff: And that was the first day?

Brit: That was the first day of the Battle of the Bulge. But we didn't know that Hitler...no one on our side even had any conception there was going to be a battle. Eisenhower and Bradley were in charge of us and they didn't have the least idea that the Germans were going to have a battle. In fact Eisenhower and Bradley had come and met in the first of December with the idea of taking some of Patton's people...Patton was down south on the south end of this battle and he was scattered over a 90 mile area and they were going to take some divisions from him and send them up to the north. That was the only place we were fighting was up in the north at the Battle of the Bulge. So they were going to take these people from Patton but Patton didn't have anybody to give them. Fortunately they didn't take any of his people and we had a responsibility to defend this town of Waldbillig.

Geoff: You told me when you got there the town was a ghost town.

Brit: Oh it was a ghost town, there was no one in the town and all of the people in that little town had taken off because they wanted to be in a safe area. Those people over there they always thought that the Germans were going to come through the Ardennes Forest and boy they were and when Eisenhower and Bradley were together they didn't have any idea there was going to be a battle. In fact Eisenhower bet Montgomery (who was a British Officer) he bet him five dollars that the war would be over at Christmas, just jokingly. Eisenhower was convinced the war was going to be over by Christmas.

Geoff: Tell us about the battle. There must have been a lot going on. It must have been confusing, etc.

Brit: Well anyway, the first day we had the shellings, they were shelling us but they didn't come and the reason they didn't come was that they had 1,322,000 soldiers up behind that Siegfried Line and we didn't know they had 1,300,000 (I got that out of statistics after the war). But anyway he had so many tanks and so many vehicles and there's only a few roads where they could drive into Waldbillig and into Luxembourg and so we were there in Waldbillig with only one road coming down from the Siegfried Line. We didn't know that there was anybody in that town but all at once the bell in the church started to ring. Every time that bell rang artillery fell on us and so I knew that whoever was ringing that bell (and we saw a guy dressed as a priest ringing this bell, so I thought 'why in the world was he ringing a bell when there wasn't a person in the town'? So I just figured he was the enemy) so I had them blow the bell out. I have a picture of that that you can have that blew a hole in the church and blew the bell out. When the bell quit ringing they quit shooting at us because that bell was ringing telling them where we were. So that was an experience to have to shoot this bell out. But anyway it wasn't until on the 17th we still hadn't seen any of them. We came in on the 16th, we'd been fired at on the 16th but I hadn't seen any enemy so I was driving along the edge of Waldbillig toward the line (ordinarily our Reconnaissance Company was supposed to be doing that but I was doing their job) and I ran into these Germans coming down. So I was the first one in all of that area that saw a German. So I reported back to the Colonel that the Germans were coming down this draw so he took one of my platoons and they go up the draw to meet these Germans and because they went up there this Colonel took his Major with him (why in the world the Colonel and the Major would go off together – I thought that was the most stupid thing that they could do) but anyway they went off together and when the German's saw that the Colonel and his Major were up there they really thought they were in trouble. They were prepared to see an officer up at the head of a battle and so they were really excited and anyway I had one man killed up there and one man taken as a prisoner but the Germans instead of coming down that draw they came down the Waldbillig draw where we were ready for them. By this time I had my guns all in position for them and so when they came down toward us they came down in rows. They'd have a row of infantrymen – maybe 40 or 50 in a row and then they had a row behind them and they had another row behind them. So I don't know how many people

we killed but we either killed or wounded everybody that came. We didn't have a single German get into that town.

Geoff: You say that these were infantrymen?

Brit: Yeah they were infantry.

Geoff: So you're in Waldbillig and row and row of infantry are coming at you?

Brit: They would come at us and so we would shoot directly at them. See that's our secondary role was to shoot at vehicles and their individuals and so those infantrymen as they came at us we were able to get them all because they were in line and the reason they were in line was (and why they kept coming) was because the Germans sent the infantrymen out ahead of their tanks. Hitler would not send out a tank that didn't have soldiers in front of it to protect the tank and so these infantrymen were preparing to protect the tanks so that the tanks could come. I didn't see a tank and I fought them for a week and I never saw a single tank because all we did was shoot infantrymen.

