



Louis Slama

United States Army

Sergeant

European Theater

Dates Interviewed: 11/16/04 and 8/10/05

Location of Interview:
Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, UT

Interviewer:
Geoffrey Panos

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

Geoff: Let's pick up the story from that long night where you were on the machine gun in the foxhole.

Louis: How we got into the area, we had to pull out (when we got into the Battle of the Bulge) the whole division was pulled out of a hill outside of Malmady up through there because we had no heavy fire power. So Gavin decided at that point and time to pull out the division and move into Iria (a little town of Iria). It was very small, it was one of the places where we felt or the division felt that we could stop the Germans cold. We knew that they were going to follow us all the way through so when we got to Iria we set out parameters of 504's on the left flank of us, the 508 was there, I was in F Company. E Company was in reserve and H Company was on the other side of us.

Geoff: Tell us about the terrain.

Louis: The terrain at that point in time in area was all mostly farmland. In fact all the fields at that time were all...people never had a chance to come in and bring their hay. We had haystacks all over the place. It was flat for maybe a mile and a half and then past that you had trees and forests and then you see all the farmland had all these root cellars in (you know that the people kept their stuff in the wintertime). So when we set up the perimeter we dug in fast and we were told at that time that "*this is where we make our final stand*". We either died or we beat the Germans and were able to go on with our offensive at that time.

Geoff: Tell us about your weapons.

Louis: Well we had been setup for about two or three days just before Christmas. We set up our own so we setup outposts. We knew the Germans were there, we could hear the tanks moving and we knew they building up for a big offense and at that time I told my squad (I was squad leader) I had the machine gun and the bazooka and Thornton had the 60 caliber mortars of that squad and so we set up our perimeters and set up 30 caliber machine guns and Zulkey was on the far right of us. He was also...actually he was the staff sergeant, I kind of reported to him

because I was at that time only a above sergeant and we had already taken a lot of the traces out of that. But we knew and at that point in time somehow or another when the outpost was there on Christmas and so we said *“if the Germans started attacking, set all of the haystacks on fire”*. We had them all setup to fire and then at nighttime we could see, you know when you set the haystacks on fire you can see whatever is happening.

Geoff: Was there snow on the ground?

Louis: Oh yeah there was snow on the ground, maybe a couple – about a foot and a half of snow on the ground, you know that they had. And we knew that the tanks would probably be the lead point in the attack and the infantry would come behind us. So we got the order, all of a sudden Owen says *“well it looks like they’re going to hit us tonight”*. So the guys came running back and set up all the haystacks, most of the haystacks and it was kind of a half-moon day, you know, very calm. No wind, you could see the snow sparkling and you know, it was a life or death and we knew that somehow or another we’re going to have to do something so sure enough we set the haystacks afire and all of a sudden we heard a lot of banging, screaming and yelling and the tanks started rolling up and the infantry. And what they had, they were like...when we looked up it looked like 10,000 white ants. They had all their white uniforms on and everything else and they started attacking, we saw the tanks coming up and we waited for awhile until they got maybe a half a mile closer to us as they came in. Finally they opened up and everybody was running and you know with the snow they were more or less at a disadvantage so we started...all of a sudden we started opening up on them. I took the little tripod so we could move the 30 caliber machine guns. So as this was going on I turned around and the kid that was in with me said *“Sarg I’m hit”*, so I pulled him out and he got hit right through the chest and I could tell and could hear the wheezing you know of the air getting in his lungs and I pulled him out of the foxhole and I started yelling for Medic. Everybody was yelling for *“medic, medic!”* You know, guys were dying and they said *“I want my mother”* or something like that and so I pulled him out and I got back into the thing and I started firing. All I did is fire that thing back and forth and I mean that 30 caliber was so hot you could see the red from the bullets you know; from the barrel it was so red from firing so fast. I kept firing and we kept hearing screaming and finally the tanks overran the infantry and they ran right over the top of the foxholes so what’s his name

