

### **Interview of Howard Clements.**

Howard Clements: Do I look okay, Dick?

Interviewer: You look great. Really good. All right, we're happy to have with us today Doctor Howard Clements, who served valiantly in World War II and we're honored, Howard, to have you with us today.

Howard Clements: Thank you.

Interviewer: Can you tell us where you were living when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and what your thoughts were at that time, a little about that?

Howard Clements: I lived in Park City, Utah, and I was a senior in high school when Pearl Harbor was attacked. And, I can remember that Sunday that that happened. We were listening to our old radio and we had (inaudible) Gladon reading the funny papers to us. And they interrupted the broadcast to tell us. I never heard of Pearl Harbor and I don't think my dad had, either. But he was just furious because he had been in World War I. And anyway, when I went to school the next day, we had a big assembly and they said that all the seniors in the class, all the boys would be in the service within a year. And they told us that. And so, we had no idea what was going on except that that had happened and that we were going to be gone within a year and it just so happened that it was, it wasn't even a year before I was in. And so, Beth and I went down to the University of Utah to go to school, and we got two quarters in and then I was called.

Interviewer: So, you were drafted then?

Howard Clements: I was drafted from Summit County. And, along with everybody else that -- we had a whole bus load of guys that went from Park City down. I went to see my father and mother because we lived down there -- Beth and I lived down there and I went to see my Mother and Father to say goodbye to them and my Dad couldn't even turn around because he'd been in the fighting in World War I and, anyway, I got them to pick me up at the south gate of Fort Douglas. And Beth walked with me and we lived with President Leroy Coles, whose apartment that we had -- we had an apartment. And we were very young, but everybody that had anything to hang on to started to hang on to it. You know a home. And, uh, so we -- Beth and I walked from 124 University Street, out to East High and then up Sunnyside Avenue to the south gate of Fort Douglas and we stood there and waited for the bus and we stood there for 20 minutes before it came. And I got on the bus and she turned around and walked home. And that -- I didn't see her again till, that was in May, let's see. May of 1943 and, I didn't see her again till December just for a few hours

Interviewer: Okay, so what happened then after you got off the bus?

Howard Clements: Well, we went into Fort Douglas assigned us barracks and gave us all GI clothes and we were all a bunch of softies, you know. No sun shine, no nothing. I'd been going to school all the time, but I had been in the ROTC at the university. So I had a little training. So I understood some of the things that were happening to me. And anyway, they had KP duty and they started at the top of the list every day, and I was always at the top of the list with ABC. So I got KP duty 6 out of the 7 days, I think.

Interviewer: Huh, and then take us through, where did you go to basic?

Howard Clements: Then, I was sent to Camp Roberts, California, and, uh, a lot of my friends went with me from Park City. One fellow in particular, Cornell Diamond, uh,

was there with me. And, uh, a fellow by the name Laif Bowen in Coalville went with me. And, uh, Laif Bowen was still alive over there in Coalville. He had been a barber there for years.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Howard Clements: But anyway, Cornell Diamond and I were in the, uh, he was in the infantry and he transferred to the 10th mountain division to be a ski trooper. And I had had enough of skiing. I didn't want any more -- no more of that cold weather for me. And, huh, so I stuck with the -- I was in a specialty communications platoon of stringing wire and being a forward observer for field artillery. And, I learned to do that. I learned to judge distances and, uh, while we were there in Camp Roberts, they put us in an overlook of where the impact range was going to be for the artillery. And while we were waiting, a fellow, Woodsoe Bastion who was from Southern Utah and I were in this look-out thing. It was all, was a concrete bunker. And we had what's called a BC scope and it's just like a pyroscope with two eyes that separate, you know, so that you can use it to triangulate where your position is. Anyway, I took -- turned it around and looked in the glass and here was this gorgeous, gorgeous Castle and swimming pools and girls. And, you know, here we are out in the middle of nowhere in Camp Roberts, California, it was called Hunter-Liggett. And anyway, it was the Hearst Castle. And I got on the telephone and I said, "You'll never believe what I see." And the Lieutenant that was there said, "Yes I would, Clements. And that's the reason you're there and not some of the others."

Interviewer: Tell us about now when you got shipped overseas and, uh, assigned to what you were going to do.

Howard Clements: You want me to fill in the space between that time?

Interviewer: Yeah --

Howard Clements: Well, I was sent from Camp Roberts to Buckley Field, Colorado. And to learn to fly a B-17. And I've passed all the tests, you know, psycho-motor tests that they give you. And anyway, I was eligible. So, of all places they sent me, it was to Cedar City, Utah, to learn to fly. So, I mean, there were -- there were dozens of places around the United States that I could have been sent, but they sent me there. And so, I mean, that was like going home for me. Really. I'd been in Cedar City. We'd stayed in the Escalante Hotel in Cedar City, and I spent four months there learning to fly a piper with a dual control stick controls between your legs, you know. And I got 20 hours of flight time and, uh, right at the time I was going to be transferred, they told me that all the ground forces wanted their officer material back and since I'd had ROTC up at the University of Utah, I was considered officer material. And, the Air Force -- the Air Corps. It was all one service then. There was no Air Force, it was just Army Air Corps, Navy Air Corps and the Army did with you what they wanted. So there were all kinds of guys that were -- one fellow that was with me most of the time was a guy by the name of Stroia and he spoke seven languages and taught at Columbia University and there he was in the Ninth Armored Division. You know.

Interviewer: I'll be darn.

Howard Clements: But anyway, I was, they told me I couldn't be flunked out for any reason other than the Army said I was to go back to the ground forces. So they sent me to Texas and I went to Camp Bowie Texas and trained with an armored infantry division there and went overseas, got to see my brother, Blaine just before I did and like a good soldier, I didn't tell him one word. He came from Arizona from where he was, Texas, and we had a night together and we had dinner and everything. And I didn't tell him a word about my leaving. And I left the next wording.

Interviewer: And you knew it at the time?

Howard Clements: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, what was it like going over?

