



Don Verle Breinholt

United States Army

Staff Sergeant

European Theater

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Rick Randle

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Rick: Thank you for being with us today. Verle, would you tell us your name and spell your name for us?

Verle: Don Verle Breinholt, actually I'm a senior now because I have a junior Don. I was born in Venice Utah down in Severe County near Richfield and my folks moved to Salt Lake City when I was in the second grade. I attended the Hawthorne School in Salt Lake City and Highland Park school and graduated from Granite High School.

Rick: Spell your last name for us will you?

Verle: Last name is Breinholt, B-R-E-I-N-H-O-L-T.

Rick: Tell us a little bit about your early life and leading up to Pearl Harbor Day.

Verle: I was schooled at Granite High School and my father was a brick mason so consequently I was a laborer and about that time I also went to Denmark on a call as a missionary and read in the newspapers there about the invasion of Hitler's army into Poland and after just a short time we had to come back to the United States in 1939 where I finished my mission down in Alabama in a Southern States Mission.

Rick: So you were in Denmark in '38 and '39 and came home early?

Verle: Yeah, I was in Denmark in October of 1938 and after the Germans invaded Poland in 1939 they had to call all of the missionaries out of Europe. So we came back on the freighter from the moorlands and was then reassigned in the mission field to the Southern States Mission and I finished my mission in Alabama. I spent another 18 months down there. A year in Denmark and then another year and a half in Alabama.

Rick: Do you remember any specific instances when you were in Denmark of what the feeling was toward the Germans and what was going to happen?

Verle: I only had one experience realizing the German build up, I was in Randers Denmark and they had some German training sail ships come into the Randers Fjord and docked there and I went down and saw those German ships there. Other than that, prior to the newspapers saying that Warsaw Poland was totally surrounded and that the Nazi's were there, I didn't have any build up at all to realize. But there were refugees coming out of Germany into Denmark, mostly the Jewish people and it was kind of sad to see all of that buildup in there. I happened to be over on the Jutland in Denmark and so these things were happening mostly in Copenhagen and we had to go from there over into Copenhagen to catch the ship to go back home. It was kind of a miracle to all of these missionaries and other Germany refugees coming into Copenhagen there wanting passage to come back to the States. The McCracken Line took the trouble to make room for passengers. The ship we came in on was the SS Gatun. It was a freighter and they took the top holds and left them vacant and put bunk beds around the hold in there so they could accommodate more passengers on the ship. Consequently there was about 250 missionaries plus 40 Jewish Rabbi's plus a lot of Jewish refugee's on that ship coming across the water there.

Rick: Boy they were lucky to get over to the United States. So you finished your mission then tell us what happened leading up to Pearl Harbor day on December 7th.

Verle: I went down to Alabama and was working as a missionary there so I registered for the National draft, the Selective Service in Birmingham Alabama and as a missionary I was registered of course as a minister of the gospel so I was given a 4F classification and when I finished my mission in the spring of 1941 I came home and registered again with the draft board and they gave me a 1A classification. 1A was immediate deduction when my number came up. I think I went to work for the National Defense Industry building, the small arms ammunition plant out to the west side of Salt Lake here, laying brick on those buildings out there.

Rick: You helped build that Remington Arms Plant?

Verle: Remington Arms Plant, yes.

Rick: On Redwood Road and 17th South?

Verle: Yes, I was laying brick out there and enjoyed my work and had a deferment for six months because of the draft and of course my girl was going down to BYU down in Provo and we set up a wedding date for the 17th of December 1941 and everything was going rosy for me because I had a job, I was making 1.37 and a ½ cents an hour - \$11 a day and that was top wages then as a brick layer.

Rick: Did you know you were working on an arms plant?

Verle: Yes, I did. They needed brick layers and we couldn't get any bricks or housing at the time because the National Defense Industry was utilizing the majority of the building materials to build Hill Field and a lot of the other defense industries around and so consequently it was a good job and I knew it.

Rick: And did you remember any specific things that would not go into a regular building due to the fact that that was an arms plant?

Verle: Oh things are getting scarce; you couldn't get other building materials because they were all going into the defense industry at that time. I can't name off hand anything specific out there. The lumber was coming in plentiful and things were construction that way.

Rick: And then you were engaged to be married December 17th?

Verle: Yeah. It was quite interesting, our courtship was really interesting just having to travel to Provo that way and Gladys was living in an apartment there just off the BYU campus and so Sunday morning on the 7th of December I went down to pick her up to take her to Sunday School at our church and a neighbor came out of the house and said "hey President Roosevelt is on the radio and he's just announced that the Jap's have bombed Pearl Harbor and now we are at war" and oh what a shock that was realizing that I would become immediately a draftee and a soldier in the United States Army. This was very much a shock to us because of our potential marriage.

It was one of those things that I knew it would change our lives and yet we met with each other and realized that our future was whatever we planned for and we would take it one day at a time. At that time we got an immediate draft notice then I was to be drafted and to report up to Fort Douglas just down below here in the barracks. Fort Douglas is where I reported to at the Induction Center on January 14th 1941. So of course we went ahead and got married on the 17th of December and then we had a whole four weeks of marriage before I was inducted. Gladys and my father brought me up to the Induction Center at Fort Douglas on the 14th of January and I was then sent to Camp Roberts California for my basic training in field artillery. After basic training then they sent me up to Fort Lewis Washington to join the 3rd Infantry Division and they assigned me to the hand tank or the tank destroyers which were just being organized then in the latter part of '41.

Rick: That would be '42.

Verle: No it was actually '41 when they organized them. I was reading the other day that actually the beginning of the 613th Tank Destroyer Battalions were being organized on the 16th of December of 1941, it was right after Pearl Harbor. That was very interesting.

Rick: So you went to basic training in California at Camp Roberts and then take us through basic training and how you got into being a Tank Commander and all of that.

Verle: Well actually it's a long period there but in basic training. They give you the routine where you go on the rifle range and do all the dry runs of shooting all the ammunition like this and training on all the small arms as well and whatever else they had there at basic training. It was fun for me because I loved to shoot the rifles and the pistols. They taught us the motor skills of driving and things like that and then I went up to Fort Lewis and joined the 3rd Infantry Division and of course we went back to Fort Ord California right down near Camp Robinson then I became a Company Clerk because I could type. I'm not proud of my typing because I was a very poor typist but I was the Company Clerk for about four months.

Rick: Was your wife able to travel with you to any of these places and stay off base or anything?

Verle: When we went down to Fort Ord California I went over with another buddy and we rented a house and we shared an apartment there and I had Gladys come down and we lived together in the house there off the base that way in New Monterey California – that’s almost down to Carmel – that area is a beautiful area. We used to go down to the beach and watch the waves come in when I was off duty.

Rick: How much was your pay in those days?

Verle: My pay was \$21 a month when we first went in and then after about four or five months then they upped the pay then for a Private to be \$50 a month and by that time I was Private First Class and so that’s \$54 a month, off that \$54 they took out \$28 and sent it to my wife and she got \$50 a month as an allotment to keep. So I lived off the other monies which I had to pay insurance and laundry and those other things but of course they were feeding me regularly and giving me all my clothing – my khaki uniforms and my navy uniforms. Anyway Gladys and I lived off base in New Monterey California and really enjoyed the time we were together there outside of the sand fleas.