was in reverse behind us – E Company which was Pollet, he was the company commander so they pushed them back so they turned around and came back and came right back over the top of our foxholes again. In the meantime we've already had the infantry guys already pushed down, they couldn't move because we had so much fire and all of a sudden daybreak started coming and I was sitting there looking down at the barrel of the gun smoking and we could still hear the cries and the Germans out there "*American, American save us!*" Comrade was their big thing and I looked out there and in front of us there was maybe 75 or 100 Gerry's laying down in the snow with their white caps and just as I was moving around about maybe 50 or 60 feet I had the thing and I was just kind of fooling around with the gun to make sure it was still workable and this German was laying there. I don't think he was hit or anything else because he was smack right in the snow, he jumps up and points this Bazooka – they had these one-man bazooka's, you know with a tube on it and you shoot it once and then you turn the tube away and each infantryman at that time at the Bulge had one of those – once you shoot them you throw them away, well this guy jumps up right in front of me and points this thing right at my foxhole and I opened it up and I just went zoom and I cut him right in half and he went down. And that's the first time I ever saw one of those Bazooka's, so we found out that those things were pretty deadly. So we repelled the first attack and then we got orders not to shoot. The commander for the Pageant division asked if they could go and pick up their troops, you know their dead and stuff like that so we allowed them to come. The next night we had that same thing back and forth, for three days they attacked us. They attacked us and we lost a lot of guys and all.

Geoff: What were your casualties?

Louis: We lost probably at that time we lost at Erway we probably lost 35 to 40 percent of our people at that point in time.

Geoff: Was this the young German soldier you were previously talking about?

Louis: Yeah and after that we kind of went out to find out what it was you know, I went out of the foxhole after I killed this guy and they were all laying there and I turned this one guy over that was laying in the snow and I turned him over and he couldn't have been more than 15 years

old or 16 around there and we kind of turned and we went through there trying to see if there were any casualties in our guys but most of those times the guys that were hit probably went into shock and during that froze and died, you know they were frozen already from the bitter cold that we had. Then we allowed the Germans to come in and after that, right after that January the sixth or seventh we went on the offensive up through the Ardines into the forest, you know through the Sigfreid line and went on the offense at that point in time. Because we stopped them cold right there, I think that was probably one of the battles that turned (in our estimation) turned our days at the Battle of the Bulge around. They took enormous casualties because you know you had...people don't realize you had 80,000 casualties in three months. 80,000 casualties, that's unbelievable and you know the Germans had 130,000 so you can imagine in the three days of continuous fighting and a lot of that was people, you know guys get hit and the medics never got to them and they die, you know and they freeze to death like Polette. When Lieutenant Polette got hit up there near Irea and he got hit with an 88 too and he went into shock and he died.

Geoff: People don't understand how cold it was.

Louis: Oh, COLD! I mean I have never been that cold in my life. I could always remember, you know we didn't have decent clothing and we still had our boots and it got to the point where...you know the sleeping bags that we had, the Marin sleeping bags? So when a guy got killed we take his sleeping bag and we take the sleeping bag and we cut the bottom of the sleeping bag off, just at the bottom. Cut the legs and arms over here and then put the sleeping bag on and then zip it up and then put your jacket over the top of that. That's how we used the sleeping bags in order to keep warm. Our boots were, you know if your boots get wet and frozen then they freeze, there's no way in the world. When we were taking this town I remember we were situated in a forest there and one of the worst things you can do is to dig a foxhole in a forest because when the Germans take the 88's there's no protection. The 88 hits the tree and everything else, shrapnel fly's all over the place. You have no safety you know you get hit by shrapnel you get killed. That one night there when we sat there they opened up on us and we knew that they were coming again and the shells were exploding and I woke up and I woke up and I yelled "*medic*", I thought I was hit. The medic comes running and I said "*I'm hit*" and he