Geoff: You were saying you had to use your main cannon on them?

Brit: On these Tank Destroyers they had a 50-caliber machine gun but they weren't close enough to use them, we used the tank on them and we killed or wounded everybody that came and I didn't see a single German in that town (any soldiers). We kept them out of that town and for three days we were there by ourselves and then the third day some infantry came up and they had dug in behind us. They thought we were going to get wiped out and instead of protecting us we were protecting the infantry. So that was the 4th Infantry Division that came in behind us.

Geoff: You said that you inflicted a lot of casualties on the Germans.

Brit: Yes, I don't have any idea how many. There had to be hundreds and hundreds of them, in fact when our infantry finally came up to help us they were able to go up there and they said they had never seen so many dead. They went into one building where there were many dead and 45 still alive and more than that who were dead in this one building.

Geoff: Tell us about the casualties you had. You said there was a story about two officers.

Brit: Well I had four officers (there were five officers counting myself) and in that battle I lost every one of them. I was the only one that survived that week in Waldbillig. You have to understand that the Battle of the Bulge was in two parts. It was the first week – that's when the Germans made all of their progress, that's when they surrounded the 101st Airborne Division, that's when they went all the way they went. I've got maps showing that you can see how far they went and what they did. But it was in that first week, then in the second week and the third and fourth week that we pushed them back. We pushed them back into Germany then the war ended on what most people say was the 12th of January. Now ordinarily you don't know when a battle ends. You know when they start but you don't know when they end but on the 12th of January the Russians started their last offensive and Hitler took what he could (and he had already lost the war) of his men and went to meet the Russians.

Geoff: So that first week you were the only functioning officer after the first week?

Brit: Well at the end of that first week we started getting some help. For three days we didn't see anybody to help but then after that we started getting a little help. I didn't see any officers at all, there were some infantrymen that were up there and they're the one's that went up and came back and reported how many dead they saw. You know we killed so many people and wounded so many people that they spent their whole evenings (the whole night) picking them up. We didn't have any fighting to do at night. My goodness they didn't fight us at night, they'd just fight us during the day. Nighttime is usually a

terrible time to be fighting but they were picking up their dead during that time and spent all night just picking up their dead and wounded.

Geoff: What was the weather like?

Brit: Oh it was the worst weather (according to the reports that I've read); it was the worst weather that any of those natives had ever seen. It was cold! We were blessed to be in their houses. I didn't have single person get frozen feet that I know of and there's no reason I should have had anybody with frozen feet. But the others during that battle it was so cold and such a miserable time that 45,000 of our people got frozen feet. So many got frozen feet that they passed the law saying that the next guy that gets frozen feet is going to get Court Marshaled. They would rather get frozen feet than to continue to fight and 45,000 got frozen feet.

Geoff: So was it snowing where you were?

Brit: It snowed a little but during that week we didn't see any snow and we didn't see any airplanes. He had 1500 airplanes there that he was going to use but he didn't use any of them on us. I read where he used some airplanes somewhere but I didn't see any of them.

Geoff: Tell us about the story where you lost two officers that were right in front of you.

Brit: Well we only lost one officer in Waldbillig and he was a Lieutenant, he had a platoon and I had just gotten through talking to him when a shell landed and killed him. Then my Executive Officer and I were talking about a week later (it was on the 21st of December) and a mortar shell landed in the tank where he was and so he got killed. The last words he spoke in this life were to me.

Geoff: What did he say?

Brit: I don't know that we were talking about anything in particular but while we were talking they started to shell us and it was one of these shells that landed. He didn't die, he died on Christmas day but he was unconscious from the day that he was hit on the 21st of December.

Geoff: So you went from Waldbillig to Bastogne.

