



Douglas County History Research Center Oral Histories

Oral History Interview with
Otis M. Chartier

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Veterans History Project

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SUMMARY: Otis M. Chartier is a World War II veterans, having served from August 1940 to December 1945. Originally enlisting in the US Army Air Corps because he wanted to be a pilot, he completed his tour of service in the 70th Infantry Division, US Army. Following recruit training here in Colorado at Lowry Field, he was posted to Fort Logan before being sent to Europe. Arriving in Marseilles on December 15th, 1944, Chartier and his company were soon involved in combat duty in France. He was the sole survivor of a squad ambushed by machine gun fire near Bitche. He participated in the battle for Philippsbourg, where he spent five days in a foxhole with no food or water. As a result of the extreme cold, he suffered from frost bite, but considered himself luckier than most as some of the others lost toes or feet. He also took part in the fighting near Spicheren where he was part of a two-man bazooka squad that knocked

read it because she was so trembly and everything.

BELT: Okay. And you were approximately nineteen, twenty years old?

CHARTIER: I was nineteen.

BELT: Nineteen,okay. So you enlisted in the U. S. Air Corps.

CHARTIER: Mainly after I graduated, I got on a train, the old steamer, and rode to Denver to the Custom House, and tried to join the Air Corps. Well, they gave me the physical and everything. They got ready to talk to me about it. I told them I wanted the Air Corps because I was always crazy over airplanes and everything. So they hem hawed around about like the Army usually does. They wanted me to get in the Quartermaster Corps, which is service and supply, you know. I didn't know much about the Army then, but I knew I didn't want that. So I says, "Nope. I'm not going to join. But if you'll tell me when there is an opening in the Air Corps, I'll join." So about a month later, I got a letter saying "Come on up." So I came on up and they sent me out to Fort Logan,[*Colorado*] and I took my little extra physical test and I was okay, so they sent over me to Lowry Field and that's where I took my recruit training.

BELT: You mean boot camp?

CHARTIER: Yeah, "boot" is really Marine and Army is "recruit." They call you rookies. So, I was there about, probably about a month or better. I can't exactly remember. And then I was graduated and--

BELT: What was that like, doing that? What did they make you do? A lot of marching? What did they make you do?

CHARTIER: Well, Lowry Field wasn't developed very well before the war, and we was in a tent city. I think about six guys to a tent, or something like that, a big tent. And we had to drill out on the roads, dirt roads. And they had brought in a bunch of sergeants from other outfits that was a little harder boiled than the Air Corps to give us the drill. So they put us through that. No guns, just marching and everything. Of course, they always pull things. Like, never volunteer for anything. Well, one instance was, they lined us up one day and the sergeant says, "Anybody do shorthand?" So, two guys, they waved their hands and stepped forward. So, he looked at them and grinned, and he says, "Well, shorthanders are them wheelbarrows over there. Get over

there and get going." So, that's why you've got to watch about volunteering for the Army. *[laughs]*

Anyway, we fooled around there for a while. I did KP *[kitchen police or kitchen patrol]*, and the bombing range. We'd go out there, we'd repair targets that the bombers blew up with test bombs, little hundred-pound bombs with sand in them, and we had nailed little boards around this. And we hauled coal out there. It was guard shacks that had little stoves in them to keep the guards warm, and we had to haul coal out there.

BELT: So this was KP duty?

CHARTIER: No, that was just fatigue duty. And then we'd go, sometimes we'd go on KP. Well, I learned to be an airplane mechanic, because at that time you couldn't be a pilot and just have a high school education. So, I applied for the Alpha Math Test. So, as luck would have it, the order came in for me to take that test at a certain time one day, and I was on KP. So, we asked the Mess Sergeant, nope, couldn't let us go. So there was two or three of us, so we just, it was about ten o'clock in the morning, kind of a slack time in the kitchen, so we sneaked off and went over there and took it. Well, we come back like thieves. He knew we'd been gone, so he wanted to know where we'd been. We told him we went and took that test. And do you know he got on the phone and called them up and told the instructor over there, "Them boys was over there illegally. They are supposed to be on KP. Throw them papers away." *[background noise, possibly microphone being moved]* So that was the end of that.

BELT: They did throw the papers away?

CHARTIER: They threw them away. So I don't know if I made the test or not. But, anyway, a few days later, we got orders. They was forming new cadres, as they called them, or whatever, and they had took over Fort Logan as a substation, and they was going to teach clerical work over there to Air Corps guys. So they had to send all kinds of people over there, cooks and MPs, so here I got detailed as an MP and went over there.

BELT: MP meaning Military Police?

CHARTIER: Yes ma'am. So, I think I was probably one of the first ones to walk guard there, and we went down to where my post was I was supposed to walk, and the Eighteenth Engineers was there and they were going to lead. So he was walking guard

with his big old rifle and I got out with my pistol and started walking. I thought, "Oh boy, this is better than carrying that rifle." [laughs] So, anyway, that went on for a while, and I made PFC [*Private First Class*] and got a specialist rating and then I had a little trouble and they decided to change me. So, they sent me up to the Bachelors Officers Club. Well, it was actually Officer's Club, and there was bachelor quarters there. So they made a waiter out of me. Think about an old farm boy who didn't know how to set a table or anything and, golly, when you set them tables for them banquets you had a line of silverware that long, that wide, and all kinds of glasses and candles. So anyway, I learned. When we wasn't doing that, me and two other guys had to go upstairs in the bachelor officers. We had to clean their rooms, make their beds, shine their shoes. And they all chipped in so we would get ten dollars extra a month.

BELT: How long did you do this?

CHARTIER: Oh, quite a little while, about six months or so. I'm forgetting here. In the meantime, the war had started. I was at Fort Logan when they hit Pearl Harbor, and it wasn't very long ago that Air Corps changed that pilot training if you didn't have to have two years of college. If you were just high school and could pass the intelligence test, why they would take you. So I went and took it, passed it and went over for my medical. I had to go to Lowry Field for that, to the, I forget what they call them doctors in the Air Corps. You know they're testing you for different Air Corps crew things.

BELT: The physical?