says “*where?*” From here down I was completely frozen, I couldn’t feel a thing. It took him almost an hour to get my circulation back; he worked on me all that time trying to get my circulation back. My feet and legs were completely frozen, I fell asleep and that’s not what you’re supposed to do. You know I fell asleep and I dozed off and then finally I got my circulation and that was probably the coldest days and then when you have three feet of snow and you’re on an offensive, you’re on attack you have 10 to 15 guys in the front in line as breakers. They start walking and they break the trail and then they come back and the next guys break the trail so you can walk along that trail to break a trail through the snow. You can, you know, do you ever try to walk through about two or three feet of snow and then at the same time being attacked and people are shooting at you, they just fall as you’re walking. The Germans are picking you off. But that’s probably...my mother used to always send me chicken noodle soup, have you ever had that stuff? That’s probably what saved my life. I used to take the chicken noodle soup and I used to take compound C2 which was in a grenade and that stuff burns so when I was over in a foxhole and nobody was looking I’d take water and put the chicken noodle soup and my buddies there in the foxhole, we’d make chicken noodle soup and have hot...I mean that was unbelievable. She used to send me all these packages and I used to give them to the guys and all and we’d use it with the C2O. But it was cold, it was cold. I don’t think I’ve ever experienced in my lifetime that kind of weather that we had. It was probably more snow...you couldn’t get the jeeps through because they got bogged down in the snow with even front wheel drive and stuff. So I learned how to drive on a jeep but I never had a license or anything else before I went to the army, but that’s how I learned to drive a jeep.

Geoff: Could you give us a real good paragraph about why we were so threatened?

Louis: Well when I came to this country I was nine years old and my mother and father were all living here already. My sister and I were living in Czechoslovakia and my mother and father eventually wanted to come back to make some money and then go back to the old country so when Hitler started with the Nazism and everything at that time they went to the Red Cross and they said “*if you don’t get our kids out now*” and they knew that Hitler would start the invasion in Poland and all the others so they had to get us out before all that started. So we came here through the Red Cross but on our way we had to go through German into the ports and we came

on a Barager, which was a German ship. When we got into Germany all the swastika guys took all our clothing and opened it up and checked us all and you see a long line of them and you could tell that Hitler's regime was already starting in 1934. I mean they were all over the place like flies. So that always stuck in my mind thinking that these people were ruthless, they're killers that they wanted to control the world. At nine years old you really don't take into account a lot of that stuff but when I finally came to this country in '34 and when Hitler started the invasions my father and I used to talk about the freedom that they have here that we wouldn't have back in the old country if Hitler ever invades like he took Poland and then he took Czechoslovakia and he took all the other countries and put them under a rule where they had to go into the German army as Germans and all. I knew at that point in time when I finished my season that somehow or another I'm gonna end up fighting for this country and at that point in time I was still not a citizen of the United States. Because you're not a citizen until you were 21 so when I went into the army at 17 I was not a citizen of the United States. So I knew and I talked to my father and I said *"well I'd like to go into the army now and maybe have a choice of where I want to be like in the air force or something like that instead of being drafted"*, because I knew eventually I would be drafted and go into the army. So he said, *"okay"* because my father was in World War I and he fought on the Austrian/Hungary side at that time and he lost his brother there. So I signed up and I signed up to try to get in the Air Corp and when I went to Fort Dicks, I took all the exams and everything else and Lambert and I were in Fort Dicks and it's amazing, they said *"you can't fly because you're color blind"*. So I said, *"What's my next alternative?"* They said *"well we can put you as a gunner in one of those big fortresses"*, I said, *"I can't stand to be in a place where it's tight"*.

Geoff: Try to explain to somebody what would have happened if the Nazi's had won and why the United States had to prevent that. Kids in the United States don't understand the threat to the United States.

Louis: What would have happened would have been the same thing. We would have lines waiting for food; you would be picking up cigarette butts. You wouldn't have the freedom that you have now in the United States; it would be controlled by Hitler and his regime. I mean it would be a life of hell. I mean it would be something because I saw some of those people after

the war after they were taken over by the communists and all which was even worse than under the Hitler regime. My father used to tell me, he used to get a letter from his brothers that lived in Czechoslovakia and he said they were treated like animals and stuff like that. They couldn't do anything, they had no freedom, they couldn't do anything. So that is more...you fight for freedom and what you believe in and that you know when you come back you can do what you want with your life. You have the opportunities in the United States that you wouldn't have any place else and the flag meant a lot to me at that point in time. I felt that that's the freedom I had. You know the book that was written about me *'Freedom if for Those Who are Willing to Defend It'* – Helena Omar asked me, she said “*what do you think about the American flag and what they're doing to it*” and I said “*the people that burn the American flag should be sent out of this country back into the communists and see what hell is all about. Take their freedom away and see what it's all about*”. I said, “*that flag meant my life*”, I saw many of my buddies killed. Lambert was killed for freedom to fight for what we have here in the United States. It's the greatest country in the world and there's nobody else better and that's why so many people are so jealous of the American way of life here. So basically that's what most of the guys were fighting for, you know the guys that were in my outfit and everything else, we saw what was happening during the battles that we had against the Germans and how they controlled everything and all and how they killed people and all.

