

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
JEROME G. NELSON  
Rifleman, Army, World War II  
1995

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**Nelson, Jerome G.**, (1923- ). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 55 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 55 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Jerome G. Nelson, a Two Rivers, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service with the 394<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment as a rifleman in the European Theater. Nelson recalls being aware of political tensions before the war. He describes being denied entry into the Coast Guard and Navy after failing the eye exams, working in the Manitowoc shipyards building submarines, and enlisting with friends in the Army in 1943. He talks about basic training at Camp Maxey (Texas) and going through the Army Specialized Training Program [ASTP] at Louisiana State University. He touches on ASTP classes, dropouts, living conditions, and fraternization with civilian students. After the ASTP program was terminated, he speaks of assignment to Company E, 394<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and advanced infantry training at Camp Maxey. Nelson touches on off-base activities on the weekends and relaxing in the PX during the evenings. He discusses conditions of the convoy journey overseas to Greenock (Scotland), crossing into France, and moving into combat areas by train. He recalls that, at first, fear had not set in and states life on the front was cold and hungry. Nelson recalls one of his foxhole buddies, James Russell, nearly getting pulled off the front through the political influence of his mother. Nelson gives a detailed account of his participation in the Battle of the Bulge. He recalls orders to hold at all costs, his sergeant's surviving a near-miss situation, and listening to the yelling of the attacking German troops. He describes being in a rear action holding team during a retreat in the dark and stumbling over men who were wounded or killed by friendly fire of artillery. Wounded by friendly fire himself and separated from his company, he speaks of spending the night alone in the woods and eventually finding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. After being interviewed by a lieutenant colonel, Nelson talks about stopping at a clearing station and being sent by ambulance to Liege (Belgium). After moving through different hospitals for three months, he discusses returning to the front as the war was winding down and the changes he noticed in his unit due to replacements. After V-E Day, he talks about occupation duty in Wuerzburg (Germany) guarding displaced persons, ammunition dumps, and wine cellars. Nelson mentions most of the refugees were women and the soldiers didn't really follow the anti-fraternization rules. After discharge at Camp McCoy (Wisconsin) he recalls his homecoming, getting reacquainted with friends, and the role of veteran preference in getting a job at the post office. He discusses joining the Manitowoc County chapter of

the VFW, eventually becoming an adjutant and a member of the firing squad, and also attending division reunions for the camaraderie.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.  
Transcribed by Karen Emery, WDVA staff, 1998.  
Transcript edited by Jackie Mulhern, n.d.

Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2010.

**Interview Transcript:**

- Mark: Okay. Today's date is December 15, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Jerome Nelson of Two Rivers, Wisconsin, also a veteran of the European Theater in the Second World War and this is the second of the interviews that we're doing at the Courthouse in Manitowoc. Thanks for coming in this afternoon. I appreciate it.
- Nelson: You're welcome.
- Mark: Nice to have you. I suppose we should start at the top, as they say. Why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- Nelson: Well, I was born February 5, 1923 in Peshtigo, Wisconsin and shortly thereafter my family moved to Two Rivers, Wisconsin where I grew up. When World War II began in Europe I was attending Washington High School in Two Rivers and I also had a part-time job working at an A&P store. I was very lucky to have a part-time job in those days, in a store.
- Mark: With the Depression, yeah.
- Nelson: Because you're lucky if you had a paper route in those days. Well, anyway, I just don't vividly remember just when or what I was doing when Germany invaded Poland in 1939, but I was very conscious of the fact that the escalating hostilities in Europe were on everyone's mind. Then we had the draft, lend/lease program. Eventually we were preparing almost for our entry into World War II although there was a lot of isolationists but--
- Mark: And so, as a young man of 17, 18 years old, are you thinking, gee, I'm going to end up in a war? Or do not have those kinds of thoughts at that age?
- Nelson: No. It seemed so far away that if the United States would maybe enter the conflict it would be over before I was old enough to get over there, so I wasn't particularly concerned about my involvement at that time. But anyway, going on, I distinctly remember when President Roosevelt, he called for the building of 5,000 planes, and at that time we thought, gee, this is something unheard of but it was a reality. And then I remember Britain's Neville Chamberlain with his proclamation, you know, peace in our times. It was that ill-fated agreement with Hitler. Anyway then, getting back to that dreadful Sunday morning, December 7, 1941. That was the Pearl Harbor attack and I remember normally we always played bingo on a Sunday afternoon and we had just finished playing bingo and I was uptown and just about on my way home and we heard the terrible news. When I studied geography in grade

school, to me Japan seemed like it was on the other side of the world. And now, just overnight, they were in our own backyard. How, I thought, could a small country like Japan, you know, that shipped all that junk in our dime stores, you know, how could they attack the United States? You know, it was unbelievable. But it was a fact and we were, the next day we were in a declared war.

Mark: And how did that affect your life?

Nelson: Well, I was a--

Mark: You continued working.

Nelson: Yes, I was a senior in high school at that time and I was due to graduate in June of 1942. So once we were involved in this conflict I prepared myself for enlistment in some branch of the service. And I had a close friend that was going to enlist in the Coast Guard in what was a radio school at New London, Connecticut and I thought this would be a pretty good place to get involved. It took several months, you know, before we were scheduled to have any physicals or when there would be any openings. There was a long waiting list. But just before high school graduation I received my orders to report and all I had to do was pass my physical and I thought that would be a snap because I was 19 years old at that time and I thought I was in excellent physical shape. But anyway, I was absolutely shocked when I failed the eye exam. You needed to be 20/20 without glasses and I went to my eye doctor and I said, "What can I do to pass this eye test?" And he said, "Well, really, there isn't nothing you can do." But I thought I'm going to try it again, the test, and I failed to pass, so I was turned down. And some months later, I also failed the same eye test when I tried for the Navy. Well then finally, I was out of high school and I was working in the shipyards in Manitowoc, we were building submarines at that time, and it happened to be a very cold January morning and I did not go to work. So most of us fellas hung out at the Two Rivers Community House and I went down there and ran into several of my friends and we were talking and they happened to mention that they were going down to Milwaukee the following morning to join the Army. And I said, "Hey, about going along?" And they said, "Of course." So the next morning we were down in Milwaukee and we found out we could not enlist. Enlistments were closed so we could only volunteer. So, believe it or not, I passed with flying colors and I was very happy. Finally got into service. I didn't want to be called a 4-F.