CHARTIER: So there was about thirty of us, and they lined us all up and told us to strip down, and put us in a big circle. Well, that got me all shook up, standing there with thirty naked guys. So, he was going to come around and ordered us to hold our hands out and he's looking at the fingertips to see if we were shaking, and he flunked me. He said, "I don't think you better try." So I told him, I says, "Well, if it takes six months, but I'll be back." So in six months I was back and I passed it. And then I had to go before a board of officers and they looked you all over and asked you all kinds of questions. They decided I could go. So, I was waiting for orders. About that time I got transferred from the Officer's Club to the Fire Department, and I became a fireman, a soldier fireman. So I was in there about a year, I guess, and I made corporal there, I guess, and it wasn't long until the war was going on so they decided to replace those soldiers with civilians, in the fire department, so we all got transferred out.

BELT: What did you do as a fireman? What did you do there?

CHARTIER: Just like a city fireman. You rode fire engines and hooked onto water and put out fires and stuff--

BELT: On the military post?

CHARTIER: On the post. It's just like a city fireman.

BELT: Did you like that?

CHARTIER: We slept right in the fire department. It was an easy job, really.

BELT: How long did you do that? Can you remember?

CHARTIER: Oh, probably about a year, guess. And they decided to get rid of them, like I said. So then I went down to another technical school, squadron, they called them. And that's where the boys, the draftees, was coming in and going to this clerical school to be Air Corps clerks. Well, they made me a barracks sergeant, and so we had to march them to chow and have bed check on them and all that kind of stuff. I did that for a while, and then it came spring of '43 [1943], and they started talking about saving food and everything. And everybody was supposed to grow victory gardens and everything.

So, the Army decided they wanted a victory garden. So they checked through all the records and, of all the guys at Fort Logan, I was the only boy from Colorado that had agriculture experience. So, the finger was pointing, "You're going to raise that victory garden." So I had to go downtown and buy seed. They give me a jeep to ride. Then Logan's Home, out there by Fort Logan, well, it's a high school now, but it was a home for boys at that time and they had acreages and they had farm equipment and stuff. So, the Army didn't have nothing, only a tractor and a plow and stuff in the Engineering. So I took that out and we plowed up thirty-two acres. It was irrigated, it came out of the Bear Creek ditch. Then I had to do, they gave me ten boys and we planted that all about with hoes and stuff and with corn, tomatoes, cantaloupes and all kinds of stuff. I only made one mistake and that was peas. It was all right, but nobody wanted them. *[all laugh]* So anyway, we had a very good crop, but when I went to deliver these peas, I took one pick-up load to the mess hall, but when I brought another one, the mess sergeant turned it down. He said, "Get them things out of here." He says, "All my KPs, that's all they did, was shell peas." And he said, "I ain't got time to do that." Well, I said, "I got orders. I got to get rid of these."

And at that time, we was on the Air Corps side and over where the cemetery is now, they had the Draftee Center, where all the draftees was coming in. So that old sergeant said, "Take them over there and give them to the draftees. They won't know any better." [laughs] So I went over there, and the captain took them. I got rid of them.

So, but then we had a stand for us and on the parade ground, why right on the corner we set up and put roasting ears, and cantaloupe and the officers would come by and get them. The officers' row went right around the parade ground, and they'd take them on home. And so, it went like that. Came fall, and I was going home. I went home on the weekend, I guess. You see, it was just Fort Morgan, and so the captain, he was also in charge of the guardhouse, a provost marshal, they call them. He was in charge of me to see that I run this garden all right. And he'd come out there, about every other day, or something in his jeep and give me heck about something. He never seemed to encourage me. [laughs] But anyway, I was gone and he decided to get a little deal out of it, so he called the *Denver Post*, and they came out there and they made a two-page deal about it.

BELT: About the victory garden?

CHARTIER: Huh? About the victory garden. He brought a couple of WACs, [*Women's Army Corps*], and it must have been close to Halloween because he had my boys to get some pumpkins. They lined them up and shucked the corn, and they had these two pretty WACs to stand there. And I was a, his name was all through the *Denver Post*, but mine was never mentioned. [laughs] And I was told, I was supposed to get staff sergeant if everything was okay. I didn't get a thing. So, I came back and the boys told me about this write-up. So I got the paper and read it and that was the way it was.

BELT: Did you save the article? Do you have that article?

CHARTIER: What?

BELT: Do you have that newspaper article?

CHARTIER: No, I wish I did. I might be able to get it through the *Denver Post*, but I wouldn't know the exact day.

BELT: Uh huh.

CHARTIER: I just know that it would be last of September or maybe October of '43 [1943].

BELT: '43. Okay.

CHARTIER: So then I was getting disgusted and about that time, why, I went over to the bulletin board and there was something else which disgusted me worse. There was a thing on the bulletin board, says, "All flying cadet applyees, [applicants] how old you are, has been changed." It had been twenty-two, I mean twenty-three. And they was cutting it back to twenty-two. Well, I was twenty-three, so I was out as far as flying was concerned.

BELT: That was very disappointing for you.

CHARTIER. Yeah. It was very, very. So long about that time, they sent an order through, they wanted glider pilots. Well, I says, jiminy, that will put me a little closer to the airplane, so I signed up. And do you know how they got those glider pilots? I was gone that weekend and we'd been waiting a month or two. Finally the order came in, says "Anybody that wants to get into the gliders, pack up and we'll ship you out today. So, when I came back on Monday, they told me that all the guys was gone, and that was the last of that. So, I didn't know what to do then. So, then here come a nice, big picture in of a paratrooper. Said "Join the paratroopers," and kind of glamorous looking picture. So, I thought, "Well, jiminy, I'll do that. Anything to get away from here." So, it also said your officers can't stop you. If you sign, they can't stop you. They have to let you go. But I didn't read the fine print on the bottom. And it said, you have to go to the infantry first.

So, okay. I signed and it took a little while, and I think it was August of '44 [1944], I got my orders and they shipped me out to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Went down there on the train. Got off in a little town there, just a little old wide spot in the road called Newton, Missouri, but there wasn't a soldier in sight or anything. And I thought, "Well, gee, have they put me off in the wrong place?" So I wandered around there, half hour or so. Finally, here came an Army truck, asked me who I was, and I told them. And they said, "Get in. We'll take you to the post." [laughs] So, I went up to the post. I was in the infantry. [laughs]

BELT: Were you upset to be in the infantry?