Geoff: Did you guys talk about why you were there?

Louis: Oh yeah. Oh many times.

Geoff: What would you say?

Louis: Oh we used to say...like Lieutenant Pollet used to say “*survival of the fittest*” – you kill them first so you can survive and go back and enjoy the freedoms that you have and that's exactly what kept a lot of the guys alive. The thought of coming back home and being able to know that we had just destroyed the army that wanted to control the world and that was something that I think everybody knew, especially when he went into Russia and all. He wanted to control everything and so the only thing you could do was stop him because eventually he

would not have stopped there, he'd of come over here into the United States and probably attacked the United States too at the same time. That's what his belief was.

Geoff: We were in a *'Death Grip'*.

Louis: Oh yeah. Like when we were in Iriah, you know this is the way you live or you die and you're fighting for your freedom, you're fighting for these guys to kill them before they kill you. So basically it was, you know when you finally make it home you know you've done something to preserve the humanity of the world and a freedom to the people that will come in for your kids and all that stuff. This is what you fought for, to keep it that way and not have somebody take it away from you and a lot of guys felt like that. I mean there's a lot of guys with graves out there in Normandy and Holland and the Battle of the Bulge and stuff and those are the guys that are hero's that fought for this kind of freedom and people should...you know the problem is that people don't realize what happened to World War II veterans and what they did to preserve our freedom and sacrifice their lives.

Geoff: Did your buddies know you weren't a citizen?

Louis: Yes, they knew I was not citizen. Of course, when I used to write to my mother and father I used to write everything in Slovak and before you send a letter you had to have your first lieutenant or company commander had to read it before, in case you give out some information (I don't know what the hell you'd give out). So I wrote everything in Slovak and they'd say *"Geese, look Slama is writing to his mother and father in Slovak again"* and that's how I used to write to them in Slovak back there what we were doing and that's how it came out to when we were in the Battle of the Bulge we had captured a whole bunch of Czechoslovakian soldiers that were in the German army and they were trying to figure out...nobody could talk to them, so one of the guys said *"oh we got a guy in F Company – Slama, he writes his mother and father in Slovak, he can talk to these guys"*. So battalion headquarters called me and they says *"you've gotta interrogate these guys that we captured"* and there was maybe about 30 or 40 of them and they're all sitting there. So I went over there and I started talking to them in Slovak when this one guy lieutenant jumped up and started kissing my hand *"ponslama"* in Slovak and that means

'mister' and I started talking in Slovak and he started hugging me and crying and all these guys came around so I finally asked them I said "*what's happening*". He told me that they were forced into the German army as one of the things that I said that would have happened here and they were put up in front of the SS to fight against the Americans. Now they said if they go back the German's would kill them so they had no choice but to go firmly with flag and that's how they gave up. They knew if they'd go back the SS would kill them so we took them as prisoners of war and they gave us some information on what the Panza divisions were doing more or less and everything else. So I finished talking to these guys, I told them where I was born and everything else. It was very interesting.

Geoff: When you got back, did you come back to New York?

Louis: Yeah.

Geoff: Tell us about what you saw and tell us again why this was so important as you saw that stuff.