Brit: Oh yes, at the end of that first week we had stopped the Germans, not a single German got into Luxembourg but my outfit (and I didn't know it at the time) was given instruction to report to the 101st Airborne in Bastogne, that was my instructions. So I went up to Bastogne and I thought the Colonel and those people were going to come but he didn't come. He and the rest of the soldiers that were under him, they went to a rest area and I didn't know that until recently that I was the only one from my outfit that went up to Bastogne. I thought I was reporting to General Taylor. My orders were to report to General Taylor but General Taylor was in the United States at the time and his assistant was this McAuliff who told him "*nuts*" when they told him to surrender and so he's the one that I reported to.

Geoff: What did you see when you got to Bastogne?

Brit: Well Bastogne was cold, you see that was on...we got there after Christmas. We left Luxembourg on Christmas night and we went up to Bastogne, it took us several days to get there with our tanks and when we got there why they sent us up to a little town nearby and we were under their direction and we stayed under their direction when I got wounded. I got wounded on the last day of the battle on the 12th. Every report that I've read says that that was the last day of the battle because the Russians had started a big offensive then and Hitler took what men he could from the western front to fight the Russians on the eastern front.

Geoff: So when you got to Bastogne there was still heavy fighting?

Brit: Yeah, there was still heavy fighting. We only had about 400 or 500 yards into the town; the rest of it was still under the control of the Germans.

Geoff: And so you were immediately put into the lines?

Brit: Yeah we were immediately put in the line there and the rest of my fighting was just three weeks up in that Bastogne area.

Geoff: Were there any tanks there?

Brit: Yeah we saw a few tanks up there. We got some tanks up in the Bastogne area but we didn't get any tanks down in the Waldbillig area because all we got were infantrymen.

Geoff: Tell us about when you were wounded, what happened that day?

Brit: Well when I was wounded a mortar shell landed above me and a piece went into my left shoulder and it was that piece that broke my shoulder (they call it a broken shoulder but it didn't break it it just left a little hole) and it left a hole in my shoulder about the size of a 22. But anyway I got wounded with that shell and that was the last day of the battle and the last time I saw any war. They took me to Paris where I was in the hospital in Paris and then I was there for a few days and they flew me from Paris to England and it was there in England where I met my brother. He was with the 8th Air Force.

Geoff: Tell us about that. How did you find him?

Brit: Well I don't know how I found him; it was kind of a miracle. When we got into the hospital I reported in the hospital and got settled in there and I could walk around. The only thing wrong with me was my broken shoulder and I had a sling and anyway I went into the operator and I said, "*Is there any way I can get in touch with my brother?*" And she says "*is he in the Air Corp?*"

And I said, "yes."

She said "*there's only 500,000 of them here and we don't have any communication with them.*"

Well anyway it was an interesting thing because without her looking at any instructions or calling anybody she made a telephone call and the fellow that answered the phone knew my brother and my brother was in that room. It was a room up on the border of Scotland where this whole crew had been shot down. He was on a bombing mission and he was shot over Germany but his plane didn't crash until they got back across the water and when they got across the water they all had to jump out. They jumped out and they sent him up to Scotland (around the border of Scotland) to this rest home and that's where I found my brother. So we spent three weeks together. I was in the hospital in the south of England and he was in the rest home in the north of England and we got together and had a good time. That was interesting.

Geoff: Do remember much about how you got to the United States?

Brit: Oh yeah, I don't want to forget this. When I got back with my outfit the war was about over. I got out of the hospital the day Roosevelt died. There were big headlines in the newspaper and everything; I'll never forget the day I got out of the hospital because it was the 12th of April 1945 and Roosevelt had died that day. Well they gave me a few days off to get back to my outfit and I went up to Scotland and saw some sights up in Scotland on my way back to the outfit. I don't remember too much how I got back to that outfit but when I got back to the outfit they were on their way to Austria. But some fellow had taken my place as Captain, so they promoted me to a Major (I never got any 'Major' insignia's, I still go by Captain but I got that during my leave when I got out of the army that that came through). When we got to this town of Laakirchen we were in that town when the war ended in Laakirchen and I think it was about the 12th of May (the war ended on the 8th or 9th) when there were a lot of railroad cars that ran through the town and one of those cars started to explode. Shells started to explode in that car and so the Colonel and I and four or five men went down there and with our Tank Destroyers we pulled the train apart. We couldn't get that train apart without using a Tank Destroyer to