Mark: Now, this is something I'm interested in contrasting the World War II generation with the experience between the Vietnam War when they went through these elaborate, during the Vietnam War, when young men sometimes went to elaborate methods trying to stay out of the military. You were bound

and determined and trying very hard to get in. I'm interested in why it was so important for you.

Nelson: Well, right after Pearl Harbor they said that the lines at induction centers, they were blocks long. There was a huge wave of patriotism that just encompassed the whole nation. People just wanted to respond because the attack on Pearl Harbor was so terrible that you just wanted to get involved and do something about it. A lot of my friends, even almost my age, were being drafted already, too, at that time. So, yes, I was anxious to get into the service.

Mark: I'd like to backtrack for a minute. The story of Manitowoc submarine building is interesting so I just thought, I don't want to dwell on it too much, but I'm interested in what you did and what your experiences were in the shipyards building submarines.

Nelson: Well, I was what they would call a ship fitter's helper. I was too young to have any real good skills although I had a good background in blue print reading and I helped the journeyman ship fitter. But many times he wasn't around and when I had to look at the blue prints, we put in what they called "foundations" in the bottom of the sub. On the bottom of the submarine itself there was a line right down the center and all your measurements were taken off from that line. And the tolerance, by the way, was only 1/32<sup>nd</sup> of an inch. So once we put these foundations through the various things that were placed in the submarine, we would have a welder attach those foundations in. Then the Navy would come along, perhaps the next day, and they would check for the measurements and then they would write "Okay to weld." Then the welders would weld those in permanently. And that was my job. And it was very cold in the winter out there, too, and they had these salamanders, we would warm ourselves in that and hang around in the bathrooms and that to warm up. But I was young and I could handle all that stuff.

Mark: And it was only a short time anyway.

Nelson: Uh hum, yeah.

Mark: So, describe for me going off to basic training. I assume you had to go to an induction center, get the haircut, then you had to go meet the drill sergeant, and that sort of thing. Just walk me through the steps of your actual entry into the service.

Nelson: Well, after I was sworn in I took a, I believe it was about a five day leave to prepare my, you know, getting rid of some of the businesses I had at home. And then I reported on February 5. It was on my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, by the way. And I went down to Fort Sheridan, Illinois and I don't recall any induction interview but there we had some more physicals and then they gave us literacy

tests. I remember being on a troop train, I was in the kitchen train, and the doors were open and we were just sitting with our legs over the edge and going through all those different states. And, incidentally, I'd just been through all this area a few months before because when I was working on the shipyard about five of us thought we'd go out to California and work at the Kaiser yards, so we had driven through all this area just, only months before. But anyway, I arrived at Camp Maxey, Texas and lo and behold I found out that I was going to take my infantry basic in an MP battalion. We had guys that came in from Chicago area. Later a bunch came in from Michigan and New York. Some of the guys from New York, a few of those guys had some bad habits which surprised me.

Mark: From Upstate New York or New York City?

Nelson: Well, I don't know just where but some of their morals were kind of, well, a little shady. I mean, it surprised me but after I was in the Army for awhile --

Mark: Swearing and gambling?

Nelson: Yes, yeah. And chasing women and all that stuff. But the IQ for an MP had to be 100 or above so we did have quality in the literacy area.

Mark: Let me turn to my questionnaire here. Was your training effective, do you think? You didn't stay in the MPs.

Nelson: No. My military training consisted of normal basic and later on it was academic. The academic part was in the ASTP, that's Army Specialized Training Program.

Mark: And when did you get involved in that?

Nelson: Well, when we were in Camp Maxey race riots were going on in Detroit and we were on an 18-day alert and the guys were going buggy. We couldn't leave the grounds at all. During that time they gave us some tests and it was mostly in math and that, and I had taken all the math I could in high school, so I must have passed the test because in a couple of weeks, or maybe two weeks, I was sent off to the Army Specialized Training Program at Louisiana State University just outside of Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Mark: And what was your course of studies supposed to be?

Nelson: Well, it was mostly for basic engineering but we had like basic trig and later on geometry and later on integral and differential calculus and all that, the physics, geography, military history, American history, anything pertaining to basic engineering.



- Mark: Now, you had been selected for this program because you had qualified with certain tests, which obviously demonstrated some aptitudes. Before the war, while you were in high school, were you considering going on to college?
- Nelson: Yes, I was.
- Mark: Had your parents been to college?
- Nelson: No. But I had considered, yes, going to college for engineering, yes. As a matter of fact, in high school we only had 11 kids in advanced math. It wasn't one of the most popular subjects but I was glad I took it because it laid the basic groundwork for advanced schooling.
- Mark: And so what kind of other young men were put in this program?
- Nelson: Well, they came from all over. I mean, these, the various college and universities throughout the United States had the ASTP program. It was sort of organized by, I think, a lot of college administrators working with the War Department to utilize the academic institutions because a lot of those seats at college, they were vacant on account of men entering service. And at the same time they would prepare the United States for engineers once the war was over. It was very controversial, the whole program, from the very beginning. And after about three semesters it was abruptly terminated, except for courses maybe in some foreign language and maybe in the dental area.
- Mark: So, what was your daily routine in the ASTP? Was it just like going to college and live in the dorms? Or what sort of role did the military still have?
- Nelson: Well, we got up early in the morning and went to chow and then we had calisthenics and then we were off to class. And we studied, oh, we had, we took a full, full course of studies that you wouldn't believe. My daughter just got out of college now and with the courses she took, my goodness, what she took in one month we did that almost in a couple of weeks. Anyway, we were in classes all the time. In the evening, you could not go to town. We had to study, you studied until lights were out. And then we had tests and all that and if you flunked out, then you were out of the program, although quite a few fellows did purposely flunk out because they didn't--
- Mark: Why was that?
- Nelson: Well, some way or other they thought they were supposed to be in the Army and they didn't think that being in college was what they wanted to do at that time. And I can remember Major General Troy Middleton. He just came back from the Italian campaign and he had heard about the fellas that were dropping

out purposely and he told us, he gathered us all together one day and he said, “You know, those troops in Italy that are being shot at,” he said, “they would give their right arm to exchange places with you.” Incidentally, his son also went to LSU, too. And later on, he became the president of LSU.

Mark: Did you have much contact with the regular student body? Or was there even such thing in wartime? I imagine there were some women for example.