Rick: Well tell us about the sand fleas down in Monterey – they were just all over the place I guess?

Verle: Yeah, the sand fleas were something you’d just have to experience. They get into your bed with you and I’ll tell you they could chew you up! They didn’t bother me at all but for her it was.... anyway the sand fleas became quite a nuisance. They chewed me up so I went down and bought some flea bate and put it in there and it about killed her. Anyway other than that Boyd Bear was my buddy there and he got married and we just had a really good time there. He was from an Italian family and they were just a really neat family and they had children in the service and they used to tease Gladys – “are you going to have a baby yet?” So we just really had a compatible time down there.

Rick: Tell us what happened after Fort Ord then?

Verle: Fort Ord was a training area for the 3rd Infantry.

Rick: Let's see, after Monterey we want to find out how you got shipped overseas.

Verle: This is a really long story. We loaded up all of our tank destroyers. At that time there were 75mm on a half-track tanks. In the meantime they were developing these bigger more modern tank destroyers the T70 and the M18. But anyway, the units we were using at that time were the 75mm on the half-track and they loaded those up on railroad cars and shipped them clear across the country. Through a southern route to Camp Pickett Virginia down on the bay area there near Norfolk Virginia and Newport News and those areas and that was a staging area for the invasion of Africa and all the divisions were being assembled there to cross the Atlantic for the landing at Casablanca in Africa. We didn't know it of course but while we were there Gladys came and we rented a little apartment in a garage that had been converted for soldiers and we lived off base there for about a month. And then one day they had us assemble on the parade grounds and General Anderson said "the 3rd Infantry Division – all of you soldiers are now on alert and the next time you shoot your rifle it will be at an enemy and all of your facilities are now frozen. You can't communicate with anyone off the base". And we realized this was a desperate situation. It happened to be that they didn't have enough ships to take the 6th and 3rd Tank Destroyer Battalion with them so they left us at Camp Pickett Virginia. A couple of days later we woke up and there was nobody in the base except for just the maintenance crew and a few of our tank destroyer units and everyone else had flooded out and had gone across the....

Rick: You were there left at Camp Pickett?

Verle: Yes.

Rick: How long were you there?

Verle: We were there for about two months or three months, I don't know, I can't remember. That was in November, December and January of '42 and I signed in for Officer's Training

School, so they advanced me from Company Clerk to a Corporal rating and they sent me to Officer Training School. My 613th Tank Destroyer Battalion then was assigned to Camp Hood Texas for further training and they also went on to Fort Hood Texas and I was able to train on all the modern equipment – the T70's and the Armored Scout Cars and the Personal Carriers and things like that. My outfit, after three months training, were scheduled as school troops and I rejoined them there. I actually dropped out of the training because I voiced my command and went back to my outfit so they assigned me then as a gunner of a tank destroyer as a Corporal rating. I then trained with my outfit there at Fort Hood. We were assigned over to Louisiana Maneuvers and about that time we were expecting our first child in June of '43 and while I was at maneuvers there I kept bugging the company clerk [I said] "I need to go home, my wife's expecting any time now" and about three weeks later we got out of maneuvers and went to Camp Shelby in Mississippi and the Company Commander said, "Here Breinholt, here's your appointment now get out of here". So I went home and she was down in South Carolina staying with her folks and we went down there and they were just loading her up ready to take her to the hospital to deliver our first baby right when I got there.

Rick: Tell us about being shipped over.

Verle: Okay, from there we were back in Camp Hood and stayed there probably six months in preparation and then went up to Paris Texas to Camp Maxi in Texas there and further trained and that was when they started assembling us for overseas and that was our staging area. From there we went up to Camp Kenwood New Jersey and boarded the Queen Mary as a troop ship. We went across the Atlantic on the Queen Mary Troop Ship which was really a beautiful ship and the 603rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was assigned the KP duties on the ship so consequently we had special duties. We served five meals in the morning and five meals in the afternoon. They had that many soldiers on there. I heard rumor that there was probably 14,000 soldiers on the Queen Mary going across the Atlantic to Glasgow Scotland.

Rick: What were your accommodations like? Were you in four or five deep hammocks?

Verle: I don't know where all of them were but they actually had the units on there assigned to sleeping in shifts. A person was assigned a certain place on the ship and they had that for eight hours and somebody else had that sleeping position. Since we were the KP's on there we were serving those ten meals a day so we were busy all day long and so they gave us bunks at crews quarters so we got hammocks in the crews quarters which is really a special one.

Rick: After you landed in Glasgow what happened after that?

Verle: We went from Glasgow Scotland down to Kennick England for a brief stop and then from there went down near Birmingham in Chilton England and was stationed there in some quanson huts – that's the tin type barracks built on the water. While we were there we had a few leaves and went in to Stratford and saw quite a bit of England just from being there. We attended the theaters there, they spoke English in a Limey accent and I couldn't understand, but anyway we trained there and we went down the coast to the south of England and fired our 76 mm guns as well as our tanks – we had a 50 caliber machine gunner named 'M18 Hellcats'. And that was really a beautiful tank, it had an open turret. But anyway we practiced firing there in England and we didn't know it at the time but at that time we were being assembled for Patton's 3rd Army. Patton's 3rd Army was being initially organized there and we didn't know and so after the training there...we got into England in April of '44 and of course we didn't realize that June 6th of 1944 was D-Day and we didn't know anything about these things. We were sitting around the barracks and things like this just killing time playing Pinochle and we actually did see a few bomb raids but we killed time that way.

Rick: Where were you during D-Day?

Verle: We were in England and not alerted. We did have all of our equipment and everything like that until one day they came to us with the order 'everybody gets a short haircut' and we realized that things were getting close. We didn't know that the invasion was going on but they told us we had to get our haircut. I have a very humorous situation there, I don't have much hair but I had one boy McCarty there that had a beautiful head of hair and he combed it and kept it immaculate and he was the last one from my squad to get his hair cut. So I challenged him one

day and I said “Mac, I’ll cut your hair and I’ll let you cut my hair if you let me cut your hair”. So we swapped and I cut his hair and I gave him a haircut where I cut it all off except for a mohawk – just this ridge down through the center of his head and left it ¾ inch, it was quite humorous. So they came over to me and said, “Okay, we’ll give you one too” and they looked at my hair and I didn’t have enough on the top of my head so they gave me a ‘fire tuck’. It was like a little hedge.

Rick: Did you leave it that way?

Verle: Yeah, that’s the way we went into combat. So after we got those and got ready why then of course we were shipped down to South Hampton and boarded the Liberty Ship and this is probably two or three weeks after D-Day and so actually we got our stuff on the Liberty Ship and floated across the English Channel there behind the block ships off of the Omaha and Utah beaches. Actually we were on the Omaha beach and they unloaded us off of our Liberty Ships on to landing craft and when they put us off on the landing craft they started in for the shore there and there was a heavy storm at the time. Those waves were waving big, I mean it was terrific but we started in and our landing craft sergeant headed for the shore for the landing and got to about, I guess about a quarter of a mile offshore and they blinked their flash lights saying ‘no more landings’. The waves were too heavy and so we had to go back out and sit behind the block ships for another night.

