Frank Mjaatvedt

United States Army

Private First Class

European Theater

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Interviewer:
Rick Randle

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Rick: We really appreciate you letting us in your home like this and interviewing you for a few minutes. Can you just state your full name and spell your last name for us?

Frank: Okay, Frank Mjaatvedt (Meeyattavit in English, Miyottvit in Norwegian) it is spelled M-J-A-A-T-V-E-D-T.

Rick: I understand you came over to America very young can you tell us about your early life here in Utah and leading up to where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor.

Frank: Well in my early life my folks came to Salt Lake and then they moved up to Ogden and dad went to work for the railroad and we had a home on 26th Street right where Stimpson's Market is. Stimpson's used to live on the corner in a home then. Then we moved and we went back east for awhile to Minnesota up by Lake Superior, then we came back here and we bought a home up on 25th Street, way up close to the mountains. Then we stayed there for awhile and then we moved out of there and when I was about 15 we moved down on 24th Street and Orchard Avenue, we lived there for awhile. The depression was on and I used to sell newspapers for the paper and I had quite an experience on 25th Street selling papers and it was quite a colorful street in those days. I guess it still is. But due to the depression dad was out of work so much and he had a chance to go back to Norway. Well he didn't go back to Norway until later on, but he did go back to Norway just before the war started. When he got over the he got stuck, the Germans moved into Norway. It was just my sister and I, my mother died here and my sister and I got a place over on 22nd Street – a nice apartment and we lived there then the war broke out and everybody was enlisting into the army or navy and whatever. So I went down and I decided that I'd try to join the Navy/Air force so I went down there and took an exam and everything and I actually passed. Then they told me that they couldn't accept me. In the very beginning it was kind of hard to get in but they said *"you have to be a citizen*" and I only had my first papers so they said, *"in the meantime you can avoid the draft"*. I used to ski and we used to ski jump. We had a banquet down at the Hotel Ben Lomand and Strand was President of the Youth Ski Club and we were sitting all around the lobby this evening talking about where we were going into service and what we were going to do and that and I told Strand what I had done and he said

"hell why don't you join the Norwegian Air Force?" So I said *"do you think I could do that?"* and he said, *"Sure, try and go down to see the consulate"*. So I went down to Salt Lake and I remember I was working for Don Maroney then for the Pullman Railroad Company and I had Monday off and I went down and I saw the Norwegian Consulate and he said, *"I think we can arrange for an exam"*. So about two weeks later I got a letter to come down for my exams and I remember it was a cold January day and everything and I went to three different doctors and took a written exam and boy I remember I was really pooped out and he said *"come back to the office as soon as you're through"* and it was around five o'clock in the evening. It was a dark, cold and it was kind of rainy that day and I walked and came up to his office and he had the most beautiful office. He had the King and Queen of Norway and the King and Queen of England and the President of the United States, it was really a terrific office he had and he stood up behind his desk and he held his hand out and said *"congratulations, you're in A-Category so you'll probably be accepted"*. So he said *"you'll hear from us later"*. So about a month went by almost and I got a letter that notified me that I was to report in Canada on the 17th of March. They had a railroad ticket and everything for me. So I had to get a visa and all that and I went to Canada. So I was amazed when I got to Canada how many people were in uniform in the huge railroad station when I came in. It was really something. Anyway I reported to the Norwegian Air force a couple of days later. I stayed at the Royal York Hotel.

Rick: How old were you at that time?

Frank: I was about 24.

Rick: Your father was in Norway and your mother had passed away and so you had no…

Frank: My sister was living with me.

Rick: It was just your sister and you here in the United States?

Frank: Yeah. So anyway we went to radio school for about a month or so and took sort of aeronautic classes and this and that and that was on Centre Island in Toronto Canada. I met

another fellow named Olaf Scarra and he was a terrific guy and his folks had almost done the same thing as mine but they'd come to Canada though. So Olaf and I had joined the same day, we both got orders to go to flying school at the same time so we went up to a place called Graven Hurst Canada. It was about 120 miles north of Toronto and I was up there for about six months or so and I got a letter from the immigration department that said *"if you want to be a citizen of the United States you're going to have to transfer to the American Armed Forces or else we would consider you an alien"*. That really worried me and I thought about my sister you know and everything and I thought *'God maybe I'll never see her again'*, you know it's funny. But so I showed my commanding officer and all that and they all thought that I was crazy if I had a chance to join into the American Armed Forces. So I asked for a transfer, I didn't think I'd get it but by gosh I did. So I came back here and I remember I went to Fort Douglas after they gave me another exam and they said *"you have to go to basic training and what you've got here will probably count later but right now you've got to go to basic training"*. So I went to Camp Fan in Texas and I thought *'my god why did I ever ask for a transfer after going through that'*. But then I noticed on the bulletin board after I'd been there for about a month and they wanted volunteers to join the Tenth Mountain Division but you had to have three letters of recommendation to get there. You had to prove that you could ski and all that, so I thought *'God'*. But I knew George Eccles in Ogden and he was a prominent man and everything and he was a real swell guy and I used to see him skiing up there at Snow Basin so I wrote him and asked him if he'd give me a letter of recommendation and I wrote to my commanding officer in the Norwegian Air force and I got two letters, but I didn't get three. Anyway I turned the two letters in and shortly afterwards when my outfit broke up and finished training I didn't go with them. They sent me to Camp Hale Colorado, me and there were some other units at the camp down there and five of us went. That was like being back in the Norwegian Air force. It was terrific! Camp Hale was a terrific place, terrific guys! And so we trained there for I guess about a year and a half or so up there. We thought we were never going to go overseas and then all of a sudden they gave us an order that we were to be going to Texas. So we went down to Texas for a while, Austin Texas at Camp Swift and we were there for about a couple of months or so. We got our maneuvers when we got alerted to go overseas so we came back, went to Camp Patrick Henry. We went over on the Argentina ship and we were all amazed at the size of the ship and how big it was and everything yet this ship wasn't one of the big new one's but it was