Louis: Well I left the company in December of '45 to come back home. I had a choice at that time to stay and then go to officer candidates school or come back home but I knew I had a contract and I knew that I was picked up by the Giants at that time and so I was sitting in LaHarve waiting to get a boat to come home when I heard that the 82nd division was going home. So I called the company clerk and he said, "*yeah don't worry, you go there and I'll send the papers and set it up*". So I reported to the 82nd headquarters and they had all my papers so we came home on the Queen Mary and I had know by living in New York and everything that we were going to go to Camp Shanks and I remember when I went overseas and I watched from the boat as we left the Statue of Liberty going overseas when we went in May of '44 and when we finally started coming back I saw the Statue of Liberty and I knew I was home! It was kind of a feeling you know that is hard to visualize – I'd finally made it! I knew that a lot of the guys...buddies like Lambert he didn't make it and I made it so I made a sign of the cross and I said "*welcome home*". They took us off the boats and they put us on the train as we came off the boat and my father worked for New York Central at that time and my uncle (was not really my

uncle) but I called him my uncle because he was there for my confirmation and all but they also knew we were coming home and he had signs on the side of Pier 7 that we came in saying “*Welcome Home Lou*” and stuff like that. I saw him and he came running up and my father was not working that day so he was not there, so that’s how I got on and then they moved us to Camp Shanks and then we waited and then on the first of January we marched down Fifth Avenue. I can remember I asked the headquarter guys, I said “*well I was in the Fox Company – F Company*” I said “*is there any chance...I don’t belong to anybody really now*”, I said “*I’d like to carry the flag of the 508 or something*” you know of representing the 508 (there was a couple of other guys) and he said “*sure*”. So we all lined up and there were all these people taking pictures of us. So I carried, while we marched down Fifth Avenue and went under that thing on Fifth Avenue I got very emotional and it was a wonderful sight and a wonderful feeling. I finally came home and we lived in a little town of Guttenberg and at that point in time I was kind of bitter. I was kind of a psycho because of some of the things that I saw and I couldn’t get out of my mind. I used to dream about it a lot.

Geoff: What was it like when you stepped foot off that ship?

Louis: I don’t know. To be honest with you I didn’t think of that, but when I stepped up I put my hands in my pocket to make sure I had the 300 or 400 dollars I won in a crap game. I took that with me and thought I’d be able to enjoy that and have a ball when I get home. I was glad to be home, I mean I was there 18 months overseas and I was glad to be home. I was very sad that Lambert couldn’t come home with me and that we couldn’t share our life together for the future and everything else. It was a good feeling.

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Geoff: Let’s continue with what you were saying about the Nazi’s.

Louis: Oh the Nazi’s were bastards, they weren’t human. They wanted to destroy everything that we believed in. I mean they felt that they were the super race, that they could control everybody’s lives and control the world. That was their mission to control the world and spread

their Nazism all over the world. They were just...you know I didn't feel bad about killing them because I knew if we didn't kill them we might end up being under their rule and stuff like that and I thought that if the United States hadn't gone into the war they probably would have controlled England, they were already at France and Poland and they had Italy and all. The next one from there they would have hit probably Russia and taken all those men that were under the German rule into the army and they probably would have attacked the United States. There's no doubt, I mean that's what his mission was, you know and you can see what he did with all the Jews. He called all the people; he had no respect for human life or anything else that existed. The human race to him was nothing, just the Nazi's and the super-duper race is what they were. You will never want to see another guy like that that would exist in our future, I probably won't see it and hopefully it never happens again. But people knew at that time when we were fighting the Nazi's that that's what it was all about and like always Lieutenant Pollet said "*survival of the fittest. You kill them first before they kill you*". At my age, you know younger guys don't mature as fast sometimes, you don't think about certain things in life as you go along you start thinking '*why did I do that*' and you realize you did the right thing by defeating this monster that existed in Europe. Because he's already three quarters of Europe already, the only country that he didn't have was Britain and Russia and all of those people were in his army. You're not just fighting the German himself that lived in Germany, you're fighting the Polish guys that were in the German army, you're fighting the Italians that were in his army too. The French weren't, I don't think they had anybody in there but the rest of them – the Czechoslovakians; they had put all these people in their army. So that's why I think decided to invade Russia at that point in time.