Nelson: Yeah, there was, there weren't too many fellows in school there. I can remember the LSU football team. They only had one senior on that team. He was an All-American. His name was Steve VanBuren (??). Later he played with the Philadelphia Eagles, I believe, and he was a senior at that time and actually he was playing up against kids that were high school seniors the year before. But, no, there weren't a lot of men at the college at that time. I tried to help one fellow that was in charge of the baseball program and we couldn't even get enough people to participate. I can remember going to basketball games and I would say lucky if there were 12 people watching a game. There were a lot of girls there but they were sort of off limits, too. They couldn't leave their dorms unless they had approval from their house mothers and so on, although they did have various social events on the campus — dances and so on — and I attended several and I enjoyed that. But as far as the Army men associating with the girls, not a heck of a lot.

Mark: And your classes, were they just ASTP students? Or were there other students?

Nelson: Strictly ASTP, not mixed at all, nope.

Mark: So this program eventually ended and you ended up in the Infantry.

Nelson: Right.

Mark: Could you describe that process.

Nelson: Well, before the ASTP program terminated there were rumors going around that it was about to end. About, several days before we were given a date when we would be leaving and that happened to be on, I believe it was March 3, 1944 because on March 4, the following day, I arrived back again at Camp Maxey, Texas where I had taken my basics and I was assigned to a company, 394<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 99<sup>th</sup> Division. All together there were 3,000 of us that went to the 99<sup>th</sup> Division and we were recommended for Officer Candidate School but I never attended.

Mark: Why not?

- Nelson: Well, I don't know if I would have liked to because we heard that second lieutenants, or better known as "90-day wonders," were almost a dime a dozen, you know, in combat.
- Mark: And I suppose, to jump ahead a little bit, did that end up being the truth?
- Nelson: Well, I would say, of course in combat, the enemy doesn't distinguish between if you're a private or an officer sometimes because they can't, you know, can't always distinguish, you know, like I say, the officers from the enlisted men. But at Camp Maxey, then we received advanced infantry training. And what we really did then, shortly after we got there there was an exodus of a lot of the NCOs, non-commissioned officers, that they sent to the different, other divisions that were leaving the United States for deployment, the ETO, as replacements for D-Day. So that was another reason why we were assigned to these various infantry divisions. It wasn't only the 99<sup>th</sup> Division that got these ASTP fellows, other divisions got them as well.
- Mark: In fact, I've interviewed three veterans from the 84<sup>th</sup>, all in the ASTP.
- Nelson: Sure. 106<sup>th</sup>, 102<sup>nd</sup>, oh, yeah.
- Mark: It's interesting actually. So you spent quite a bit of time in the U.S. — Camp Maxey twice actually. Did you get off the post much while you were in training? If so, what did you do?
- Nelson: Sure. On weekends, usually what we did, me and another fellow, a friend of mine, we would go to some of these small towns around Camp Maxey and there we would stay over night and usually we ran into some civilians and they would ask us to their home. Once in awhile we would go to the big city, like Dallas or a little town about 20 miles away called Hugo, Oklahoma and there they had a roller skating rink and maybe some movies and some bowling alleys. But other than that there wasn't a lot going on. A lot of the areas, Lamar County where Paris, Texas was located, it was just outside of Camp Maxey, that was all dry so we mostly stayed at camp.
- Mark: Yeah, as you mentioned, some of the other young men were a little more wild.
- Nelson: Oh, yeah.
- Mark: And they had opportunities to do this sort of thing then.
- Nelson: Oh, yeah. So we mostly stayed in camp and we had the PX where we had that 3-2 beer. You know, we'd go in the day room and write letters home and so on, read a book, or something like that. And we usually had to be in bed

pretty early, too, you know, because the next day we were up early and activities were always quite strenuous.

Mark: So when did you finally deploy overseas?

Nelson: Well, anyway, at Camp Maxey we trained until September of 1944, when we left for Boston, Massachusetts on our way to the ETO. It took us 30 days by train from Texas to Camp Miles Standish. That's just outside of Boston. Then we left Boston on September 29, 1944.

Mark: Describe your trip over. You were a kid from Two Rivers. Perhaps you got out on the lake a little bit. Perhaps you had more sea legs than other young men did.

Nelson: Well, there was kind of a strange feeling to be on a small boat and we boarded it I think in the morning some time and the next day when we got up and went up on deck, we noticed there was water all around. And then we had, you know, air cover for the first day. And then later on we had destroyer cover, you know, all the way over. And we were on the ocean for 12 days and on the way we did have one submarine attack — and this happened to be one of the largest convoys up until that time and, I believe, maybe the largest convoy during the war. And during the submarine attack our destroyers, they dropped these depth charge barrels and the convoy just changed direction every so often to avoid any submarine action.

Mark: I assume nobody was sunk.

Nelson: No, we never knew if anybody was hurt or anything. I don't think so. We would have known if there would have been, yes.

Mark: And so you landed in England somewhere.

Nelson: Well, Greenock, Scotland was our--but I might mention, the accommodations are about what you would expect on a troop ship. You could hear the sound of the boat motors, you know. And then there was that sort of obnoxious oil smell in all the compartments, too, you know. And what was kind of nice, we had one guy from Pennsylvania that had his guitar along and he would sing and play at night, you know, way below deck. But during the day most of us were always on deck because the weather was usually pretty good.

Mark: So when you landed in Scotland, you basically are getting ready to go to France right away. Probably in not much time anyway.

Nelson: Well, not right away but it was such a pleasant sight to see land after say about 12 days. You could just see those green hills meeting the coastline. And we

just about got off the boat and then we were on trucks and we went to southern England, a little town called Charmouth, England. And there we stayed for just a short time and then we boarded a troop train and went to Southampton where we left to cross the Channel for LeHavre.

Mark: And you landed in France.

Nelson: Yes, uh huh.

Mark: And how long was it before you landed in France that you were on the western front?

Nelson: Well, it doesn't take very long. No. Once you're on a movement, I can remember sitting on those small trains over there and all along the tracks you could see those big potholes where bombs had, you know, craters where bombs had dropped, you know, trying to blow up the railroad tracks. But I remember getting into, our first combat area was a little town called O'bell (Oevel?), Belgium and that was in early November. And it was snowing and I was cold and also very miserable because I knew that the real thing was only moments away. It was getting very close to actually, you know, actual combat. So it was a matter of a day or two that we were in the combat zone. I remember, we just about got there and our platoon leader, his name was Sergeant Wallace, he picked me out 'cause I — incidentally, I happened to be a sniper and it's kind of ironic because here I couldn't make, or I should say it was really a paradox, I couldn't make the Coast Guard or the Navy on account of my impaired vision and here I was in the Army, they sent me to sniper school for two weeks. So anyway, a platoon sergeant, he picked me out and he was anxious to get out first kill. So, we could see the enemy, but they were about 500 yards away and then he debated the idea and he thought, gee, we might stir up a hornets nest by, you know, shooting at someone so he called off this little thing that he intended to do.