Howard Clements: Well, we into a converted ship that was a liberty ship with a stack and everything in the back, you know. In those days, most of the ships had the stack in the center of the ship, but these ships had the, I guess you call it the calling tower or where ever the driver was in the back. And they were just big steel tubs, what they were. And there were five thousand of us on that one ship, and it was -- it was just, you can't believe there were five bunk beds high, and we left New York harbor. We went to Camp Kilmer New Jersey from Texas and then from Camp Kilmer right to the war for the ship. Loaded us in New York Harbor and we were all given a bunk, and what they do is they put you down and put the next bunk down with you and all your gear laying flat on your back and then they'd put the thing over you. You couldn't get out, you couldn't do anything. And so, luckily, I was on the fifth bunk up. And that was the highest one. And it proved to be very good after we hit a few waves where the ship dropped 50 feet.

Interviewer: I heard of that.

Howard Clements: Everybody was sick, and I was sick, too. But I never threw up. But everybody else did. And the stench was just something terrible and you know, there was so many bunk beds in there and just one great big long latrine and salt water for bathing and shaving and stuff and we had drinking water, too. And, they'd throw a depth charge off every once in a while in the middle of the night and it'd just scare the day lights out of you because it made such a -- it sounded like a torpedo hit the ship is what it did. And we never did know whether it was a torpedo or whether it was a depth charge. And, there were 85 ships

around us. And I counted them. And I didn't see all of them because a lot of them were over the horizon, too. And the HMS Nelson, the biggest British battle ship was right in front of us all the way across. And they just littered the ocean with garbage. It was hard to believe.

Interviewer: This was in 1943?

Howard Clements: This was in -- this would have been in -- 1943. Yes, '43.

Interviewer: Okay, and then where did you land and --

Howard Clements: We went into Southampton for just a few hours. It took us 21 days to get there. You know, zigzagging back and forth. And, uh, we spent a few hours in the harbor of Southampton and about, oh, I don't know what time it was. We all had watches, but I'm not sure what time it was. But it was night. They took us over, uh, crossed the channel to Cherbourg Peninsula, and we landed. They opened, in fact, I went on the Higgins boat where you climbed down and get in the thing and then they take you in. But there was no equipment that was landed with us. We were all on foot.

Interviewer: All right, now, this was late in '43. But D Day occurred in June of '44.

Howard Clements: '44.

Interviewer: So you're talking about after D Day then?

Howard Clements: Yeah, I am. I said '43, no; this was '44 when all this happened.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Howard Clements: So, yes.

Interviewer: So you landed after D Day?

Howard Clements: Yes, I landed after D Day.

Interviewer: Okay.

Howard Clements: But all the debris, it was just; it was a dark night, even.

But the debris and the obstacles were still there were still there. But all the sunken ships -- you could even see the tops of some of the Sherman tanks that had just didn't, you know, didn't make it to shore. And probably all our crews were drowned but we didn't land any equipment with us at all. It all came -- we had to go to get it later. So, we, we got onto Utah beach and there were trucks waiting at the top and we got in trucks and it seemed like we went forever, but I don't know where it was. It was a place called Hoogle -- H-o-o-g-l-e Ville. Hoogleville, Normandy. And they dropped us there and, but right while we were standing there, trying to get in the truck, here comes an ME 109 strafing and so our first few minutes on Utah beach were with an ME 109, a German war plane with machine guns that kill people after us. And I think I got pale right then and the guy said I never did get my color back.

Interviewer: Now, were you assigned right then to the Ninth Armored?

Howard Clements: No, we were immediately part of the 20th Corps of the first Army. And that's what they called it -- the 20th Corps. And so, it wasn't till the -- and everything now is compressed. I don't know how to tell you. Everything just seems like it was all together. The -- the whole year was just, uh, nightmare, really, from start -- from the very start until, until it's finished. And we got very little sleep. I was a walking zombie most of the time. And of all things, uh, well, when we were -- we were part of the first Army, General Bradley's first Army, and we were in the 20th corps.

Interviewer: All right and then what were your duties at that point and tell us some of those experiences that you had after landing over in --

Howard Clements: Well, we went to get our, we went to Royan, France and picked up some tanks and I was a buck sergeant all this time, and I was a squad leader. And I took my squad up there to Royan and got these tanks that were being -- they came up the Seine River I guess, I don't know. That's where Royan was, on the Seine River. We got 'em, took 'em down -- of all the dumb things that anybody could do would light a cigarette around there because we used gasoline to take all the Cosmoline, which is a thick, thick tar that sealed all the turrets and the doors and everything else while they came across on the ships. And, we used a donut heater, put it in the water, and it was run with gasoline. Was a gasoline heater, and it heated in a GI can, a big, deep, GI can -- GI garbage can. And they heated the water with that thing till it was boiling, and then we would put a container of gasoline, a bucket of gasoline, in there until the gasoline started to boil. Now, you know, gasoline boils at, I don't know what the temperature is, but it was a lot less than what the hot water was. And so, immediately boiled and we used that to get that Cosmoline off. It was the only thing that would take it off, and there was still some guys that smoked around that. It was a wonder that we weren't all killed.

Interviewer: Well, you and your squad were assigned a tank?

Howard Clements: Yes, we were assigned to get a tank and two half tracks.

Interviewer: And were you one of the tank drivers then?

Howard Clements: I was just the squad leader, I had two half tracks and then I had a driver for the tank and I spent a lot of my time in the tank, but most of the time in the half tracks.

Interviewer: All right, and then, tell us about a half track, as it different from a tank.

Howard Clements: A half track, they were made by the White Motor Company, and they had front wheels on them, and they were drive wheels, too, that was four wheels. But the rear wheels, instead of having tires, had tracks. And that's why we called it a "half track," because the back end was driven by the tracks and the front end was driven by the front wheels if they wanted to put it in four-wheel drive. And it was a very good --

Interviewer: The fire power was the same in both, the half track and the tanks?

Howard Clements: The first tanks we had were big V-12s.

Interviewer: Sherman tanks.