still huge. It took us about 14 days in the convoy, we didn't even know where we were going. At first we thought *'maybe we're heading for Norway'* and I was hoping for that but we didn't know. We were completely in the dark about that and we had been at sea for about 12 days or so and we saw the Rock of Gibraltar in the distance and I remember they said aboard ship *"now hear this, now hear this, that is not the Cliffs of Dover. That's the Rock of Gibraltar"*, you know it was way off in the distance. So we went to Italy. We arrived in Naples a couple of days before Christmas of 1944 I think and we stayed in one of Mussolini's orphanages overnight and I remember there were kids and groups all around begging for food. I was just astounded really how little ones were running around and it was cold too. There was no snow but it was really cold and there were kids dressed poorly and I remember a fellow was eating C-rations in the school part there was a big auditorium but you couldn't sit down you had to stand and eat off of the tables and one of them said *"oh this doggone C-ration"* and he threw it out the doorway and a bunch of kids dove on it. We never realized just how bad it was. Anyway we left for the frontlines on Christmas day in boxcars, they called them *"40 and 8's"* and we went about 30 miles an hour for about an hour and all of a sudden the train stopped and there was a bunch of shooting. We were all sealed inside and we didn't even have bullets for our guns at the time and we just sat there for about a half an hour then the train started out again. We drove all night long on a train and I think we got to a place (I don't remember the name) but anyway we went as far as we could on the train and I remember it was just really cold then.

Rick: Were you in boxcars?

Frank: Yeah we were just jammed in boxcars. We couldn't even stretch out and lay down we were so packed in them. They had to help us out of the cars because it was so damn cold. You know the guys would help one another because we were so stiff. Then we got in trucks and we got up to the city of Pisha or the outskirts of Pisha and we were still in the frontlines but they were up in the Apennine Mountains where the war was being fought there. So they told us to dig foxholes so everybody dug foxholes everywhere and I remember that evening we had what you would call a *'latrine'* down at the end of the field there and I had to go down there and just then they blew three whistles (the same kinds of whistles that you blow when you're playing basketball or something) and that meant *'Air Raid'*. So I was just getting out of this hole and my

buddy Quigley, they blew three blows on this whistle and Quigley got all excited I remember he said *"God they're going to have an air raid"*. So I remember I ran down and came back and those planes came in so damn low so they wouldn't be picked up on radar and they flew right over us. God if they had known a whole battalion of guys was there they could have done a lot of damage. But they went up and bombed the city of Pisha.

Rick: These were German planes?

Frank: This was German Air Force, yeah. Anyway we got in trucks and drove for about an hour or so, well we drove more than that, I remember we were so smashed in or pushed in these trucks. They were short of them and they just piled the guys in them and I dozed off at the tail end, we had been driving for quite awhile and I remember I opened my eyes and looked out and I could see these big huge mountains with snow on them and I thought *"oh god we're back in mountain country"*. I got dark by then so we had to help each out again it was so cold and it was just completely black out but they had searchlights that were maybe two or three blocks apart that were just standing like fingers shining in the sky. I could see about ten of them all along and they said that was artificial moonlight for those who went on patrols. So anyway we got out and then we started to hike and we were in snow and it was snowing then too. We hiked for about an hour or so and we came to a village and I remember this village was just so beautiful and I thought about the Christmas cards I had seen pictures of with villages with snow and all that. These homes were large homes and the walls on them were about three feet thick. Some of these homes were hundreds of years old and I remember we came up to this one place and they came up and opened the door and took us down some stairs and there was a big room with a little tiny weenie fire burning in the fireplace (everything's blackout) and I remember we didn't even have a bullet yet. We hadn't been issued any ammunition or anything.

Rick: How about your ski's? Did you have skis then?

Frank: No we didn't have skis. They sent our skis to Wisconsin (they laughed and said that). So I remember we got in and we were just pooped out and these guys that were down there, there were a bunch of them you know, it was a big room, large maybe about 50 by 25, it was a great

big large room and there was a bunch of these guys and they were so darn happy to see us guys because they were going to get relieved. It was just so beautiful, the country up there. Anyway we came in and they said *"we've got to send a patrol out"* and we didn't even have our *'whites'*. Everything they said was sent to Wisconsin (I didn't know if that was a joke or what but we didn't have it), so I didn't have to go on that first patrol and I thought *'oh my god I'm lucky'* and it happened to be the other lieutenant that was in another unit. So they went on a patrol and boy they came back about an hour later and they'd gone out there completely pooped out as it was and then to send them out on patrol to penetrate the German lines just to feel them out. And the Germans had put what they called *'Trip Wires'* here and there and if a guy hit one it would set like mortar shell fire, a shell that lights up like a big flare and they hang on parachutes coming down – they light the whole area up. The Germans had the high points, we were down in the valley part, the Germans had the upper part and anyway they got back but none of them got killed or shot but they went through quite an experience anyway. Then we got assigned holes and they'd been there for a long time and these holes all had telephones in them, a party line and I remember I had hole number seven. There were two of us that shared them and we could talk to one another on these lines and the first night was uneventful, we didn't have anything happen but the second night the Germans had come down and how they did it it's just a mystery to me but they actually kidnapped two of our guys out of a hole in position number one and left a note saying *'fellows, welcome boys to the tenth mountain'* and we were supposed to be top secret you know, but the Germans knew all about us. And they said *'welcome we just had to borrow a couple of your buddies so we could hear how things are going on the outside of the world'*. And boy that was quite demoralizing for a while.

Rick: The note was written in English?

Frank: Yeah and they actually got these guys, how they did it it was just amazing but they did. They picked these two guys up; they got them out of there and captured them. So anyway the next night they had new guys in hole number one (I never did see those guys again) we talked to them and one guy says *"I think I see two or three Germans crawling down along the snow"* there was a big valley maybe half a block or a block (sort of a valley) before you climbed up into the mountains and it was all sort of like moonlight because of the artificial searchlights and we could

see the shadows out there. So they said, *"we've got them zeroed in"* so the artillery's could see it was zeroed in so they bombarded the hell out of the place. Anyway the next morning they found two dead rabbits.

Rick: That was all?