CHARTIER: What's that, Ma'am?

BELT: Were you upset to be in the infantry?

CHARTIER: Well, in a way. In a way, I wasn't because they told me there that I could still go to the paratroopers. So they sent me over and I took the medical for the paratroopers and I passed. Then they sent my orders to Fort Benning, *[Georgia]* where I'd have to go. That's where parachute training was and then about that time, they came along and told me, says, "You haven't had a furlough in a long time. You're going to have to take one." Well, I should have known something was up then, but I didn't realize it. So I came back to Denver and stayed ten days. Got back and the camp was all in an uproar. Boxes and stuff piled everywhere. So I seen a guy I knew and I says, "What's happening?" He says, "Don't you know, we're loaded for overseas." So I went a-running to the bulletin board and there it was. All orders canceled, you know. So, no more paratroops. Now I got to thinking about this afterwards. I think that was a good way for the Army to get a lot of infantry guys that they needed. They didn't need any more paratroopers. So, that's how I felt about it.

So, anyway, November, let me see. Got to turn the page here. *[sound of page being turned]* November, why we took a troop train and rode it all the way to Camp Miles Standish in Massachusetts, and that was the embarkation center. So, we was there a few days and did some more training, and got some more supplies, and I got to go to Boston, and a few of the towns there, when they'd let us off. Then, finally they loaded us on trucks, and on December the sixth, we got to Boston. And we loaded onto the USS West Point, which was a big boat, and that night or evening, we pulled out of there. And we went out to sea away, enough to get away from the land, and then they turned south and went down towards Florida. And we went unescorted, because the boat was so fast, submarines couldn't keep up with us. But they did zigzag, you know, so something happens that the torpedo might glance off the boat or something.

BELT: Otis, did you know where you were going?

CHARTIER: Not for, we didn't know. We just thought we was going to Europe; that was all we were interested in. We was in the Atlantic. So we got out and we went by the Azores Island, and that's when they told us. Says, "We're going to embark at Marseille, France, which is in southern France, in the Mediterranean Sea. So, about that time, we went through the Straits there, the Mediterranean. I got to see the Rock of Gibraltar sticking, see that's only nine miles wide there. We could see the Rock of Gibraltar on one side, and on the other side was Africa, Morocco. We could see two continents at the same time.

So we came on in to Marseille. We got in there and the harbor was just full of boats that the French had scuttled to keep the Germans from getting them. Just the smoke stacks sticking out of the water. So our big boat couldn't get in. They sent out barges and took us in. And it took quite awhile to unload us, 5,000 or so of us. They put us in trucks and took us about 20 miles out in the country on a hill. They called it CP-2; I don't know why. But anyway, we just got there and we set up our pup tents and it started to rain, and before we left, we were in mud six inches deep. *[laughs]* And so I think on December the 16th, no, I'm getting ahead of myself. We arrived in Marseille on the 15th, and the 16th, the next day, was the day that the Battle of Bulge started, when the Germans attacked. They didn't tell us nothing about it or anything. We didn't know nothing about it. So, they took us down on the 21st and they put on these little old French trains, World War II boxcars. They was called 40 and 8, which meant 40 men or 8 horses. And they put a platoon in each one, which was 36 guys. Our boxcar didn't even have a roof on it. It was the middle of December. We were heading north.

BELT: It was very cold?

CHARTIER: It turned, it kept getting colder and colder as we went north. So, we got up there couple of days and it was getting so cold, we couldn't hardly stand it. At a rest stop, why we found an old barrel, a small barrel, and some wood and we was going to start a fire *[laughs]* in there. We like to smoked everybody out and then the floor caught on fire, so we *[laughs]* had to put it out. Anyway, three days and we came into Strasbourg, France. And so there we got on trucks and we went down by the, the Rhine River runs right the, with France on one side and Germany on the other at Strasbourg. So, we went to a little town and we unbarked *[disembarked]* and they put us down along the river. We kind of got in a canal, that was dry, so we didn't have to dig any foxholes.

But anyway, it was either New Year's Eve or not, I take it back, or Christmas Eve or Christmas. I can't remember which. But I know we was on this one side and right across the Rhine on the other side, you could see them over there. The Germans. Nobody was firing much or anything, because everybody was doing the real fighting at the Bulge farther north. But anyway, they were singing. They were singing carols, "Silent Night," and of course, it was in German. And I thought, "Gee, that sounds pretty coming through the night air." Sure them guys ain't as bad as they told us they are. And anyway, that was it. So, the next day we were going into a little town, the name of Crecy, France. We were supposed to get a Christmas dinner. Nothing doing. Here our orders came. We had to head out, so we ate K-rations for Christmas.

Rode a truck and we got up, I don't know, we traveled and stayed all the night at

a couple of places, I can't remember. But we ended up at midnight on New Year's Eve in a town called Niederbronn [*Germany*], and we was going to stay all night there. They put us in an iron foundry, cement floors, and that's where we spent the night. But the boys, just before we got off the truck, it had turned 12 o'clock, so some of the boys shot off their rifles, to have a little fun, you know, in the air. And they all caught heck for that and I don't see where it would have made any difference because we could hear the big guns and everything in the distance from where we was at. So, I don't think it made any difference. But anyway, we spent the night there.

So the next day, we marched to a little town, oh about five miles up toward, closer to Germany, called Philippsbourg. Well, there we took our packs off, and we had on snow packs for the cold, and our dog-gone captain, he told us to get rid of them and put on our combat boots because we was going to do a lot of hiking. Well, it was zero right then, degrees. And the boots, the combat boots, would have been all right as long as we hiked. But we started out, and by that time, it just got, it was dark and we started up this road towards a town called Bitche [*France*]. Of course, us guys, all called it "bitch," you know. [*Yokum chuckles*] Bitche was its real name.

And it was right on the Maginot line, you know, that was the French fortresses that the Germans went around. We went right down a road single file on each side. The moon was shining. And on the right side was a hill going right up like that, and trees and shrubs, real thick, and on the other side, was a railroad and plowed land where it was farming. So our orders was "March till you contact the enemy," and I've thought to this day, that was the craziest order I ever heard, sending a regiment of men into a place like that in the middle of the night.

BELT: How many men?