Mark: Could you describe some of the actions you participated in leading up to the Bulge. Were you in combat a lot? Or were you just in and out a little bit? I suppose they were trying to get you inured to the situation.

Nelson: First of all, I want to say it's surprising how you adapt to your surroundings almost immediately. And then we were in a relatively quiet zone at that time. You don't realize the dangers though when you're in when things are rather quiet. As long as there wasn't any incoming, you felt quite safe. And I can even remember I volunteered for one of the first patrols 'cause I was kind of eager to see what would happen. And when you're green at this, fear hasn't set in yet. One thing I would like to mention, too, is that it was cold and you're always hungry, even though the winter was rather mild. We were outside all day and then we crawled in our sleeping bags at night, you know,

in a dark foxhole, and we only ate like twice a day. Living out in the cold all the time, you had a ferocious appetite. I can remember taking my boots, shoes off, thaw out my cold feet at different times. On Thanksgiving, we got all the turkey and all that good stuff. That was really a treat. And usually when we went to eat though, we only went to eat a few at a time in case artillery rounds or something would come in that the enemy wouldn't knock out a bunch of people. So that was one of the things.

Mark: So, you're living on the front, outside all the time. Did you get back to the rear once in awhile to like take a shower and shave and that sort of thing? How did you take care of yourself?

Nelson: No, no, I never got back. A few people did. I remember one of my, my foxhole buddy, he was from North Carolina and his mother was an attorney and she was a close friend with one of the senators from North Carolina and she was very persistent in getting her son from being an infantryman. And she even pressured, you know, the United States senator and so — my friend's name was Jim Russell — and one day he got called back. They were going to make him a typist in a company headquarters. About a day later, after he had a shower, he was back because he didn't know how to type. He was very apologetic. He didn't have to tell us this, that his mother tried this, but he didn't like the idea either. But the final thing was the Army, I saw the final papers on this after while and the Army ruled that Private First Class James Russell could best serve his country as an infantryman in an Army division. So he was good enough to show me the official papers on that.

Mark: In the days leading up to the Bulge, where were you and what sort of activities were going on? It might seem a fool question, but did you have any ideas of--

Nelson: Well, no. Usually, like I said, this was a very quiet sector and it was a good thing for the troops to learn, to live under, you know, winter conditions and also combat conditions, too, because different times artillery would come in. I can cite several examples where, I mean I flew, once or twice, you know, when an 88 landed because our position was exposed and they could see us and that. But there was combat patrols every day and, you know, reconnaissance patrols and all that. It was, like I said, a quiet sector but it was still an active area where we were, we weren't just sitting there, you know. We were always doing something. You had to do something to be alert.

Mark: And none of these patrols you didn't pick up on the fact that there were German divisions moving up.

Nelson: No.

Mark: Getting close.

Nelson: Even Eisenhower's headquarters, there was no inkling of a build-up, although I've read one book where one Army Intelligence officer predicted that this would happen. But the Germans moved their troops and their equipment mostly by night and all commanders were sworn to secrecy. And the commanders themselves, I believe did not know the actual hour or the date when the Bulge would start.

Mark: So when the attack actually started, where were you and what were your experiences?

Nelson: Well, when the Battle of the Bulge began, it was approximately 5:30 on December 16, 1944. The whole front, which was about 75 miles wide and, it was shelled for up to two hours. In our area, I would say we were shelled for one hour. And we were in a different foxhole at night other than in the daytime. We only had just a little shelter over our heads, a few boards, to keep the snow out but we were in our sleeping bags and I can remember just grabbing my helmet and putting it on and waiting for the barrage to subside. No one had any idea that this was the beginning of a massive enemy assault. We just thought it was, you know, local action because there was artillery barrages before but nothing of this, with this intensity. Incidentally, I might mention that there were four divisions that manned the 75 mile front. There was the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, the 28<sup>th</sup> — the 28<sup>th</sup> is called the Bloody Bucket Division out of Pennsylvania — then there was the 106<sup>th</sup>, then there was our own 99<sup>th</sup>. All together about 55,000 troops. And the Bulge was the biggest battle in United States history. And just to mention, the number of attacking Nazis, the numbers are just staggering. There was the 15<sup>th</sup> German Army, it was composed of three divisions. Then there was the 6<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army. That was the one that hit our 99<sup>th</sup> Division. The 6<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army had seven divisions and one brigade. Then there was the 15<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army, included eight divisions. And then there was the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army, four divisions. And these German divisions were paratroopers, armor, and artillery, besides infantry. However, I might mention that the German divisions are somewhat smaller than our divisions. They number maybe between 8,000 and 10,000, while ours are between 13,000 and 15,000 men. But I would say that the German force in the Bulge exceeded 200,000 troops.

Mark: So you had to, like, retreat.

Nelson: Well, no, not initially. Getting back to this initial barrage that the Germans threw at us, and all our troops, this 47<sup>th</sup> German Panzer Corps alone, it was supported by 23 battalions of artillery and they had six Panzer Corps. But one had 23 battalions of artillery and that's not counting the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army. So if you saw the Ardennes, the woods were not, they weren't all over. You would hardly recognize the place from all the, you know, shellings and

missiles that hit the trees. I was 21 years old at that time and I thought I would be 21 years old forever it seemed if I'd ever got hit at the Bulge, you know. But we were fortunate, we only had two guys killed at initial Bulge and one was a real good friend of mine. So, no, we were ordered to hold at all costs. I can remember, it seems kind of humorous now, or not humorous but when it happened it wasn't so funny — we were dug in and small arms fire was coming in and our squad sergeant was about ten yards from us and all of a sudden there was some commotion and I yelled, "Hey Sarge, what's going on?" And he could hardly talk and he held up his helmet and what happened, he had a BAR, that's a Browning automatic rifle, in that foxhole and some German rounds came in and they hit the flash lighter on the BAR so as he reached up to pull it in to see what had happened to it some more rounds came in and it hit just the edge of his helmet and that is only about 1/32 or 1/16 of an inch thick and it just hit the edge and it just scooped up and landed and he found the slug in the bottom of his foxhole and he held up his helmet and he showed where the paint scraped off it and he held up that slug and he could hardly talk. But that was just one of the near misses. There's more misses in combat than there is, you know, but that happens to everybody.

Mark: So as the battle progressed, day after day after day, how long could you hold out?