Frank: Yeah, it was just the shadows form the light and those rabbits had made it and these guys were suspicious after that kidnapping out of the foxhole, which was really something. So then we got relieved there (our platoon got relieved) but I had to stay because Thor Thokels platoon, the ski platoon was…he was the top skier you know Thor Thokel he was famous in those days. It was his platoon coming up so I had stayed there and I stayed with him another week and got really acquainted with Thokel then, we talked about Norway and everything you know. Then we came back and we went on patrols. Patrols were scary as could be. We would go out on the south patrols and penetrate maybe miles into German territory and we had gotten skis by then (I forgot to mention) and I remember our unit went over about a month before the main body went over (the 10th Mountain) and I remember we went on a patrol to feel the area out, you know it was a daylight patrol to see if there were Germans in this area and it was just beautiful, beautiful country and I remember a skier by the name of Riley and he was lead skier and I was tail skier (it was about a 12 man patrol). Riley gets to the top of this big ridge and he looks over and he said there was at least a 50 man German patrol coming the other way. So we used to have skins on the bottom of our skis so we could climb and we were spread apart, about 20 feet or so apart and he passed it on *"skins off! Let's get the heck out of here"*. So that was the best I think I've ever skied. We went straight down that mountain and it was like going down Wildcat – straight down, you know at Snow Basin. We got to the bottom of the hill and got where we were safe and we all got in a group and we were sitting under a bunch of pine trees and we all looked at one another and started to laugh. We were just to go out on patrol, not to fight them or anything like that.

Rick: Were those Germans on skis too?

Frank: Yeah. So we never had any contract with them except for what Riley saw. So then the main war had started for us guys yet. We were only on patrols and all of this and that but there was a ridge in Italy that was called *'Riva Ridge'* and it looks just like the mountains here to the east, just like these mountains and they were higher than this mountain called *'Belvedere Mountain'* and they had the allies (I think the 34th Division and I've forgot the names of a couple of others – Japanese division and that), they had attacked Belvedere and they had been pushed back. They had a colored division too – a black division. I think there were three divisions that attacked that hill – Belvedere Mountain and they got put to a stand still but it was because of this Riva Ridge it was above it and it was off to one side and they could see all the movements that we made. So that was the taking so I guess that's why we went over to take the top of that ridge if we possibly could. Anyway we moved up to the base of this ridge under darkness and there was a river flowing right along this ridge and we got up there and it was Sunday night I think and we stayed all night long (the battalion of us). There houses had nobody living in them, it was just nobody's country and we stayed all day in there. The Germans could have rolled boulders down on us and could have done damage but as soon as it got dark we crossed the river and started to climb. We had to use ropes at places to get up and it took us from as soon as it got dark until five in the morning before we got just below the ridge of the mountains. It was maybe about half a block almost where we got just below the top of the mountain, it was what they called *'Taylor Rock'* it was a lot of that loose kind of rock. It's kind of hard to climb in it and it's slippery you know and anyway it got foggy. It got real foggy. It got so foggy that we surrounded one stump because we thought it was a German on the way up. We got on top and we got no resistance, we were so lucky. We could hardly see one another, the fog froze on our guns, we had to work our bolts back and forth but we got up there and assembled and since we know the Germans are up there and they got fortifications here and there and we went on patrol to knock them out. That's one of the pictures there you see. But it was foggy when we started and we went for about two blocks, we went up in the top and down sort of along that valley, just below the ridge and this is when we first got there and we never came across anything. By the way that was when we surrounded the stump we thought was a German. That's how foggy it was. But anyway we got clear back up on top again looking down into the valley below on the other side of this Riva ridge and we couldn't believe it and all of a sudden that fog started to rise up and I was sitting with Captain Neidener and I used to be a ski messenger with him – like

when we were in the states we were on radio silence, they would say *"tell B Company that the problem is off"* and boy that was neat, you could take off on your skis and go down and tell the captain of B Company without a pack and it was so fun to ski that way. But anyway I was with Neidener and the fog lifted up and we were just amazed that we hadn't had any resistance and all of a sudden the guys were coming up all over. We could see where we had been and it was astounding where we were at, we took the highest point and they were about a block and a half away down below us and I said, *"Are those Italians – Piazanos?"* I said to the captain and he looks in his binoculars and he said, *"Well if they are they're carrying German burp guns"*. Then all of sudden everything broke loose – tracers and bullets were flying, well you should have seen it. That whole place looked like the Fourth of July when we realized and they realized. But most of those German guys took off and Thor Thokel and his squad went down and they captured a bunch. I have pictures of that, of some of the German guys that he captured and that. Then we were up there for about three days and then they took Belvedere Mountain and that was weird to sit up there and watch the planes come in and drop bombs and you'd see the shells exploding then you'd hear the noise afterwards. It was just…they had a lot of casualties on that mountain. I have a brother in law that was at the island of Capri and he said that after that attack that they had asked for 5,000 replacements, that's how many guys. It was just a lot. There was a lot of guys that got hit up on Riva Ridge too but right where we hid out we were so fortunate that we got up when it was foggy.

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Frank: The reason we were successful I think in getting up there was because the Germans didn't expect us to come up the cliffs like we did and that's why we were successful and that's why they didn't have much of a lookout in that area. Anyway taking Riva Ridge made it so that we were able to take Belvedere Mountain. After we had been there for about…I was up on Riva Ridge for about I guess three days or so, we came back down (maybe four days) but we came back down to the valley below and took a break. We were still under artillery fire and I took pictures. I have pictures of Thor Thorkel and his platoon doing exercises and all that, we even did calisthenics. Then Thokel asked me if I'd take a picture of his platoon, he was Platoon Leader (there were four platoons in the company and I was in the third platoon and I think

Thokel's was the first platoon) anyway I took a picture of the platoon. All of these guys were like one big family; we'd been together for over a year or so together you know.

Rick: Go back to where the fog was raising and you saw all these German troops down and tell us a little more detail that ensued right after that.

Frank: Well, it wasn't too much of a battle actually. What happened was the Germans too surrounded one of the platoons on the edge and that's where those pictures were that you see, we were going into rescue them.

Rick: So they didn't just start firing at one another then after the fog lifted?

Frank: Oh yeah, there was a lot of gunfire. A lot of small arms fire. Small arms fire is more scary than the artillery fire almost because you know you're getting shot right at, you know when the bullets hit right around you.

Rick: So they were shooting at you and you were shooting at them?