pull it, so we pulled that train apart and found out that all the other cars were full of bombs that would've destroyed that town so they gave us a medal. They gave us a Soldiers Medal which was the highest medal you could get for bravery and we didn't even know we'd done anything. We used the Tank Destroyer to separate these cars and only one car was exploding and I don't know what was in there, we didn't get into there but the others had these bigger bombs that would've ruined the town. But anyway two or three days later I took a group and we went into Austria to a concentration camp and we were the first ones, I was the first officer in that concentration camp.

Geoff: What did you see?

Brit: I saw people dying! 100 people a day were dying in there starving and it was the most miserable experience of my wartime. This is after the war was over and we went into this little town and we asked the people where the concentration camp was (I don't know how we found out there was one) but we asked these people and nobody knew, they didn't understand you but you could smell it for miles. We got to it and it was the most sickening experience of my life. We got into that concentration camp and 100 people a day were dying in there from starvation and those Germans were using those rooms for experimenting – the doctors. And I went into one room and they had all of the doctors equipment there (I almost thought of bringing some home as souvenirs but I was so sick of the whole thing that I didn't take any. I didn't even take a picture – I had my camera but it was such a deathly sickening thing that I didn't take a single picture). I've got a picture that somebody else took that you can see, but I just couldn't take a picture of those people. That was such a terrible terrible thing. I can hardly talk about it without crying.

Geoff: Were you married during the war?

Brit: Yes.

Geoff: When did you get married?

Brit: When I graduated from the Field Artillery School I came into Salt Lake on leave going to Georgia and my girlfriend and I decided it was about time. I'd been trying to talk her into getting married for years but I'd been on a mission and I'd been in the army and I hadn't been around. She'd been going to school up at Utah State and she finally decided that it was time so I got married the last day I was here in Salt Lake and the morning after I got married I flew to Georgia and she went home to pack her clothes.

Geoff: So you see the death camps and then you head home...

Brit: Oh that death camp, that was the saddest experience that I ever had!

Geoff: So how did you get home? Do you remember much about how you got home?

Brit: Well we thought we were going to go to Japan. It was kind of nice having those big old tanks, they don't just take them any old where, but anyway we were going to go to Japan. But before we left Austria the war ended. So the war ended while I was in Austria and we didn't go on to Japan and they sent me home. I was one of the first to go home because they gave me five points for being shot and they gave me five points for getting the Soldiers Medal, they gave me five points for getting the Bronze Star and then they give you so many points for each year you'd been in the service so I was one of the higher number of points. None of them really counted (I didn't think) but anyway it was nice.

Geoff: So tell us about when you got home to Salt Lake.

Brit: When I got home I got back into law school; I had two more years to go.

Geoff: Do you remember the day you got home?

Brit: I can't remember the day I got home but we had a celebration. I got home and got back into school. I wore my uniform and they took a picture of our law class and there were two or three of us there in uniform and I don't know why in the world I was going to school in uniform but I guess while I was still in the service I didn't wear civilian clothes until I got out of the service.

Geoff: Tell us about the men who served under you.

Brit: I had the best men in the Army. I'll tell you this, we were on maneuvers out in Arizona and after those three months of maneuvers they gave the Battalion a three-day pass and we all went to Phoenix. The whole battalion went to Phoenix and after those three days the Colonel called me in and said, "*What are you a Chaplain?*" And I said, "*what do you mean 'am I a Chaplain', you know I'm not a Chaplain.*" He had four stacks of military police reports on his desk and each stack was a company of rowdiness and drunkenness and everything and he didn't have a single one of my company there. That's why he said, "*What are you a Chaplain?*" But anyway, the reason I didn't have any troubles was that I took the best men that I had (non smokers, non drinkers) and put them in charge of my outfit so there wasn't a better army. There wasn't a better group of men in the whole army. My driver made his living making liquor in Kentucky and he didn't get a drop of liquor while he was in our outfit.