Rick: What beach was this?

Verle: This is on the Omaha Beach.

Rick: So you went right in to the D-Day area about how many weeks after D-Day?

Verle: Oh it was probably three weeks after D-Day. And at that time this was when the 1st Army had landed on D-Day and gone into France and secured the French landing points which was sad to see all the atrocities that had to be committed there. It’s sad to see those soldiers going into those situations, I feel for them. They were heroes!

Rick: What kind of evidence was there on Omaha Beach when you landed?

Verle: We didn't see anything really grave, actually we didn't go into the beach landings that way, the next day they took a convoy of about eight of these landing crafts and went down the coast a few miles and went up into a harbor where it was high-tide and we went in and drove our tanks right off the ship right on to the dock – our tank destroyers right on to the dock. So I didn't actually land on the beach, it was in the beach area and we were scheduled for Omaha Beach landings. We went into the towns then, we went over the hedgerows and waited for the kickoff of Patton's 3rd Army which is one of the days that we saw huge bombers coming over the top of us and we could hear in the distance the roars of bombs. They were bombers that were softening up the St. Lô area in France so then we were committed to the combat there and that's when General Patton's 3rd Army was initiated after the invasion. We went from there down to Brest and there was assigned to my tank a Free French Soldier – as a guide you might say for our whole platoon. His name was "Diddy" and I have pictures of him and he was just really a neat kid. He spoke English and while I was there I had one fun thing happen – on a Sunday the villagers were out moseying around like this and so we walked down along a little stream of water there to get away from the camp area and I saw a French boy wearing some wooden shoes and I said "Diddy I'd sure like to get a pair of those wooden shoes to send home to my little son that's just a year old" and he called the French boy to come over and the little French boy came and handed me his shoes. I says, "I don't want his shoes, I want you to get me some shoes sometimes when we get to a shoemaker" (wooden shoes) and so we did so, consequently I have some of those shoes that I sent home. [Displaying shoes]

Interview interrupt – interview in progress

Verle: No we didn't, actually there were a lot of the soldiers who did during the Battle of the Bulge, there were a lot of conflicts there from other parts of my other assignments of my units. In other words the 603rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was met of three companies, and we were in B Company and the A Company and actually the B Company got into some encountering, but up in the bones there, there's a lot of the tank destroyers that actually had to knock out Tiger Tanks.

Rick: So your tank destroyers had guns that were capable of penetrating Tiger Tanks?

Verle: Not head on. Those Tiger Tanks had four to six inches of armor in front, and it was very, very...they couldn't get them from the front but they could get a side hit and could knock them out and penetrate.

Rick: Start back to where you landed in Omaha Beach and picked your tank destroyer up and then where did you head after that?

Verle: We came off of the Liberty Ship onto a landing craft in our tank, and that became our home from there until we met the Russians. Anyway we drove that tank right off and that became our home throughout all the combat. Back in our hedgerows we sat there and when a German plane came over and did some firing this way, everybody started shooting at the plane that had already gone by. In the melee the Sergeant (the Commander of my tank) went bezerk, (combat fatigue) so they made me Sergeant on the tank then. So I never did operate as a Gunner on the tank because I was assigned to a combat platoon.

Rick: And what does a Commander of a tank destroyer do? What's your job?

Verle: Actually this M18 has an open turret, it doesn't have a closed turret and it also has a 50-caliber machine ring on the top of it, and the Tank Commander sits up in the machine ring for anti-aircraft or shooting anything like that. A 50-caliber machine gun is really a powerful weapon for anything other than the bigwig gun. But anyway from there he commands and has radio control to his driver, radio control to his assistant driver and was able to direct the tank in any category. Then as a Tank Commander you observe and follow your leads to be able to direct fire in any direction, and in this position you're also in charge of the lives of four other fellows in the tank.

Rick: You were in Patton's 3rd Army; tell us the experiences you had with General Patton.

Verle: He was a great General. I take my hat off to this great guy because he was a wonderful General. I realized that there was a problem down in Africa there that the newspapers played both sides of, but he was a great gentleman. All through combat he was a wonderful guy and in my experiences there with him, the only time we saw him was after we got through our assignment. We were resting on the Britney peninsula, and when we got into one town there, the task force was going through the town, and it got bogged down. The Germans had some anti-tank guns there on a bridge that was in a marshy area so we couldn't go around them like this. They stopped there and a half an hour went by, and another half an hour went by and we kept starting up our engines and figure we could have gone on like this. But after we'd been there for about an hour here comes this light tank down with a General's flag on the top of it and it was General Patton. He came down by the tanks there and he says, "Get those damn tanks off the road!" That's the only time I really saw him in combat, but he was a great General.

Rick: Did most of the men under you feel the same way about him?

Verle: I think so, yes. They used to have some slogans that would defame him a little bit but to me he saved lives by his aggressive action, and he also shortened the war by six months because he was aggressive. He sent his tanks up into northern France there, and put the Germans back on their heels rather than waiting for them to attack him, and that aggression there saved lots of lives.

Rick: Do you have any combat experiences that you'd like to tell us about? Your most severe combat you encountered?

Verle: I had several real experiences this way. You have to understand that an armored task force is made up of commands and they have combat A and combat B as two task forces running parallel, and they also have combat reserve which is a reserve where if one gets pinned down another comes in after to replace to take the pressure off of them. One time we were assigned with the combat reserve and they called us up, and this was in an area of Huisne in northern France, and the battle there was to cross the Huisne River and there was one bridge there that was so special that the Germans had really fortified it and when we were called up we went

down that road leading to that bridge and we looked down and we could see burning American tanks. We went towards them and then the marker, which is a soldier, stopped us and says, "We want you to go off the road here behind those windows over there and take position. We're getting fire from an anti-tank over across the river this way and we'd like you take care of them." So we did, actually as we cut off the road I was in the second tank destroyer at that time, and the first tank destroyer went across the field to take position and we were following them. That's generally how we do it. And as I got out there in the middle of the field I sensed something and said, "Skip giver her a hard left" and he did, and he switched the tank like that and I saw a gun flash (a muzzle flash) maybe four or five hundred yards down the side of the willows and I still feel like I saw the smoke of that tracer come right up where we would have been had we not made that instant turn.

Rick: So if you hadn't had turned left you would have been hit?