CHARTIER: Well, it was a regiment; it would be three battalions and there's three companies, three or four companies to a battalion, and then there's companies which is approximately 190 men. So if you figure it up, it would be quite a few. And we was strung out, we was probably almost a mile or better, you know.

BELT: You never mentioned, what is the name of your division?

CHARTIER: What?

BELT: What is the name of your division? What is the name of your company?

CHARTIER: I was with the Company I, the 275th Infantry Regiment, 70th Division. But

now, let me tell you something. We didn't really know it at the time. But we wasn't a full division. They made a task force out of us. We didn't have our big guns or quartermaster or anything. We just had our units to fight, and they sent us in there and they attached us to the 45th Division. Well, when you get in a task force like that, it's just like being a stepchild. They give you all the dirty work. They take all the credit and they do everything that way, you know. So their men don't have to do it. So maybe that's why we ended up down the road that night, I don't know. Maybe the orders probably come from the 45th Division.

But anyway, we was going down this road, and I got to mention that Fort Morgan where I lived, there was a lot of Germans lived there. And I'd heard the German dialect a lot, people standing around the street talking German. So, we started out and I was the flank scout. That's 12 men, two scouts up ahead, squad leader, and then about four or five guys on each side of the road, and the squad leader was in the lead. And at the time, I was the assistant squad leader; I was on the tail end. And I was supposed to keep in contact with all the men behind, so nobody lost contact or anything. So, we was going along there, and a sergeant came up from the platoon back behind. I think he was wanting to see about, if it was time we interchanged, so it wouldn't be dangerous all the time. Because that the most dangerous spot there is.

BELT: So you're just, you're still walking at night?

CHARTIER: What?

BELT: You're still walking at night?

CHARTIER: Yeah, we're still walking, and then all of a sudden, just out of the thin air, somebody hollers, "Halt" in a German accent. Well, everybody kind of hesitated and that's what they wanted, I guess. Because he hadn't any more than said it, than they cut loose with these machine guns. And maybe, by me knowing the German dialect, maybe I beat them to the ground, the rest of the guys. And this sergeant that had just come up, he fell right on top of me, and he was shot right through the neck. And I could look up, and I see the other guys laying ahead of me, three of them. The platoon, or not platoon, but the squad leader and two privates. And we went off the road, and it was raised about a foot or so, but there wasn't really any ditch. Because when we got down there, I looked up on the side of the mountain and I could see the machine guns, just the tracer bullets just coming like mad. And about six inches over my back. And then after he got everybody off the road with the gun, he lowered it a little bit, and put it on the paved, it was asphalt, put it there and he wanted the bullets to ricochet, you

know. He thought he could get more that way. Of course, the guys, I was on the side of the road that the gun was on. Of course, the guys on the other side of the road, they had their little 18 inches or whatever it was, road to help them. So I laid there, and I didn't know what to do. I was mad because I joined the infantry. *[laughs]* And I **[unclear]**, I prayed to God, and I did everything else, and finally I turned around to this guy that was laying by me and he was still alive. And he told me, he says, "You get out of here." He says, "They're going to come down here." He says, "You get out of here." He says, "I'm done for." He was bleeding awful through the jugular vein. While this was going on, why--

BELT: Do you remember the name of that person who said that to you? Do you remember the name of that person?

CHARTIER: The sergeant that was shot?

BELT: Yes.

CHARTIER: Sergeant Gorkin *[sp?]* was his name. I believe he was from Ohio or back east somewhere, and he was one of the first ones shot. Well, the other guys up the road. So, I laid there and they brought out a barrel and there was shooting **[unclear]**, and I could hear them cranking and clanking it, and the officer called rollcall .

BELT: The German officer?

CHARTIER: Yeah. And the guys answered, "Ja, Ja." And it was kind of of funny. They must of knew each other real well because he was calling them by their first names, like Hans, Fritz, stuff like that. It wasn't German names, last German names. So there must have been ten of them or so up there and I didn't know it at the time, but they was scattered all the way back. There was three machine guns. And they got a lot of the company on further back, too. So, I saw that they shot up a flare to make sure everything looked all right. I hadn't been in the infantry very long, but I says to myself, them guys are going to come down here to see what they did. So, I started crawling, and I don't know how far I crawled, and I got back to where the first platoon was, that I belonged to. And there was just equipment and dead people laying everywhere.

BELT: Were you crawling down the road?

CHARTIER: I was on the edge of it.

BELT: The edge of the road.

CHARTIER: Yeah, like where it kind of dropped off and then went up on. It kind of made a ditch, but if they would have looked real close, they could of seen me crawling.

BELT: Who's crawling with you? Are you crawling by yourself?

CHARTIER: Nobody. I'm the only one that got out of there that night. So, I get down to where the rest of the company was, and I found a BAR man dead.

BELT: BAR man, what is that?

CHARTIER: That's Browning Automatic Rifle. Kind of like a machine gun. He was dead, they'd got him. He had a pistol on his hip, and I pushed my rifle away because I had to go, carry it like this. And there was some dry weeds, it seemed like you'd hit them weeds, it sounded like firecrackers. So I abandoned it and got rid of it. So anyway, I took this pistol and kept on going, and probably got down the road almost a mile or so. Somebody hollered, "Halt." And this time it was an American. So, he says, "Password." Well, my golly, what I'd been through, I had forgot it. And I knew I was in a jam, so real quick, I just says, "I'm Sergeant Chartier, Company I." And it just happened to be I knew the guy. And he says, "Come on in and be recognized." Or I would have been shot by my own man, right there.

So, he told me t the rest of the company and the CP [*Command Post*], which is where they all grouped together, you know, officers and first sergeants, everything. He said they were down, on down a ways in a little settlement called Lieschbach [*Germany*]. So, I walk on down there. Well, everybody was scared, really scared, and I found out another guy had just got shot by his own men, same thing that almost happened to me. He didn't answer the challenge, and the guys was so trigger happy, they'd shot him. And so, his name was Homer Bowie [*sp?*] that they shot. But anyway, I seen the first sergeant, and told him, reported in. About that time, one of the guards come in and says, "They're counterattacking." I don't know where our captain was at this time; I heard that he was plumb back at battalion, seeing what to do, and a first lieutenant was in charge. So he says, "I don't know what to do." He says, "Retreat down the road, I guess."

