

Transcription: Arthur Hill

My name is Tom Cengel. I'm with the General Land Office. Today is May 30, 2008, Friday. It's approximately 9:15, and I am interviewing Mr. Arthur Hill by telephone. I am located at the General Land Office, and Mr. Hill is at his home. The interview is in support of the Voices of Veterans Program of the State of Texas Veterans Land Board. The purpose is to create a permanent record of the military service experiences of veterans. Mr. Hill, as you know, I'm about to interview you relating to your military experiences.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

The interview is by telephone. I will be using a tape recorder to record this interview. The interview will be transcribed and made a part of the permanent records of the Veterans Land Board in Austin, Texas. Does the Veterans Land Board have your permission and consent to conduct this interview and to make it a part of the permanent records of the Veterans Land Board?

Arthur Hill: Yes, it does.

Okay, Mr. Hill, the purpose of the interview is to record your recollections of your military experience. We will follow somewhat question and answer format but please feel free to expand on your answers and add anything that you think may be helpful in refreshing your recollections so that future generations will have the opportunity to know what it was like for you during your military life and how those experiences shaped your life since then.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

We understand some of your experiences may be difficult to discuss and, if so, you are free to limit the interview to the extent you are comfortable in relating the experiences, okay?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

Okay, let's get a little background information to begin with. Could you give me your full name and your present address?

Arthur Hill: Arthur James Hill, Sr., 509 Staghorn Pass; Kyle, Texas. What's the area code, Florence? 78640.

Okay, good. And Mr. Hill, do you care to give your age?

Arthur Hill: I am 85.

Eighty-five years old, okay. If you don't mind, we'd like to have a little bit about your family information, just a background from your birth to the present.

Arthur Hill: I was born in Buffalo, New York.

Niagara Falls.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, and I lived in Niagara Falls until I went in the service.

Did you attend schools in . . .

Arthur Hill: Yes, grade school, Whitney Avenue, grade school; North Junior High School, that was from seventh to ninth grade, I think it was. Trott Vocational High School which I quit when I was 17 years old.

Okay, would you tell me what your father did?

Arthur Hill: My father worked in a chemical plant during the Depression, and he delivered groceries for my uncle who had a grocery store.

Okay, and did you have brothers and sisters?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. I had a brother named Harry, a brother named Bob, Robert, and a sister named Barbara.

Did any other members of your family spend time in the military?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, my brother, Harry, he never left the States but he was a cook, and my brother, Robert, was in the Navy, and for medical reasons he had to get discharged.

How old were you were you joined the Army?

Arthur Hill: Well, I ran away when I was 17 years old to join the Army which was the later part of 1940, but I didn't get in the Army until I was 18 because I had to get my parents' signature.

So they caught you.

Arthur Hill: Yeah, they did. I went to the recruiting office and they wouldn't even talk to me until I had . . . My father and I had some problems, and the point is I had to take him out and get him drunk so he could sign my papers.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, but don't put that in there.

Was that in Buffalo?

Arthur Hill: No, Niagara Falls, New York.

Okay, in Niagara Falls. And that was in 1941 or . . .

Arthur Hill: Forty-one, yes sir.

What part of '41?

Arthur Hill: April when I turned 18.

Okay, April of '41.

Arthur Hill: The first.

April 1, '41 is when you joined.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

So you were a volunteer?

Arthur Hill: Oh, most certainly. You know, I never received a draft card until I was in Iceland.

Is that right? They tell you to go back and sign up?

Arthur Hill: Then I had already been in over a year.

I guess . . .

Arthur Hill: That was a joke.

Yeah, that was a waste. In April of 1941, there were some pretty hot times, war wise.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

Although we weren't in the war . . .

Arthur Hill: We weren't in it, no sir.

It was going hot and heavy in Europe.

Arthur Hill: Had submarines in the Atlantic Ocean and stuff like that.

And some concerns about what was happening in the Pacific with the Japanese.

Arthur Hill: That's right. In fact, on my way to Iceland, we almost got torpedoed.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

Now when you entered, you had to know all of this was going on.

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes sir.

And what was your reason for joining?

Arthur Hill: I just wanted to join the Army. I really didn't have no reason. I wanted to get away from my problem family.

Oh, okay. So it wasn't a patriotic, "I'm gonna go out and take care of the Germans," and what have you.

Arthur Hill: No, I didn't even know anything about that really, to tell you the truth. I was understanding there was submarine problems in the Atlantic Ocean.

Did you at the time that you joined, were you thinking that the United States might get involved in that war?

Arthur Hill: I thought so, yes sir.

And that you would then be directly involved?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, 'cause my father . . . Remember I think I told you. He was in the Army but he joined the Army shortly after World War I, and he was stationed in Buffalo, New York. He only was in three years.

So you joined April 1 of 1941, and I assume then you went to basic training somewhere.

Arthur Hill: I went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, first.

How long were you there?

Arthur Hill: There about a week, and believe it or not, I was having trouble getting uniforms 'cause I looked younger than 18 years old. And finally I got uniforms, and we were living in a preamble tent, a bunch of us, and this is going to be humorous if I may say so. This sergeant came along . . . I found out he was a sergeant later on. He came along and he got tired of us laying around, and he picked me and another guy, took us out in the field to guard these two trees. We could never understand what it was all about.

To this day you still don't understand what that was about.

Arthur Hill: I still don't understand. The other guy fell asleep so I figured if he could sleep, so could I, and the next thing I know, somebody was kicking my feet. It was an officer, and asking me what we were doing out there. Well, I didn't notice at the time but I learned later on, we had a Springfield '03 in our hands but no bolt. I didn't know much about weapons at the time, and I asked the gentleman which I found out it was a lieutenant, why I was here at this tree. "There's nothing around here and this gun looks broke to me." That sergeant got in a lot of trouble. So things like that did happen.

Oh, I believe that.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

Okay, so you were there just for a short period of time?

Arthur Hill: Just one week.

One week.

Arthur Hill: Then I was sent to Camp Croft, South Carolina.

Camp what was that?

Arthur Hill: Camp Croft, C-R-O-F-T, out of Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Okay, and how long were you there?

Arthur Hill: About six months.

Oh, okay. That was the basic training time.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. Basic training. I was a bugler there.

Bugler? Wow.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. When I was in the boy scouts, I was a bugler. Anyway, this was I blow Reveille in the morning and Retreat at night but when I was on guard duty, I was also the bugler. And if I may say so, the first time I ever seen a dead man was one morning. The guards were in the prison, stockade you know. We slept in there where the prisoners were. These prisoners were guys that went AWOL and stuff like that.

Yes.

Arthur Hill: And we had prison handlers. And when a prisoner took out, a handler took out prisoners, he either took one or two out to do guard, you know, ground work, taking care of the landscape and that. And when they came back, they'd stand outside the gate, the stockade and say, "Prisoner number one, guard number one, two prisoners, both walking." Well, the first, second guy that came in, "This is prison guard number two, one walking and one riding." And they carried shotguns with 'em, and the guy shot this one kid.

Because he was trying to . . .

Arthur Hill: Trying to get away, yeah. We all got sick about it naturally.

So you actually saw it happen?

Arthur Hill: I didn't see it happen but he came back with a wheelbarrow and the dead man was in the wheelbarrow and the other kid was pushing the wheelbarrow.

That's a nice introduction to the military, huh?

Arthur Hill: You're damn right, you're right. Neither of us, none of us people that were on guard duty could sleep that night.

And I'll bet it was a lesson to stay away from the brig.

Arthur Hill: That's right.

Wow. That's a . . . Not too many people have that introduction that early in the military.

Arthur Hill: Right. That happened while I was at Camp Croft, South Carolina.

Okay, and that was your basic training?

Arthur Hill: Basic training, yeah.

Basic learning about being a soldier, shooting, and all the rest?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, right. Went through obstacle courses, fired the Springfield rifle and so forth.

Were you a good bugler?

Arthur Hill: Yes, I thought I was. In fact, I could jazz up Reveille.

All right. You were the first to get up and the last to go to bed then at night.

Arthur Hill: That's right, right, right.

And did you perform that duty all the time during basic?

Arthur Hill: Yes, basic training, yes sir. And then we had a bugle and drum corps while we were there, and we played several times in the city for football games.

What were some of the things that you enjoyed about your basic training?

Arthur Hill: Well, I got to know people, and then I got to learn how to drink a beer.

In basic training?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. When you could go into town, yeah.

How do you think you adapted to military discipline?

Arthur Hill: I thought I did all right.

Did you?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

Okay.

Arthur Hill: I never got in trouble. In fact, I was scared to get in trouble.

After what you experienced and saw, I could well imagine.

Arthur Hill: That's right.

What were some of the difficult things that you had to deal with while you were in basic training?

Arthur Hill: Well, gettin' up early in the morning, going on KP if I had to go on KP. And I did a little boxing while I was in basic training.

And how'd you do?

Arthur Hill: Well, I was doing okay until I got in the ring with a guy that, before he come in the service, he was professional. And the guy that was my manager told me, "Don't worry about him, Art." God, he hit me five times before I knew what was happening, so I quit.