Frank: Yeah, we were both you know but of course there was more of us it seemed like. We had gotten the upper part and they were down below us and then they took off. A lot of them got away from us and Riva Ridge was slanted down, you could almost drive up it from the other side but those cliffs that we had to come up and I remember I took a picture when one of the planes dropped a bomb down below, you know one of those P47's. We seen a lot of that later but anyway Riva Ridge was taken and I mentioned that one of the platoons got surrounded by the Germans to our flank so we went in the next day to try to help them out and the lieutenant (I think his name was Lieutenant Luce if I remember right) he called down in the valley for artillery fire but that's difficult kind of firing to stay up a cliff and have the shells come down so they had what they called *'Radio Shells'* or that's what they told us anyway and these shells would go up so high and then they'd turn and come down and they'd get about ten feet above the ground and they'd explode. That saved us from having to go in, we were just about ready to go in but with the bombardment from that the Germans got taken over. So anyway Riva Ridge got

secured in about two days and then Belvedere and then after that…I was telling about how I remember we exercised and just kind of played it easy, we dug holes and we had our foxholes and everything down below because we were still within artillery range and we were to make another big attack on another mountain there in a couple of days. The day we were to attack it was cold, there was snow but not much and it got postponed so I remember having it postponed for just a short time and it seemed wonderful to have that much more time to live. But the next day (they postponed it two days in a row), the reason they postponed it the second day was because Franklin Roosevelt died and for some reason or another they postponed it and that was almost a blow to think that the president had died. I don't know, he was thought of greatly. Then the third day we attacked and I remember it got sort of foggy and it started to snow when we were to make this attack. It's funny, our artillery was just bombarded at the top, we were at the bottom climbing up and they would let up and you were just hoping that they'd keep bombarding until you got there almost to keep the Germans down. Anyway we got up on top and attacked and the Germans were here and there and God I'll never forget it. They were coming right over the hill at us and I remember firing at the guys, there were three of them coming right at me and I fired one shot it seemed like and they all three fell. But anyway we got up further and there was a gully and there was one of those ski huts up on top, there were a lot of huts like that that the Italians would go skiing to during peacetime and there were Germans in it. So they said we were going to pour small arms fire into this house and the lieutenant would say, *"I volunteer you and I volunteer you"* because we used to laugh and they used to say *"whose going to volunteer"*. So I can't remember who the other guy was but I was one of them. They were shooting fire and we went right up this hill to this house and they were shooting at the building to keep the German's heads down so they wouldn't see us coming up. So I got clear up to the door and they had shutters on the windows and right by the door was a shuttered window and all you could do was just shoot. But the door was of course bolted and locked and I took a hand grenade off and I reached over and I threw it inside the window through the shutter and it wasn't a very big building or big house and out the back door come ten German guys and boy they came flying out of there before that grenade went off and I ended up taking them all as my prisoners.

Rick: All then of them?

Frank: Yeah, all then of them and I don't know what the hell happened to the other guy, I remember they just kept going, pushing you know. So I knew that if you've got prisoners you get them back to the rear if you can. So I had these guys and boy they were classy dressed German guys you know but they cooperated with me. I was lucky, I think they were kind of glad that they could get out of it; you know it was pretty bad for them. I got them down the side of the hill. First we got counter attacked by the Germans and there was this big V-shaped valley there about the length of a block to get to the top, to get down on the other side where our artillery was and stuff. But this was all hard packed snow and the Germans counter attacked with artillery shells and the shells would come one right after another spaced about 50 or 60 feet apart coming right down towards us and I remember these German guys just laid down and they'd just clawed at the snow to get their face as flat as could be because these shells were coming towards us and I thought *"my god they're as scared as I am"*. But I remember the shell that looked like it was going to hit and I kept looking down because these were my prisoners and I'd look over to keep an eye on them at the same time and these guys were flat. I remember I laid to the side and I looked up to the side of the mountain and I thought *'my god the next shell will be just about right on us'* and to this day I don't know whether it was a big dud or whether it was a big chunk of a shell from the other one but about 30 feet about me up on the side of this V-shaped mountain a big indentation went into the snow. It didn't go off and the next shell blew off down below us so we were just lucky you know. So I finally go these guys over on the other side and got them down and we came to a stream of water and a couple of the German guys wanted to know if they could get some water in their canteen and we were told don't ever give them anything, be harsh and all that. But I said, *"Sure go ahead"* so they filled their canteens up, about three Germans and I remember they thanked me and I remember I admired them because their dress was so classy. They looked really sharp.

Rick: Could you speak German?

Frank: No, I could speak some, well there are some words in Norwegian that when I couldn't say it in English I'd say it to them in Norwegian and they understood. I finally got to where our artillery was down below and I'd seen some guns there that I'd never seen before. This one gun

was like a tank but it was about three times the size of a tank but it was just like a tank but it had a huge gun on it. I don't know if it was a 105 or what but I have a picture of one of them though that I took later. But I got them back to where the captain was with the medics and all that and I remember these Germans all had their hands behind their head and they were all model prisoners as far as that goes and two of them had P38 revolvers on them and they could have easily got them out and shot me, but I think they were happy to give up. I remember one medic run up to this one guy and he ripped their insignias off and they all had neat wristwatches. The Germans had real good equipment; good stuff and then the captain said, *"Hey if anybody get anything he gets it"* and I said, *"I don't want none"*. Thorkel had taken a P38 from a German but when we were back there right at the same time this had happened news came over that Thor Thorkel had gotten killed up ahead, him and Takola and god that was a blow. Anyway I caught up with my outfit the same day after I got rid of these German guys and I couldn't believe when I walked through the field, I walked clear through this field and I had my camera too and I walked through this battlefield you could call it and I was amazed how many guys were laying around dead. I couldn't believe it – Germans and American guys. One American guy had crawled up an irrigation canal just on one side and he looked out and his eyes were still open and he had a bullet right through the forehead. Anyway I caught up with my outfit that evening and some of the guys seen me and they were up high on a hill there and they hollered down to me *"we're up here"* and I started going through some brush and they started to holler *"there was a Tedeski"*, they called the Germans *'Tedeski's'* down by a well, down in there where I was heading *"so watch it!"* So I went through this brush carefully and there was a German guy sitting right by the well but he didn't have a gun or nothing and I came out in the open from the brush and the guys were coming down the mountain then too and he held his hands up and I remember he came up with us to where the guys were at, to where they were dug in at and he sat down and he pulled his wallet out and showed us a picture of his wife and his three kids sitting on the front lawn of his house in Germany. They treated him real good; they gave him some food and everything. It was just one thing right after another and finally we got out of the mountains.