Geoff: So how were they in combat?

Brit: Oh they were good! They were good! I didn't have anybody go to the hospital, you know a lot of people have problems after war, they go to these psychiatric hospitals. Just like my brother, they had him getting psycho treatments up there at the rest camp for the Air Corps because a lot of people really get sick with that but I didn't have any problem. I don't think I had a single man that went to a hospital for mental problems. I remember one guy grabbing his machine gun going down the road and shooting it but he just went off for a short time and I don't remember sending him to the hospital or anything.

Geoff: It sounds like they wanted to please you.

Brit: Oh they wanted to please me and I wanted to please them. It was kind of a family affair. I'd been on a mission you know and I loved everybody and I wanted everybody to love me. I didn't Court Marshal a single man in my outfit, from the beginning to the end. The Colonel wanted to know why none of my men ever got Court Marshaled and all I did was treat my men the way I liked to be treated. He couldn't complain about that.

Geoff: So is there anything we've left out that you want to talk about?

Brit: No I think you've got more information out of me than anybody else ever got.

Geoff: How do you feel about World War II? When you think of that time what are the thoughts that come to your head?

Brit: Well you know it's hard to understand how you can kill a person. I'm so grateful that I didn't have to tell anybody to go out and kill anybody. I think that's quite a rarity.

Geoff: So you had great men? You had a great unit?

Brit: It was a good experience.

Geoff: That's wonderful; we sure appreciate you coming in.

Sally: What did you do with the prisoners you captured in Waldbillig?

Brit: I don't know what they did with them because it was the infantrymen that brought them down. The infantrymen took them down from this house and they took them away, I never did. I really worried, when that war was going on I was worried about somebody putting up a white flag because if they had put up a white flag I couldn't shoot them and

if they came down and found out that we were only 125 men and they had thousands behind them I think I'd be the captured instead of them. But anyway that was a scary situation to have those people and I was so grateful that I didn't have to take a Prisoner of War and I was so grateful I didn't have to shoot anybody. We shot a lot of people but they were a long ways away and we couldn't hear anything. We didn't hear the sounds you know, it's like the Air Corps, when they dropped bombs they didn't see what happened to them and we couldn't see much what happened to them too we were so far away. But I was grateful not to be hearing these people and I was grateful I didn't have to tell anybody to go and do something like killing somebody. A friend of mine was told, "*you go out and shoot that man*".

Sally: When the German's were slaughtered in Waldbillig, is there a process in the Army where you allow them to come and get their deceased?

Brit: We killed these people so far away that we didn't even know they were dead. We knew they were dead from the explosions but we didn't ever get near them. We never shot a person or we never wounded a person that we had to send to a hospital or anything but they must have done it. Everybody didn't die that we shot at and that was a problem, we had all those soldiers coming. I don't know how many, I asked one of my men I said, "*how many men did you kill?*"

"*Oh*" he said, "*at least 700.*"

And I don't know whether he killed 700 or not or why he picked that but he said "*at least 700*" and that could have been because those Germans kept coming and we kept shooting. It was far enough away that it wasn't like shooting you or somebody near you it was more like the Air Corps dropping something on a house when they fly by. But it was sad. Those were sad days to have to shoot people.

Geoff: What happens to your own men when they are injured?