Howard Clements: Sherman tanks, now the older ones had rotary engines, and they just made all kinds of noise. It was like a, the old airplane, you know, with no cut-outs on it and anyway, they made a lot of noise. And so the new ones that we got had these new engines in them, and they were a lot more quiet.

Interviewer: Okay, now, get into what your assignments were after you got your tanks and half tracks going.

Howard Clements: Then we were assigned to the 13th Armored Division at the time. And, the Ninth Armored Division was there, and the Third Armored Division had just been organized. So the Third, the Ninth, and the 13th. And the 13th was just a little outfit, but the Third and the Ninth were Big Armored Divisions. And I was in what was called a headquarters company of the 16th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 13th Armored Division, and we were on loan -- we had a reconnaissance platoon, we had a assault platoon, and I had one of the tanks and two half tracks of that assault platoon, and there were three tanks, three other sergeants with me that each one of us had the same thing.

Interviewer: Okay and tell us about some of your battle experiences after that then.

Howard Clements: Well, we first, I don't know how -- you know; I'd have to look at them. In fact, I read the history books, and I find that the, you know, what I did, or what I was supposed to have done, and I think, "Well, was I in the third Army, or was I in the first Army at times?" I was in the Third Army at times, I was in the Ninth Armored Division at times, and I was in the Third Armored Division at times. But I was always in the 13th Armored Division as a unit. So anyway, we were assigned though to the Ninth Armored Division a lot of the time, and it just so happened we were with the Ninth when we came to Remagen, but we went -- we were sent up immediately to Belgium to the Bastogne. And, we made a side trip, and I'm not sure why or where, but we went to Saarbrücken, Germany, and it had just been bombed the night before, and I tell ya, you talk about carnage. We just could hardly believe -- there were cows that had been blown off the ground that were on top of picket fences 20 feet high, and you know, naturally, they were dead. But it was really terrible to see something that had just happened within hours before you got there, let alone be there when it did happen. Then we went straight to Bastogne from there, and that was when we had to dig in for the first time.

Interviewer: All right, were you aware that you were part of Patton's Army rescuing these beleaguered --

Howard Clements: Yes, because we traveled. They told us that, in fact, General Patton came and talked to us for just a minute. He was a man of few words.

Interviewer: Well, tell us about that. What was he like and what was he wearing?

Howard Clements: Well, we were in this little place somewhere right near Hoogleville -- I'm not sure, I've looked at the map and I've never been able to find it except from this Google Earth thing, and I can zero down on to Normandy and see all these places, but I finally did find that name, but it was just a chateau out in the middle of nowhere where we were, and I'll have to tell you a side story about that. Right at the side of that was a whole bunch of horse corrals and barns, and it was filled with electronic equipment like you wouldn't believe, and just before we got there that night, when we were traveling in that -- in those trucks, we heard this terrible explosion, and saw this things take off into the air, trailing -- was like seeing something happen at Cape Canaveral, and I'd never heard of the V2 rocket, but that was one of them and it was shot 200 yards away from this place where we were going to stay.

Interviewer: Okay, when did General Patton visit you while you were in Hoogleville?

Howard Clements: Right while we were -- just before we left Hoogleville. The night that we left Hoogleville, we knew that we were going to be fighting right shortly. And they gave us all ammunition before that, but we had all of our gun and all of our ammunition -- my duty was to carry this bag of 12 hand grenades, and I had my carbine rifle, and I didn't carry a side arm. And I had my carbine and these 12 hand grenades, and I had a D-ring with two on my -- one on each suspender with a D-ring. So I carried actually 14 grenades, but my duties when we dismounted and started to fight were to carry those 12 with me all the time, and I was to guide it through them if they need it to be through them.

Interviewer: Do you remember the words that Patton said?

Howard Clements: That, I'll tell ya. I'm glad you keep me on the subject here. He said, uh, I don't know -- I shouldn't really say what he said because I don't think you

can put it on there, but I'll say it and if you can edit it out, that's okay, but he said, "Those bastards invited us over here. Do they want to die for their country? Let them die. Help 'em, but don't let anything happen to one of you." That's what he told me.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Howard Clements: Let 'em die for their country, that's what he said.

Interviewer: And so right after that, that's the first action that you saw. So tell us about that.

Howard Clements: Well, we went up to Bastogne and we knew that they were going to counter attack, and they -- it just happened and you know the, it was in the middle of the winter. It was terribly cold, and we dug in. I dug a fox hole, and I had my two machine guns -- one off to the right of me, and one off to the left, about 50 yards away on each side, and then I was in my own fox hole listening, and we were waiting for a counter-attack. And all of a sudden, all hell broke loose and we got a barrage of artillery that landed right down on top of us, and I was glad to be in that hole, I'll tell ya. And anyway, I told -- I can't even say his name now. Anyway, I told him, "Get ready now, you guys. Don't try to hit anybody because you can't see 'em. Just fire right where we got 'em." And we had 'em all fixed so they crossed, firing crossed. And I said, "When I give the order, you fire." Anyway, all this artillery hit us, and I was down in the hole and I heard something hit the ground right up above me, and I put my hand out to see it, and there was a piece of metal that was just red-hot that was a -- must have been ten inches long and maybe five inches wide, and it was just razor-sharp. And it just hit right at the edge of my hole, and that was the first time that, you know, my life had been saved because I wasn't standing there with an arm out or something, or my face. And so, we had to stay all night, and it was ten below zero. And we were just a bunch of pansies we didn't know.

Interviewer: Did you have winter clothing?

Howard Clements: Yeah, we had -- I had rubber boots. I had my own combat boots on, and I had rubber boots on them of them, and I had a pair -- I had my long john wool under wear, lowers and uppers, and I had my combat coat, my combat jacket, an over coat, and my pistol belt with my D-rings and my hand grenades, and that was it. But it was cold, it was -- everybody was cold, and I had a friend that was with an infantry unit there, and I didn't know him at the time, but I knew -- anyway, he was in a ditch trying to get as low as he could when the artillery fire hit -- one of these pieces of steel like I was telling you about hit him right in the rear end. Took one side of his rear end right off.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Howard Clements: And anyway, almost bled to death. He almost froze to death, and he was in terrible shock. And he was telling me about this later after the war was over. And anyway, he made it. He made it, but I saw him -- we played basketball together and I saw his rear end and he didn't have one on one side.