Rick: Where was it that you said you had a buddy that was shot right in front of you?

Frank: Well that was at the very last hours of the war, that was in the Alps. Anyway we got to city outskirts to go down into the valley and we were digging in. As soon as you stop you dig a hole because of the artillery and Quigley by buddy he said *"to hell with this, I'm not digging a hole"* he says *"I'm just gonna…"* (There were trees here and everything) and he says, *"I'm not digging a hole, every time I get my hole finished we move out"*. I said *"go ahead, if we get shelled I'm gonna dig my hole"* I said to him *"you'll get shelled and you'll get killed because you're too lazy to dig a hole"*. He looked live Van Johnson, he was a real nice guy and a terrific skier and he said, *"oh okay"* so he digs his hole and they said, *"we're moving out"*. We got out into the clear and we got into a big sort of a valley (this is way up high in the mountains) and we started getting out in the middle of this thing and all heck broke loose. Shells everywhere were coming in from all directions, it seemed like you know and that's when I told you about that one guy that got down in the irrigation canal (oh no that was another time, I've mixed him up). I remember we jumped into an irrigation canal too, me and a fellow by the name of *'Blaine Hunter'* he was our sergeant and he was a terrific guy, he lives in Provo – I think he's a Bishop down there or something, he was I don't know if he is now. But we were both laying in this irrigation canal and we were looking out because that was down below and the shells were coming in and Blaine said *"oh no Quigley got it"* and Quigley was about 50 feet away from me or from us and there were big deep shell holes or pretty deep, you know they were smoking and god they just really bombarded that place and Quigley had fell down and I got out of this irrigation canal and I ran like hell and I drug Quigley into this hole that was still smoking even. He had blood coming down his sleeve and onto his hands and I thought *'god he's lucky he just got hit in the arm'* and he looked as pale as could be though, I'll never forget that. I stayed with him for a minute or so and they said *"we're moving out, get out, get the hell out of there"* because of the gun fire and everything and then the medics were notified behind us of where Quigley was at and I never did see Quigley again. They sent him home, he had been hit in the stomach and in the arm and in the leg. But he was okay, I've heard from him; you know we've corresponded since then. He never came back, they sent him back home he was wounded that bad. We got out of the mountains and we were making a long skirmish line across the valley, it just seemed so wonderful to not worry about somebody above you looking down at you and it was all flat country and we had better plane protection and everything and about the first half hour we were out of the mountains we got news that a German tank division was heading our

way and I thought *'oh brother'*. But that never materialized for us guys but the planes came in and they saw us down there and they thought we were Germans and so they came in and they strafed us.

Rick: They were American planes?

Frank: American planes, uh huh and of course we had what they called *'smoke shell'*, it was a yellow smoke shell that meant friendly troops. They killed a couple of the horses that were out in the field there but I don't think anybody got hit or any of the guys that I know of. I remember that night I had a horse steak, I went down to the CP for a minute to take some pictures and they said *"you wanna steak?"* and the Italians had taken these horses that got killed and hung them up and made food out of them. I thought *'it tastes just like the other stuff'*. Then we got passed that, we got going the next day and we came to a big irrigation canal and it was a big modern V-shaped concrete canal and to get across it there was about 15 from one side to the other and it was this V-shaped concrete and they had poles laying on the side – 15 to 20 feet poles and how you got across you took the pole and stood at the edge and pole-vaulted over on the other side and slid down. We were spread quite a bit apart, each guy and I got to this thing and I got up there and I pole vaulted and slid down the other side and god I got shot at. There was a house up ahead and there was a haystack, it wasn't a very big haystack, it was medium sized but I ran behind the haystack. I had a B-A-R at that time, when Quigley got hit he had a B-A-R and it took his automatic because I liked that better, it had better fire power. It was heavier but I liked it. So I got small arms fire from that house and the house was about 100 yards away from the haystack so I leaned out and I fired down at the house put a burst of shells through the windows and stuff, it was just a small house but I didn't get any repeat. So when I was down at the haystack we were told to feel them out, we were told to burn them really, set fire to them but I hated to do that to the farmers. But anyway I probed into the haystack and god out comes three Germans. One was a German SS Colonel and his two aides and he had the most beautiful briefcase, carved with a swastika and everything on it and they got out the other side of the haystack and they started to run for that house and I hollered for them to stop and they kept going so I put a burst of bullets up in front of them and of course that stopped them. And pretty soon the rest of the guys pole-vaulted over and Captain Neidener…I brought them over to him.

It's a long story and it's kind of a big country you know, but I got them down there and I remember the Captain picked up a bicycle, he was sitting on it when I brought these three Germans with their hands behind their necks and the Captain said *"My God Mjaatvedt"*, he says *"you've got a German SS Colonel"*. And he had this briefcase and they took his briefcase and they were on the go, we had to keep going you know and he says *"God this is terrific"* and he's says, *"We'll take them back"*. But before he did this he pulls his 45 out and he points it right at this Colonel and that Colonel looked like he was 70 years old, he was straight as an arrow, he was skinning but he had million wrinkles. He pointed that gun right to his chin and I thought *'God you're not going to shoot him?'* And he says, *"what's you name and rank"* and all that and he told him but that was all – name, rank and serial number. He wouldn't divulge nothing else. So the Captain said, *"okay Mjaatvedt, they're your prisoners take them back"*. And that's how…you know you don't know where in the hell you're at or nothing but that's the way it was. So I thought *'boy this is the second time I've had prisoners like this'*. So we all pole-vaulted back across and they walked down the path and I knew of course the rear echelons would be coming up, the rear units so we walked and we walked for about…I had what they call a *'pile jacket'* it had fur on one side and I had my *'whites'*. They were brown but we could reverse them and they would be white on the other side. I drank all the water out of my canteen and we came to a well and I had these three guys up ahead and so I went over and I filled my canteen up from the well then I stepped back and I said to the to German aides (they were just young guys you know, they had blue uniforms and the Colonel had *'Africa Corp'* written on his khaki uniform, boy I admired him though he was some guy really) so I told the German's *"fill your canteens up"* so they filled them up and then they thanked you know and I told the Colonel (and I guess he was maybe provoked that I didn't ask him first) but he clicked his heels and said *"Naytock"* and I thought *'my God that guy must have been in Africa'* because he had *'Africa Corp'* written on him. Of course I was really hot, I didn't want to lose all my equipment, it would get cold at night and stuff but I was hot. So we started out and we walked and walked and walked and there for a while we didn't see anybody, I was alone with these three guys and you know I just had to keep going that way. We came to another well and repeated it and that Colonel refused me again.