And you went back to being a bugler.

Arthur Hill: That's right.

A little safer occupation.

Arthur Hill: That's right, right.

Did you miss anything from civilian life?

Arthur Hill: No sir, no sir.

How about basic training, the food? How did you . . .

Arthur Hill: It wasn't bad, wasn't bad. It was all right. I enjoyed it. I didn't have to pay for it so it was okay.

That's right. Free food and lodging. All right. So after you finished your basic . . . Any other interesting things that happened during that . . .

Arthur Hill: No, just the normal things. Going to the rifle range, and going through the obstacle courses.

So you were there six months, so that's, what? About September or so that you got . . .

Arthur Hill: We left there and I was shipped to the Brooklyn Army Navy Depot in Brooklyn, New York. I didn't know what was gonna happen, and naturally I knew it was something 'cause there was boats there so you knew you were going somewhere.

So you didn't know from the time you left until you got to the Brooklyn Naval Yards what was going to happen to you?

Arthur Hill: That's right, I didn't, no sir.

And that was getting pretty close to December 7th, so . . .

Arthur Hill: That's right.

So things were getting pretty sticky and hairy.

Arthur Hill: Right, this was, let's see. I got there about the latter part of September, and when I finished up and we got into Brooklyn, we were there about a month. I don't know why they kept us there that long but what we were actually doing while we were there, we was helping renovating ships to be troop ships.

Okay.

Arthur Hill: Yeah, we worked on cleaning 'em up, and getting things ready.

And then I assume all of a sudden somebody said, "You're boarding ships."

Arthur Hill: That's right, that's right.

Did you know at the time where you were going?

Arthur Hill: I heard that we were just going towards Europe. I didn't know we were going to Iceland.

I'll bet you had never heard of Iceland.

Arthur Hill: Then I knew we were in the North Atlantic, and one morning we were told that a torpedo missed the front of our boat about a foot.

Wow.

Arthur Hill: In fact, I was seasick all the way across.

I was not very good at that myself.

Arthur Hill: You're not kidding, boy. I've been at sea 13 times and sick every one of 'em.

Before you left, did you know what Iceland was or where it was located?

Arthur Hill: No sir, I didn't. I didn't pay much attention to it.

And I don't imagine you thought you would be going to a place like that.

Arthur Hill: No, I didn't. I thought maybe we were going to England or Europe, but I really didn't know where we was heading for.

Okay, so you got on the ships without knowing where you're going except probably somewhere in Europe, and after dodging a torpedo, the next thing you know, you're in Iceland.

Arthur Hill: Yeah, we landed in Reykjavik.

That's the capital, isn't it?

Arthur Hill: That's right, and I got pictures of the place and everything else. You know, when you come off a ship, they call your last name?

Yes.

Arthur Hill: If you recall, and then you give your first name, your rank and everything else. And when the guy called me and I answered, he said, "Where the heck you've been, Hill?" I said, "I've been laying in bed for a week." I went to sick bay once and they sent me back to my quarters. I could hear my name being called on for to come on KP and to go on guard duty, but I was laying in bed I was so sick.

I had a similar experience way back then. I can certainly . . .

Arthur Hill: Just a minute, sir. (Speaking to someone else: "Will you close that door, honey?") We got a parrot here in the house and he's sounding off and the door's open.

He doesn't cuss, does he?

Arthur Hill: Yeah. He likes to answer all the questions.

Okay. So tell us, what was Iceland like back in 1941?

Arthur Hill: Not bad. We were stationed, the company I belonged to was between Hafnarfjörður and Reykjavik, halfway between there. In fact, I have an outlay of it and all this stuff. It's a shame you can't be here 'cause I've got all this material. My campground was called Slingsby Hill. The biggest thing that happened to me when I come there, I was assigned to the First Platoon, Second Squad, and I went to the Quonset hut to enter the Quonset hut, and this big guy . . . This outfit was completely manned by lads from West Virginia, Virginia and Kentucky. And

here I'm a Yankee, and I come to the door and I hear some music. I like, always rose up on country music anyway. I heard this music going on and said, "Oh boy, this is great." And this big guy come open the door, he said, "Hey, Yankee. Do you like hillbilly music?" And his name was Private Frye. I said, "Yes sir, I do." Said, "Well, then come on in." In the middle of the floor of the Quonset hut was this 55-gallon drum, and you guess what was in that. And they were having one bang-up of a time.

And they invited you?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yeah. They invited . . . I had to go in there 'cause that was my squad. And so this guy says, "That's where you sleep." He never called me by name. He always called me Yankee. He says, "That's where you sleep, Yankee." And I said, "Okay." And this is when, the first time I ever got an M1 rifle. I was issued a rifle before I went to that quarters.

Okay, so that's the first time?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

So you had never fired an M1 and any of the . . .

Arthur Hill: No, not until I got there.

Okay. Once you got there and realized you were kind of at the end of the earth, what did they tell you you were going to be doing? What did you do?

Arthur Hill: What we mainly did for a while, we would build roads and unloaded ships. In fact, the outfit got there in September of '41, and I got there about end of October, first part of November.

And the outfit was . . . ?

Arthur Hill: Company A, 10th Regiment, 5th Division.

Okay, and eventually the whole division came there?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

So how long were you on Iceland?

Arthur Hill: Well, we left there I think in '43, but we spent three and a half months in England.

Okay, so you spent what? A year, more than a year on Iceland?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We had your 24 hours of daylight and 24 hours of darkness so to speak.

Right, yeah. Did you like your time there?

Arthur Hill: I enjoyed some of it but it got boring 'cause you didn't really have nothing to do. The fathers and the men in Iceland would tell their daughters if they had dated . . . Incidentally, we relieved a Marine division up there.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: The Marines were there before we were. In fact, I had to laugh. They were loading on the ships that we were departing from, and half of 'em weren't in uniforms.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: But there was a Marine, and the English were up there too. So when we got there, the guys told me there when I got to talk to 'em that I thought they were gonna be doing basic, you know, training for combat and that. That's all they performed, was guard duty, building roads and unloading ships.

Okay, so you spent little time training for actual combat?

Arthur Hill: That's right, very little time.

There wasn't a lot of places to go on your time off?

Arthur Hill: No, there was theaters for us but . . . In fact, what was that Clark Gable picture? *Gone With The Wind* or something? That's the first time I ever saw it and it cost me fifty cents to go see it in Reykjavik.

Wow.

Arthur Hill: In fact, I have a Bible that I bought in a drug store . . . Well, their drug stores are called apoteks. And I have a picture of the building that I went in and bought this Bible for five Kronas. And I carried that through my whole military career.

Did you have any other experiences of interest while you were on Iceland that you'd like to share with us?

Arthur Hill: Really, no. Nothing much. Oh, then my platoon was shipped to Hafnarfjörður to guard the docks, the latter part of our stay there, and my job was that if we got invaded by the Germans, up on the hill in this outpost was a plunger to blow up the docks. That was one of my jobs.

To blow up the docks?

Arthur Hill: To blow up the docks, right.

While you were on Iceland, was there any shelling of Iceland?

Arthur Hill: We got strafed a couple times by pilots, and we shot down a plane.

Do you recall what kind of plane it was?

Arthur Hill: Some, one little ol' wing plane, and we buried the man at Slingsby Hill.

So it was a single wing plane?

Arthur Hill: Single one, yeah.

Or single engine rather?

Arthur Hill: Right, single engine.

He must have flown out of Norway or something.

Arthur Hill: Somewhere, right, right.

So other than that, that was the only combat, if you will, type situation that occurred?

Arthur Hill: Well, there was a three-masted schooner off of the island close to a small island off of Iceland that was a spy ship for Germany. And one of our lieutenants with five men captured that schooner and, like I said the other day, the lieutenant got a Silver Star, a Soldier's Medal for that.

You were then on Iceland when Pearl Harbor occurred?

Arthur Hill: That's right. We got woke up that morning and we were told what happened. And a lot of us, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" You know what I mean?

Kind of like a little time before you would have said, "Where's Iceland?"

Arthur Hill: That's right.

Now you became a worldly person. You knew where Iceland was and you knew where Pearl Harbor was. How did that news, how did you take that news?

Arthur Hill: Real bad 'cause we worried about the men that was killed there and stuff like that, like any soldier or serviceman would feel. We figured, "Well, this is it." We didn't even think about Germany.

Right. A couple days later you found out though that you had to worry about Germany too which was a lot closer than Pearl Harbor.

Arthur Hill: That's right. Well, you know there's a lot of submarine traffic going on, and we used to recover bodies from all kinds of nations off the coastline.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. A lot of ships being sunk.

They were sunk and the bodies floated into . . . ?

Arthur Hill: And the bodies would float ashore.

Okay. Approximately when was it then that you left for England?

Arthur Hill: I'm trying to think. We were in England for three and a half months so it had to be first part of '44.

First part of '44. So you were on Iceland a long time.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, and we spent three and a half months in England where I said before, we got outfitted, equipment and new personnel.

While you were on Iceland and after the war started, after 1941, so 1942 and parts of 1943, the United States was now at war, and you were in Iceland.

Arthur Hill: We were on full alert constantly.

What were your thoughts at that time? Were you anxious to go somewhere and do something or were you . . .

Arthur Hill: Yeah, right. We really did. We wanted to know why we were in Iceland building roads and unloading ships 'cause actually we were acting like stevedores really.

And you were anxious to get involved in combat?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, most of the guys, right, right.

How about you?

Arthur Hill: Well, I felt that way too, not knowing what it would be like.

Right. So finally you got off the island and you headed to England. Prior to that time, other than basic training, you had no combat training at all.

Arthur Hill: No, no, no, no. Your normal basic training, you know what I'm talking about?

Yes.

Arthur Hill: When we were on guard duty there in Iceland, our rifles were fully loaded and ready for anything, and we were told what . . . We had to be very strict. In fact, one time our regimental commander come to the base and I'd never seen the man before. And I made him dismount and identify himself and he got teed off, and he called our captain and the captain told the colonel, "This man's only doing what he was told to do."

Wow.

Arthur Hill: And one time, a panel truck, an Icelander was driving a panel truck and tore down our front gate, and knocked our guard down but didn't hurt him, and I unloaded my M1 rifle in his truck. And the next time this guy had a brand new Ford pickup that the government bought him.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: That's right.

You did the shooting because you . . . ?

Arthur Hill: Because I thought somebody was trying to kill our guard. And the next time I see this guy, he was driving a brand new Ford pickup.

So you're the cause of his getting a new vehicle?

Arthur Hill: That's right. The heck with the guard, right?

Right. I assume he wasn't too happy with you that day but maybe the next day he was.

Arthur Hill: Yeah, like I was telling ya, you know Iceland was known for the most beautiful women in the world.

Really, I did not know that.

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes. They were. And the women were not allowed to associate with the military. If the father caught 'em, the father would shave their head bald so none of our guys ever got to date anybody.

Was that just Americans or any military?

Arthur Hill: Any military.

Wow. I guess that wasn't a lot of fun being stationed there then?

Arthur Hill: No, that's true, right.

Okay, so we finally left Iceland.

Arthur Hill: And we're in England, and all we did in England is get outfitted for new personnel and equipment. Up-to-date equipment.

Okay, how long were you in England?

Arthur Hill: Three and a half months.

Three and a half months. And what did you do during that period?

Arthur Hill: Well, we were allowed to . . . This is when we got our first three-day passes 'cause they mentioned one of our men, the only man in our outfit that didn't get wounded, and incidentally, the poor guy today is crippled from the waist down, and he's got all kinds of intestinal problems. And this man was never wounded. His name was Goodman. And he's the one who wrote a book about our company.

And he was the only one in the company who wasn't wounded?

Arthur Hill: The only man who wasn't wounded. See, I have a picture of our platoon, of all the men that were killed and wounded in our outfit, and he was in our platoon. And it mentions in this picture, Mark Goodman's the only man that never got wounded. That's not his fault.

Right, I assume not. Okay, here you are. You've been in the Army now for almost two years, and you've really had no combat training.

Arthur Hill: No sir.

Other than basic training, and still haven't while you're in England.

Arthur Hill: That's right.

What did you basically do during that time period in England?

Arthur Hill: Well, we had people talking to us, and we were allowed to go on passes which was the first time we had three-day passes since we been from Iceland, and we got to be able to go through London and all this place. In fact, I had the honor of one time, you know, the Queen of England today used to be an ambulance driver when she was a princess, and we got to shake her hand.

Really?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

Wow, when she was a princess?

Arthur Hill: When she was a princess, right. We didn't know who she was. We just knew she was an English girl driving an ambulance.

What did you think of the English people and England while you were there?

Arthur Hill: They treated us real nice. I got acquainted with a family 'cause one day when I walking around the general area, I came to a playground and these kids were on this thing where you had . . . It was big, round like a big platter. I forget what they call it. And they were trying to get this thing to go around and I was pushing it around for 'em, and I met the mother and father of one of the little boys on there, and they got to be pretty friendly with me and invited me home to their dinner.

Terrific.

Arthur Hill: So it was real . . . The English treated us real good.

Did you ever wonder whether you were ever going to see combat after all that time?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. We wondered why we were there. We thought maybe we were gonna be there to help defend England until we met General Patton.

Okay, so England about three and a half months. Then you went up to where?

Arthur Hill: Northern Ireland. Newcastle, Northern Ireland which was about 20 miles from Belfast.

And how long were you there?

Arthur Hill: We were there until July of 19 . . . And incidentally, when I said we landed in Normandy D plus 10, I meant to say we landed July the 10th, not June the 10th.

Okay, so a month after the initial invasion?

Arthur Hill: Right, a month after the invasion.

So from the time you left England and went up to Northern Ireland and until the time you went across the channel, you were in Northern Ireland.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

And what did you do there?

Arthur Hill: Training, combat training. We trained with the British troops, and let me tell you something. When we were with 'em, the English troops would say, "Hey, Yank." I don't want to say this to you. Is there a woman present?

Someone in the background: Yes, here.

Arthur Hill: No, that's my wife saying yes. "You don't urinate on the English highway." They always kidded us about that. But these guys already had been in combat some places, you know, 'cause they were all over the place, and they were real good to us.

Did they ever talk to you about their combat experiences?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes sir. They'd tell ya. And they put it in a humorous vein.

Did that change your idea about wanting to get into combat?

Arthur Hill: No, we were all willing to go really. Naturally we all had in our mind what would happen.

So let me try to figure out world events about that time. We're talking about first part of 1944.

Arthur Hill: Right, right.

So, the things that were happening, at least in the European Theater would have been the bombings out of England and the Mediterranean Campaign was going on. They were coming up Italy by that time.

Arthur Hill: Right, right. In fact, Patton landed in North Africa if you recall.

Yes.

Arthur Hill: 'Cause I had a cousin that landed and got wounded going into Africa.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

So '42 and '43 were Africa, North Africa, and then across to Sicily and up the boot.

Arthur Hill: And I was on pass in London, England, when what do you call 'em? Rockets they used to send over?

Oh, the V-1s?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, the V-1, yeah. A building nearby where we were at got hit.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: That scared the living daylights out of us.

I would imagine. So, okay, now in Northern Ireland you finally began combat training?

Arthur Hill: Right, right.

And what were you being trained to do?

Arthur Hill: I was a bazookaman. In fact, the first time I ever saw . . . This was when the bazooka was one solid piece. I got to fire it. I was a bazookaman.

Would you tell us what a bazooka essentially is?

Arthur Hill: It's a rocket. It's a rocket shell that's for to hit tanks with, or anything else.

It's a handheld like tube?

Arthur Hill: It's a handheld. You hold it over your shoulder. Your ammunition man loads it for ya, and at the very end of the rocket, there's two wires. He attaches the wires to posts that are on the gun itself. And then you fire it.

Now, did you ask to be trained or were you told you were going to do this?

Arthur Hill: No, I was told I was going to do it. You didn't ask for anything.

Were you happy with the choice they gave you?

Arthur Hill: Well, in a way I was 'cause it was something new but later on, I'd be the first guy they'd holler at when we were in combat going through woods. It was hard to control 'cause you know you're gonna hit stuff. You know, by bumping into it. And I'd be the first guy they'd holler at. "Hill, be quiet." It's the gun hitting the branches and that.

How long was it?

Arthur Hill: Oh, God.

It was about five feet, wasn't it?

Arthur Hill: Something along that, right, right.

One piece?

Arthur Hill: Then they came up with the two-piece one.

What did you carry in addition for your own self protection?

Arthur Hill: A carbine.

So you carried an M1 carbine and a bazooka.

Arthur Hill: M1 carbine, yeah. I got one here at home.

We won't try to figure out how you got that one. Okay, so you learned to be a bazookaman.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. Then you had an ammunition carrier. He'd carry two satchels, I'll call 'em, with the shells.

Did you enjoy learning to fire?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, I thought it was unique. I really did. I thought it was something. And I couldn't wait to use it which I never did get to shoot at a tank but I did have the opportunity to shoot at a sniper in a church steeple.

Okay, we'll get to that. So you learned to be a bazookaman, and I assume by then you pretty well knew that . . .

Arthur Hill: We were going to combat, right.

You were going into combat, and did the troops at that time know that it was going to be across the channel?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. We had an idea that's where . . . Because that's the only thing we could think of. We didn't think of Africa or Italy or anything 'cause we thought that was about over.

Yeah, so you anticipated it was going to be across the channel.

Arthur Hill: 'Cause you know, we could see the planes, the B-17s, going over to Europe.

I always wonder what that would have been like, to experience all of those airplanes on that island of England. It must have been sights to see.

Arthur Hill: Oh, my God. It's hard to believe. In fact, the VFW post I belong to here in Kyle, one of the men in there was a B-17 crew chief. And he got shot down, and he got out all right. In fact, I don't want to bring . . . He was the oldest man in the outfit until I joined, and they thought he'd get very mad 'cause I was two years older.

You became senior, huh? Positioned.

Arthur Hill: Yeah.

Okay, so you're getting close now to knowing that you're going to be going across the channel, and I assume even though it was a deep-kept secret supposedly and what have you, everybody who was there had to know what was happening because of the number of men. There had to be so many GIs, you probably standing on each other, and ships and everything else getting ready to go. So it happened in the beginning of June 1944, and you didn't go with the first groups.

Arthur Hill: No sir. We landed July the 10th.

Were you getting word back of what was going on?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, we were informed where the troops were, where the various outfits were located, so we were wondering when we were going to go.

Did that increase your desire to go to combat or diminish it?

Arthur Hill: Well, it's hard to say, sir. When I was only a young man, I thought, well, it'd be great to go but I was wondering what would happen. We all felt we wanted to go really, but we all had in the back of our mind what would happen.

Yes, you had to have great trepidation about what was going to happen since you've never experienced it, but knew it was going on.

Arthur Hill: Right.

So finally, I assume you got the word that you were going to be going over?

Arthur Hill: That's right. Well, we got that word when I told you that we were woke up that one morning, get full field packs, and class A uniforms and we marched about 25 miles to the deserted Northern Ireland airfield. We were going to meet somebody there. We'd already met Eisenhower 'cause he came one day. The picture I got of my platoon is the day that he was there to just speak to us. He didn't bring up that we were going or anything else, he just wanted to congratulate us being where we were at.

This was a little bit before D-Day I assume.

Arthur Hill: That's right, right. And then when we met Patton, we had a . . . We were astonished and admired by this man, and we figured, "What's he doing here?" And then when he started talking, we knew what was going to happen.

So he came to visit you in Northern Ireland?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. He came to visit us and spoke to us. I have that speech.

Did you see him?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes. He walked through our ranks. He walked through every rank.

What were your impressions?

Arthur Hill: We thought he was a great man, and there ain't one of us alive today that feels that he was disgraced by being killed by an automobile accident instead of in combat.

So you eventually became attached to the 3rd Army which was Patton's outfit, right?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes. Right, right, right. I think we got into the 3rd Army in July 'cause we were sent over there, and we were sent to a field where the first time, we got shelled. And I tell you, we were all scared to hell. Fortunately nobody got hurt.

One off-the-wall question. Did you ever see the movie, Patton?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

And did you think it was realistic?

Arthur Hill: Real close. I don't believe Patton got out there and fired at airplanes with a .45, but I wouldn't doubt if he would. But he had pearl-handled pistols, you know.

I know. I know that, yes. Okay, so where was the first time you were fired at?

Arthur Hill: We were in Normandy. We just got there.

Before we get to Normandy, you were at the airfield in Northern Ireland, and why were you at an airfield?

Arthur Hill: To meet him.

Oh, okay.

Arthur Hill: It was deserted. No planes came in there. He came in from someplace else 'cause he came up the road in a Jeep with sirens blaring and everything else. And him standing up instead of sitting down, he was standing up holding the top of the windshield.

Did he have his helmet on?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yeah, yeah.

He was in all regalia.

Arthur Hill: Yeah, he had them pearl-handled pistols. And another thing too, it rained a little bit, and all of us took prophylactics and put over the muzzles.

Muzzles of your rifles. Well, they served useful purposes.

Arthur Hill: Right.

After Patton's visit, you then what?

Arthur Hill: We went back to our outfit, and about a week or so later, we were loaded on trucks to go to the ships.

Do you recall what kind of ship you went over in?

Arthur Hill: Just a cargo ship. And then, you know, you went up them nets. Boy, that used to scare the hell out of me, going up those, you know, climbing aboard and coming down. And then we come down our landing craft, and then we went ashore and we saw what trouble that went on. We landed on Omaha Beach and we seen what was left of Omaha Beach, and we couldn't figure how our guys come ashore there.

Just before you left England, I know that right after D-Day, the Germans started sending very large volumes of the V-1 rockets into England.

Arthur Hill: They did that quite a bit, you're right.

Did you see any or experience any of them?

Arthur Hill: Well, I was in town one time when one landed. That scared the hell out of me too.

Was that your first experience of something really exploding?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. That was the first time I ever seen anything like that.

And hostility?

Arthur Hill: Right. We never got none of that in Ireland. If you recall, Southern Ireland was pro-Nazi. In fact, Southern Ireland had a German compound there, and the Northern Ireland people wanted us to go down there and invade 'em.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: That's right. They wanted us to go across the Irish Sea and do that. They constantly asked us to do that.

You never did though?

Arthur Hill: No, no we didn't.

What was the trip like going across the channel?

Arthur Hill: I got sick again.

You got sick again.

Arthur Hill: Man, that's one thing I couldn't stand.

Did you ever get over that in your whole life?

Arthur Hill: No, I didn't 'cause I've crossed the English channel twice, once coming back to the hospital and another one going back, and then when we come home from . . . I was shipped out of Marseilles, France, when I'm coming home to get discharged, I got sick all the way home. And then when I went to Alaska the first time, until I got up to Anchorage, I got sick going there too.

I guess you don't go on cruises.

Arthur Hill: I don't go on cruises, and I don't fly anymore.

All right, now. You're going across the channel. You landed, what, at Omaha?

Arthur Hill: Omaha Beach, right. We knew that was one of the famous landing places. If you recall your history, they thought Patton . . . They didn't even know Patton was there yet in this part. They knew he was in Africa but they thought he was going to take an outfit further up the coast and invade up there. If you read your history, they were all ready for him to head up there but not where Omaha and Utah Beaches were.

So what did you observe when you came ashore on French coast? There had to have been substantial wreckage and things from . . .

Arthur Hill: Yeah, right. We saw a lot of stuff like that, and, thank God, there was no bodies there but you could see the damage that was done by the pillboxes and everything else. They were still cleaning it up, and there was sunken ships and landing craft nearby.

At this time, was the 5th Infantry attached to the 3rd Army yet?

Arthur Hill: No, we didn't get attached until we got into France.

So it was soon after you landed that you did get attached?

Arthur Hill: That's right, sir.

Was that considered good news or bad news?

Arthur Hill: Well, we all thought we were gonna fight under him, and we thought that was great. But nobody really realized what was gonna happen until we actually got into combat, that we started losing men.

How long after you got into France did you first start experiencing combat?

Arthur Hill: I think about a week we start taking off. It's hard to remember after all these years, sir.

Tell me what kind of an outfit were you in when you got into France, the basic unit that you were in. Was it an infantry platoon?

Arthur Hill: Infantry platoon, solid infantry, although we did have tanks in our organization, not our company but in the 5th Division, and, you know, supply, artillery and all that stuff. Division was a big outfit.

I know you were a bazookaman but what kind of duties did that entail? What did that mean in combat? What were your responsibilities?

Arthur Hill: Well, if they needed me, they'd call me forward. If they saw a tank or something, or a building they wanted to hit or something. If they thought they needed a bazooka, they'd call you forward. But I'd be in front line right with 'em, and I would fire my carbine if I had to.

Okay, so you were in the first instance an infantryman with a rifle, a carbine.

Arthur Hill: That's right, and then the bazooka was the secondary. It's like a Browning automatic rifle or a machine gun. You don't call upon it unless you want a lot of fire laid down.

So your basic responsibility was an infantryman in the squad?

Arthur Hill: Right.

Do you remember or recall the guys that you went over there with and experienced the war with?

Arthur Hill: Right, right. When we were in the breakthrough in the hedgerow country, I was in a foxhole with a man that was killed, and I was praying. And this Stevie Frye was a couple foxholes from me, and he's the guy that always called me Yankee. And he said, "Yankee, what the H are you doing?" I said, "I'm praying." And he said, "How do you do that?" And I told him. And incidentally, after the war, both him and his brother became priests. They became ministers, yes sir. And they're both dead today.

Wow.

Arthur Hill: And he's one of our men that was captured, and he escaped 10 days after he was captured, and he's on the wall with "Send." You could come . . . They would send you home but he wouldn't go home 'cause his brother was a platoon sergeant still in fighting, and he returned back to our outfit, and both of 'em . . . I didn't run into them again until we had reunions up here in Tennessee, and they both got severely wounded.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, but they're both dead today.

What was your first combat experience?

Arthur Hill: Scared as hell.

I assume. What kind of encounter was it?

Arthur Hill: Well, we got shelled the first day we landed. I was trembling like a leaf like everybody else. We didn't know what was happening.

You mean this was a month after D-Day, and you landed on Omaha . . .

Arthur Hill: We went inland, we were still in France. What the heck, part of that town, I forget. See, I got this all in a book.

Sure, that's okay.

Arthur Hill: And we went to this field where we had to regroup and get our orders and everything else when we started getting shelled.

Do you recall what kind of shelling it was? Was it artillery shells?

Arthur Hill: Artillery shells, yes sir.

Was it intense or . . . ?

Arthur Hill: No, not really severe but enough to scare the devil out of all of us.

Was it close?

Arthur Hill: Nobody got hurt, no sir. It could have been a field away and you were in another field but it always felt close to you.

Not close enough to feel the concussion, I assume, but close enough certainly to hear the . . .