Interviewer: Well, now you had to break through the German lines to get to Bastogne?

Howard Clements: Yes, we had a set up so that they couldn't come back at us. We had to set up because they'd try and come in at night, and so we set up a perimeter of defense so we could get enough guys up there to do something about it. And we finally flattened it out and just followed them as fast as we could go. If they moved back, we moved. If they moved one mile, we'd try and keep right up with them. And they were surrendering like crazy.

Interviewer: And you didn't get much sleep at night, either.

Howard Clements: No, we didn't. And I couldn't go to sleep unless I felt like I had something over the top of me, and I remember going into the Ruhr. And I got into the house, and they had a potato cellar, and we took the kitchen table and put it right over the top of us in the potato cellar, and I had my trusty 12 grenade back for a pillow, and I went sound asleep knowing it was safe that particular time, and that's the first night's sleep I had for a long time.

Interviewer: What was it like when you got to Bastogne and had to break through a --

Howard Clements: We had to fight our way into Cologne, Germany, and we stopped and again, it was terribly cold. But one morning, and I should say that I always thought because the B-17s that were crippled flying back and one of them had the tail blown off and the cables were just trailing behind us, and the vertical stabilizer to the tail part was just hanging on the back by cables, that's how they controlled them, you know. Not like modern planes, and but they were only 50 feet off the ground, so they couldn't bail out, and they had to ride that plane down and they were headed for the channel. He tried to get it into the water, if they could. And anyway, while we were going into Cologne, I kept thinking about those guys, how they were going to go back to England and have a nice, warm bed. And here we were down there at 10 below zero and couldn't even see what we were doing. And I thought, "And that's what you have been doing, Howard, if you would have flown one of those bombers." And so this one day -- I'm still trying to get into Cologne with you here. But, one day, we were sitting there, and I heard this roar of a lot of them coming, a lot of the B-17s were coming. And when you'd see a lot of them, you knew that something was going to go right in front of you, or near to you. And so I heard them coming, and I couldn't believe it. I couldn't even see the end of them. They were so strung out. There were 600 of them -- I counted them. And that didn't -- that didn't involve the

B-25s, and the P-38s, you know, the double tail, the beautiful planes that went back and forth in the formation to try and protect them, and the P-51s, the same way. But I didn't count any of them, but I did count the bombers, and there were 600 of them that came over us. And, now that was -- it would have been close to what was in February, it was in February when all of this happened.

Interviewer: And so the Battle of the Bulge finished and you were advancing on?

Howard Clements: Yes, we were advancing on and chasing the Germans all the way. And then, but 600 of those B-17s came over and they bombed Cologne right in front of our eyes. We were just sitting on a slope that was going down so that we could -- and we were dug in so that we could see, and it was just like having a ring-side seat in the ball game, you know. But they were 20 miles away from us almost, and yet, every once in a while, I'd see one of those bombers break formation, and I'd see parachutes, and see the bomber going down in flames or sometimes they were just chopped right in half. And the minute I saw where the wing was gone, and they -- it would fall and go into a spin, and the guys can't get out when that happens. And we never did see any parachutes when they went down. And I'll tell ya, right at that time I thought, "Boy, Howard, you're lucky you weren't in one of those." So maybe, you know, maybe I was, maybe I wasn't. I had a lot happen from that time on that made me wonder. But then we went in the Cologne, do you want me to back up any where?

Interviewer: No, just continue on and tell us what happened to you after that and tell us in detail about capturing the Remagen Bridge.

Howard Clements: Well, we went into Cologne, and we went into -- now, some of these names, for some reason, we went into Düsseldorf, and I don't know -- that was part

of the Ruhr. That was part of the industrial Ruhr, and we were assigned to go there. The Solingen Steelworks in the town Solingen. And you know Solingen Steel, even to this day, is the best steel there is, you know, for knives and things like that. And we went in and captured that, and by capture, I mean destroy it. And General Patton told us, "Shoot, and then ask questions later. If it's a question, shoot." And that's what we did, and I found out that that was an important lesson, because as we were going into that Ruhr, we got every day, all day, we just had artillery barrages hit us and try to pick us off and no hand-to-hand combat yet. Going into Cologne almost, but we still didn't. But we fired our guns from the -- we had 50 caliber machine guns on the turret of the tank and both half tracks. And we had four 30 caliber machine guns on each track, and then we had a spare 30 caliber machine gun, and one guy had a bar. And anyway, as we were going into the Ruhr, these guns kept firing, and they'd fire at the bombers. The British would come at night with their bombers, and we'd hear them go over and the anti aircraft fire would just be unthinkable. And they'd put the big lights and try and spot them, but they did it with these big anti aircraft guns that had the long, long barrels, and they were fixed. They weren't mobile, they were fixed and they had 88 millimeter muzzles, and they sprayed flack everywhere when that thing hit. Well, as soon as we started coming and the bombers weren't there, they lowered those gun and tried to get us. And they had so much, when one of those flack things explodes, it's just as bad as 155 millimeter howitzer having a high explosive round in it, and it just throws -- today they use BB's and marbles and anything else. We just had steel that flew every direction, 180 degrees from the explosion. 360.

Interviewer: Well, you know, come to think of it, prior to you going to Cologne, tell us about capturing, or being a part of that unit that captured that Remagen Bridge to get over to Germany.

Howard Clements: Now, that happened after Cologne.

Interviewer: Well, Cologne's in Germany, but I thought you had to capture that bridge before you got into Germany.

Howard Clements: Well, we wanted to get the bridge that went through Cologne, that's what we went after.

Interviewer: All right, okay.