Geoff: Did your buddies that had to go to the Pacific think '*damn, we've got to go continue the war?*'

Louis: Not really, I think most of time...after the war ended a lot of them stayed. When the war ended some of the guys wanted to just go home you know they were tired of being overseas two years fighting and they wanted to get back to their families and start a new life and everything else. Now that we defeated Hitler, some of them decided to stay and I had another friend of mine that stayed and he ended up in Korea and when the Korean War broke out they never found

his body. He was killed I think the first week in Korea. But most of the guys when we were in Frankfurt Germany that stayed, you know the 508 was special guard for General Eisenhower, most of them stayed and a lot of them stayed in the army. I used to think that...at one point I thought maybe if Lieutenant Pollet would have lived I might have stayed with him and gone to school and stuff like that. After he was killed I made up my mind I'm going to go back and do what I wanted to do and play baseball and stuff and that's what I did when I came home in 1946. I came home in '46 and went to spring training with the Giants and before that we played with the 508 Division Regimental Team in Frankfurt Germany. We used to play against all the other teams then and I was a catcher and at that point in time I started to realize that maybe I was not in the best shape that I could probably make it but I figured I've got to give it a shot and as years went by I couldn't...being a catcher is the toughest part of a baseball team because you're always in the game and everything else and due to my injuries I went four years almost and at one point in time I decided it was time for me to get an education and if I didn't make it, you know I got as high as the International League, but if I didn't make it I didn't know how long I was going to last. In those days baseball was all together different, you're making \$150 a month or \$200 a month in the minors. It's nothing like it is now, but I was always a good hitter. I never batted under 300 and that was one of my forte's and they tried to make a first baseman out of me, they tried to make an outfielder out of me so I would stay in. But I knew down the line that somehow or another my legs would go and basically it was a right move.

Geoff: Along this line, you're 18 or 19 and you're in war, were you angry? Were you upset? This is your youth and you're out doing this. Did you feel a sense of loss?

Louis: Well I was not really angry. I was more scared than angry I think. I think my perspective changed after Lambert got killed. I started to do things that I normally wouldn't take chances on. I'd be more...attack a machine gun or anything like that or go with Pollet when we were at the Wall River and do some of the things that we've done, you know and jump into the foxhole and kill these guys and stuff. After Lambert I really got angry. I got to be like a maniac basically, I mean nothing mattered to me. There were two tough guys in Fox Company (they used to call me *'The Kid'*) Seals was number one, he was probably one of the meanest guys I ever met in my life and I was learning from him. I took more or less number two and they used

to say “*kid I’m gonna kick your butt*” and I said “*in your dreams*”. It got to a point where we were maybe two of the toughest guys in the thing. But I got very very bitter about ‘*why did Lambert die*’ and then I said to myself ‘*I have to live in order to get back and tell his mother what a hero he was and what a wonderful friend he was that we lost in the war*’. I mean my time changed, you know I was always looking for a fight ready to get at it – let’s get it done and let’s get out of here. Never laid back anymore and sometimes when you’re laid back that’s when something happens, if you think about it you get out there and do your job and that’s it basically.

Geoff: Can you let us know more about what the Nazi’s were?

Louis: The Nazi’s were not human, they were animals. They had no respect for human beings. They always thought they were the super human race and when you get people like that the only way you can change that is to destroy them basically. The German soldier was rated the best soldier in the world so what we were doing we were fighting the soldier that was best in the war and we had to defeat them at all costs really. I mean look at what they did at Malmandy; I mean they had no respect for life. The guys were there with their hands up and they shoot them and kill them. The SS and all the other people in Germany and if you were not a Nazi you were in a concentration camp. They sent you out to do labor out in the concentration camp and that’s what they did with all the people. They were very...like I say to destroy the humanity and put their fear of God into you. They thought they were... “*Heil Hitler*” was an expression they always used...the super human race, that’s what it was. They always felt that they were the super human race; they had the best of everything. They had the best ammunition, they had the best guns and everything else which is true, they had the best 88’s, they had the best machine guns and everything else. The only thing they didn’t have is the willpower to defeat them like we had. With the British and us and all and our allies at that time, we knew that we could beat them. Somewhere along the line we knew we could out beat them. Because you know the old saying used to be “*the best fighter in the world is the German*” because he’s so well trained and once one of his superiors like a Lieutenant or a Staff Sergeant gets killed he’s like a lost duck. They all sit around waiting for people to do something and the American soldier – if you lose your Lieutenant or your Sergeant and you’re a Private First Class, you take over the platoon and keep

fighting. So we were guys that could think for ourselves, we were not to think like they thought. Our thinking was a hell of lot much different than theirs was.