Verle: Yes we turned left into the willows there and put our tube of the gun through the willows and I asked the assistant driver to part the willows so that the gunner could get a view of it, and from the location of the smoke in that round, he was able to pick up the tank that made fire. We were able to fire off a couple of rounds and went back down and the task force that was assigned to take that bridge, they had had a lot of trouble and had been in there for several hours fighting that way, I don't know how long. Anyway we sat there like that for a little while then that night we went down and went across that bridge and the most harrowing experience I had there was I saw a squad of American soldiers laying along side of the road and they had been ambushed by a German machine gun. We went off into the field there and took position. It was on a built up road and we went down the field and took position. That night the German patrols came and tried to blow that bridge twice. The infantry was able to secure the bridge and keep it in tact. The next day after that there was a big field there and it was filled with Sherman's and Tank Destroyers and everything else, and they had a great big new task force assembled there to keep on going. It was a great experience! Another experience right there is we were with the 9th Infantry, and the tank destroyers we were with didn't do tank to tank that way. We used our gun as a self-propelled rifle gun, we took out gun emplacements or anything else that was there and we were with the 9th Infantry Task Force at one time and they called and said they were getting

tank and anti-tank fire from a crossroad location and they had asked for help. So my unit was in the unit tank and I was in the anti-tank destroyer and we went up across the field and come up to this crossroad that looked almost like a Z. In other words the road came in here to a main road and then down here there's another road taking off to the right and we saw a tank taking off that way so we stopped and started laying on that one. Just as we started to traverse our gun I observed through my field glasses that there was an anti-tank gun just a short distance in front of us so I said, "Gay, stop where you are—anti-tank guns three hundred yards – fire!" And he did. And I think the motion of that anti-tank gun turning around on us is what caught my eye; the movement of it because it was well camouflaged and he shot a round, and another round and it collapsed the gun.

Rick: So were you using your big gun to shoot it?

Verle: The big gun yes. The Lieutenant in the other tank when he saw why we're shooting on them he came over and said, "When I saw what you were shooting at I would have sold out for a nickel." And his tank then laid on the other tank and knocked it out.

Rick: Now you received a Silver Star and a Bronze Star. Was that the incident around that bridge there?

Verle: They identified this crossroad experience as being joint geometry in action and also there was another place there when we crossed the Rhine River. They went up to the river and at that point we figured we were going to have a big break because the Rhine River was an un-crossable river. It's a huge river, and about a half mile wide. And we figured well we've been here for a long time but a lot of sergeants got into a cellar and got drunker than skunks so they broke up the Platoon Sergeants and they made me a Platoon Sergeant at that time in charge of four tanks instead of just the two. We went across the Rhine River with Patton's units across the pontoons and drove across the river on those pontoons with an 18-ton tank. It was almost like we were going up hill. But when we got across then we assembled on the other side and the next objective was Frankfurt—a big city on the Main River, which is another branch that comes into the Zeynep over maybe a thirty five or forty mile distance. Our task force then was coming into

the Frankfurt area there and my platoon leader was with another division (task force) and he called and said, "Hey come on in, we're all clear." So we started in for Frankfurt on a real beautiful park road and all of a sudden we looked over and there were some 88 anti-aircraft guns and we started getting machine gun fire and we were driving by at that time and there was a jeep leading this way and the machine gun cut the canvas off of his windshield and we got some rounds on our tank but it was not effective. We went on into Frankfurt and off to the Main River where there's a city on the south side of the river, and just before we got there within a half a mile or a quarter mile away we saw them blow the bridge. We saw a big cloud of smoke. We went into the area of the bridge and the infantry came in and saw that the whole bridge wasn't blown so they aggressively sent a squad across the bridge. So we covered them across the bridge that way. We started getting some artillery coming back at us and I felt like there was somebody directing the fire at us because they were coming so close. I got on the tank and took an axe and cut a big old communication cable there and I exposed myself to the flack that was hitting the bridge.

Rick: Was that the Germans trying to blow the bridge or the Americans?

Verle: The Germans blew the bridge so that we couldn't cross it.

Rick: You were already across on the pontoon bridge?

Verle: That was on the Rhine River. This is over on the Main River outside of Frankfurt. It's a main river on the fork of the Rhine River. I have all of the maps here. We had a map board to show us our objective and we'd draw where we were going ahead of time, and I have those maps with me.

Rick: So by then you had been promoted to a Platoon Sergeant and you were in charge of four tanks? Then what happened after Frankfurt?

Verle: From then on it was a "gas up and go" operation. We had very little opposition from then on, even though some of the other units would come into some of the hot spots, we would

actually by-pass those and keep on going. That was the advantage of this armored warfare and this taskforce of combat A and combat B. They'd go to someplace and if they got pinned down then B would go right around them aggressively, and we just kept on going from there on.

Rick: How many miles a gallon can you get in those tank destroyers?

Verle: That would be a technical question. We had about 75 gallons of gas on there and we might have gotten two miles to a gallon with those big engines.

Rick: They brought the gasoline fuel to you by tanker trucks?

Verle: No. Have you seen these five-gallon square gasoline cans? We'd have to open it up and put a nozzle in it and fill it up with those gasoline rations.

Rick: Now you're commanding four tanks and it's after the Battle of the Bulge.

Verle: Actually they divide those into sections and the platoon leader is in charge of actually 32 men in a platoon and you're actually on one tank and these other tanks need to have the tank commander, and you're in charge of those but you have a lieutenant, a commissioned officer over you and you do everything under him. And it's great to have those officers.

Rick: At night in a combat area, would you sleep just around the tank or on the ground or would you sleep inside the tank?

Verle: All of those. During the Bulge there were eight to ten inches of snow on the ground and so we tried to find a barn or house or something like that to stay in. In Luxemburg we took over a farmhouse, and it had an elderly lady in it and as we sat around their fire we'd say "Luxemburg" and she'd look at us and say, "Net Luxemburg - *Luxembourg*" (pronounced correctly). It was kind of fun in some respects but a lot of times we were out in a position where we would actually lay our sleeping bag along side the tracks in the snow and sleep.

Rick: How about meals? Did you liberate chickens and farm animals?

Verle: We traded our chocolate and cigarettes and things like that for things like that but they gave us a lot of rations; the K-Rations and C-Rations and the ten-in-ones. On our tank we had compartments that way. We also wired a ration box on the back of our turret, and kept a frying pan and our little stove and things like that so we could make our own meals. These K-Rations were nice. I enjoyed them. Some people hated them. The C-Rations...we had a built-in stove, our tanks had a Riddle engine on them so the exhaust came up so hot in our tank that we could put our C-Rations on there and heat it in about two minutes. So we'd do that.

Rick: Tell us the difference between a C-Ration and a K-Ration.

Verle: A K-Ration is a little flat box that is about the size of a cracker jack box and it has a can of meat in it and some cookies and some toilet paper and a can opener and things and some jam and some jelly to go with the crackers. That's the K-Ration then they give you one of those for each meal if you're using that type. The C-Rations were a little can of (not quite as big as your pork-and-bean can) but it's a meal that has meat and gravy. They had different beans rations and stew was a different kind, but there were about three different types of main meals in those. With the C-Rations they generally had a can that opens up and had crackers and jam and jelly and toilet paper in it and things like that. Your ten-in-one's; that means that they had two sections, each section for five men. It had rations there for a days supply for five men.

Rick: When you were going through Germany after leaving Frankfurt, did you ever have any GI's jump on your tank to try and get rides and stuff?