Nelson: Well, we were very lucky because, see the Germans did not attack in force on the entire front. I was in Company E and our company was bypassed. But Company B on our right flank, they were hit head on and in about 20 minutes of combat they had eight survivors. The rest were either killed in action, or wounded, or taken prisoner. They were really, you know, caught the full strength of that onslaught. So anyway, we, I told you we had to hold on at all costs. It's kind of, well, when you think about it, I thought the Germans were doped up 'cause they would be yelling and, you know, acting real crazy like they were supermen or something. But it made a sort of a weird feeling listening to them, you know. But you get sort of used to it after awhile. Well, anyway, then we held there until I think, yeah, the 16<sup>th</sup> and into the 17<sup>th</sup> and then toward evening on the 17<sup>th</sup> we had to withdraw, oh, I don't know, maybe 100 yards or something, and we spent the rest of that night in the woods. And then the next morning as I faintly recall, we left the Ardennes woods, or the forest, and we were going through an open area and it was very foggy and it seemed as though the hours, it's hard to just remember the time itself because it seemed like it was morning and all of a sudden in a matter of just a few moments it was dark already. But we, it was real foggy and we were like pinned down in this open field and no one wanted to move, and I said, "Hey, let's get out of here because if this fog ever lifts we're going to be sitting ducks." Because the Germans were in this little village, you know, just a little ways away. So we all moved away into an area, it was sort of in a ditch like, and then the commander decided to attack this village and the Germans were



in there. We thought it was in friendly hands but it wasn't. Our mortars didn't seem to work and all of a sudden it was getting dark so they told us we had to withdraw. So, me and a guy named Smitty were like we called, rear action holding team, as the entire group, I don't know how many guys it would be, maybe less than 100, withdrew. We had to stay behind in case the Germans, you know, attacked our rear. So Smitty and I were the last two men in that column and all of a sudden it was very dark. They talk about all the snow at the time of the Bulge. Well, in our area that was no snow to speak of. Earlier, in early December, at different times, it snowed but the sun would come out and the snow would melt but on these days, in our area, there was hardly no snow. But anyway, when the column was withdrawing, it was so dark that night that everybody was told to hold on to the belt, you know, the man in front of you so we wouldn't get lost. And as we were withdrawing, the word came along that our Second Division, their big 55s, would be shelling our flanks and our rear so that the Germans, in case they decided to attack us from the rear, that we would have this protection. It was a sad thing because after holding our positions on the front lines for three days we now came under that murderous artillery fire from our friendly forces and Smitty and I, being on the end of this line, we stumbled over, you know, many of the fellas that were killed and wounded and it wasn't long before the artillery came, you know, down on Smitty and myself.

Mark: Is that where you got one of your Purple Hearts for this?

Nelson: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But then what happened, Smitty and I couldn't go on so we made it back into the edge of the woods there but you could hear some of those guys groaned and, you know, during the rest of the night and you couldn't do nothing about it. And then the thing was, the next morning you're all alone and you don't know where in the heck you are and what do you do? Anyway, before we could figure on where to go or what we could do, first of all Smitty wasn't hurt quite that bad. He had shrapnel in his back and I had it in my thigh and my left leg but I could hop along, you know, fairly well. But while we were trying to figure a strategy on getting out of there and where our friendly troops would be, some artillery started coming in on us. We knew then that we couldn't hang around there. We were wondering how in the heck, there was all this empty space all around and someone had spotted us, you know, why they were just shelling us. And that's when I got hit twice more before we finally got out of there. I remember finding a compass, lensatic compass and I took a back azimuth reading and we figured what way to go and it wasn't long before we ran across our 105 emplacements that were left there. The jeeps were around and the artillery men must have left there in a hurry because in their dugouts I remember seeing pictures of a couple of the guys, their girlfriends are in there yet, there were clothes on the line, and I know I remember, I lost my rifle and I remember picking up about half-a-dozen hand grenades. Finally, we saw some little heads sticking out of some

foxholes and we had picked up some white, I don't know, pieces of cloth or something, I don't know what they were, I don't remember, but we waved them. You know, we didn't know if they were Germans or what to let them know we were like unarmed, we were surrendering, that we weren't the enemy in case they were American troops which we were hoping they were. And all of a sudden, sure enough, here it was members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Oh, and was I glad to see those guys! So right away, this lieutenant that walked up to us, he took us down to their must have been battalion CP and there was a colonel, maybe a lieutenant colonel, he wanted to interview me and wanted to know who was out there because they didn't know what was out there. They were dug in in sort of a top of a hill. So I always thought that any officer, if he was only a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant, and I was only a private 1<sup>st</sup> class, that those guys were like gods. But here this lieutenant colonel hands me a cigarette and he lights it for me. Oh, was I in a, I couldn't believe it!

Mark: Felt like a king.

Nelson: Yeah, really. Anyway, it was, oh, then I remember we hadn't eaten for hardly none of those days. I remember digging some frozen potatoes out of the ground with my bayonet and I found a can of frozen corn. That was about the only food I had to rely on. But then they did give me what they call "D" bars. They were these pure chocolate bars. They had the American "D" bars and the English "D" bars. And I was so hungry that I just ate about half of one of them and I, my stomach, I regurgitated it. It was so rich, I couldn't take it. And then they send you to what they call a clearing station and there there was just wounded guys all over, Germans and, oh, just unbelievable. You have to give those medics, rear echelon, they had some young nurses there, too. It was the first females I saw, you know, Army nurses.

Mark: Because you were injured too at this time. Some sort of medical attention I would imagine.

Nelson: Yeah, well, there they figured, well, I wasn't dying so I didn't, you know, the Germans, I heard they were just left there, they died okay, but they gave the Americans the attention first. And then I, all I can remember is that later that night it was pitch dark and they placed us in ambulances and somehow or other they had ways of finding their way at night. And I often think that the only guys that should get the glory are the infantry men and the artillery men, the guys that, you know, had the face-to-face combat, but when I think back, the guy that drove that ambulance that night and it was in a war zone, I never knew his name, but he was doing his job too to win the war. And then we arrived in Liege, Belgium. I don't know just, it was early that morning or what but it felt real good to be in a hospital and to sleep on a real pillow.

Mark: And it was warm I would imagine.