Geoff: What did you observe about the American character in all this?

Louis: Well the American character was...guys would do things that they themselves couldn't believe that they could do. I mean the will to fight, to stand all the atrocities, to stand the cold like we had and everything else. We never gave up! We always knew at the end if we don't give up we're going to win. No matter how bad it was like when we jumped in Holland, our mission was in Holland was for maybe ten days. That's all, eight to ten days but we were there for 53 days. 53 days sitting in the middle of Aarm and Nimegan completely surrounded by thousands and thousands of Germans. You look at...the British lost 8,000 killed the first air born division, the finest division in the British Army was completely destroyed at Aram at that point in time. But they never gave up, we never gave up either. We knew somewhere along the line we were going to have to get them out of there sometime and we finally succeeded. We didn't liberate Holland but somehow or another we kind of stopped them from doing anything else, because most of the German troops that were in France when France was liberated, they all went into Holland – the Panza, the SS. So when we jumped in Holland most of the Panza division and everything else were all sitting there waiting, they were right there. We jumped right smack on top of them.

Geoff: So this American character...

Louis: Oh it was unbelievable. I mean it was...you know I can't say that looking at some of the guys that fought against the odds that we fought and in the end we knew that we would win. It was always the thought that we would win, we would not lose and that's what kept most of the guys going. We knew that we were going to defeat these guys. No way in the world were they going to beat the Americans. We had the power, we had the manpower, we had the brains, we had...the guns started coming in, the tanks and all and everything else. Our air born units were...the German's at one time had the best Air born units in the world and we made them look sick. We ended up with maybe three or four months of training where they had years of training

and we still out did them. At the end we out did them. Just willpower! We had more willpower than they did, where they ran and I mentioned that the one time that I ever remember the 82nd Air born Division going in to retrieve was in the second or third day of the Battle of the Bulge when we pulled out and went into Irian, Gavin pulled us out because he knew that they would slaughter us and we pulled out and made our stand in Irian. Otherwise it was the only time that an air born division went backwards, we always went front wards, never backwards.

Geoff: I wanted to go one step further and ask about the 82nd Air born and the difference you saw in that unit between maybe other American units.

Louis: Well I think the air born unit was trained much different than the regular infantry units. We knew that our mission was to jump behind enemy lines and once you jump you're infantry basically. We had the power and everything else to accomplish our missions and get the hell out. When the infantry was, you know, they keep going in their direction and we were put into areas like in Holland and you could imagine over 20,000 air born troops and a C47 only holds 27 guys and you jump 12 guys in 10 seconds out of that plane and you could imagine how many times they went back and forth. The sky lit up with somewhere over 20,000 people. You can't imagine what it was and also the willpower to get down and complete your mission. We always knew we would complete our mission someway or another, we had the willpower and also the brains. Some of the people like Gavin and Shannon and all those guys that were regimental commanders, these guys were all good guys. They knew what the hell the war was all about. We had good leaders.

Geoff: So to see that many planes in the air...

Louis: Unbelievable. I had a fellow that used to work for me that lived in Holland, Vandetul was his name, he was only about 12 or 13 years old and lived in Holland and he was working for me when I was President of Ford Bacon and Davis and he came up to me one day and he said "*Louis, I understand you jumped in Holland*" and I said "*yeah*", he said "*do you know I was only 12 or 13 years old when you guys were coming over and I watched you guys as I was on top of the roof watching all these planes coming in, watching all these parachutes come down*". He

said, “*The German’s were so afraid they started to run back to Germany*”. They were, because when we jumped the German’s ran away they were so scared they ran away because we jumped at 2:30 in the afternoon. It was the greatest air born accomplishment in the world, nothing has ever been done like that before, I mean it was unbelievable.

Geoff: What was it like to be in the air and see all that?