Verle: Not per se that way. In France we transported the infantry on the tanks several times but they hated us because the noise of our tank destroyer was so loud. They liked it quiet so they could tell where the shells were coming from. One place we had an instance there that was very amusing. We were going across a meadow area that had a bridge over here that was a wood bridge, and when you start putting a 18-ton tank like ours and a Sherman is 36 tons on it, there is no way it would carry it, so they decided to go across the meadow and then right in the middle of

the meadow there was a little stream of water. The first tank destroyer went across and we were falling too close so we were in the second tank destroyer and we went up and couldn't pull out of the stream. The weight and length of the tank was such that it dammed that stream up and here came a Sherman behind us and he went in there and he got stuck and another Sherman got stuck. There were about five of us stuck in that little stream of water right in the middle of a big field. The combat was such that there weren't any Germans within the distance there because they would have had a shooting gallery with us. We dammed that stream up and it flooded over the whole meadow so we were sitting in the middle of a lake of water. When they pulled us out they pulled some other Sherman's in to retrieve us out of there and pretty soon the water came into our tank holes and it flooded the whole tank; the engine and the whole works so we were dead weight in the middle of that field and that marsh. So they pulled a tank retriever, which is a recovery tank with a winch on it to pull us out of the muck. He was also dead in that muck so they tied two Sherman's on behind those for dead weight before they could finally get us out of that mud. They took us into the ordinance and it took them about three days to dry that thing out.

Rick: The Sherman tanks were 32 tons and yours were 18. It seems to me like you were faster than the Sherman's but you were probably a lot more vulnerable.

Verle: This is true. The Sherman's had a lot more armor on them and they also had closed turrets so they weren't so susceptible to the artillery shells and things like that. We were maneuverable. We had speed. It was fun to ride these tank destroyers too because they had wheels that were almost like a caterpillar tractor.

Rick: Could you go twice as fast as a Sherman?

Verle: Easy, yes.

Rick: Did the infantry generally go ahead of you guys?

Verle: In armored warfare you actually have a task force that's organized so generally you have a jeep or a light tank in the front and then they have a couple of destroyers then they would have

other light tanks, then they'd have Sherman's behind that. In other words it's a long string of convoy you might say. The armored infantry would generally have half-track personnel carriers and they would drive those in the column and whenever we got into a spot why then they would have the armored infantry come up and dismount and take the position where it was necessary. If we hit a point this way, a lot of times we would bypass it and the armored infantry then would come up and take over the dismounted chores of taking care of it. I hope that explains it a little bit. While we were in the boats there, it was very interesting there – at that point when you were talking about speed and things like this and this M18 was a special track and it actually used it's driving brakes instead of it's steering wheel (most of the tanks did) but anyway it was like driving a Caterpillar Tractor and when we left to go up to the Bulge (this was in December of '44) we didn't know what was going on. They both started about the middle of December and towards Christmas they told us we were going to be relieved of our assignment there in the Star Valley along the Saar River and be relieved so they sent us back to Metz and on the way back to Metz the Lieutenant said "okay I want all the assistant drivers to drive" and I said "Lieutenant I just assigned this new assistant driver on my tank and he hasn't any experience" and he said "well he's the assistant driver, you've got to teach him". These tanks had steel tracks on them to a point that on cobblestone roads they were just like going for a sleigh ride on ice, there's just no control. The good drivers can drive them all right but this assistant driver had a hard time. We had just gotten outside of the town there and he hit the brake too hard and it threw us off into a tree and it collapsed the final drive on the track and put us out of commission. The rest of the battalion had gone on and so the retriever came (they knew of another tank destroyer that had been knocked out) so they went and retook the final drive off of that and put it on ours in the field and we went on another five miles into a town. There we hit a hairpin turn where you go like this to wind up...and as we made the hairpin turn I heard a 'click' and the shear pin on the final drive was out of commission again so they piled us behind this wrecker (a 32 ton wrecker) and went on into Metz. But on the way in there we came across Metz where there's another river valley that had a large levy coming into the bridge and it was getting dark now and he sensed that we couldn't make it across the bridge so we had to back up a little ways, go down across the river and go up the other side. The retriever's had flat tracks, they didn't have steel tracks like ours that could dig in the soil like that but his had flat tracks and so he'd go into the grass with this 18 ton headway behind him and he'd go 'rrmm' and it took him I guess about an hour to

make it up to the bridge. So we got into Metz at about 11 o'clock at night on Christmas Eve and the next morning the whole tank's troop left for Belgium to the Bulge and as soon as they got our tank fixed up they sent us up in there. So we went into Belgium and we got into Mach de Werdann in Southern Belgium and there was a family that hosted us there and they had a new tank destroyer for us so we had to take all of our stuff off of this tank and put it onto another tank, this new tank and we didn't have a chance to test fire it. So while we were there we were hosted by the family of Roger and Yvette who gave us a bedroom upstairs and it was really nice. While we were doing this commission that took us maybe one or two days, one day it was a Sunday and so we went to church with them there in Belgium at a Catholic church with our rifles on our shoulders. So we went to church with them there and I have pictures of those.

Rick: Those Belgium's loved the Americans.

Verle: Oh they did.

Rick: When they gave you a new Tank Destroyer and you didn't have a chance to check the guns out, what happened?

Verle: In Belgium at the Bulge the new tank had a brand new gun on it and the temperature was down around zero at times and it was extremely cold and we were called on to fire up on a post just outside of Belgium outside of Bastone on a high hill. They had infantry outposts around the hill there and a German patrol came into the area and the outpost called us and told us to secure for the night, they said, "Go down here firing your big gun" and we did. We fired the 76 mm gun and it wouldn't go back in the battery and we had to push it in the battery to get another round in and it was so cold that the oil in the cans that made it semi-automatic froze up to a point that it wouldn't go into automatic. The tanker fired a couple of rounds and it was warm enough then but it couldn't go.

Rick: Did the 50 caliber work okay?

Verle: No. It was a brand new gun and we had just cleaned it up and we hadn't test fired it. So I fired a round and ejected it and fired another round and come to find out that the defect was a factory mistake. On the machine gun they have a breach block that has a double bevel in the front and instead this gun only had one bevel on it, it didn't have the second bevel to make it so it would go automatic.

Rick: Did they give you a new gun or did you have to go the rest of the war with a defective gun?

Verle: They came up and corrected it all and put another breach block in there and it worked fine. It was a beautiful gun, beautiful gun. On the 76 mm they told us not to use any oil on the cans on the gun anymore, to use antifreeze to oil the cans with.

Rick: I can imagine the infantry out there in that cold and you guys didn't have any heat inside that tank did you during that cold weather?

Verle: Those tanks, since it was air cooled, that engine pulled air into it so it was freezing. We preferred to stay outside the tank in some of those situations. We couldn't sleep in them at all it was just cold, freezing!

Rick: Did any of your guys get frostbite?

Verle: No. We had some overshoes and consequently we weren't like the foot soldiers. The foot soldier's biggest problem that they had was that they couldn't change their socks or their shoes so the sweat would build up inside and that created the frostbite. But we had overshoes over our shoes so we had laminated shoes and was able to take care of ourselves well.