- Nelson: Although a couple of nights before those B-1 and B-2 rockets had shattered some of the windows in that hospital.
- Mark: So how long were you in the hospital? How long until you got back to your unit?
- Nelson: Well, before I get into that, I would say that, in our division during the Bulge, our three infantry regiments, we lost about 3,000 men. Well, then from, well, I was operated on in Liege and I was there for, well, I had to think of this backwards because I, you sort of lose, you know, you never know, in combat you never knew what day it was, it was Monday, or Tuesday, or Friday, or what, or even what day, you know, if it was the 2<sup>nd</sup>. You never kept track of dates like that. So anyway, after I was in Liege for awhile, that hospital, we were put on troop trains and I remember we were on, oh, however long it took to get from Liege to Paris, and we got into Paris, it was on a, it was at night and they were unloading us and it seemed to be these Frenchmen were chattering around and it seemed to be like a jovial mood and I asked someone, "Hey, what's going on here?" and he says, "Well, it's Christmas Eve." And I said, Christmas Eve, I couldn't believe it. I had no idea it was Christmas Eve. And then the following day we were moved through Paris to a hospital near an airbase and from there, they couldn't move us to a hospital in England because the weather was so foggy, I was there for several days until the fog had cleared 'till the weather was suitable for flying. Once the weather was okay these C-47s, you know, they ride like trucks when you're up there, but they were the workhorse of the Air Force and all the wounded guys, they just flew them all to England, you know, over the Channel. Got to England and I was at a couple of hospitals there, too. They kept on moving you, you know, different places. I was there for about a little over three months. I had several operations after I was there. Had therapy and so on.
- Mark: But you did get back to the front didn't you?
- Nelson: Yeah, later on as the war was winding down.
- Mark: Did you get back to your same unit?
- Nelson: Yes I did, uh huh, yup.
- Mark: Three months in the hospital, the right towards the end of the war, this had to be March.
- Nelson: Yeah, yeah, it was, the war was winding down. As a matter of fact our division was almost hitting into Austria. We were way down there past Bavaria and we'd crossed the Danube and that, yeah. And at that time there

was very little resistance, although there were civilians and that that were, I don't know who killed them, you know, along the roads and that, but the resistance was almost nothing although occasionally there would be sporadic, you know, fire but it was move as fast as you could, you know, riding TDs or tanks, you know.

Mark: So there wasn't much resistance. Did you have much contact with German civilians at all?

Nelson: No, not, nope. They sort of stayed out of our way, especially in our area, yeah, right.

Mark: So when VE day was declared on May 8, how far had you come? How much combat had there been in those two months that you were back with your unit?

Nelson: You mean after I got back at the front?

Mark: Uh hm.

Nelson: Not very much. I don't remember exactly because it seemed I wasn't back with our unit very long. We were also like in reserve, even though you were attached to your unit you weren't right up way in front yet, see.

Mark: There was another unit ahead of you or something like that.

Nelson: Well, it was our unit that was ahead of us but you were sort of maybe in company headquarters or something like that that followed the spearheading unit.

Mark: I'd be curious, actually, you managed to get back in the same unit you were in before you were wounded and that you had changed much over time. I would imagine you weren't the only guy. There were a lot of people that didn't get back to the front for whatever reason. Had things changed? And how had they changed?

Nelson: Oh, yes. There were tremendous replacements. Some squads were down to two fellas even out of 12 and a lot of new faces. They had a lot of these replacements that maybe kids graduated from high school in June, took their 90-day basic training and maybe got a 14-day furlough, and before you knew it they were on a boat. Even before we went overseas some of these young kids, they came into our company to bring us up to strength and I know about a half a dozen of them never saw another Christmas, you know. They were just 18 years old and they were already, you know, dead. It was kind of sad.

- Mark: So, these new guys, how did they get into the unit? I mean, I realize there wasn't much combat as you got farther and farther and farther into Germany but there must have been some.
- Nelson: Well, see mostly you were, it's kind of had to explain but you had, when you were dug in in a foxhole you had a certain area that you and your foxhole buddy took care of. And the rest of our platoon, I mean, they were spread out so thin probably a couple of blocks, you know, so you didn't have that much contact with anybody, unless maybe you'd run into a few guys on a patrol or while you went to eat but other than that — and even though some of these kids came in before we went overseas, you thought of them as part of the family. You didn't think just because they were only, had been in the Army a few months and you were in almost two years already, or 20 months, you thought they were almost just like you, you know, so you didn't think of them as being green or anything like that.
- Mark: Or a danger in combat. Wouldn't slip up somewhere and put someone's life in danger.
- Nelson: No, no, you never thought of that although a lot of, I wouldn't say a lot, but some of our troops were killed by friendly fire. I know our platoon leader even called on our artillery fire even on our own positions because the enemy was right amongst us. He got the Silver Star for that. Anyway, you talked about when the war ended. That was on May 8, 1945. And anyway, in our area there was no celebrating of any kind. Not like the big United States cities. And anyway, I know I felt so humble and I prayed and I thanked God that he saw fit to spare me. And I know my mother, too; she was praying for both of her sons. I know she did it every night because she was very religious.
- Mark: Did you think, well, now I'm going to the Pacific or Japan? Or did you think the war was over? I know rumor is one of the hallmarks of the military experience. I'm interested in what people were thinking and what people thought would happen.
- Nelson: Well, yeah, that was, if it was on our mind, it was very remote. We knew the war was going on there and we had what they called some of these "salt water boys," they had just got over in Europe and the war had ended maybe while they were en route, even on the ocean even, and they were sent right back. I suppose to prepare for the war in the Pacific with the Japanese. But no, I myself wasn't too concerned about that. I thought well, gee whiz, that's months away yet and at that time a month was like five years, you know, a long time.
- Mark: So after the war what were your duties? Were you in sort of occupation duty? Or did they ship you up and send you home?

Nelson: Well, what we did, we were, I was on occupation duty in Wuerzburg, Germany — that's in Bavaria — and I was on occupation duty for three months. What we did, we helped guard displaced persons where the German Army camps used to be and we would go into Wuerzburg and I remember seeing Jack Benny and some of the entertainers, and I would have to pull guard at ammunition dumps and some of the wine and champagne cellars that were still intact underground, and it was just basically what you would call normal occupation duty. The German people themselves were no problem. As a matter of fact, there weren't that many around. There were more displaced persons around than there were German people, especially where I was.

Mark: Were there many camps up in that area? Concentration camps or other sorts of prisoner camps?

Nelson: No, not that I know of, although one of our units, when I wasn't with them, they did overrun one of the concentration camps, yes, uh huh. And that's a long story. I've got a friend of mine that was a squad leader at that time. He was even, see the Jewish community when this Holocaust commission was forming, they wanted to pick certain American soldiers that were instrumental in overrunning some of these concentration camps and this Curtis Whiteway was one of those that did. They even gave him a trip to Israel and presented him with their highest award. He rode on a big 747, red carpet treatment, everything else.