Howard Clements: But they destroyed that, they destroyed all the bridges. And the big one that was going to be in Cologne was going to be a prize if we could get that, but they blew it before we even got. There we went into Cologne, and like I told you, we went into Düsseldorf, and I don't know why we were up there because it's a little higher than Cologne, but it was part of the Ruhr group. Essen, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Mayence, anyway. We were going along -- we went to the Rhine river and the Rhine River went right through Cologne, so we came down the west bank of the Rhine pause we were supposed to meet up the Ninth Armored and the Third Armored, and we were part of the Ninth at the time. The Third Armored went first, and they were going to go down the Rhine River to where they could make a pontoon, and we called them "pon-ton" bridges, not pontoon bridges, and I don't know why. But if it had a road way that was put on top of it, it was called a "pon-ton" bridge. Anyway, we knew that's how we were going to get across the Rhine was to get down there where General Patton was and the rest of the Third Army. They went down there and we were supposed to meet them. I didn't know this at the time; I had no idea what we were doing. And all of a sudden we stopped, and we came to this place. We were up above the Rhine River on the -- I don't know how to tell you except to say that you go up into Idaho and you look down into the river there, the --

Interviewer: Snake.

Howard Clements: Snake River and you know how deep the canyon is at Twin Falls. You look down and then you can see the river, but this river was like a flowing lake. It was a huge, huge river. And it was down below us, and it was all foggy in that whole basin just covered -- the Rhine River was all foggy. We couldn't see it. But we knew it was there because we just come from Cologne. And I don't know whether we -- there was a time warp. I don't know how many days or hours or anything. I can't really tell you the date, except I look at the record and it says it was the 7th day of March when we were there. See, that's right now, within this week.

Interviewer: Yep.

Howard Clements: And 64 years ago, how can I remember this?

Interviewer: Well, it's hard, that's for sure.

Howard Clements: And anyway, as we came down, I can still remember looking down and seeing all that fog, and I thought, "Boy, how are we going to get across that darn river." You know? It was just extended out indefinitely. It was like being in an airplane and being in a cloud. And then all of a sudden, the fog just kind of moved just a little bit, and here's the top of the bridge. The bridge is still there. And we all stopped and the words started coming out, "The Ludendorff Bridge is still there. Let's get it." And so, instead of going like we were commanded to do to go down 30 miles to meet the rest of the Third Army and what was left of the -- and the parts of the first, and I was with the Ninth Armored Division at the time. We stopped, and looked down, and each time that thing opened up, we could see it. That bridge went clear across, and so the first part, the fifth infantry division, and this is when I say, "I don't know why they put this on there, there were sure a lot of guys that were involved besides us." And the fifth infantry division went down there, or I don't know -- there was a whole bunch of

combat engineers that went down there to assess the damage, and to see what they could do because they knew that they were going to blow it, but they said there were still Germans going across the bridge. And I didn't see 'em because I just see the top of it. And but we were stopped, and you can't stop if you're in an armored vehicle. You become a sitting duck. But we did, we stopped. And as we stopped, I kept seeing the bushes around us on the side next to the river kicking up, and I couldn't figure it out for a little while, but I realized we were getting shot at. And I see the muzzle flash way across the -- I forget the name of the hill. Epie, I think we called it. The mountain that was on the other side of the river, and I could see the muzzle flash all the time. So we just got a 50 caliber machine gun and started shooting as much as we could, arch it, but it was I don't know how many hundred yards away, or miles even. Bullets are just spent by the time -- well, if you get hit by one; you're not -- it can penetrate. Anyway, this is what we saw. Then, the word got back that the bridge was intact, but we couldn't get across because they made a big hole. I wasn't there now, not yet, anyway. And so the infantry started running across the bridge as fast as they could go, but it was a railroad bridge. And a railroad bridge just has one track that goes both directions, and then the train coming on the other side waits till you get through, and they take their turn. Anyway, that's what happened. And I could see as the day wore on, the bridge became exposed. And I could see people on the bridge, and I couldn't tell if it was ours or the Germans, but we didn't fire because we were afraid. But in the mean time, all these ME 109s fighter planes kept coming right down the valley of the Rhine River. We were up above looking down at it. And they were coming so they were right even with us. Well, we just started shooting at them as they came along, and there were 18 of them that we shot down. We had anti aircraft units with us, up on the edge there, and we kept shooting. But they were trying to blow that bridge; they weren't trying to hit us. They were trying to blow that bridge, and now

I read the history of it, and I find out that somehow an artillery blast cut one of the main cables, so that the rounds that they had had it all made so that when the Germans got over, they were going to blow it so we couldn't. And they did that in Cologne. And so, anyway, guys from the engineering group all went down and cut the cables. One guy even shot the cable with his gun because he couldn't cut it, and it kept -- but there was a big blast that went off. And the night before we got there, there was a big blast that went off, and it was one of the V 2 rockets that they shot in there, and there was three of them that they shot. And they didn't bring the bridge down. So the Germans were trying to blast that bridge so we couldn't get across. And when the fog cleared and I could look, I could see right through the bridge right through to the other side, and there was a tunnel on the other side where the railroad went through the tunnel, and they were shooting from that tunnel. Anybody that got on the bridge, they shot. So anyway, we pumped a whole bunch of artillery, even the tanks up above. We didn't want to shoot. They were our guys over there, so we were very careful. And I find out when I read the history that people in Remagen, the little city on the west bank where we were, the Germans didn't shoot into that city or bomb it because it was a village and a big town, well anyway, make a long story short, a long of the infantry got across, and there's a few that took credit for being the first, but I'm not too sure who was first and whether they really were because I was sitting there as an observer at the time, and by the time it was our turn to move, boy, we shot down that road as fast as we could go, and but we didn't see any heavy tanks or heavy half-tracks on the bridge at all. And there were some light vehicles, a jeep that tried to go. And it fell through the boards that they had. The Germans didn't take their big tanks across.

Interviewer: So, you didn't run your vehicles across the bridge then?