Rick: So your equipment was a lot better.

Verle: Yeah.

Rick: As you were going through Germany after you left Frankfurt, are there any other experiences that you'd like to share?

Verle: We got into the area of Weimar and the task force stopped briefly and there was an officer that came over to me and said,

“Sergeant Breinholt, will you bring your two tank destroyers and follow me?”

And I asked him; I say, “Should we unlock our guns? Will there be any firing?”

He says, “I don't know, what I heard there won't be any firing so just follow me”.

So we went out of Weimar about two miles on the road (this is not downtown, this is actually the outskirts of Weimar) and we turned onto another dirt road and went about another four or five hundred yards and there was a great big huge compound, fencing with barracks on the inside of it and we didn't know what it was. We had no idea what it was and the Lieutenant was in the Jeep ahead of us and he told us to get to the gate of the compound and he said, “You stop here and cover me”. He said, “I'm going inside and from the looks of it there's not going to be any firing”. We saw then prisoners coming out of the gate. The gate was open and they were coming out of the gate and he went on inside there and these prisoners came down to our tank and one of them climbed up on my tank and put his arm around me and gave me great big kiss. He was jabbering in that foreign language that I didn't know. I had a little bit of German language experience but he was a foreigner, to me he could have been Polish or Russian or something but he was a prisoner that had come out of the compound and I got a big kiss. He was jabbering and there was actually three of them and they were jabbering and they were so glad to be liberated. Why after that the Lieutenant came back over and we were there for probably a half an hour, maybe an hour and that was the Buchenwald Concentration camp and we didn't know it at the time and so we went on with the task force. About two weeks later when we were stationed in Klausternostnets why the whole company came over and visited the camp. They'd cleaned it up and I've got some pictures of the barracks inside there. I've got pictures of the ovens where they burned the bodies. I took those pictures with a little camera I had and took pictures of those. But it was devastating to me to realize the inhumane suffering that those prisoners had suffered, so many of them! A lot of them were political prisoners and they were

suffering from malnutrition and stuff like that but after the other persons came into the camp they showed the atrocities where these prisoners had actually been treated so inhumane, it was devastating. You just could not believe that humans could treat other humans like they had treated them at that camp. And I understand that other concentration camps that were liberated it was even worse than Buchenwald, I don't know. But the liberation of Buchenwald at that time, we came in on this side over here and hours prior to that there was actually another task force that came in the other side. This is a big camp and it had a lot of barracks in it and they had 20,000 prisoners in there and the doughboys that went in the other side they found some Russian prisoners that had actually come underneath the fence and were breaking out and they invited them to come in. So they got them inside there and I have an article from the 603rd Tank Destroyer telling about them coming underneath the fence there and going in and the prisoners inside bounced up and down in joy like this and finally after a little while they told them, they said, "well, we've got to get on with our task force" and they went back out and said that there would be others coming in to relieve the pressure of the camp there. As we were maybe a few hours behind the original liberators there and others came in to liberate them so there was a lot of liberators of the concentration camp there.

Rick: The one with 20,000 what was the name of that camp?

Verle: That's Buchenwald.

Rick: Well that's something to be an eyewitness to. This guy that climbed on your tank, was he wearing that traditional uniform that the prisoners wore – the striped?

Verle: No it wasn't striped he was actually in a khaki uniform and it was most likely a Polish or Russian uniform, I didn't know what it was but he was in a khaki uniform. There were several of them that way that were in uniform; they weren't in the prisoner uniforms. Some of the camps I understand did have special uniforms for them.

Rick: When you went back in a week or so later did you see any dead bodies in there?

Verle: Oh no, they had cleaned all of those up. They had the big sign up on the barracks there in Hebrew I guess it was or in German – a big sign explaining the liberation, it was a joyful account for some of them. But I understand that after it was cleaned up General Patton came over with his group and when he went in and saw the atrocities that had been committed in there it was so nauseating to him that it was very devastating to him. And so he went into Weimar and got the Mayor and all the City Councilmen and had them come out and witness the atrocities that had been committed in this camp. And the Mayor said, “We didn’t know what was going on out here”. To me the German people are wonderful people, I have no animosity towards the Germans themselves, they are just a wonderful people but the Third Reich, the political people that controlled the political situation there was the ones who will have to answer for all the atrocities that were committed there. Because the Germans themselves, the Germans that I had anything to do with after the war, they’re just wonderful people.

Rick: After that tell us where you finally ended up when VE-Day occurred?

Verle: From Weimar we went on through probably a couple of hundred miles distance to where we met the Russians. Actually we’d gas up and go, gas up and go and I think we went 125 miles in two days or something like that. In other words that’s a long distance to go. But anyway we ended up over on the Malta River at the city of Weimar and there we had to sit and wait for about a week for the Russians to come in to align. So while we were there we just had to kill time waiting for the Russians to come and finally when communication was made then we pulled back into a little town of Klausternostnets and there we assembled and we became Occupational Forces until the Armistice was signed.

Rick: Tell us in detail about your first experience with the Russian troops when they first came in.

Verle: Well to be honest with you I didn’t ever see a Russian. Only in the prison. We had to wait for them and we were back trooped in this situation and the forward elements were the ones that were actually making contact with the Russians and we were on the south side of the Mulde

River which flows into the Elba but anyway the Russians were on the other side so I had nothing to do with them.

Rick: So the Russians took Berlin and you guys hung back and was there any feeling among your troops waiting there about not going into Berlin?

Verle: I can't remember, we're talking about 60 years ago and I can't remember any ill feelings at all towards the Russians. I did have just a little bit of feeling that the United States was taking...I think we have a beautiful country, it's a wonderful country and what we experienced here I have no qualms or regrets of having been drafted into the United States Army and served for three years and eight months and six days. Three years and six months is a long time and I was away from my family and things like that but I think the cause we were in was justified and I think it was wonderful that I could serve my country in such a capacity there. After we met the Russians we were stationed there for a little while so we actually patrolled an area between Gera and Jena (I think it was on the map) about 26 miles that we'd secure with TD's around the first couple of days and then we got into a Jeep and patrolled that for probably a week or ten days and then they sent us down to Bavaria. I had one little fun thing that happened there in the Jeep – one day it was raining like crazy and between two cities, I think there was about three or four miles between the two towns and it was raining like crazy and we had our top over our Jeep so we were protected. We got out about a half a mile out of town and there was a young girl in the rain and she was getting drowned so I pulled up along side of her and said, "Hop in". She resisted and I said, "hop in" and she finally got in and we took her into the next city where her home was and let her out in front of her house and waved goodbye and we went on down the road. We'd been down that town a half dozen times and never seen a face anywhere. Didn't see a face or nobody. It was in enemy territory you might say and the next day when we came back by there she was out in front there dressed beautifully and everybody was waving to us as we went by. I have a picture of her; she was a really cute girl.

Rick: Was there any thought of you guys having to go fight the Japanese after the war?