BELT: How many--?

CHARTIER: So we did.

BELT: How many men do you think are there at that point?

CHARTIER: Well, it was the company.

BELT: Okay.

CHARTIER: Except for the ones that had got killed and wounded.

BELT: Okay. So it was the full company.

END OF INTERVIEW ON TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

CHARTIER: Okay. So, we walked or half ran back to this little town called Philippsbourg, where the biggest share of the 275th Infantry was, and we didn't get back until almost morning. So there was a church there, that they had took over for a command post. We went in there, and got K-rations to eat and I got a rifle and got a helmet. I had lost my helmet when I went off the road. They don't allow you to wear that band under your chin when you are in combat. If an artillery shell lights, a concussion will blow your helmet off and that strap will break your neck. So you wear, it just went a rolling, you know. *[laughs]*

Anyway, we got ammunition, and we started out, and we went up to the end of this town. Instead of taking the one road where we had been the night before, we took a road fork and went up the other way, and we went up on a mountain about a mile from Philippsbourg. Went right up there on top and tried to dig in, which we couldn't. I got about a foot deep and hit solid rock. And I had one old hard chocolate candy bar with me when I got up there, and my canteen. And we didn't know it, but we was going to be there for five days. Cut off. Because the Germans came. This town was, it was kind of a fork. It came in the one road in the town, and the fork came around this mountain. So the Germans came down each fork and took this town, and we was setting up there behind the enemy lines. And we didn't have much fighting to do up there; about all it was, was patrols and stuff that would come in. They knew we were there, you know, and they kept throwing Easy Eight *[M4A3E8 Sherman tank]* shells into us. That was their famous artillery shell.

And then a radio in that mountain area wasn't any good. So nobody knew where

we was at. So the Americans was throwing 105s [105 mm artillery shell] in on us. That's our big artillery shell. So we was getting them from both sides. And I don't know how many guys, rifles, got shattered and stuff, and shrapnel . And we were cautioned to stay in our foxholes. Mine was only a little over a foot deep, that was the deepest I could get. And five days like that, the guys kept getting wounded from artillery. They set up a CP [Command Post], kind of built a shelter like, and got the wounded in there. Our canteens were froze, so we couldn't use them. So they came around and gathered our canteens up and took them in there for the wounded, and we didn't have no water for five days. The only thing I had to eat was that old chocolate candy bar, while I was up there. So, we'd sit there and our hands would freeze, and our feet started freezing. I would kick them and everything else, trying to get some circulation into them, but I knew it was just a little too much, but the orders were stay in those foxholes. Well, the officers and stuff down at that, where they'd built that, they got to walk around a little bit, and they would send a few patrols out, which were the higher sergeants and they walked, too. Well, they didn't get trench foot, like us guys was confined to our foxholes.

BELT: What do you mean "trench foot?" What does that mean?

CHARTIER: In the infantry, your pants went down and you had combat boots and you tucked them into them boots and then they had straps that drewed it up and held your pants in. And if you're in cold weather and can't walk or anything, you loose circulation and your feet starts turning black and everything, and swelling and everything else and that's trench foot. And so anyway, why in the meantime down here in Philippsbourg, the rest of the company finally drove the Germans back enough that we made a run for it in the middle of the night and got out under these conditions, trench foot and everything else and there was nothing they could do. They marched right on through town and they were scared to keep us there because the Germans might counterattack. So we went, we marched five miles down the road on them feet. I remember mine just felt like a big sponge, you know, when it hit the ground. And we got there, they had a place. It was a sawmill where they sawed lumber and stuff. And it had a wooden floor and they brought us in there and they had hot coffee for us. And let me say, government coffee ain't very good, but that night, that was the best coffee I ever drank in my life. [laughs] And so, they give us some sandwiches. Well, we couldn't eat them. We hadn't ate for so long our throats were swelled, and we couldn't swallow. You know, like dried food like that. So they told, they give us a blanket, told us to go in and lay on the wooden floor and go to sleep.

BELT: Do you have cigarettes?

CHARTIER: Huh?

BELT: Do you have cigarettes?

CHARTIER: I didn't smoke.

BELT: You didn't smoke? Okay.

CHARTIER: So, I did do one thing right for a change. I took my boots off before I went to sleep. Some of the guys didn't and they had to cut them off. They swelled during the night. So next morning, they woke us real early, said the doctors are here. Don't get up on your feet, just sit there with your feet sticking out. And if anything's wrong, the medics will pick you up by your shoulders and carry you and put you in a truck. So, man, those doctors started in and I seen them guys just carrying them like mad. They got to me, sure enough, and here they grabbed me and away I went. And so before I forget it, why there was 99 guys that morning had trench foot. That left 33 men left, and three officers in the company. So we went to battalion first, medical aid station, they called it. And they wouldn't do nothing for us. They said, "Go on to where they bring them all in from all over the front. I don't know just what they call it. It wasn't a hospital. But it was a big warehouse when we got there and they took us in there and golly, it was like a [unclear], and just army cots laying everywhere. And they were bringing them in from the Bulge, you know, just shot all to pieces. And groans and moans and every--

BELT: What city is this? Is the medical?

CHARTIER: Eh?

BELT: What city is this medical hospital at?

CHARTIER: I don't know.

BELT: Okay. That's all right.

CHARTIER: You see, they didn't really tell us and I wasn't too worried about it. But anyway, we was just there the one night and they said, told us the next morning. Said

there's a hospital train outside, and we'll put you people on this train and the ones that's injured or wounded the worst, will be on the bottom bunks and the ones of us, will be on top. Well, of course, I was on top because there was guys a lot worse shape than me. So we rode that train and again, it seemed more like a day. It was a streamline train, French, and it was painted white, and had a red cross on it. So we ended up at some general hospital, and you know I've never found out exactly where that was. I thought maybe it was either Nancy [France] or Cormandy [sp?], but I'm not sure. So, they took us in there. When we got in there, well I have to say this, the Army nurses is the best there is. They really treated us nice. I'll have to say that. I can't say that about the WACs [Women's Army Corps], but I'll sure say it about the nurses. And this gal came and she said, "I'll have to take your overcoat and you'll have to undress and get into the gown. So I handed her my overcoat, and when I did, she said, "Oh, gee, that's heavy," she said. And she reached into the pocket and pulled out that big 45 I had. [laughs] Oh, my goodness, she says, "You can't have that here," and so that's the last I ever seen of it. So I suppose some doctor got a good 45. [laughs]