Rick: The word *'Naytock'* was just like *'no'*?

Frank: '*No thanks'* – Tock means thanks. He clicked his heels though and bowed to me kind of but I thought *'why didn't he take the water'* I couldn't believe it. Anyway shortly after we got down and in the distance I could see trucks and stuff – troops, you know American stuff and I was so glad. Finally a big truck pulls up and you could see they were putting up a big stockade where captured German's were being held. They were stringing up barbed wire fences and everything and this truck pulls up and a great big heavy-set guy was standing there in the back of the truck and he looks down at me (and the truck stopped) and he says *"my god soldier, do you know what you've got there? You've got a SS Colonel"*, and he says *"let me take care of him for you"* and he picks his rifle up and he aims it at him. I couldn't believe it you know and I says *"if you shoot my prisoner I'm going to recommend you for the front lines"*. I don't know if he would have shot him or not but that's twice that guy had a gun pointed at him.

Rick: He was intending to shoot the Colonel?

Frank: Yeah, he was going to shoot him you know; at least he acted like he was. Finally I got rid of them. They came to the stockade and I took my camera and tried to take a picture of the Colonel. I tried to do it once before and boy he just turned his back, he wouldn't let me. So I didn't push any further but when we got to the stockade he leaned up against it and he slid down and I thought *'my God how that man walked all that way without drinking water is beyond me'* and why he didn't take water I can't understand but I was relieved of them. So I thought *'well I'm not catching up with my outfit the same day'* like I did the first time so I stayed in the church house. There was a church right close by and there was big American artillery everywhere and god that night all hell broke loose on the artillery fire. The Germans counter attacked with artillery fire. I didn't think there would be anything standing. I thought the church would go any minute but luckily it didn't. They never hit the church and I looked out as soon as it got daybreak, you know I looked out to see what the damage was and everything was going along like nothing had happened. It was just amazing, and they were having chow line out there and they were having pancakes. The artillery unit don't have to…all we had were K-Rations you know. So I had pancakes that morning and then I caught up with my outfit. Then we got to where the Po River is and we were on the outskirts of the Po, we were maybe just from here

down to maybe 1,000 yards away and we had been leading the attack – I was in the 86th and the 87th had to lead the attack. They had to go over the Po River first and when they started they brought in big artillery pieces right up to where we were and that's why I took a picture of that one gun and they were here and there spotted around and they were huge those guns. They said *"these guns wont fire unless it's an emergency"* and I remember I dug a foxhole (and they even brought up our mail) and I remember I got a little package with some cookies in it from a girl that I knew in Texas and her name was Virginia Wilder, she was a terrific gal. She was Student Body Vice President of the University of Texas and I met her down there. She sent 33 pounds of cake and stuff to the guys (later on, they sent a whole bunch to my platoon and that) but we had to cross that Po River and the 87th went across first and that sky just got black with anti-aircraft fire. I couldn't believe it that the artillery fire shot airbursts, they'd throw shells and small fragments and they went around in boats, rowboats, any kind of boats they could get. I went over in some captured ducks that the Germans had had laying there that we got, they're almost just like those assault boats (I have some pictures of that). They just bombarded everything and we did too and finally we got on the other side. We went over peacefully but some of the guys – I have a letter that a guy wrote me that said it was the worst experience he'd ever had. He went to the Korean War afterwards and he wrote back after and said *"never will I forget when I crossed the Po River, what an experience all that shelling was"*. But we got across the Po and they brought trucks across and they said that we were going to go in trucks and head for the Brenner Pass and try to blockade the Germans from retreated through there, that's the way they had to go because they were retreating out of Italy. So we got in trucks the next day and we drove for about 25 minutes and I remember I was in the tail end of this convoy and there was two or three specks up in the sky ahead and I could see them coming down and they were German planes and they were coming right down and strafing our whole convoy. I remember we all piled out of the trucks and took off for the fields and they just ate up those trucks those three planes. But they all got shot down. They had the planes that looked like a P38, but we shot two of those planes down. We could see them away in the distance. So then we walked on foot and we got up to Lake Gotta that's the mouth of the Brenner Pass and they have tunnels all along there. It was just beautiful country of course we were not in a beautiful time in the season it was in March or April then and it rained a lot. So they had tunnels that went all along that lake and it was just gorgeous and the Germans had blown the first tunnel up so you couldn't go through and

they'd retreated through the tunnels. So I don't know where they got these ducks at or these boats but we got into some of these boats and went around that first tunnel in boats. The mountains went right into the water up there with those tunnels. There was a town like from here to Wainsguard away or about a mile or so away from us and they opened fire on us and I remember we laughed and we said *"well we're in the Navy now too"* because the shells would hit out into the water you know. Anyway none of us got hit. One of the other company's got hit, one of them they said, I never seen it but we climbed up and got into these tunnels and they were not blown up. I remember I stayed overnight in one tunnel before we attacked this town and we started to attack about…it was like being way up above the mouth of Ogden Canyon looking down at the Rainbow Gardens where these Germans had fortified and we started down that. It was real steep coming down that. We didn't have any artillery fire because the tunnels were blown up.

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Rick: Tell us about why you didn't have the ski equipment.