Verle: Actually everyone that was there was interested in getting out of the Army after serving that time. Actually at the same time when the Germans quit they initiated a discharge program which allowed the GI's to accumulate points for service and awards and family and there were several things that way to accumulate points for discharge. They set the discharge at 85 points and they'd give you your medals. They give you points for medals, the length of service, overseas gave you double points – I can't remember how the point system went but I had accumulated 105 points and they allowed you to discharge at 85 points and so I was on the list to get on home as soon as I could.

Rick: There was no thought about you having to go to the Pacific?

Verle: For me, no but there were other units – the 6th Armored Division was sent down into Bavaria down into the Regensburg area. Actually we were stationed in Eversberg and we were reassigned then through another unit and actually the 3rd Army was down there and the discharge area was a different unit. But in Regensburg we were just sitting and waiting because they said that the 6th Armored Division would be assigned a patrol or occupational forces first and then after a months time they decided they would disband the unit and send all the low point men to the Pacific. While we were down in Bavaria the Company made a trip through Hitler's hang out – down in Burchess Garden and I had so many points boy I was ready to get on that plane and fly it home. I wanted to go home so I didn't go down to Burchess Garden but I do have some pictures of when some of my crew had come back and taken pictures down there.

Rick: Did you sail to New York on your way home?

Verle: On they way home, yes we did. Actually I was to fly home because I had a Green Project flying all the high point men home and I went down to get my discharge placed at Camp Jordan Georgia (that's where my wife was) and when I got down there about the 16th of August I was supposed to have flown out and they said the Green Project is cancelled now, you wont be going home on the plane, you're going to be going home on a ship. Because the Jap's had quit and the whole discharge system was such that rather than shipping all the GI's from Europe they were being sent to the Pacific. And so they had all of these soldiers going to the Pacific and we were

way back in interior Germany so it took a long time to get the system going where we could go home. So actually I sat in the discharge center there for another month until the middle of September. The German's had quit in May and in September they finally got through but we went out of Cherbourg Peninsula aboard the troop ship the Marine Panther and on there they had all the soldiers at that time that were headed for the Pacific – low point guys. They were going back to the states for routine things and so on the ship I didn't have to pull KP on that one. But it came into the New York harbor and I think that's one of the most touching points of my whole career.

Rick: Tell us about that now.

Verle: On the ship they had decked it out with flags and came into the New York harbor and they had some reception USO boats coming and playing all the patriotic songs and I looked over there [tears] ...I had been away from home and the states for a year and a half and...this is kind of hard...but on this ship was a beautiful ship coming in with all these soldiers on it and of course the big band's playing as we're coming into the New York harbor. These greeting boats came in playing these patriotic songs and over here we saw the Statue of Liberty and she was beautiful! I realized the touchiness of the situation and I definitely had a feeling of patriotism and gratefulness in being able to come home into the United States again on to American soil. I loved my country and I loved that flag and seeing these beautiful flags of ours flying I still feel like this is the greatest country in the world and realizing that I'd soon be joined with my family. I just had that overwhelming feeling and I wasn't alone. It was very touching. After being out of the states for a year and a half and about 14 months of those were in combat situations why it was a very very emotional moment for me to come home. From there we were assigned into Fort Dicks New Jersey for discharge and they reassigned me to go down to South Carolina instead of Fort Douglas and it took them nearly a week to be processed with all of these soldiers coming through. It took us nearly a week after we got into the New York harbor to get processed through the discharge center. So we got on a train and went down to South Carolina where my wife was waiting for me and she didn't know that I was coming home because we didn't have any communications – we didn't have cell phones or things like that. She knew because she had been getting letters back that I was on my way home but she didn't know where or when and so I

finally came into Aiken South Carolina and got a taxi and went out to the farm where her folks had a farmhouse just outside of the town there and I drove up in the driveway there and the taxi rolled in and I got out of the taxi and when she saw me – Gladys and her mother were out raking leaves in the yard – and when she saw me get out of that taxi she starting running towards me and just before she got to me she fainted dead and I caught her. It was very touching. My little son then was 2 ½ years old. I had left him when he was just taking his first steps, he was just 10 months old that day that I left and so I hadn't seen him. It was very very touching to come back and see my family there. It was a wonderful experience to come back home! We stayed with her folks for several weeks and then finally made our way back to Utah and that's where we've been in our home since that time. But I have to tell you that I still appreciate this lovely companion I have, this wife. We've been married now for 63 years and we had our ten children born one at a time and we've had a wonderful life together and she's been that patriotic and has been a very devoted and faithful wife all the time! We've had a wonderful marriage.

Rick: Well Verle it's been an honor to have you with us. Thanks for your service and the sacrifices your wife has made. Thank you very much.

Verle: I should have had her over sitting by me.

Elizabeth: Can you describe his division's role in the Battle of the Bulge?

...in process

Verle: That wasn't in the Bulge but it was down in the Britney Peninsula the first combat we had was down on the Britney Peninsula on our way to Brest and one night on the night march we came across a German horse-drawn cavalry and paralleled them. It was just at daybreak and at that time my gunner was on alert and I was under there (Glen Anchoram was the gunner) and he grabbed his gun and started shooting at the German's in the trail of the artillery piece. The German had a gun and he up and shot Glen Anchoram and his bullet panned here and the concussion of it broke his arm and he fell right back in the tank on top of me. But that was the first casualty and we had to get him out of the tank – in other words the German's really

surrendered there, there was no way they could survive there. The German Lieutenant had a note and he was on a bicycle leading the column and he said they had to get into Brest with all haste. But in the Battle of the Bulge there we were in northern France and so consequently when we finally did get up into the Bulge it was wintertime and it was very very cold and outside of Brest we had quite a few experiences.

Rick: When they broke out at D-Day and you were in France, you had no idea that the German's were going to counterattack. Where were you when you first heard that there was this counterattack in Belgium?

Verle: Actually we didn't know the size of it until we actually got into it. In other words there were other units and our tank was decommissioned because we had wrecked it on the way up there and that's why we were two days behind the rest of them. They had all gone up in there and when we think of a battalion we're talking about 30 – let's see each company has 12 tanks and there's three tanks, so there's about 36 tankers to our crew that was involved there. So Company A and Company C were both in combat. The other unit Company B was in combat into Bastogne so that would answer your question as to where I was involved. When we left Mach de Werdann on the south end of Belgium to go up to the Bulge we had a very harrowing experience. It was wintertime and the tracks on the cobble roads...we were going up a hill and it had a road that had a side hill and the road sloped slightly that way and it was so cold and frozen that our steel tracks would start sliding and one driver had those tracks churning trying to get up the hill and all of a sudden he started sliding off the hill and I looked off the side of my tank down there and it was about 40 feet down into the bottom. We started sliding off there and all of a sudden we got more to the edge of it and he spun us up the other way. Those are the kind of things that were harrowing! But anyway in the Bulge itself I can't speak for all of them, we did have a couple of scirmages there that (the same place I told you about where my gun wasn't firing) we were there for probably four or five days up on top in a defensive position on the hill and we had patrols come at us and one night there we were alongside of a hedgerow and this trail come up out of the woods. During the middle of the night we were alerted by the outpost of the infantry that there was a patrol approaching us and so we were on alert. All of us on the tank had our guns ready and this patrol came right into us (probably 15 or 20 yards or less) so I hollered

“HALT” and they broke and ran. Of course my troops all fired at them and you don’t move after that because you don’t know who was alive and what the situation was. The next morning there were two dead German soldiers there and a Belgian came up with a wheelbarrow and the corpse was frozen and they took the corpses away. But the next day the Lieutenants decided we wanted to move around a little bit so we took our tanks down that same trail down into the edge of the mountain and came back into the woods and it was foggy. The whole valley was filled with fog...