But anyway, they had a regular trench foot ward. They took us in there, and they had the beds made like for a Saturday inspection with the white sheets turned back in a collar. They call them white collar. And then your white pillow. And in the trench foot ward, the foot was made the same way. The foot of the bed it was turned back, so when you got in there, your feet stuck out the bottom because they wanted them to get all the air and everything they could. So they started doctoring us, and I almost had pneumonia. They wasn't doing nothing for that, and finally I told the nurse. I says, "I think I almost got pneumonia." So they sent a doctor down. He looked at me and they started giving me penicillin. And I started getting over that. But they wouldn't let us get out of the bed to get a drink or go to the bathroom, we had to use the pan. They were that particular about our feet. And there we'd walked five miles on them. [laughs] So, anyway, I was there almost a month and they told me I was about ready to go back.

BELT: Back to war?

CHARTIER: Back to my company.

BELT: Okay.

CHARTIER: And so I says, well, have they got a barber here? I needed a haircut. "Yeah. Down in the basement." So I went down there, and there was a German prisoner who was cutting hair. That's the first contact I really made with the Germans

and golly, I don't know if I want him cutting my hair or not. *[laughs]* But he did all right. And it cost one mark, I believe, which is the equivalent to our money was ten cents. That's what he got for cutting my hair.

BELT: And you had to pay him?

CHARTIER: Yeah. That's what he did as a POW *[Prisoner of War]*. So then we got on trucks and we kept going to these replacement depots, because that was a long ways from the front line. And we'd stay all night and about freeze to death and finally got to this one, where we was getting close to the line and they told me, says, "Go down and draw you rifle and from here, you'll ride a truck and go to your company." So I went down to the supply room, and he asked me, says "Well, what do you want?" I said, "I want an M-1 *[M-1 Garand rifle]*." He said, "We ain't got any." Says, "They're, they're all gone." Says, "You'll have to take an old Springfield *[rifle]*." And I says, "Man, I've been in the infantry. I want an M-1 Garand." "Can't do it," he said. So he brought me out an old World War I Springfield, and it was just completely covered with cosmoline *[used in the storage and preservation of firearms]* and the barrel was full. That's the way they do the guns when they're shipped overseas, to keep them from rusting. Well, he didn't give me a thing to clean it with, so I took it, and walked out the door and when I did, I noticed there was a pile of M-1s there, about four feet high, that was damaged, broke you know, artillery or whatever had broken. And I says to myself, well, God, I'm coming back tonight and I'm going to have me an M-1. So that night after dark, I slipped back there and took three M-1s, you know, because they were all damaged. So I found different pieces that wasn't damaged and put it together. And I had me an M-1. So I left the next morning and they had an old mattress made out of straw we'd slept on. I just stuck that Springfield under it and left. *[laughter]*

So, I got back to my company and they had withdrewed up the line. They were shot up so bad, replacements were coming in. I didn't hardly know anybody. And so they were kind of in a training session, and they'd got in another ambush, like the one I was in. But I was in the hospital when this one happened. And many got shot up. So we was there a few days, and training those guys a little bit. Then we took off. And they had moved the line while I was gone. We was up pretty close to Germany when I was there. And it was kind of a, in a loop-like where we'd went up in there and taken the land from the Germans. And Eisenhower decided well, the Bulge was on and he'd pull Patton *[General George S. Patton]* out to go north to help the 101st Airborne in Bastogne *[Luxembourg]*. So that left all that place scarce where, there weren't any soldiers left, where Patton pulled out. So they had moved us over there to take Patton's place and they just pulled up land up there where we had fought for. They brought it

back and made a straight line so that it would be shorter. And the Germans had moved back in after all that fighting and stuff. They let the Germans have it again.

So we started in on another town, and we went through, oh, a lot of little towns, Alzonne [France], Grossbliederstroff [France], Lixing [France], and finally we hit Spicheren, France, which was the last town in Germany at that point. And it was down in a valley. And there was a big hill, we had to take. And the Germans was on that hill, and they had old World War I trenches dug around there instead of foxholes. So we came up the bottom of that hill and was going to take it. So they shot off a bunch of smoke and stuff, so we could get up that hill. And we'd just got almost to the top, and the smoke cleared away, and I looked out there in front of me, about 50 feet and there was about three or four Germans and they had one of their big heavy duty machine guns, which would be approximately 50 caliber pointing right at us guys. And I thought, "Oh, man, this is it." And about that time, they raised their hands and give up. So we took them prisoners. So there was another lucky part of my life, right there.

So we occupied them trenches and down on one end, there was a German machine gun, and they were fighting like mad down there. So my platoon sergeant, his name was --, was going to slip down there, and try to slip down the trenches and take that machine gun. So the way you usually do that, you put a bunch of your boys firing rifles as hard as they can fire them at the machine gun to keep his head down. And then a couple of guys slips close, and they throw hand grenades in there. So, we was going to do that, and it worked alright the first time, and I think we got a couple of the guys, but there's still one guy there and he was really a pouring it on that machine gun.

So we told our guys to do that again, the part of, well they were replacements. They really didn't know how important it was. So, we started our, we got down there close enough to where we could hand grenade that guy and we raised up, and he was just firing like mad. So we couldn't throw our hand grenades. So we looked back, and these replacements instead of shooting their guns right at him, they were down in the trench and they were shooting -- You could see the barrels sticking up in the air. So, we had to give up on that guy and went back and give them guys heck. About that time, an artillery round came in. And it hit right where that machine gun nest was, and I'll always remember that. It must have went right in under that guy because I can still see it. He just, just seemed like a full body went up about 20 feet in the air or higher and then everything just started flying, you know. And we went over there then. About the biggest thing we could find was an arm. It just blew him all to pieces.