Arthur Hill: No, just hearing the bang and the flashing.

That was your first experience, was being shelled?

Arthur Hill: That's right.

Lead me, if you will, with your progression and your unit's progression through France.

Arthur Hill: Well, one of our biggest battles is the breakthrough in the hedgerows if you read your history. And then there was somebody in the tank corps that came up with this idea in the tanks to tear down the hedgerows. This is where our first man was killed. He got out of a foxhole to relieve himself and got shot by a sniper. That's our first man we saw getting hit.

Did you know him?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, I did. He wasn't in my platoon but he was in our company. In fact, I used to play cards with him.

I understand that the hedgerows were horrible to experience for combat.

Arthur Hill: Right, they were. What the farmers did, they built these up around their lot, their land, and I guess it was their idea to protecting their land or something. And then there was like a pathway down between 'em, and a lot of 'em had built-in foxholes and buildings where the Germans had built in, and that's where we were trying to take. Which we did.

Do you recall the first time that you saw a German?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, could see 'em there.

You saw them in the hedgerows?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, that's right.

So you were close enough back and forth to see them running between and running back and forth and what have you?

Arthur Hill: Right, yeah.

I assume at that time you were being shot at and you were shooting at them?

Arthur Hill: And I was shooting at them too. And I don't know if I was hitting 'em or not but I know that I returned fire. I assumed I was hitting some of 'em.

Did you see any German equipment at that time? Tanks or anything such as that?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, artillery shells, bombed-out tanks, weapons carriers and stuff like that. They even used horses to draw some of their stuff. We saw a lot of that.

Okay. Lead me through the hedgerows to your next experiences.

Arthur Hill: Well, after we got through there, we were pulled back for a while. Then we were sent up to relieve the 1st Division at St-Lô. Oh, and we were on . . . We relieved 'em foxhole for foxhole, and were around there, and our lieutenant and our . . . We had a heavy weapons platoon, had captured 10 Germans. His outfit did 'cause we had outpost out, and they captured these 10 Germans. And he was a German himself, and he's coming down the highway and I was in the foxhole with my ammunition carrier. He's counting cadence in German. We thought these were Germans coming after us so we all jumped out of our foxholes and I loaded the bazooka, and here this was Captain Davis was his name, Lieutenant Davis. We asked him what he was doing. He says, "I'm telling 'em how to march." He had 10 prisoners.

Is that right? Brought them in by himself.

Arthur Hill: Well, he had a couple of his men with him. They captured them at an outpost.

So that was the first time of seeing a German face up.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

A German soldier . . .

Arthur Hill: Right.

What were your impressions? What were your thoughts?

Arthur Hill: Well, I thought they were no better than us at that time. Being young, you know, you didn't think too much. I tell you, I was scared. I was scared all the time I was there. I'm just like anybody else. I didn't wanna die.

Was the general feeling and your own feelings relative to the Germans, did you feel a hate for them? Did you feel a disgust for them? What was it?

Arthur Hill: We just didn't . . . I don't know if you want to use the word hate but I know we didn't like 'em. 'Cause I figured what they would have done if they got into . . . You know, read your books about the Jewish people there that they, and all that stuff. I figured I didn't want them in my country doing the same thing.

I take it at that time though that you didn't have any information that they were doing things like that.

Arthur Hill: No, no, we didn't. No, not until we started getting, freeing some of 'em in these places.

Okay. Take me along as you're moving through France and the experiences that you had in dealing with the fear and everything else.

Arthur Hill: Well, then our biggest, real biggest engagement was we crossed, we crossed a lot of rivers. We were known as the sailors in the arms so to speak 'cause we crossed so many rivers. But my biggest experience is when we crossed the Moselle River to go into Metz, France, where I got hurt.

That was some of the really last major battles in the war.

Arthur Hill: That's right. In fact, we had just . . . We were in a church and Rosemary Clooney, I think it was, was singing for us. And right after that, we had to cross the Moselle River.

Lot of people probably don't know who Rosemary Clooney is.

Arthur Hill: That's right.

But we know, don't we?

Arthur Hill: That's right. And so we crossed the Moselle River and we were told, "There's nothing gonna happen. There's nothing over there." And when we got across, we got fired upon. And that's when I got into a foxhole, and all I cared of, if I was gonna hit, they could hit my feet and nothing else. But then fortunately our mortarman wiped out the gun placement that was shooting at us.

So you came across the river in boats?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, yes sir.

And under fire?

Arthur Hill: Under fire, yes sir. And sometimes on the pontoon bridges they built.

From what I understand, your outfit lost a lot of guys there.

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes sir. I got . . . In fact, out of our platoon today, there's only myself, Goodman, Farley, and one or two others left. And out of that all, Goodman was the only man that never got wounded.

Out of your platoon that you were with when, I assume you stayed in the same platoon while you were in mostly going through France?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir.

How many were killed or wounded as you go on through France?

Arthur Hill: I don't know the number, sir, but I do have their names and I do have it in this book, every person that was killed in our outfit.

Would the total number constitute more than 30 percent, 40 percent, 50 percent?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes. In fact, our platoon was practically wiped out at one time. And some of these guys, I didn't get to know 'cause they came in as replacements. Like the day I got wounded is the day our commanding officer got killed.

Your commanding officer of your platoon?

Arthur Hill: Richard Dick, right, our company commander. And he was one of these guys . . . I told the other day, he graduated from the Virginia . . . What do they call it?

Military Institute?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, military institute where Patton prior to him had graduated. And he was one of these guys, when he took our company over in Iceland, we were all troublemakers really 'cause we didn't have nothing to do so everybody was getting in trouble. So when he took over, my platoon was in Hafnarfjörður at the time, so when he came down there to talk to our platoon, we went in there, we were going, "Boy, we're gonna meet this new captain," and he came in, the sergeant called attention, we stood up, and he told us, "At ease and sit down." And come out and he says, "My name is Richard Elias Dick. I'm your new commanding officer. If you f-up in the

company, I won't put you in that damn guardhouse, I'll put you underneath it. Goodbye." That's exactly the way he put it.

That was your initial greeting.

Arthur Hill: That was our initial greeting. Boy, we all got to sweating blood but we got to thinking, "Who is this guy?"

But over time you . . .

Arthur Hill: We got to learn to love him 'cause when something happened, he was out there in front.

And what rank was he?

Arthur Hill: Captain.

And how was he killed?

Arthur Hill: Machine gun fire. He wasn't killed instantly but before they could evacuate him, he died which we found out from the runner that was with him. And that guy fell all apart, boy. He was crying naturally. We all did. And then our next commanding officer was a Lieutenant Holloway who later on in years at one of these reunions, I met him for the first time since the war was over. And he became a captain at the time. He was our adjutant, company adjutant at the time when he came and took over the company. And I don't know what happened to him later on 'cause after I got wounded, they came back to the hospital, then came back to the outfit, a lot of things had changed. We had all new officers and I don't even remember their names.

I guess we should move on towards the time that you were wounded. Where was that?

Arthur Hill: It was on the hills going into Metz, France, and we were doing pretty good until what they call the 8th Tanker, special division of the German Army, countertactics. That's where we really started fighting like the devil. That's when I got hurt, and then we fought them off and myself and three other men that were wounded was in this large foxhole waiting for to be sent back to the rear.

Describe the scene for me that day. What were your assignments? What were you doing? Where were you going and how . . .

Arthur Hill: At that time I was still a bazookaman, and I was firing it as much as I could. I don't know what I was firing at. Just fire 'cause you were told to fire. And when this whole outfit seemed . . . And we're a little company and this whole outfit came across the dam, high ground, and that's where we got in trouble.

So you fired your bazooka often I assume?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes sir, but I don't know what I was firing at, just to fire.

So somebody would tell you . . .

Arthur Hill: "Fire."

At this time your platoon was what? Moving forward or in foxholes?

Arthur Hill: Moving forward towards . . . Our company was moving forward towards Metz, France.

And all of a sudden you were come upon by . . .

Arthur Hill: The 8th . . . That outfit.

Did you see them coming?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yeah. We had hand-to-hand combat.

Did you see them only just before the hand-to-hand combat or could you see them coming across hills?

Arthur Hill: We saw 'em coming.

And they just kept coming?

Arthur Hill: Kept coming, right. They were fanatics, you know. They thought they would live forever just like us. We believed that too, I thought.

And you knew eventually that they were going to be upon you?

Arthur Hill: That's right, right.

Do I need to ask you if you were terrified at the time?

Arthur Hill: You bet I was. Just like everybody else.

But were there any people terrified beyond their ability to perform?

Arthur Hill: No, as far as I know, we never had nobody running, go the other way. I take that back. I'll tell you when we get to that point.

So the experience for you, the personal experience of what transpired that day . . . Tell me how it developed.

Arthur Hill: Well, we got into where it was getting close to hand-to-hand, and then me and a couple guys, this guy was coming at us and he wouldn't stop even though we were hitting him with bullets. He did get me in the lower left . . . Above the lower top of the knee, but the blade only went in about half an inch. There was a hilly country and I fell off the dam after getting hit. Took my leg away from under me. I fell over this hill and hurt my back. And when I got back down to what was the aid station, they got us down there. And there was one of our sergeants. He was there and he should have been up there, and I told him, both me and another guy hollered at him, "Sarge, you're needed up there, not down here." And he told us to keep our mouths shut.

So somebody didn't want to go back?

Arthur Hill: That's right. That's the only time I ran into somebody that didn't want to go back.

At the time that you were wounded, did you see the person who was about to stab you?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes. Yes sir.

And I assume . . .

Arthur Hill: I didn't like his face.

I assume by what you said that you had, in fact, shot him.

Arthur Hill: That's right. The thing is, we were really fired on. All of us were shooting so three or four of us could have hit this guy but he still was coming.

And you saw his face?

Arthur Hill: That's right, and it didn't look good.

Did you see the bayonet coming at you?

Arthur Hill: Well, really no, I didn't. And I think it was more of an accident than him trying to do it. And like I say, after it hit me, I fell off this hill and hurt my back so, fortunately, the scar is not very big. Fortunately, I don't think it went in there more than a quarter of an inch but I'm having trouble with it now. Arthritis has set in.

I assume that they did not overrun you.

Arthur Hill: No, no. We won. We won. We won.

But you didn't know that, I assume . . .

Arthur Hill: No, I didn't know that.

Laying down at the bottom of the hill.

Arthur Hill: Right, I didn't know that until I got back to my outfit 'cause my outfit entered Metz, France, a couple days later.

So this was at the border of Germany. This was the last really major battle in France before you crossed the border.

Arthur Hill: That's right. I've got the names of all the battles my outfit was in. We wore five battle stars in our ETO list.

Okay, so you got wounded. You got a bad back from falling off the hill, and what transpired then?

Arthur Hill: Then I was taken from that area back to Cherbourg where . . . We didn't call 'em MASH at that time but I was in . . . We used to have these feathery jackets to keep us warm. And I still had mine on, and I gave mine to a nurse in that hospital. She thought that was great. And they sent me there, flew me back to England.

You flew back to England?

Arthur Hill: No, I'm guessing. No, I went by boat. Sick again.

I was going to say . . . So you went back to England, was hospitalized.

Arthur Hill: To Southampton, right. And I was there for a couple months. My hobby at that time was . . . I'm a retired artist. I did a lot of Norman Rockwell. And I went to the guy in charge, I said, "Can I paint Li'l Abner on the men's door and Daisy Mae on the women's door?" He said, "Yes." And I did. I drew the pictures on the latrine.

May still be there today.

Arthur Hill: That's right, and my, in fact, I still have stuff in storage and my daughter's got a bunch of my stuff, and my wife has three of my pictures in the bedroom.

Great. You were in the hospital, I assume, mostly because of the back?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, right. But I could get up and walk around. I was there for a couple months, then I was sent back to my outfit. Then they give me the B-A-R exam.

So you became a retired bazookaman and a BAR man. You want to tell us what a BAR is? What's a B-A-R?

Arthur Hill: Browning Automatic Rifle, and it had magazines that you load on it. And you had an ammunition carrier. I did get to fire it a couple times but I don't know what I was hitting.

So you went back to your outfit. Where was your outfit at the time you got back?

Arthur Hill: We were in Luxembourg. If you know, if you look at your maps, Luxembourg and Luxembourg, that's the country of Luxembourg. The city was the country. What you'd call a country. It was a very small country, and that's where we were told . . . The guy that was our commanding officer at the time and I don't recall his name, he told me, this is where I was to receive the Bronze Star and the Infantry Combat Badge. He give that to me and I said, "What's this rifle, what's this for?" He said, "That's the Infantry Combat Badge. You know you were in the infantry and you were in combat." I said, "Well, what does that do for me?" And he said, "That gives you ten dollars more a month."

How about the Bronze Star? What did you get the Bronze Star for?

Arthur Hill: That was for being in combat, and receiving whatchamacallit.

Okay. Let's see, are you telling me because of your time in the hospital that you missed the Battle of the Bulge?

Arthur Hill: No, we went into the battle. We were in Luxembourg when I returned, and the captain said to me, "Well, hell, take it easy." They had just got through some sort of a battle, and he says, "We're just resting. We're waiting for our next orders." So I went to my barracks, and I was half asleep when we got woke up. "Get ready, we're moving." And Patton loaded us on trucks and that's when we into the Battle of the Bulge.

So that was as soon as you got back.

Arthur Hill: As soon as I got back, yes sir.

So you had three months to recoup and what have you, and then . . .

Arthur Hill: And the next thing, we're in the Battle of the Bulge. And we received a medal for that, and I also have a certificate saying I was a member of my outfit during the Battle of the Bulge. That's in storage.

And that was around Christmas of '44?

Arthur Hill: Forty-four, right. That was terrible.

So you came up with the 3rd Army Group, and tell me what was that like, that experience.

Arthur Hill: We were busy all the time, sir. We're in all kinds of combat and skirmishes and stuff like that. He didn't believe in standing still, and we won that battle, you know.

Yes.

Arthur Hill: And it was cold. Boy, it was cold. Snow was all over the place and everything else.

What was it like personally for you?

Arthur Hill: Bad because I remember what happened to me before. Thank God nothing else happened to me.

Did you come close to hand-to-hand combat?

Arthur Hill: No sir, not that time, no. You see something off in the distance, and you start firing.

Okay, so you participated in the Battle of the Bulge and the release of Bastogne and all of those things that we all read about in history and what have you. And you survived that.

Arthur Hill: Right. Then we start crossing the Rhine River and the Seine, and I had a few, they turned out to be pleasant experiences but for a while they were scary.

Did you ever think you were going to die?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. Yes sir, I thought that . . . I think every one of us had it in our minds.

Did you think about that often?

Arthur Hill: Quite a bit. Every time a bullet was fired or something was shot. I was scared. I'm not gonna lie to you. I was scared. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be human.

I wouldn't believe anybody that said they weren't.

Arthur Hill: That's right, neither would I, unless the guy was out of his mind.

In your combat situations, could you describe some of the bravest acts that you saw while you in combat?

Arthur Hill: Well, we had a couple guys that went into a building and captured a few prisoners that wouldn't come out, and stuff like that. But nothing really outstanding.

How about acts of cowardice?

Arthur Hill: The only time I thought I ran into that is when I got wounded. I told you about that sarge.

The sergeant.

Arthur Hill: Other than that, I don't recall anybody going the other way.

Okay. How would you compare the American soldier at that time to the German?

Arthur Hill: We were good. If we beat them, they were supposed to be the master race. We had to be better than them, right?

Yes. And how about the equipment? How would you compare . . .

Arthur Hill: Our equipment was good. The only time I had a problem with my equipment was the B-A-R.

That could jam fairly easily.

Arthur Hill: That's right, right.

How about . . . There were some concerns about the American Sherman tank versus the tanks of the Germans.

Arthur Hill: Oh, yeah, 'cause that German tank was pretty powerful. The armament on it was strong. It was hard to get rid of but we found a way, I guess.

Did you see a lot of destroyed American tanks?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, and a lot of German equipment too.

I guess I would have to ask you, especially in France as you moved across . . . I guess we have to give some credit to the Air Force, the Army Air Corps.

Arthur Hill: Oh, most certainly.

I assume that at times that you were getting air support from . . .

Arthur Hill: Our fighter planes, yes.

From fighter planes, and that must have been a pleasant sight to see when you were in a jam.

Arthur Hill: Well, like I told you the other day. We had a pilot shot down, and we were coming across the field. Fortunately, he crash landed without getting hurt. But when we got to him, he was out of his plane, standing alongside of it with his .45 pulled, and he didn't know who we were at the time, and he was ready to fight. But fortunately, we told him we were Americans, and

he was so happy to see us. And we always were thrilled when we seen a fighter plane coming over, and the bombers. When we were at St-Lô when the B-17s carpetbombed St-Lô . . .

Yes.

Arthur Hill: Man, that was a sight to see. And we were hoping them bombs were falling the right way.

And most of them did.

Arthur Hill: They did.

Do you recall what kind of a plane was that was shot down, the pilot that you saw?

Arthur Hill: Let's see, they had 47s?

P-47, the Thunderbolt? The big fat one?

Arthur Hill: Right.

Did you observe him being shot down?

Arthur Hill: No, no. In fact, he had already crashed when we got to that field. No, we didn't see him come down, we just knew . . . When we got there, we looked. We said, "What the heck is he doing?" And we thought he was an American 'cause we could see the star on the plane, and he was standing alongside, right outside the cockpit with his .45 drawn. Unfortunately he didn't know who we were at first until we hollered at him, told him we were Americans.

I assume you saw a lot more American planes than German planes.

Arthur Hill: That's most certainly. We were strafed a couple times but nothing got hurt. In fact, when I flew from where I got wounded back to Cherbourg, my C-47 was strafed.

Really?

Arthur Hill: That's when I first ever was in an airplane. I didn't want to get on one anymore. Fortunately it didn't hurt us.

Wow. Was it hit?

Arthur Hill: It didn't hurt nothing on the plane. Nobody got hurt in the plane.

Wow, that's very lucky.

Arthur Hill: You bet.

How are we doing relative to your energy level and what have you?

Arthur Hill: I was doing pretty good. I was a lot smaller than I am now. I weigh about 235 right now but that's what happens when you get old.

Good food. Okay, you're okay right now, energy level wise with the interview and everything?

Arthur Hill: No, I'm on all kinds of medicine, blood pressure medicine, cholesterol, stuff like that.

Yeah, you and me both.

Arthur Hill: So is my wife and I. But we're doing good other than that. In fact, I admire myself, the fact I'm 85 and still driving.

That is an accomplishment. That's great.

Arthur Hill: And I get up myself. I do have trouble getting up on account of my legs, especially my left leg, and I have fallen a couple times but that happens.

Okay, let's proceed on because I don't want to keep you all day.

Arthur Hill: No, 'cause I got things to do.

Sure. What do you think . . . Do you recall, or in your mind, what was the most effective American weapon?

Arthur Hill: The infantrymen.

The infantrymen?

Arthur Hill: That's who I think, and how they handled their equipment.

And what do you think was the least effective weapon that we had?

Arthur Hill: I really couldn't tell you 'cause I've been in battles where the mortar was fired, and we did all right, and where the bazooka was fired, we did all right, any of our weapons.

Okay, you went back to your outfit, went through the Battle of the Bulge, horrific experience.

Arthur Hill: Right.

And then proceeded to go across the Rhine.

Arthur Hill: When we crossed the Rhine which I told you, I got a picture of you-know-who. And we got across there, and we're going down this highway with our squads on both sides of the road, nothing was happening until we come to a little cluster of houses, and we hear a rifle shot and our scout dropped, and we all ended up firing in that general direction. And when we were told to cease fire, we come on a building and here is a young lad laying dead with a sniper's rifle, and his mother came out screaming her head off. And our platoon sergeant's name was Crockett, and he came over when he was a young man from Germany, and he could speak German. And he really hollered at that woman and told her, and she wouldn't shut up and naturally I can understand that. That's when we got fired upon, and then we continued on.

Okay, you were talking about the photograph you took at the Rhine.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, that's Patton urinating in the Rhine River. I didn't take it. One of our men did. It's in my book.

You have a copy of it.

Arthur Hill: Oh, most certainly, and I have a copy of his speech.

Okay, great.

Arthur Hill: That's where you're missing really the history better than what I could tell you.

Well, that's true but we're interested in yours. A lot's been written about Patton. We want to preserve yours.

Arthur Hill: Well, like I told you before, he died the wrong way.

Yes. Did you follow along with Patton all the way to Czechoslovakia?

Arthur Hill: Oh, yes sir. He was our commanding officer, Army commander, until the end of the war.

Was the combat, once you got into Germany, less intensive than it was in France?

Arthur Hill: No, 'cause you remember when we got in Germany, they didn't want us there. And naturally they were fighting every minute to keep us from doing things but we won anyway. But also, we found out that the normal German person wasn't bad. We'd go into a house and we'd be invited to dinner.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: That's right. Now, in fact, one time I went into this house and nobody was around but I heard some noise, and down in the cellar was a whole family, and there was a candle. I was a B-A-R man at the time. There was a candle on the table lit, and one of the kids blew out the candle. And they had a big dog and he started barking, and I kept hollering, "Hands ho," 'cause that's all I knew in German. And fortunately the father came over and lit the candle again and pulled the dog back. In his way, in his language, he come over and apologized to me.

Wow.

Arthur Hill: That's one of the first experiences I had with a close family. And several others I had.

So you considered the combat to be as intense once you hit Germany and went through Germany as getting there?

Arthur Hill: Right, yeah. When we were in France, we had the FFI helping us, and you know, they wanted their land free. But when you got into Germany, they didn't . . . Remember, they didn't think nobody was ever gonna take Germany.

And who was that you said in France helped you?

Arthur Hill: The French, what do they call'em? The FFI. Free French.

Free French, okay. That was de Gaulle's group.

Arthur Hill: That's right. And we were supposed to go into Paris, and they give that to de Gaulle, and Patton was . . . I don't need to tell you. He was madder than a . . . And our division was the one that was supposed to go in there.

So you never made it to Paris?

Arthur Hill: That's right. We went by the outskirts of it, but, boy, let me tell ya, he was so . . . He was mad.

I would imagine. Okay, so what incidents of combat experience while you were going through Germany stick out in your mind?

Arthur Hill: Well, I think I told you this too. You know, somewhere along the line I remember being told the German people weren't religious. That's a lie. So we came into this area after we crossed the Rhine, was a big monastery. And when I went in there, I was a B-A-R man at that time, the place was gorgeous. And I went into the kitchen, and the kitchen was bigger than some of our hotel rooms, restaurants. Anyway, there was a German soldier sitting at the table talking to a nun, and his rifle was leaning against the wall. And I pulled down on him, and I told him, "Hands ho." And he turned around, didn't get up or anything. He said, "Would you please turn around and go out. I'm saying my last rites." In perfect English he said this to me. And I start turning around, then I got mad. I come back down, I pulled the bolt back on the B-A-R, and I said, "Get up on your feet." And the guy could speak perfect English. He graduated from college in England.

Wow.

Arthur Hill: Then I said, "I'm not gonna shoot ya." And actually, I was mad but he was smiling, and the nun got up and shook his hand, and he came towards me. And he didn't touch his rifle. We had him in the outfit for three days before we could send him to the rear, and he was funny. He was really pleasant to be around. And I'll never forget that.

Wow. Was he anticipating you were going to shoot him?

Arthur Hill: He probably thought 'cause that's probably what they were told. He thought that the American soldier, they won't capture you, they'll kill you. But I wouldn't fire at him. The only thing is he caught me by surprise speaking perfect English, better English than I could speak.

That must have been a shocker.

Arthur Hill: Yeah, boy, it was. And everybody started, when I brought him out of the building and I told my sergeant, I says, "Listen to this guy. He ain't no German." So he starts talking to the sergeant. He said, "Where are you from?" And he starts telling us where he graduated and everything else. But he was wonderful. He was a tall young man. And everybody from then on, everybody would say to me, "How's your German buddy doing?" But it was real good. I'm glad it ended that way.

Was that close to the end of the war?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir. It wasn't far from being to the end 'cause we were on our way to go towards Prague, Czechoslovakia, which we never got into 'cause the war come to an end.

Right. Were you involved in any of the concentration camps?

Arthur Hill: We captured a Russian women's prison camp in Frankfurt, Germany. And they were so happy to see us. They made beer. They found a way to make beer.

A Russian women's?

Arthur Hill: There were Russian soldiers, Russian women soldiers that were in this prison camp.

Wow, I never heard of that.

Arthur Hill: It was just a small camp on the outskirts of Frankfurt, and this is where we really ran in the first time into the young lad, what they called him, I forget. They were training 'em to be soldiers.

Oh, the Hitler youth?

Arthur Hill: Hilter youth organization. We ran into them, and them kids didn't wanna fight. We had a bunch of them on our hands, and they were pleasant young men, 13, 14 years old. Once in a while you ran into one that was a fanatic which you got American kids today is the same way. But they didn't want to fight. They just liked the uniforms really.

I assume towards the end of the war, your opinion of the German people and the German soldier was changing.

Arthur Hill: That's right.

Kind of a consolation type thing, conciliation type?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, right. Towards the end, I don't think . . . They knew they were losing. They didn't want to die or anything else, 'cause we captured some, and this is when I got my first German watch. I took it off a man's wrist. He didn't argue with me. He gave it to me. And they'd smile or something. Once in a while you'd run into one that was a fanatic, and you got the same thing in the American Army.

Do you recall where you were when Germany surrendered?

Arthur Hill: I was in Winterberg, Czechoslovakia. And incidentally, when they signed the surrender papers in Reims, was it Reims? We took that town. That's where the papers were signed for the surrender. We took that town.

I'm not sure what you mean, you took that town?

Arthur Hill: Well, before the surrender, during our battling. We didn't take it the day it was surrendered. That was a long time ago.

Okay, now I understand. That was your outfit that went through.

Arthur Hill: Our company, right.

Okay, so that's the end of the war for you?

Arthur Hill: Okay, well, then we were told to be ready. We were in the little town I called it Winterberg, Czechoslovakia. It could have been something else but that's what it sounded to me like that. Anyway, we were told that the Germans were coming towards us to surrender. Well, I'm out on this roadblock with another man, and this whole German tank outfit's coming down the road, and I thought, "Boy, this is it. We're gonna get killed sure as hell." But they're coming to surrender. They had their families with 'em.

Were they coming with their tanks as well?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, they're bringing everything with 'em. They were fully armed and everything else. And here we were a small company, and they had their families with 'em, women and children. And we even brought four babies into the world during that period of time, some of our guys did 'cause some of the women were pregnant. Anyway, the guy, I ended up finding out that he was a colonel, wanted to surrender formally. He wanted to go through all this junk, you know. And we got the lieutenant. We didn't have a captain at the time, and I called the lieutenant over. He said, "What's the matter?" I said, "I don't know what this guy is saying, sir, but he's got this big sword and I thought he was gonna kill one of us with it," but what he wanted to do, he wanted to surrender to somebody. "Yeah, I'll take over." So he took over, and the guy give him the sword.

And that was the end.

Arthur Hill: That was the end. But then they were relieving themselves all over the place so I went to the lieutenant again, and I said, "Sir, these guys, this place is stinking terribly." So he said, "Grab three of 'em and make 'em dig a hole." Well, the only way I could tell 'em, "Dig a scheißen hole." So I grabbed these three guys and fortunately two of them were officers and one was enlisted man. I didn't know their rank. And I told 'em, "Start digging." And they started arguing with me in German. I don't know what they were saying so I pulled my bolt back on the B-A-R and said, "Start digging." So they started digging. And then I went to the lieutenant, and I said, "You know, them guys are hollering, sir. You told me to get three men and I got three of 'em, and their digging out . . ." "Well, damn it, Art. They're officers and enlisted men." I said, "What the hell, they're prisoners." But they dug the hole.

Prisoners have no rank, right?

Arthur Hill: That's right, as far as I'm concerned at that time.

So what happened after the cessation of hostilities to you?

Arthur Hill: Well, we're waiting to be relieved and another thing that happened to me was peculiar. I'm on a roadblock again and this, I think I told you before, this staff car . . . Well, it wasn't a staff car but it was a big limousine coming down the road with two men in the front seat and two guys in the back seat with big black leather jackets on, you know, coats on. And the guy that was with me, we pulled down on 'em, and the guy was the bürgermeister in that town, going back to town. And the two guys in the back seat were SS officers, and they had their burp guns

which we called 'em laying on the floor. And I made 'em get out, and we stripped 'em, took their jackets off and everything else, and we turned 'em over to the lieutenant. Nothing happened there but it was just peculiar this was happening.

This is your only encounter with the SS?

Arthur Hill: I think they were SS, really. I think they tried . . . Because that bürgermeister was really happy when we pulled them out of the car. He didn't say nothing but he had a big grin on his face, and you know I felt like he was relieved.

Probably. They were probably going to take all of his stuff.

Arthur Hill: That's right. They probably thought they could take over that little town. One other thing that I wanted to bring up to you. Up in the hills in that little town, there was three German soldiers, and we wouldn't go after 'em. And the Russians, you know, they were all over the place. And this one Russian soldier come in and he was, in a way, trying to ask us what was happening. He went up and got them three guys and brought them down. We laughed about that.

Wow. Fascinating. So there is some humor even in the terror of war.

Arthur Hill: Yeah. Then after we were there, we were sent back to Germany, to Reinstädt, Germany, where we were waiting to rotate, then they transferred me and four other guys out of the outfit to the 103rd Division. That was in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

How many Russians did you meet at the end?

Arthur Hill: Not too many, just a few. One there, couple there, and that was it.

So you weren't involved where the armies came together and shook hands?

Arthur Hill: No, no, no. I remember seeing that picture.

Okay, so, the war was over in Germany. Were you concerned you were going to go across the world in a boat?

Arthur Hill: Yeah.

To Japan?

Arthur Hill: I thought I was going back with my outfit but they came around and asked us if we volunteered to go to Japan. And some of them said, "Hell no." So the ones that said no got transferred out of the outfit. And ironically, the funny part about it is these guys were home and out of the Army before we even left Europe.

The guys that what? Said . . .

Arthur Hill: That went home with the outfit.

Is that right?

Arthur Hill: Yeah, 'cause if you remember, they dropped the H-bomb on them places and the war come to an end, and them guys were out of the Army before we were.

So they probably sent them back to the United States to . . .

Arthur Hill: To train for Japan.

To train for Japan before you got back . . .

Arthur Hill: That's right.

Well, you said the wrong thing, didn't you?

Arthur Hill: They didn't do a damn thing when they got back home 'cause we talked later on in some of the reunions. I asked some guys that went back with the division. "Oh, no. We went home. We were given furloughs and we didn't have to return for a couple weeks." And by then the war was over.

Well, sometimes the right answer is the wrong answer.

Arthur Hill: Well, that's right but I was sent to Stams, Austria, where we were in a big cathedral where we stayed, and we could get into Innsbruck, and I used to go into Innsbruck until we shipped out of there to go to Marseilles, France, to come home. And again, there was a squad of us . . . You know, you got points. You got so many points for how many, for each month you were overseas, so many points for your medals that you won and everything else, and I had 121 points, a lot of points. So they sent us home on a ship, and again we were on the . . . There was no room in the quarters so about 18 of us were out sleeping on the deck, and this one lieutenant evidently just got in the Army, he come out and start raising hell with us, and really chewing us out. And this captain comes along. He said, "What are you doing, lieutenant?" "Look at these guys. They're all here. They're not in the quarters." He said, "You better leave those guys alone. Every one of these men out here has more points than you're old. You leave 'em alone." So we were allowed to stay on deck.

That saved you, didn't it?

Arthur Hill: I still got sick.

You still got sick?

Arthur Hill: That was on our way home. Then I got discharged at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

And that was about when?

Arthur Hill: September the 12th, 1945.

I know that subsequent to all of that action and combat and being in the Army, you later went back into the Air Force.

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, I missed the service really, sir.

You do miss it?

Arthur Hill: Oh, you missed it between the time . . . I just missed the camaraderie and the experiences, and I thought, well, I could express myself to some of the people that were there that was in this reserve unit. And I was married at the time, and I had two boys at the time.

When did you get married?

Arthur Hill: In 1945.

So you didn't get married until you came back from the war.

Arthur Hill: No, I met my wife, she turned 18 on the 14th of October. I met her on the 17th of October. We got married 10 days later, and we've been married going on 63 years this year.

Wow, fantastic. She must be a very patient woman.

Arthur Hill: She's a beautiful woman, even today and she's 81. The thing is, everybody said it would not last. My dad, the first thing he told me when I told him I was married, 'cause when she was a little girl, she lived across the street from us back when we were small kids. And, you know, just being the neighborhood kid, I forget who the heck ever she was until one day after I got out of the Army, I ran into a friend of mine name of Roy Priestler, and he was an old buddy that we chummed around with when we were kids. And he said, "Let's go to this restaurant, Art." And I said, "Okay." "I want you to meet somebody." So I goes to this restaurant and here's this tall girl standing there with light brown hair. And he said, "You ought to know who this is." I said, "No, I don't but I'm gonna marry her." He said, "You can't. She's engaged." I said, "I don't care." And that was Florencie Meyers. So I asked her for a date and we started dating, and I told my dad I was gonna get married, and he said, "You ain't never gonna have nothing, you marry in that family." I said, "I'm marrying the girl, not the family." And until the day he died, I couldn't even argue with her. He thought the world of her. My kids and her were the cream of the crop when they come to that house. Like my wife had a job there in town, and my daughter also had a job there in town, and they would stop at my father and mother's house. If my mother did not have coffee on the table, he got madder than hell. He says, "You have coffee on the table when my Florencie shows up here." That was his Florencie, not mine, his. And he'd be in a card game with my grandfathers and her, and he'd tell 'em, "That's Florence's hand." whether she had a winning hand or not. He just thought the world of her.

That's terrific. It sounds like you've had a pretty wonderful life and fulfilled a lot of your ambitions and your desires. Did you spend full time in the military enough to retire?

Arthur Hill: Yes sir, I retired 24 years. I was on recruiting duty in Chicago, Illinois. I retired in '67, 1st of August, 1967.

How did you get to Texas?

Arthur Hill: Well, we decided . . . I had a fifth wheel. I bought a fifth wheel, and we came to, I forget where we were. We were in Arkansas I believe. No, we were in New York, back up home. And we got tired of the cold weather, and we thought, well, we'll go south. And on the way we stopped in Oklahoma where our oldest boy lives, and we didn't like it there so we decided we'd go to Texas. So I had an Air Force buddy lived down there, so he told me to come down there. So we came down to Austin to Pecan Grove. You know where that's at?

Yes, yes.

Arthur Hill: We ran that place from '82 to '86, my wife and I did.

You're kidding?

Arthur Hill: That's right, we ran that place, and it snowed a couple times we were there and I said, "Heck, we gotta get out of here." So we got in the truck and the fifth wheel and we went down to the Rio Grande Valley to Donna where we ran Victoria Palms Resort where a lot of Winter Texans, people up north would come there and camp.

Yes.

Arthur Hill: We ran that for 16 years. In 2002, we decided, well, we better go live with one of our children on account of our age. So I bought a pickup which I still got, and only got 40,000 miles on it. We sold our fifth wheel and we moved to Jacksonville, Florida, which was a big mistake. Not account of our kid being there, but the town was terrible. The motel complex we lived in, the kids ran the damn place. Nobody else would and so forth. A lot of stuff went on so we . . . Our daughter bought this place in Kyle, Texas, and she's by herself 'cause her daughter's getting married.