*** Tape Interrupt ***

...in process

Verle: The Lieutenant had us start up our tanks and retreat out of there so we were actually to follow him out. We went out facing the road and got back onto the main road and as we got out there there was an artillery round waiting for him on a tank firing at us. The tracks on our Tank Destroyers picked up the snow and threw it up in the air and the exhaust made a snow screen so the Germans couldn’t get a direct beat on the tank and they were knocking the limbs off of the trees above us. Every one of our tanks – four of us got limbs knocked down on top of us but they were shooting too high and they couldn’t get us. It was scary. But after we had been up on this high point out of Bastone I looked out over to the north and there was the First Airborne breaking out and circling Bastone and there was American tanks burning out in the distance. It’s sad to see these tanks burning but they do. And another experience outside of Bastone in the Bulge was that we had outposts around there and there was a flat field up on top with trees on the south side of it and the Platoon Sergeant said “hey Breinholt come and go with me, we’re going to alert our outpost here to come back in for the night rather than break radio silence” and so we did. We walked over to these two other destroyers and as we were coming back across that field all of a sudden we heard a ‘boom, boom, boom, boom’ and another German artillery band had opened up. We heard the shells coming for us and so we hit the ground! And they came over the top of us and hit the Tank Destroyer that we were walking to and a couple of our Tank Destroyer crew was there – a kid by the name of Cox and another by the name of Kaufman. It killed Cox and Kaufman was wounded. Of course that was the only time we heard guns coming from that

direction, they would come from the other direction and they'd hit the top of the trees but we never did hear them coming from that direction.

Rick: Did you participate in liberating the 101st Air or did you get there after they had already broken through?

Verle: Actually the 4th Armored Division was given credit for breaking the encirclement there and after they broke the circlement then the 6th Armored Division. From what I understand other companies of the 603rd Tank Destroyer Battalion took the flank and we went on from there into parts of Belgium and on into Luxemburg and clear back into the Sigfried line. After that we went clear over into Germany and this was where they again had pillboxes in place along the Sigfried line over in Germany.

Rick: Tell us about that Sigfreid line a little bit.

Verle: After the first world war, the war between Germany and France there wasn't mechanized equipment at that time so there was trench warfare you might say and so the German's built a huge defensive line all along southern Germany and they called it the 'Sigfreid Line'. It had artillery emplacement, tank traps and tank barriers and things like this and it was built of concrete and barriers of all kinds. And the French they also built a National Line in northern France and that was down around the Metz area and those two were fortifications so that when one attacked the other they could...

Rick: But it didn't slow you guys down any?

Verle: There were places there where we penetrated the Sigfreid Line. There was one place there where we were in Cologne and they had managed to get these tank barriers that were stood up to look like fence posts and they were so close that you couldn't get a Jeep through them let alone a tank and they had somehow managed to get through. On top of a hill there were a couple of them blown out or knocked down some way, I don't know the Sherman's were ahead of us on that one and they got through there so we squeezed through and came on to a little ridge there.

We actually came off the ridge and had to go down through woods off this hill and it was a steep one and we had to actually float down through those woods down to the stream going to the town. We got into the town there and the people were shocked to see us coming.

Rick: That was right when they broke the Battle of the Bulge and that was kind of the end of the German fighting right there.

Verle: It was, yeah they broke them back. They called them the 'Magnificent Army' because they were well organized and they were well controlled, I mean they were a mighty force. I keep thinking about the soldiers that were in there, they were fighting for a cause of survival I guess but I have some friends that fought with the Germans and then came to America that fought as Germans and in fact they're real good friends of mine.

Elizabeth: You were describing Omaha Beach and you were describing the guys that were there and how they were heroes. Could you describe that again?

Verle: The attack force had to assault the beaches and they were met with heavy fortifications by the Germans. They had to assault those things and break through before they could get back into land that they could actually defend and they were the heroes of the war. Really they were the front line of the defense and after they got their selves established that's when the 3rd Army was then initiated onto the land and Patton's 3rd Army then came into the Shereport Peninsula. They had to clean out a little bit of it but actually they could make their assembly point on the beach there. As far as the beach is concerned – the Utah and Omaha beach are quite famous for their landings because what they did there was – actually they created a harbor, a breakwater of ships where some of them poured concrete – some of those old ships that had taken torpedoes and they salvaged them and they brought them over and sank them in a line to make a breakwater harbor out away from the beach. And there were heavy waves that were coming in there and they had to protect these motor crafts because they couldn't land so this breakwater was really a genius type of warfare that protected the ships coming into the shores of the Omaha and Utah beaches. I can't describe...the storm was so heavy at that time it was kind of hard to see where they were because we were on ships and floating around there, bobbing up and down

along the shore down to this little town. I couldn't stay down in the quarters because it was so nauseating to stay down in the oil and smoke filled rooms with the diesel engines so I went up on the pilot house on top of the ship and stayed up there with the pilot. He was a young sailor and it was so rough that he would bend over and burp out the window and I asked him "don't they give you some seasick pills?" and he says, "I used all mine up". He was seasick so I said, "here take mine", it didn't bother me unless I went down in that crew quarters.

Rick: Did you get on a Higgins Boat?

Verle: The LCT was what it was – a Landing Craft Tank.

Rick: Oh I see so you were on a bigger boat then?

Verle: Yeah, there's assault boats for infantry but these landing craft are big, they actually held four of our Tank Destroyers on this one boat and they'd drop the bottom and we'd pull up. But we didn't get to land on the beach; we landed on a harbor and were pulled over to the dock.

Elizabeth: Can you describe what the barracks at Buchenwald were like?

Verle: Yes, I have some pictures of them and there are some of them that looked like they were two stories...from the distance they were just like Army barracks. You couldn't tell them from regular force barracks you might say and when we first observed them I thought maybe it was just another army base. But when we went back into them of course then they took us through there and showed us the bunks where they actually had bunks that had three and four people sleeping on what would normally be a single bunk. They had medicine there, they showed us how much medicine was there to serve 800 people in that barracks. There were things like that that were very very disturbing to see the cruelty there.

Rick: When you went back inside the barracks it was all clean? There was no odors or things like that?

Verle: No they had thoroughly scoured and cleaned them up. I have a clipping in here of when the Mormon Tabernacle Choir visited over there about 15 years ago, but they visited over there and the Deseret News wrote it up and took pictures and they look just like my pictures.

Rick: Well Verle, thank you so much!