Howard Clements: No, we didn't. And it was all -- it was so tattered and so blown that we were afraid to. So, this is why, now I'm getting to the point where I'm telling ya, they put this pontoon bridge down, inflated all these big pontoons out away from the bridge, and then they hauled them down there on truck and pulled them and cabled them together and hooked them on to the bridge. And they did this on the downwind side, or the down -- so that they bridge hung on. So that they could hang on to the bridge, and that's what they did. So then, when we got there, the guys in the Ninth Armored had put a sign on it ahead of us. They put a sign on there that we were going to go across this pontoon bridge with dry feet, courtesy of the Ninth Armored Division.

And we were -- we were the Ninth Armored Division, and I thought at the time when I saw the sign, "How about the 15th Infantry Division, and all these engineers who were killed putting these pontoons down?" So I didn't feel very good about that sign.

Interviewer: Well, that's interesting. Now, tell us some of your other battle experiences after that one.

Elizabeth: Rick, you have about 20, 15 minutes.

Interviewer: Okay, to end it, huh? So, give us a run-down of some of your hair-raising experiences after that.

Howard Clements: Well, we went down to this place called Bonn that I never heard of, I never heard of Bonn at the time. Do you know what I'm talking about? Bonn, Germany? It was the capital of West Germany?

Interviewer: I do.

Howard Clements: We went there, and all these guys kept saluting us as we moved past them, and they didn't have any rifles or anything, so we didn't worry about them.

Interviewer: They were Germans?

Howard Clements: Well, they weren't Germans. They had a different colored uniform all together, and finally some guy came out with a white flag, and I said like this, "Get out of the way or we'll shoot you." But I didn't speak German, so I just said (Speaking in German). That's the worst word you could use (Speaking in German). Get out of here. And anyway, he has this white flag and he says, "Surrender, surrender. Hungarian Army, surrender!" And I said so I just slowed down just enough to tell him, I said, "You stay right here and we'll have somebody here." And our -- his name was Major Lata, and he spoke fluent German and fluent Yiddish and English and he an attorney to boot. But anyway, he accepted the surrender, the whole Hungarian Army right there. And that's who they were, and they'd been conscripted by the Germans to come and fight. They didn't want to fight. They just came and threw their rifles away and surrendered. So anyway, that happened. And we went down the Audubon, which is a super highway that -- we didn't even have a highway in the United States that could compare with those. And anyway, we went down the Audubon, came to just outside of Munich.

Interviewer: How fast did you travel on that Audubon?

Howard Clements: Well, our tanks were made to go about 35 miles an hour maximum. Most of the time, they went ten and 15 miles an hour. And we revved that thing up, and we were going 45 or 50 miles an hour down there in some places. But, the tracks on those tanks were just almost -- they're so amazing, even to this day to me. They're made of this one piece cable with steel cross pieces that had rubber on them. Anyway, they didn't blow. They didn't get out, they didn't do anything. And ours were flawless the whole time. Anyway, as we went down, we came to this place called Dachau. I'd never heard of it. I'd never heard of it, we didn't even know we were coming to it. And we went to a place. We stopped, there was --

people were in an enclosure, and I got out of the half track and went over and it was a little tiny theatre -- something like, I don't know how to describe the size of it, but there were 10,000 people in there, and there were pigeon holes in the wall, you know, where you go feet first into the pigeon hole, and the whole wall everywhere were covered with these pigeon holes with people and they were so emaciated and sick and the stench was unbelievable, unbelievable. There was no place to sit down, you stood up or you laid down. If you were so sick you couldn't stand up, they put you in one of those pigeon holes, I guess. And that wasn't the end of it. As we went around to the back, the bodies were stacked up with not a stitch on them, and they say, you know, there was no such thing as the Holocaust. These people were all just prisoners who were being starved to death. And they stacked them up back there because there was no place to put them.

Interviewer: Was your unit one of the first ones into Dachau?

Howard Clements: Well, yes. And we, not only that, but the prisoners of war camp were all there, too. It was like coming from 5th East from where the Veteran's Hospital is here and having the University of Utah game going on, and Utah made a touchdown and everybody was cheering, you know? You could hear the cheering from a long way off. We kept hearing all this cheering, in spite of all the noise, we didn't fire anything. We haven't even fired our guns for a couple of days. Nobody fired at us, so we didn't have any reason to. Till we got right down there, we hadn't seen anybody. And here are all these prisoner of war camps, and I went down and I took our cutters, and cut all the chains off the gates, and I think that the Germans they said were going to kill them all before we got there. And they were just so -- they thought we were gods or something. It was worse than the fighting, really, to see those people and to see those prisoners of war. Our guys. They all wanted to kiss us and I told them, I says,

"The whole Army's right behind us, so don't move. Just stay here. And there's going to be food and water and everything you need, but just stay right put." And we had to move, we couldn't stop. And the only time I saw that terrible way they were treated and none of our prisoners of war were fat. They hadn't eaten for days, other than just soup or something, I don't know. But they sure weren't very good looking as far as, you know, being.

And after that, we went through Vienna, Austria and then we wound up in a place called, I keep getting this -- where we started was Hoogleville. (Inaudible), Austria. Right next to the Czech border. And that's where we wound up, and that was on May the 6th after everything that we were talking about up on the Remagen Bridge happened on the 7th to the 12th of March. We saw it on the 7th, maybe the 6th, I don't know. And so, most of the guys in the infantry got over the metal bridge, and there were few vehicles went across that bridge, they said, but I didn't see one tank go across myself, and I wouldn't have taken mine.

Interviewer: Hmm. Well, where were you when Hitler committed suicide, and how did you hear about it?

Howard Clements: I think I -- I didn't even hear about it, frankly. I just heard that the war ended and I didn't care anything about Hitler committing suicide. When the war ended, we were in this little place called (inaudible), Austria, and I'll tell ya, I got a night's sleep for the first time in a year.