Mark: So in your sector though, were these displaced persons or refugees on roads and that sort of thing?

Nelson: Yeah, uh huh, but they were, a lot of these were mostly women. Maybe the men were in some forced labor camp. Most displaced persons were women. There were a few men but by and far, women.

Mark: Were they Germans or [unintelligible]?

Nelson: No, they were French, Polish, you name it, they were mixed. Some were, well, some were very young and pretty. As a matter of fact, we were supposed to keep away from them but, they called it fraternization, but we sort of ignored that, you know. I've got quite a few pictures of some of those gals.

Mark: They didn't enforce it. I know there were fraternization rules but the GIs didn't follow them.

Nelson: No.

Mark: They eventually gave up. That was your experience. For example, your officers would say go talk to these girls or raid this liquor cellar or whatever the case may be.

Nelson: Yeah. Because there were so many of them, displaced persons, that—

[INTERRUPTION]

Nelson: --the American GIs were sort of hungry for affection, too, you know, after being away from home and these girls were real friendly and they were looking for companionship, too. They were glad to associate with us.

[END OF TAPE - SIDE A]

[A FEW SENTENCES ARE MISSING HERE]

Nelson: --average but, and those with the lesser points were assigned to other divisions. Anyway, I went back to England again and I stayed there for maybe several weeks and we had to be very careful. If you went to town, they said “Remember, Joe, you miss the boat” so you had to be there in the morning whenever they called the names out, those that were going to be sent home. So I did finally leave England and I landed back in Boston Harbor on October 10, 1945. And then I was given a leave and I was discharged at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin on November 19, 1945.

Mark: And then back to Two Rivers?

Nelson: Yes. My homecoming was on a Sunday night and only my family was there. You know, big hugs and tears. I might say this too, that when I was discharged I almost broke my right hand at that final salute. It felt so good to be home.

Mark: So it's time to get your young life back in order now. The war is over and you need to go on and find work and get on with things. What were your priorities after the war?

Nelson: Well, after I was discharged I sort of made up for the lost time. You know, going to a lot of bars and getting acquainted with all my friends that were, you know, now out of service, just reminiscing.

Mark: So you were just sort of hanging around.

Nelson: Yeah, hanging around and, you know, nothing, no job or anything particular that we were going to do at that time.

- Mark: You mentioned your friends. I assume most of them were also vets who had been—
- Nelson: Sure, oh, yeah.
- Mark: --away all this time?
- Nelson: I know when I was home on my last furlough, gee, there wasn't anybody around. I was glad to get back to camp because there was just, you know, but now all the fellas were coming home and, you know. But anyway my job before the war at the ship yards was, you know, being scaled down and like I said I had worked on about five of the 28 submarines we built there. And I had planned to go to college but I guess I didn't go because I had a girlfriend and sort of hated to leave her so I went to work at the post office, where I retired in 1985, with about 40 years of service.
- Mark: Now, as a veteran, to get that job, did you get veterans' preference points? Or were you aware of them?
- Nelson: Oh, yeah, I was aware of them, yeah. A veteran, just being an ordinary veteran you got five additional points and if you were a, if you had, if you were rated with a disability, you got ten points.
- Mark: And did you get points?
- Nelson: Oh, yeah, I was a ten point veteran. However, I was lucky enough, I placed first on the examination so I --
- Mark: How [unintelligible]
- Nelson: So anyway, I still had the ten points. But what happened with a ten point veteran, as long as you made a passing grade of 70, you went to, you're the top of the list even surpassing somebody that maybe made 100 on the test. But they gave that, yeah.
- Mark: Now was this veterans' preference a factor in you seeking out this line of work? Was this something you thought, well, I can perhaps do or were you interested in [unintelligible].
- Nelson: Well, when I entered the post office I wanted to become what they call, I ended up being a letter carrier but I wanted to be, what do you call it? Investigator.
- Mark: Oh, postal investigator?



- Nelson: Yeah, uh hum. So I thought I would get my feet wet for a few years but as I looked into it more and more I found out that I would be sent down to maybe South Carolina or some hill country, you know, most undesirable place, and I know my wife wouldn't have liked that so I gave it up and I ended up doing my whole 40, almost 40 years, in the post office.
- Mark: Or a postal inspector. I think maybe that's the term.
- Nelson: Yeah, well, it would be an inspector, yeah.
- Mark: [unintelligible] So when it comes to the GI Bill, there was more than just the educational provisions. For example, there was an unemployment provision. You mentioned you were sort of hanging around town when you got home. Did you apply for these benefits at all?
- Nelson: Yes, there was what they called a 52-20. That was 52 weeks getting unemployment of \$20 a week.
- Mark: [unintelligible]
- Nelson: Well, I think I drew, wait, I'll have to further explain this. When I started in the post office, I didn't realize it but I didn't work full-time so I only worked two weeks and then I was told I was only going to work a half a day on a Saturday and here I was married, although we didn't have any children yet. Then I would apply, for about two or three weeks I got \$18 under the 52-20 program. That was the only GI benefit I got.
- Mark: Other than your veterans' preference.
- Nelson: Oh, yeah, uh hum.
- Mark: Were jobs scarce [unintelligible]
- Nelson: Oh, jobs were plentiful. There were jobs you wouldn't believe.
- Mark: Really.
- Nelson: Oh, yes. There were now, a lot of the industry was going back to peacetime manufacturing and there was a big demand for things that were not produced during the war.
- Mark: As a young family, what about finding a place to live? Was that a problem?
- Nelson: Well, I didn't get married right away. I didn't get married until 1947 so I lived with my folks. But yes, rent was hard to come by after the war. I mean, you

almost had to, well, there was what they call a rent freeze on. In other words, a landlord could not raise his rent. It was, the rent was frozen. It was hard to find a place to rent. Luckily though we did find a place but we were very, very lucky otherwise we would probably have had to live with my wife's parents or someplace, something like that.

Mark: Which I guess a lot of veterans actually ended up having to do.

Nelson: That's very true.

Mark: Well, it sounds like you've made a successful economic readjustment. In terms of your emotional state and that sort of thing after the war, combat can take a toll on people's minds. After the war, did you have any sorts of --

Nelson: Nightmares or anything?

Mark: Yeah.