Louis: Well you jump 500 to 700 feet and when you go out they give you a reserve. I had a 15 pound mine, I had enough ammunition, I had a gamma grenade and maybe 100 pounds of equipment and I would say 80 percent of the guys that were in that plane – we lost one guy that got shot with 20 millimeters and killed and 80 percent of us took our reserve chute off and left in the plane. When we jumped out of that plane we had no reserve chutes and the reason for that was when you jump out of a plane at 500 feet you drop 85 to 100 feet before your chute opens and when your chute opens again it’s another maybe 50 or 60 feet by the time, so maybe you’re off 250 feet or 200 and some odd feet off of the ground and by the time you pull the chute and get the reserve you’re dead, you can’t get that chute open in time for you to break your fall. So we figured, well we’ll take our chances and that’s basically what it is. But you see we’re only jumping 500 to 700 feet so you’re coming down and you just got to make sure that when you pull your risers it’s like driving a car – you pull your left risers you go left, you pull your right risers you go to the right. The fronts when you go back and it’s like driving – so you don’t hit into each other as you’re coming down.

Sally: I’m doing a little section on comrades and Lambert didn’t make it to the Bulge right?

Louis: No he died the second day in Holland.

Sally: You guys were in the same platoon so can you talk about conversations and how you both responded to the anxiety of war? And what you talked about, did you talk about home or the war or how you tried to support each other.

Louis: When Lambert and I met we were the same age basically, we still weren't shaving at that point in time and we just kind of hit it off and sometimes you meet guys and say he's my buddy but Lambert and I were like twins. We never separated; everywhere we went we went together. Everything we did we went together and his family had a business in Hamilton New Jersey and at times we used to say *"what are you going to do?"* and I told him about my baseball and all and I said *"well maybe when we get back together we can do something together"*. But when we finished school we joined the air born. We joined together and we told the commanders, I said, *"look, where he goes I go. You're not going to separate us, we don't care what you do"* and you know it was amazing because our last name was "S" – so it was Sonary and Slama and they kept us together all that year, I mean we bunked together, we did everything together. We were like two brothers; I mean we were much closer than brothers I think. We protected each other and when we went on patrol I told Pollet, I said *"Pollet, Lamberts gotta be with me"* and unfortunately, what happened? We got separated and I think if we wouldn't have gotten separated at that time Lambert might of still been alive. I always say to myself *"why did I let him get separated from me. If I didn't he might still be alive"*. But we talked about what we were going to do and things after the war and all and we made a pact, we said, *"if one of us doesn't make it, one has to come back and tell them what happened"*. Tell them whatever happened to him. Like if I was to be killed Lambert has to come back home and tell my mother and father what happened to me and visa versa, if he gets killed I have to go back home and tell his mother and his family what happened to him and everything else. Fortunately I made it and he didn't. And I had to...I went back and told them, but here's a guy that...you know I had buddies after that but it was never never the same. I mean we protect our rear ends all the time but he was never never the same for me and he was taken away from me the second or third day of combat so he really didn't have that much combat to think about at all but everything we did together – chow lines, we had our bunks right next to each other, we went to the bathroom...I mean everything! They used to call us *"the Gold Dust Twins"*, *"The Two Kids"* they called us *"The Kids"* and Pollet used to say *"there goes the kids that don't shave"*, we were together and when we got into Nottingham we made sure we were in F Company and we went into the same tents and everything else outside of Walton Park and we jumped together. We jumped the same stick together; we jumped with Lieutenant Pollets stick. I made sure that we were together all

the time when we jumped in Holland and we made all our jumps together. There wasn't anything that I can say that we didn't do together.

Geoff: Did he jump D-Day?

Louis: No, we missed D-Day by 14 or 15 days. We were assigned to the 508 and by the time we left in May we got sidetracked with the U-Boats and stuff and we were ready to go when we got to Nottingham I think it was June 14th or 15th and they were already in Normandy and we thought we would be replacements and they're going to put us on a ship and go into France but they said no we're going to wait for the regiment and the division to come back.

Sally: Can you speak to the youth about why this was an important war?

Louis: At that time when I went in at my early age I really didn't realize how important it was but as I got into the battle of everything and saw what was going on I felt it was an important part of my life and I felt that by going in and defeating the Germans that we would save the future generation of not having to go through as we did as 18 and 19 year olds fighting for our lives. We hoped that we were able to defeat the Germans and provide a better future for our kids and our grandchildren so they wouldn't have to go through the atrocities that we saw and went through during World War II.