Frank: We didn't have ski equipment later because there was no snow, it was just a regular infantry but when we got to these tunnels we went around this one tunnel and stayed overnight in one and then moved out and got up on the side of the mountain to go down and attack these Germans right at the mouth of the Bremmer Pass. We started down in a large group and they started to fire anti-aircraft fire at us. That was unbelievable, you could see the shells actually coming up and then exploding in the air about as high as a telephone pole or so they explode. And I remember we laid flat, all of us and I put my hand on top of my helmet to protect me and not one of us except the cook – he got hit in the heel with a piece of shrapnel. But they withdrew us; we called the attack off because we didn't have a chance. So we waited until night and I remember the guy that's on the front cover of my book Guymon and I we climbed up on top of a big rock and we were looking down there, it was like looking down about a mile down below us and something started to explode down there. It was like a tank or maybe a bazooka at a tank or something but it was like a tank on fire and exploding because of the shells that were in it. But I remember we were standing there and all of a sudden all around us *'boom, boom'*, explosions

everywhere and I remember I was standing on this high rock and we just jumped off the rock in the dark. Neither one of us got hurt, it's amazing really so we just stayed put until the next morning. That shelling killed a whole bunch of the guys that were just below us and they were laying around without a scratch on their faces – some were sitting up just like they were resting and god it seemed like there were about 10 or 12 guys laying around there, you know dead just sitting there. The explosions had just come in that quick. So anyway we moved down but the Germans had vacated, they retreated from the town so we pulled into the town then we sent my platoon (I read in Readers Digest that my platoon was the furthest one to ever penetrate up into there – I've got that somewhere), but anyway we went around and we came to a place and it looked just like the Rainbow Gardens up there when you're going down the highway along the turn where there's a null of the mountain there, a hill that sits out in front and you have to go around it then you see the Rainbow Gardens. So the Lieutenant says *"hey Mjaatvedt take your squad around and feel that place out before we bring the main body around"*. So there were about ten of us that went around the other side, we got around the other side and no kidding there were bullets all around our feet and not one of us got hit but there were bullets everywhere. God we all ran back the other side of the hill and they said *"well we've got to get something up there on top, we've got to get up on top and then look over and see"*, we didn't know where it was coming from, of course there were high mountains up ahead of us. So I looked down and I'm about 100 yards away and I looked down and Richardson's down on the highway right where we had crossed and he got down on one knee and shot up in the hills and I thought *'my god he must see those Germans'* and he empties his rifle. He fired every one of his shells and the clip flew out I remember and then he ran across the street and I thought *'god he's daring to do that right out in the open'*. The hill was so steep and they told us to get a A20 Machine Gun up on top and I had some A20 ammunition on me (a couple of belts that I hung around and one of the other guys had a machine gun) and it was steep as hell and we were climbing and Guymon was to one side over to my left a little bit and I looked and we were just about to the top of the hill and I was going to look up and peep over (it was that hot from that small arms fire – that's scarier than hell that stuff) and here comes Richardson running right up the side and stands right up in front of me and I says *"God Richardson's, get down"* and I grabbed him by the ankle and he got a bullet right through his back. It killed him right there, I drug him down and sat him and there was blood through his nostrils and Richards was gun and why he did that I don't know. Then about

half an hour later we got down and they told us to dig in right there and the British would fire what they called *'British Longtoms'* over the tops of the mountains and have them come down and they explode in the air. But they were accurate so they said *"dig holes"* and I remember the fruit trees were blooming, the blossoms were out and everything down in the flat part, we had moved down sort of where it flat where the highway was going right down below us there out of the Brenner Pass and we dug in and here comes a German jeep about an hour or so later and this is after Richardson had been killed. There were five German guys and they waved to us and I remember Gerber the Medic was standing right by the road and I was about 50 yards back or so by my hole and Gerber was standing right by the road and he waved back and he turned around and looked at us and said *"god they're Tedeski's"* and we were amazed that there was a vehicle, you know we didn't have anything. Then D Company below us opened up fire on them, killed every one of them. It was sad really. Then a few minutes later a guy by the name of Robertson, he had a field phone and I was sitting right with him and he said *"god give me your pencil but down yell"* and he hands it to me and it says *'cancel all patrols, cease all fire'* and a few minutes later the church bells started to ring and the war was over!

Rick: So you were right…

Frank: Richardson got killed just an hour before the damn war was over. I guess that's about it, well we went back and I have pictures of it when we went back to take it easy and then we got alerted to go to Yugoslavia because of the Serbs. It was on May 20th, it was on my birthday. So we went there and stayed up there for about a month and a half, up in the Alps. I got a pass to go to Norway and then it got cancelled at the last minute because we were alerted to come back home. So we came home and we got to Port Patrick Henry, the same port and news came (we'd gotten out of the ships and we were in port and I was laying in a bunk) and the newspaper kids came in around five o'clock and there were big headlines *"Bomb Dropped on Hiroshima"* and I thought *'god can a bomb blow a whole city up?'* you know and stuff like that. Anyway we got a 30 day delay en route so we got to go home and when I got to Salt Lake City that night they had extra papers out saying the war was over and that Japan had surrendered. So I got home the day the war ended. I got home for a while and I stayed for about 30 days and then I went back and I was an MP for six months later. Our division got broke up and I didn't have enough points so I

had to go be an MP in Colorado Springs. I had a lot of fun though and then we got to come home.

Rick: So I understand the 10th Mountain Division was training to go to Japan in case they were to invade there.

Frank: Yes. They say in our records and that that we lost more guys than any division in Europe in the period of time that we were in there. The 34th Division I think was almost completely wiped out and renewed again. Imagine that – 17,000 guys and stuff like that.

Rick: You were right in the middle of a battle when you heard that VE-Day was happening? Is that correct?

Frank: Well yeah, a guy was just killed right in front of me about an hour before the war ended. We didn't know it you know, we didn't know the war was over with and neither did the Germans I guess there. Anyway it ended that day.

Rick: Just go in and tell us again about where you got the messages to *'cease fire'* and then you heard the church bells ring and how did you celebrate?

Frank: Well after Richardson got killed we were told to dig in and just stay there because the British would fire shells up ahead. They claimed that the Germans were really really fortified up through the Brenner Pass, it was unbelievable. Somebody was saying if you've seen the show *'Guns of Navarro'*, they have big guns in the cliffs there that would have had a heck of a time to have gotten up through there but anyway I was out sitting by my foxhole and Robertson's who had a field radio and he said *"god Mjaadvedt give me your pencil"* and I gave him my pen and he wrote down and he said *"don't yell when you read that"* and it said *'cancel all patrols, cease all fire'*. And he said, *"don't yell but what do you think of that?"* Just then the church bells started to ring and the war was over with. Then we were told to watch out for the Germans because Germans still up ahead of us still didn't know maybe the war was over with. So we were to watch out for German patrols and that. Then we were also told to watch out for the

Russians. They were coming in from another direction and a few days later we had Russian soldiers standing in our chow line up there.