Interviewer: Well --

Howard Clements: We'd been there two days when Colonel Downy, who incidentally was head of the Fort Douglas here for awhile after the war, I saw him and talked to him. And he remembered me. He came to me and he said, "Clements don't say anything to your

squad. We're all being re-deployed to the Pacific." And I said, "No! Here we are, we're through with the war, and now we're going to go to another war? We had our turn." And he said, "No, we're going to go to the Pacific. We're going to help invade Japan." And he said, "But I want you to go to school up in (inaudible), France. We want you to be a commissioned officer with us." And so, I left these guys that I fought with and would have died for -- it's funny how your psyche gets to the point where you don't care, you just stay alive and want them to stay alive. And I said, "I'll go, I'll go." And he said, "We're going to meet you in Marseille, France after you get through." Well, he told me -- he just gave me the papers. And said, "Leave right now." And so, he had his jeep and took me to Linz, Austria. And they were loading prisoners of war from the French Army to go back to Paris, and I -- he said, the guy that was in charge said, "Get out of here. We're just moving prisoners of war." So I talked to a second lieutenant who was one of the pilots, and I told him -- I showed him my papers and I told him I had to be there for school tomorrow. And he said, "Well, just be one of the crew. Come with me. Put your bag right down behind my seat." I did, and he did, and we got in the Tail Dragger C-47 and headed for Paris. And I got off the plane and all by myself; I didn't have anybody with me. I was all by myself, and I went to the non commissioned officer's club there in Paris that was right in downtown Paris and told them I needed to go to (inaudible) and they said, "We got a truck going in the morning. Just so you can get there." So I did, got on the truck and was in school on time. How it ever happened was a miracle. If that guy -- if I hadn't talked to that second lieutenant, I'd have never gone. And anyway, or I'd have gone late maybe, or I don't know how I would have gotten there.

But anyway, I spent two months there till July the 12th of 1945 I spent in that school and I learned all about landing -- all already done it. But most of the time, anyway, I learned how to be an officer and a gentleman.

Interviewer: But they were training you for the invasion of Tokyo?

Howard Clements: Right.

Interviewer: Or for the main island of Japan?

Howard Clements: That was the main reason for my going. And I was in France, just above Marseille back up in the mountains in a place called Compiègne. Compiègne, France, and when they dropped the atomic bomb. It was August the 12th, I think, something like that. And so instead of joining my group at Marseille, they had left in one ship and gone clear out in the Mediterranean out the Suez Canal and into the Indian Ocean and they made a U-turn and came right back. And I wasn't there, I was still up in Compiègne, and they all went home. And I never saw those guys again. Just one of them. I've tried to call them. And I'm 84 years old now, and I'm telling you things that happened 64 years ago, and there isn't a day goes by that I don't think about it. And I just couldn't hardly believe these guys going back to Iraq for two and three times, you know? They're just not going to be normal human beings. Those guys are being put through something they should never do that. I was sick some of the time in the fighting, I got a lung abscess. I coughed and coughed and coughed. It wasn't a cold -- I kept coughing up pus. And I thought, you know, I tried to get over it. There wasn't anything to do, I had some PAC's and I took those, but, you know, you had to go on. This happened in the Ruhr, and I remember a little old lady coming out and after we'd been shooting back and forth, and we had taken a whole bunch of German guys that were sniping at us with a machine gun and a Bert gun, and she just ran out in the street and yelled at us. And was just screaming at us, screaming

at the Germans to stop. Screaming at us to stop. She just -- we didn't ever see civilians except that one lady.

Interviewer: Hmm, what's your opinion of Harry Truman's decision of dropping those bombs?

Howard Clements: I supported it. It saved my life for sure because if we had -- the Japanese were dedicated to saving their own islands, and they would have fought to the death. I don't know how many hundred thousand -- I've read the statistics somewhere, how many lives were saved by dropping that bomb. And I told one of my patients one day that I cheered and was so grateful when that war ended.

Interviewer: Do you remember exactly where you were on VJ Day?

Howard Clements: I was in Compiègne, France. Yeah, I was. And I was waiting to get on the boat from Marseille to go to the Philippines, and that's where we were going to be staging is in the Philippines, and then they were going to just ship us, you know -- by that time, we would have been taking the main Japanese islands, and I think there were four of them, but I'm not sure. Thank goodness I didn't get involved in that. So when they dropped the atomic bomb, it saved thousands and thousands of Japanese lives, even though it cost them millions, you know? Maybe millions of lives, yeah. Millions I'd say, millions of lives. Let alone the Americans that would have been slaughtered trying to go in because they were dedicated. They were going to follow the emperor and if he said to defend it at the cost of your lives, do it. And that's what they did. The guys that tried to defend the Remagen Bridge, there were four commanders that were supposed to do that. Hitler sent a slaughter team and took all five of them and were going to kill them, but the one guy was captured by the Americans. I read this after I got this assignment. I read about it and they summarily shot four of those German

generals that were there in Remagen, on the other side of Remagen in this little town on the other side where I told you the railroad tunnel was. And the one guy was captured by the Americans, so the Americans saved him.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Elizabeth: Can I ask a question?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Elizabeth: Who were they going to save when they were going into Bastogne? Can you describe --

Howard Clements: I didn't understand what she said?

Interviewer: The question was, when you were going into Bastogne, were you aware that you were there to liberate the --

Howard Clements: We were aware that we were going to help push the Germans out. That's all we knew that we were going to do. And so when we set up our, like I told you, when I was in that fox hole, we were set up for a counter attack that the Germans always came at night. And so, we were set up to try and repel them and I had these two machine guns that fired so that the bullets crossed, so instead of mowing everything down, we were in Ardennes' Forest there. And they planted those trees like you plant shrubbery in rows just like soldiers, this way, and they said they found a row this way to shoot down and a row this way to shoot down and that's what we did.

Elizabeth: Describe the fear in that fox hole. You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Can you tell us what was going through your mind when you were in that fox hole and give us an idea of how much fear or what you were thinking when you were lying there and that hot piece of metal came near you?