Nelson: No. Only once when I was in the hospital in England did I have what I can remember a nightmare. Other than that, no. You got home, you're glad to get home and you were doing things that you hadn't done for almost the last three years and your mind just left the Army and everything else. You're now a civilian and you put that way in the back of your life. None of us even talked about it or anything else. We just were happy go lucky bunch of kids.

Mark: And veterans' organizations, you mentioned you joined the VFW, it must have been a couple of weeks after you got home.

Nelson: Yeah.

Mark: What prompted that?

Nelson: Well, I was still in the Army when a friend of mine, were going to go out with us one night and he said, "Before we go I've got to go to the VFW club at Two Rivers because I'm going to join." So I went there and right away they talked me into joining which I intended to do anyway, you know, but sometime later. So then I joined the VFW in 1944 and then—

Mark: For what reason? What attracted you to the VFW?

Nelson: Well, I, not any particular reason. I just thought it was an organization of overseas veterans and, you know, I felt it my duty to join. And then later on I joined the DAV, too. Once we had a Manitowoc County chapter and I'm a life member in both organizations.

- Mark: Now, of course, there's the American Legion. I'm interested, did you conscientiously choose the VFW over the Legion or it just happened to be they're the ones that snared you first.
- Nelson: That's probably the answer, although I did join the Legion for a couple of years in Manitowoc because they had a nice group of people and I enjoyed being with some of the fellows there. But then later on I didn't get to Manitowoc that often, once I was married, so I just stuck to the VFW and the DAV.
- Mark: Were you active in the organization? Did you join committees and that sort of thing or was it just sort of a social occasion for you?
- Nelson: Well, I hate to admit it but I was in the VFW for about ten years and I wasn't active at all and finally — the post quartermaster happened to be my future wife's uncle, I would meet him several times a week and he always asked me, "When are you going to go to a meeting?" and kept on asking me and finally I couldn't think of any more excuses so I said, "When is the next meeting?" and he told me and I went there and lo and behold I enjoyed the camaraderie and all that thing and I thought, boy, what a nice thing I missed all these years and before you knew it I became an adjutant and, you know, junior and senior vice, and finally I was the commander. There was an opening in the firing squad and I joined the firing squad; that was in 1955 and I'm still on it. Only missed one parade in all those years, Memorial Day parade, and I've been very active, you know, like we've had I don't know how many veterans we've buried, and civic events at Two Rivers, and things like that. So I enjoy my relationship with the VFW. But the DAV, no, I'm a member but I'm not, I haven't been active in that organization at all. The only thing I did, I sold forget-me-nots several years, you know. That's a money-making thing we have.
- Mark: Yeah, fundraiser.
- Nelson: Fund raising they would call it.
- Mark: [unintelligible]
- Nelson: No, although we have a very good membership, very good membership in the county.
- Mark: Do you?
- Nelson: Yes, we do. Very good. It's growing every year. Nice group of boys, fellas.

Mark: You've pretty much exhausted all the questions that I have. Is there anything you'd like to add, anything you think we've glossed over?

Nelson: Well, I'm quite active in our division reunions, too.

Mark: Oh, yes. I always ask about--

Nelson: I attended over 20 of them; they're held all over the United States.

Mark: When did you first start?

Nelson: Well, I--

Mark: Involved [unintelligible]

Nelson: Yeah, I was on the mailing list from the very first day but going so far away, like say maybe Washington, DC or New York or Philadelphia or Pittsburgh, that was a long ways and when you're married and have young children and besides trying to get off from work, I didn't think very seriously of ever attending a reunion until finally one was held in Chicago and I made all kinds of plans with my supervisor, I worked to get off, and lo and behold about ten days before I was going to go, he said, "Jerry, I can't let you off. I'm short of help." And I said, "Gee, here I've been waiting for years to go to a reunion that's almost in my back yard and now I can't go." But it was shortly thereafter I managed to go to my first one. It was in Kansas City, Missouri and I was so excited and had so much fun I thought, gee, I missed all this camaraderie and all this excitement all these years and from then on I've missed very few. And my wife has attended many, too. And we've also attended so many reunions, also attended two of our company reunions in Nelsonville, Ohio.

Mark: And so what goes on at these reunions?

Nelson: Well, first of all, there's, when I first went I was the only one maybe from my company. One or two other fellows but as you keep on going you create relationships with other fellas from other units and you start seeing them every year and before you know it, they're like your brother. Yeah, usually we have, it's a lot of talking about the war, and we have a memorial service, we honor our departed members that died the previous year, then we have the hospitality rooms that are open where you can have a drink and converse with fellow members from the division, and then we have what we call a beer bus night, with entertainment, then Saturday we have our banquet and that is we honor the president, past president, and those that are active in the division, and then we have a big dance, and then Sunday morning everybody says their farewells, and then they leave for home and look forward to the reunion the following

year. We get about, last year at Pittsburgh we had a little over 1,200 but this was an area where most of our members live. We don't, like when we were in San Francisco, we only had maybe about 800. So we look to the future, one of these days there won't be any reunions because the age of our members are in the last 70s, some are past their 80s, and some are wheelchairs, or their spouses are ill, can't make it, so we're trying to do the best we can.

Mark: Sounds like you're doing very well.

Nelson: Yes, we are.

Mark: The 50 year mark, I'm surprised at such large numbers.

Nelson: Yes, we have a very active division association. You have to give credit to those that make it go.

Mark: Very interesting. Anything else you'd like to finish off with here?

Nelson: Well, something I didn't mention here was that in one of your questions, it was number ten, and I have to tell you this, too. Our division had a variety of men. The division was activated at Camp VanDorn, Mississippi in 1942. If ever there was a "hell hole" of the United States, this was it, so they tell me. I wasn't there at that time. But it was tarpaper shacks and mud and more mud and heat and humidity, all kinds of bugs and snakes. Our division was made of men from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia, and some were even illiterate. Most had very low IQs. Most of the fellows, when I entered the division, were about 4 to 12 years older and I didn't think too much of this division at that time. Not because 3,000 of us were college kids but I didn't think I would be too fond serving in the division. But as time progressed, you know, I adapted to my surroundings and I was very proud, you know, to wear the blue infantry piping on my cap. Just because a guy lived on the other side of the tracks or lucky if he got through fifth grade, many of these fellas made excellent soldiers and I was really proud to serve with them. It wasn't that I was over, you know, overly patriotic in combat; it was just a case of survival. And I was able to pray, too, you know. That gave me courage and comfort.

Mark: Thanks for taking some time out of your day.

Nelson: Sure, I enjoyed it.

Mark: I enjoyed it, too.

Nelson: Sure.

**[End of Interview]**