Rick: When you heard that the war was over how did you celebrate?

Frank: We didn't…none of us shot guns in the air or nothing like that like you see over there in Palestine and all that where they celebrate by shooting, but we didn't.

Rick: They told you that the Russians were coming and you had to be careful because they didn't know if the Russians were going to attack Americans?

Frank: Well they would think we were Germans. They were afraid, you know *'be real careful'* because they didn't know the war was over and neither did the Germans that were there but the Russians were coming from the other way but just in case you know. But we did have Russian soldiers within a few days in our chow line.

Rick: Tell us about your first contact with the Russians.

Frank: Well I never talked to any of them I just seen a couple of them and somebody said, *"Those guys are Russians"*. I thought maybe they were some of our own guys at first, they didn't seem too different, in their uniforms you didn't notice too much of anything. So we stayed up there for awhile and what was scary was when we went to Yugoslavia and they told us to rearm again and everything like that and that the service was pretty tough guys. But we got out of that too. We got put on full alert there in Yugoslavia and the Serbs told us to get out, they gave us orders to get out. They told all the people not to fraternize with us but it went the opposite way you know. I went to the city of Trieste too for a couple of days and I got to go to Venice too about three or four times while I was up there – on a pass and I've got pictures of that too.

Rick: Well Frank that's interesting, we appreciate you sharing those thoughts with us.

Frank: There's so much, but that's just sort of highlights of my experience.

Sally: Were you married when you were in the army?

Frank: No, I came home and I met my wife.

Sally: What were your thoughts when the war ended and you were coming back to America?

Frank: Well we were coming back to America and the war hadn't ended. It had ended in Europe but not in Japan so we were still involved in the invasion of Japan when we were going across the sea you know, coming back home we were still to go to Japan for the fight. But that ended when we got to Camp Patrick Henry. They dropped a bomb there in Hiroshima and the papers came out that very first day that we had arrived in America. So we figured that the war would be over pretty darn quick which it was.

Rick: Did you celebrate then? What happened after you heard that?

Frank: On our way in the Po Valley we captured a German convoy and it was loaded with champagne and I never thought I'd ever see any of that but when the war was over they issued them out. I got three or four bottles (oh I wish I had them now) and they had the German Swastika printed on them and it said *'reserved for the German SS Elite'* and I brought home these bottles and I remember when the war ended I went out to Clee Sanders place (he used to have that skating rink) and he lived in Roy then and I was out there when…Japan had, there were a couple of *'false'* surrenders too, you know the false alarms but the official one came when I was at his house. The cars were honking and everything driving back and forth to Salt Lake, they'd hoot and everything. We turned the radio on and it was really official this time. There had been a couple of false reports at first. So I went out and got this one bottle of champagne and I opened it up and we drank some champagne.

Rick: On VJ-Day huh?

Frank: Yes and I can tell you a lot of funny stories about that champagne but I remember we had a party at the Weber Club up in Belmond and all the guys, we had a champagne party and Herb Henley and some of those guys who really knew their liquor and they said *"boy why don't we buy some good champagne instead of this cheap stuff"* and I had an empty bottle of that German champagne so I poured some of the cheap stuff into it and I went out and I said *"do you want to taste something that's good?" "Yeah!"* and I told them the story about getting this champagne over there so I poured a little bit in each glass and they all tasted it, all four or five of the guys and I remember Herb looked at the other guys and he said *"now there is champagne*!"

Rick: It was the same stuff huh?

Frank: It was the same stuff.

Sally: Did you ski here at Snow Basin as a kid?

Frank: Yeah.

Rick: Tell me about learning how to ski when you were growing up. Did you go to Alta or did you go to Snow Basin, or where did you ski?

Frank: Well my folks, they had about 19 ski jumpers that came from Norway that came to the United States and put on exhibitions and when we lived up on 25th Street three or four of the guys would come…my dad, boy he got in with those guys right away you know and invited them up to the house and so they'd come up and have dinner on Sunday and they'd talk about war that might come and stuff like that. And there was prohibition then, you know liquor was forbidden then but they were ski jumpers and they jumped on Ecker Hill in Salt Lake and then they built Becker Hill up Ogden Canyon and Haulber Bjungor that one guy that I have pictures of Haulber Bjungor (I didn't take them, Glen Parent the newspaper guy gave them to me) but he got killed on a motorcycle. He more or less started Snow Basin and that. He was a beautiful jumper. But anyway us guys started to jump, we started to go up and then finally we got a jump up by Weber College and they built an A-hill up there too but they never used it. It never snowed, that was

out by the mouth of Taylor Canyon. I'd go up and stand on the platform and pretend like I was going off of it in the summer. I'd just kind of look; you know you could jump 250 or more. But the other hill we had we could jump over up to 200 feet on it. But you can still see that cut out of the mountain up there.

Rick: Was Alf Angen part of that group?

Frank: I never met Alf Angen but when I came to Camp Hale and Quigley that guy that looked like Van Johnson they had been on a two day hike when I first got there and they came in and parked their skis and came up and they were all rosy cheeked and nobody was bitching or nothing I couldn't believe it and I says to Quigley *"how do you like this outfit?"* And he looks at me and he says, *"this is the best outfit in the United States Army"*, and that made me feel pretty good. Then he says *"I guess you know whose place you're taking"* and I says *"who's?"* and he says *"Sver Angon's place"* and I said *"Sver Angon, was he in this outfit?"* He said *"yeah"* and I said, *"What happened to him?"* and he said, *"Well he hurt his knee"* or something and he was transferred somewhere else. I never met him but I met Hans Georg of Switzerland and the Tacola brothers from Finland – the ski jumpers, the one Tacola brother got killed with Thor Tholkel. I couldn't believe I got in the same unit with Thro Tholkel and he was just the hero of skiing in them days. Yeah it was a terrific outfit!

Rick: Well thanks very much Frank.