Howard Clements: I prayed a lot. I did. I'm not ashamed of that, too. But there was a Jeep driver that was with me, that was the company commander's Jeep driver, and his name was Frank Soles, and he didn't want to dig a fox hole. He said if his name was on somebody's bullet then God would take care of him. The Lord would take care of him one way or the other, and I said, "Well, don't you think he wants you to try and save yourself and help yourself?" And he says, "No, no." He didn't. He wasn't a Mormon or a Catholic -- I don't know what he was now that I think about it. He was just a fine fellow, a good guy. A real, sincere, good guy that I liked. But, he and I prayed once in awhile together.

Interviewer: Did he survive?

Howard Clements: He survived. And I've tried to find him, and I never been able to find him. I've gone to the internet, I've gone everywhere to find some of those guys and I can't. The one fellow that was sitting alongside me up in the Ruhr and he was hit by one of these pieces of shrapnel, and I told you we had a harness on with a belt with the suspenders with the D-rings and each one of us had two hand grenades, and it was clipped together and our ammunition was down here on our belt on this right side that for our carbines, and they were in metal steel jackets, magazines, that we put in the gun itself. Just put the magazine in. And anyway, we were under fire, and there was some -- given the signal for everybody to abandon ship, and to find a hole, get on a gun or get off the roadway. And so all the guys picked their own ditch to get into, you know. And but this John Howard from Baltimore, Maryland and I were sitting in the track and he was hit. And I was sitting right alongside him; it hit him right in the stomach, right here, into those ammunition magazines. And the one magazine blew all the ammunition blew up. So you can imagine what he would have been like if I -- I really thought we were just going to have intestines all over the floor and, you know, there was nothing that I

could do to help him. But anyway, I stayed with him and all the time, the trees were falling on top of us, the barrage. That was so bad, and anyway, I told him, I said, "Now, didn't straighten up." He was making this funny sound and I said, "Now, I'm here, and I'm going to take care of you." So, don't straighten up because I'm afraid that you've got a wound in the stomach." And I'd seen guys that, you know, that died from stomach wounds and being laid open like that. And he couldn't talk to me because his breath was knocked out of him. And finally, I got my compress and I got his compress and peeled all of his layers of clothes as I told you we were wearing, and he was bleeding, but there was no wound. It was just the worst possible bruise that you can imagine. It went clear down his leg to his knee, it was clear up in here and I patched him and put some -- had him take some sulfur pills, we carried sulfur pills with us, and that was all we had. And I put this on him and I put the compresses on him, and I put the shirt down again and it was all tattered and part of the thread and everything had just been thrown into him, and the thing that saved his life was that steel jacket. It just flattened out, so I called him in 1995, I tried to call him. I tried to contact him a dozen times, and he called me his Savior. And I guess I was, but it was just his comfort that I reassured him. But I was sure that he was going to die on me, that there was nothing I could do. There was a fellow just five feet away from us that had his throat cut, the shrapnel had hit him right in the throat. And, you know, you do this -- you see this all day long, every day for a year. And it stays with you to a point where you can't forget it. You can't. And I never will. And I wake up at night sometimes and Beth will have to wake me up and shake me and say, "You're having a nightmare, stop. Wake up." And I wake up and have some milk or something and I can go back to sleep, but I catch myself all the time kicking guys off the tank, telling Johnny to swing left or to swing right. And you're talking about -- we were going down this street, and I'm not sure what town it was, but this Sergeant Stroyia that I told

you about, that spoke seven languages was in the tank ahead of me in the other squad. And he took a direct hit, his -- he was pulling a trailer that had all ammunition in it. And it took a direct hit, and it blew and even -- it just about blew my head off, and I was 50 yards away from him. And I thought nobody could have lived through that. And so, after we -- just about the time it happened to him, I saw the explosion, and I told Johnny to -- I kept poking Johnny in the left shoulder and told him to turn hard, you know? Get out of the line of fire, and so he did. He turned, and about that time, about the time and it was split seconds I'm talking about, something heated the air right alongside my ear, and I went like this, and it was like a fly or a bee coming past your ear, but it heated the air so it was hot. The air was hot. And I looked just in front of me, and there was a tracer on the end of a shell, and that shell went right past my ear, went right into a building that was a three story building. It hit, it was a high explosive round, and it left the building in a heap of rubble. The whole building, and in front, Stroyia's tank had been hit. And they were after mine. And the guys behind me found -- they had a German 88 that had been dug in, and they just waited until we got in their sights, and they barrel sighted us. And he had barrel sighted Stroyia's tank, and he was barrel sighting mine. But I had turned the last split second, and that shell went right past my ear. But that air was so hot, you can't believe. I mean, I thought it was just a -- anyway. Every day, every day something happened. Every minute, all of us were exhausted. Everybody was just exhausted. And we were just like a bunch of zombies. One of the toughest sergeants I ever knew had a nervous breakdown, and you now call it battle fatigue. They call it battle fatigue because he had had so much that he just plain could not stand it, his nervous system just wouldn't stand it.

Elizabeth: Rick, we need to wrap this up in a little bit. Can you ask him about the whole war effort and his feelings about it?

Interviewer: All right, you know, one of the most poignant times in that war was when you guys were able to realize you didn't have to go to Japan, and that boat turned around and went through the Suez Canal. To me, that's one of the most significant times. Howard, it's been terrific to interview you and we appreciate so much you coming in and telling us stuff and I know it's hard for ya. And any other comments that you'd like to make in general?

Howard Clements: Yes. As we landed in New York harbor, as we came in New York Harbor, I came in like a sardine, I told ya. I came back in a state room. An officer, a gentleman, I was sitting, eating my cereal and the boat started to tilt this way, and all the troops that were on the ship were on one side. I got out and looked, big barges with American flags as back drop, a huge American flag. Dancing girls, music, and they were all waving to us. And when we landed, I unashamedly -- I kissed that soil. I was so glad to be home. And incidentally, I had a little boy in the mean time.

Interviewer: And so that you hadn't seen?

Howard Clements: That I hadn't seen.

Interviewer: Well, I be darn.

Howard Clements: And so, oh, I had seen him, but just for a minute. Just for that one time that I got home. I gotta go, and I know you've had it.

Interviewer: We have another interview here, but --

End of recording.