So, then why there was a tank down in this town and he kept acting like he was going to come up. That's a German tank. And so my captain, he told me to get a bazooka squad of guys together, that's two guys, and run down these trenches farther and find kind of where we thought the tank might come up and knock it out. So we

did. We had to get up out of the trenches and run across to each trench. Of course, the Germans seen us. And they started putting in mortars shells. And we finally jumped into the trench we wanted to get into and we was starting to run down it, and a mortar shell hit right on top of the trench where we were and caved part of the trench in and knocked us down on the bottom of the trench. And I had a walkie-talkie. It cut off the antenna on it. And we got up, we started to talk and nobody could hear anything, and our noses were bleeding and eyes, and so we fooled around there for four or five minutes, I guess, trying to clean up and stuff. One guy was almost buried in the dirt, and by that time, our hearing had come back. So, we didn't even turn it into sick call. You know, the report to go check. And the reason you do, we didn't do that, is because when you're in an outfit like that, if you turn in to sick call and nobody can see anything wrong with you, they're saying you're just wanting to get off the line. So us three guys, never even reported it. So, we went on then, and our captain, he finally, they rose the white flag down on that town.

BELT: Can you stop just a moment here?

CHARTIER: Okay.

[background noise briefly]

BELT: Okay. You're talking about the white flag went up.

CHARTIER: Yeah. So our captain took a couple of guys and a medic and went down there, and took a bunch of prisoners. There was a bunch of wounded, and the medic took care of them. That's the Germans now. And they ended up back up there, and we marched in and took the town over. But anyway, our captain got a Silver Star and got to go to SHAEF [*Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force*] headquarters and General Montgomery pinned the Silver Star on him. I'll show you the picture afterward. I got the picture. And okay, so then we went from there on.

We started out and we came to what they called the Brandenburg [*Brandenburg*] Woods and my platoon sergeant, we was sitting along the road just before we went into these woods, taking a little break, because we knew we was going to hit the Germans when we hit the woods. So anyway, everybody hollered "Saddle up" which meant get up and let's get going. And my platoon sergeant started to get up and he was an older man, and he was kind of leaning on his rifle when he got up. And some way, he hit the trigger and it went off, and it went right through his arm. That was the last we ever seen of him because anybody with a self-inflicted wound was court-marshaled. You

either had to prove it was accidental or whatever. And I'm sure it was accidental, because he was quite a guy. And he would have never done that, you know; this was accidental. So, now I got to tell you too, that machine nest, it was him up in the trenches that was helping me or I was helping him. And it was there we was recommended for the Bronze Star. So, when this happened to him, and he was court-marshaled, they just tore the order up and threw it away, I guess, because we never heard nothing about it .

BELT: What was his name again?

CHARTIER: Sergeant Scott. And I don't think it put him out of the war, I imagine it [unclear]. So, we went on in this woods and we formed a skirmish line, which is a big line across like this and we moved forward. We started going through these woods, cleaning the Germans out and then we finally came to an opening, and right over there was part of the Siegfried Line, which was the German line for-- It was actually against the French, you know. The French had the Maginot; the Germans had the Siegfried. And all they had, the Germans had, were just some pillboxes and then a lot of, we called them, tiger teeth. It was concrete teeth that stuck up in the air about three or four feet. They was placed so a tank couldn't get through them, you know. It would throw a tank over on its side. And then they had barbed wire and booby traps and everything else strung in there.

But we just came to some of the pillboxes first and we had to go across the clearing and we couldn't hardly do that. So, we kind of worked around to the left flank, I believe, and kept in the woods and we kind of got in behind them. So, the main sergeant told me, says, "Take a few guys and go up there to them to one of those pillboxes and come in from behind, and see what you can do." So I did. I was pretty scared, but [Chartier laughs] coming up on a pillbox six foot thick with concrete, you know. But I never had come up behind one before. So I come up and we looked up there and there was the stairs going down into it, and there was a German standing there. So I just throwed my rifle on him and hollered, "Hände hoch," which means "Hands up ," in German and boy, he went right up and someway or other through the communication, "How many is in there?" I couldn't understand him, but I told him, I says, "Come out. Bring them all out." And 22 of them marched out of there. Mmmm! So we took them back to camp. There was just five of us, but we took them back to camp.

And a little later, why we was in trenches again. The Germans had a lot of World War II or World War I trenches. So we was, you know, they kind of zigzag and we was across and we seen two guys up on the trench with their guns pointed down at

some of our guys. So, I really don't like to tell this, but I was with the lieutenant and he seen them. And I says, "Lieutenant, what do you want to do?" And he just says, "Shoot them S-Bs [*son of a bitch*]." So I just took my M-1, bang bang, and down they went. And we went over there, and where the other guys were and they said that they had been trying to take prisoners and stuff. And that's the only really two guys I know I really shot. The rest of the time it was just firing into a house. You don't know what you hit. But-- Okay. [*machine noise, possibly tape recorder being paused briefly*]

Okay. Let's see. So about that time, why they decided that we was going, our regiment or maybe a whole division, was going to take Saarbrücken, Germany, which was at that time the seventh largest city in Germany. And it was on the Saar River, so we thought maybe it might be a pretty bad fight. But it was tore up awful from the Air Corps bombing and stuff, it was. We got all lined up to go across the river and everything, and some of the guys went across in boats. The engineers put up a pontoon bridge. And I was lucky enough, I got to go across on that bridge. So, then we entered Saarbrücken. Well, it was deserted! The Germans had left. There wasn't even any civilians; they were all hiding out in the woods and stuff.

BELT: What year do you think this is now?

CHARTIER: This is '45 [1945], March. So, we just take the whole town. And the German people, civilians, they started coming back in, pulling their little wagons and what belongings they had left. And so we had to feed them and everything. At the same time, why a lot of the DPs, now that's displaced people, person, they could be French, Polack [*Polish*], Russian, Italian, anything. They was starting to come in because the armies had released a lot of them from their prisons. So here they came. We didn't know what to do. So they finally, they made MPs [*military police*] out of us for a couple of days. And they told us, says, "They'll come up to you and they'll say what they are and you tell them where to go." So, we did. They'd come up and say "Russian," they'd say "Russkie;" and "French," "Francaise;" "Italian," "Italiano;" Polack and so forth. And there was even some Mongolians that had been in the German Army. And they'd say, "Mongol." Oh, they had slant eyes. They was fierce looking guys. And we had to tell them where to go. So, we told them. We did that for a few days.