Brit: We have a medical unit in the battalion. I don't know how many were in that battalion but we had a doctor and we had these men that were trained in that. So when a

person would get injured they would be taken...well I'll tell you what happened to me when I got injured, they took me to the medics and it was the middle of wintertime and they gave us something to drink and talked to us to see what you needed and they take care of you. Now if a person gets killed why you just put them in a safe place until they can be picked up. We had Christmas dinner at a mansion in Christnach (that means '*after Christ*') and here we are in battle in a town named Christnach and we had Christmas dinner and out in the open there behind us were the dead all stacked there. It was frozen and wintertime and everybody was frozen. I don't know whether they were all our dead, I didn't go examine them, but they had a stack of dead and I think it was Americans and Germans. We didn't leave dead Germans lying around if we had a place we could put them. But we had that experience having Christmas dinner in Christnach on Christmas day and have all of those dead people right behind us while we sat down and ate. All of them were frozen because it was cold! It was a really cold time! We had these medics and they would treat them and I suppose a few people would go off their rocks you know and have to be taken but I didn't see any of my men except that one guy running around shooting. He was the only that I remember that needed any treatment.

Elizabeth: You talked about how you were this close to going to the Philippines and then you ended up going to Europe?

Brit: Oh yes, I was supposed to go to the Philippines but when the Japanese took over the Philippines (they did it the day after Pearl Harbor) then I was sent to that field artillery school. Instead of going to the Philippines I went to a field artillery school at Fort Sill Oklahoma.

Elizabeth: How did you feel about going to Europe rather than to the Pacific?

Brit: Well we were first trained to go to Africa. We were supposed to go to Africa and we trained to go to Africa and then when the Germans found out we were coming they gave up. They gave up and we didn't go down to Africa and then the next thing we did, we were trained for desert training and for going to Europe we were sent to Louisiana

where they had a lot of marshes and stuff so we were training for that to go to Europe by going to Louisiana. So we went there. We were trained in seven states. I was in seven states – I started out in California then I went to Oklahoma and then to Georgia and then to Texas and then to Colorado and Arizona and Louisiana, so I had a lot of training places.

Geoff: When you got into the Army before Pearl Harbor were you expecting to go to the war?

Brit: Yeah, I felt like we were going to go to war. My father is the one that got me in the service. He talked me into going to the ROTC and become an officer. He was convinced there was going to be a war. He lived through the other war and he'd been involved in the war effort and so he suggested that I should go to the ROTC which I did. The best thing that ever happened to me was to get transferred into the Tank Destroyers.

Geoff: Did you think you were going to fight the Japanese?

Brit: Yeah, after the war was over we thought we were going to Japan. Until the Japanese gave up, we were preparing to go up there.

Geoff: I mean before Pearl Harbor.

Brit: No.

Geoff: Who did you think you were going to war with?

Brit: I thought we were going to just fight the Germans. I couldn't understand how we let Hitler kill all those Jews. We knew they were killing Jews yet we didn't do anything about it.

Sally: Do you know the name of the concentration camp you witnessed?

Brit: Yeah I've got it written down somewhere. It was Orlaff (sp?). The concentration camp that we went through was near Laakirchen and Laakirchen was where we ended up after the war and we stayed there for a few weeks and while there I went into this concentration camp and we fed those people afterwards. The only thing they could take was a little soup. But going into a place where people are dying like that, but anyway we gave them soup. You know, a lot of people were starving. In fact our men, you know they would stir up their food and throw in their cigarettes and throw it away but they quit that because the Germans and population were eating our garbage. Oh it was terrible.

Geoff: This place was called Orlaff (sp)?

Brit: Well they didn't have any signs on it, I didn't know until years later what it was because you know they didn't have any names over there and we didn't know what they were called.

Sally: What were some of the feelings and thoughts and comments from others who witnessed the camps. How did you process it immediately after you witnessed it?

Brit: Well not too many saw it. The group that I went through, we were the first ones in there and you can't believe that concentration camp. They had a place where they gassed the people, they had a place where they killed them, they had a place where they operated on them and oh it was terrible. It makes you sick to see what they were doing with those people and then those people were dying. They were dying while you were looking at them. They told me that 100 a day were dying in that camp and there I was with my camera and I couldn't even take a picture of them.

Sally: What happened on D-Day?

Brit: That was a great day over there! We were in Austria with our battalion. The battalion had gotten back together again you know they were split up because I didn't see

some of those people from the other outfits during the whole war but we got together again right there at the end and we were in Laakirchen. It was there that it was decided who was going to go home and things like that – when you were going home.

Geoff: So was there a big celebration that day?

Brit: Oh yes! Everybody was just happy and thankful that the war was over. In fact the General of the Germans 6th Army gave to a friend of mine who was a captain of the Reconnaissance Company gave him the surrender message. So he had the message from the 6th Army that the Germans had surrendered and so he went and took it to our battalion, I don't know what our battalion did, you know you don't have a lot of communication. You don't have a lot of communication around so when he got this message for the 6th Army (the 6th Army is a big army) and he came and gave it to this Captain and he took it and gave it to our Colonel and that's when we found out about the war ending. But you know the Germans in the last two or three weeks they were just giving up. Everybody was giving up. They were marching down and giving up and soldiers were picking up any souvenir guns they could get and I was fortunate because I had a year of law school so I was defending the Germans that were arrested for having guns and I got the ammunition, I had the guns. If they got turned free then I got the gun. But it's interesting, I got quite a number of guns that I brought home and gave to my kids.

Sally: Do you think about the war?

Brit: No, I've never had any reaction. I've just had a grateful attitude that I didn't have to go and kill people. The fact that we killed them from a distance was nothing like shooting them face-to-face. They're coming to kill us and they were a long distance away and it was depressing, you don't like to kill people but for some reason I didn't have any emotional problems over it. I don't wake up at night screaming and I don't dream about it. I don't think I've ever had a dream of the war, which I think has been a blessing.

Sally: But you remember it with such clarity, that's amazing.

Brit: I think things that really mean something to you you kind of do remember. There's a lot of things that you just forget about but the things in your life that you stop and think about the things you remember why there's something really important.

Sally: Why was this war meaningful to you?

Brit: Well it was meaningful for me because I felt like we really had to...I was so upset about the Germans killing all the Jews and the way they treated people. When I got home I lived there on 8th Avenue in Salt Lake and my neighbor was a German kid and his wife had a brother coming over and I sponsored him to come over from Germany (he and his wife) and this fellow, my neighbor was one of these people we were shooting at over in the Battle of the Bulge. So you know it was kind of a hard situation.

Geoff: What was the range of the gun on your Tank Destroyer?

Brit: You'd be amazed at how accurate those were. We could shoot a stump as far as you could see that stump you could hit it with that cannon. That's how accurate it was. Anything you see you could hit.

Geoff: Describe how you used the Tank Destroyers to pull apart the train.

Brit: Well, we got a chain of some kind and hooked it onto the train and just pulled it. You couldn't push it apart.

Geoff: So you used the Tank Destroyer as a locomotive?

Brit: Yeah, to pull the train apart. I think it was in the back – the locomotives were in the front and these boxcars were in the back of the train and we just pulled them apart. We unhooked them and then we had to pull them apart because we didn't know what was in them and we had to get them apart so they didn't all start exploding.

Geoff: Describe again after VE-Day how the Germans would come to you and surrender.

Brit: Well they were giving up. The Germans and the soldiers they were giving up and when you start getting millions of soldiers, you know, hundreds and thousands of soldiers, you'd see big lines of them coming down. They had a real responsibility, what are you going to do with them all? And the thing I couldn't understand was the Russians. You couldn't get them to go back to Russia. We were all so thrilled we were going to go home but those Russians they didn't want to go back and we had to put them in boxcars and send them back to Russia. Wouldn't that be terrible? Anyway we had to guard them, put them in boxcars and get them back to Russia because we couldn't leave those Russians in Germany and they didn't want to go home because they didn't know what was going to happen to them. It was sad. That's a sad situation. That was the most amazing thing of all to me was that you couldn't get these people to go home. We were just dying to go home and we had to put them in a boxcar and lock them in there to get them to go back to Russia.

Geoff: Thank you very much!