About that time, we got transferred from the 7th Army. See, we had been in the 7th Army all the time. We got transferred to Patton's Third Army. Because he came back from Bastogne and started heading for Berlin. [*Chartier laughs*] And so, he was going so fast, that he outrun the infantry and the first thing we know, they come and told us, "You're 40 miles behind Patton. You'll never catch up with him. So, we're going to keep you here and you'll just do duty, helping with civilians and displaced

people. Maybe a sniper once in a while or somebody that don't want to give up, and things like that." And so we did that for a while and then Patton went on, and he hit a big salt mine down in Bavaria. And they went in there and they found all kinds of treasure. Gold bars, American money, and all the art that they had taken away from Europe was put in there, trying to hide it. So, Patton had that shipped by truckloads to Frankfurt, Germany. And there was a bank there, called the Deutsche Bank. It was a block big. And they decided to put that, all that in there. My company was detailed to guard that. I don't know who they thought was going to get that, but, man, we had guys walking the streets, machine guns on the corner, a light tank out in front, and guys up on the top with an antiaircraft gun. And we did that for, well, I was there about a week. And I was lucky, I got a pass to Paris for three days.

And when I came back, why they had moved. And there was a trust from Frankfurt, there was a great big, I believe that's right initials, IG Farben, which was a war manufacturer for Germany, and they had moved all our outfit over there to guard it and stuff. Well, we went over there and that thing wasn't even hit by bombs or anything. And I know all of us guys says, "Jiminy, why didn't they bomb that. That's a war factory." And so, we thought about that for a while, and then about, the war ended.

And they decided to let, they didn't know what to do with a lot of us guys. So, we started to getting up little schools we could go to. I says, "That's for me. I'd rather do that any time than do guard duty." So, I went to Kelcon, Germany. There was kind of a little building there, there was about a 100 of us in there from the 275th Infantry. And they found some instructors for certain things, and we started going to school. And then I found out why IJ [IG] Farben wasn't bombed, or I think. Now it's my idea. But they made that Supreme Allied Headquarters for Eisenhower [*General Dwight D. Eisenhower*]. So they was saving it for him, is all I can think. And so they moved in there and that's where they took over from, at Frankfurt, was IJ Farben's manufacturing complex.

So anyway, I was, went to school, and I took a lot of subjects. But I took radio more than anything, always interested in radio work. And we only had to go to school for half a day. And then we was off, so we went downtown and made friends with the Germans. I found a family to do my washing and I'd give them, try to sneak them a little bit to eat. I remember, a poor old lady, I brought her a piece of Army bread. She looks at it and I told her, "Brot," they say in German for bread. And she, "That's not brot, that's cake." [*laughs*] So, they was really happy to get it, and I gave them a little GI [*government issue*] soap. That was that old yellow stuff that they used. And they did my laundry for me and stuff. [*sound of papers rustling*] And so then from there on, why I got in to June or July and they just decided to break up our outfit. So they got us to the

70th Division. And they brought us all in to one place and they started transferring us out. The guys, if you had 85 points, you could go home. And the less points you had, why you was going to go to the Pacific and fight the Japs [*Japanese*]. So, I had 71, which was, I couldn't go home, but I was fairly high.

And so they transferred me to the Third Division, which is a really famous division that came all the way from North Africa up through Italy. By the way, that's where Audie Murphy's from. You've all heard of Audie Murphy. Okay. In fact, he got his Congressional Medal of Honor about 25 miles from where I was. So I got transferred to the Third, and all we did was guard duty and stuff. We'd moved to a pretty big town called Marburg [*Germany*]. And it had a big railroad center, and they brought a lot of boxcars with PX [*post exchange*] supplies and stuff. I don't like to say this. But over there, most all of our transportation, quartermaster and everything else, was done by the black troops. So they had all the supplies that they could black market and everything. And they really did, and they got a lot of girls and stuff that way, too.

And then they got to where they was stealing it. We was having boxcars that was broken open with PX supplies. I was sergeant of the guard that night. I sent my guys out, and they put guys all over town and down there around that boxcar. So, pretty soon, a 6 by 6, that's a big government truck drove up. And a black soldier got out, and started breaking into the boxcar. So the guy, the guards tried to halt him. He jumped into his 6 by 6, and took off. And so the guard notified some more guards, and they got in a weapons carrier, which is a light truck. Started chasing him. And they radioed and got a hold of an MP [*military police*] outfit, and there was a lieutenant in that, and three or four MPs. We started chasing him. He started going up a mountain, and when he did, why that lieutenant hollered, "Shoot his tires out." So everybody shot his tires out. He run into the side of the mountain. And he got out and started running. So we didn't-- What do we do now? Lieutenant says, "Well, wait until he gets to the top of the mountain, and when he gets silhouetted in the moonlight, let him have it." So that's what they did. So, next when they changed guard, here come my weapons carrier in. And see I wasn't on that, I was back at camp, sergeant of the guard. So here they come in, and they had this black soldier in there, dead. They said we got a present for you. Oh, boy!

So, it went on for-- September 24th and my points, 71 points, I had enough to go home. That was my mother's birthday. Boy, oh, man, what a wonderful thing this is. So we got in the truck and went plumb across, or not plumb across Germany, part of Germany, plumb across France to the coast, and they had places set up for the guys were going home. It was named after a cigarette, Camp, well, the one I went to was Lucky Strike. And it was an assembly area for everybody who was going to go home. So we thought, "Boy, we'll be right on our way." So, it went on and on and on, and I

took a pass to Paris again. Went to Reims [*France*], went to Luxembourg City [*Luxembourg*]; finally, they said, "Well, this is it. You're going to go to another camp and it's right by the seashore. You'll get on a boat there."

We got on trucks and went to Camp Phillip Morris this time. Sure enough, it was at Le Havre, France, right there in the port. So we was there for a couple of days, and he said, "Let's march down to the dock. You're going to get on a boat." So, we did. We got down there, and I looked at that boat, and I said, "That ain't no ocean going boat. That's a ferry." So, sure enough, it was, and they took us over to England. So we got over there, and we was there a month, and I got to go to London, and a few towns, and stuff. [*laughs*] And finally, our captain, that's in charge of the group I was in, he couldn't get a boat. There was a long shoreman's

INTERVIEW ENDS IN MID-CONVERSATION

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO