

Myron “Mike” Eberle

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Cohen: So today is July 12th, 2019. My name is Leah Cohen, and on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. I have the great pleasure of meeting Mike Eberle. Mike served as the first lieutenant in Company C of the 290th Infantry Regiment in the 75th Division during World War II, in particular the Battle of the Bulge. We look forward to hearing your story.

Eberle: You have the essence of it. [laughter]

Cohen: So, so we try to get a sense of the interviewee's background, so we'll begin at the beginning. Where and when were you born?

Eberle: I was born in Kansas City, Kansas, on January 11th, 1923.

Cohen: And what was it like growing up in Kansas City at the time?

Eberle: Well, my father worked for the Santa Fe Railroad as a construction foreman, so we moved quite a bit. Construction foreman do that. The job finishes; you go somewhere else. Uh, so I lived up and down the Santa Fe railroad. Um, my parents are buried at Emporia, Kansas. And I uh, became interested in chemical, chemistry high school teacher. I could... I checked in and found I could go to either, two, two of the, two schools I had picked were either Georgia Tech or University of Illinois. Well, I, at this point in my father's career, he, he went to work for the federal government in investigating railroad accidents. The signaling devices that are involved. Consequently, he chose Chicago because there are more trains in Chicago than there are in Atlanta, so I went to University of Illinois. In the fall of 1940, you'll interested to know, out of state tuition was \$50. [laughter] That will give you a chuckle.

Cohen: Um, and what was it like growing up in the various places in Kansas?

Eberle: Hot, and dusty. We indeed those had dust storms. You've perhaps seen photos of them rolling in. Well, they rolled it, and when they rolled in, they'd close the school down, and you ran home to help your mother try to plug all the windows, doors, and all that sort of thing. Which was, almost an impossible job, because

dust, blowing dust, it just... Um, so uh, but it was hot, and I had a good time. I had, I had friends, and uh, the Boy Scouts. When, and, and, actually the Boy Scouts gave me better training about first aid than the [US] Army did. [laughter]

Cohen: How did the Boy Scouts train you in first aid?

Eberle: Well because they knew about shock, and I knew about pressure points for bleeding. And this kind of, it was part of a merit badge program that the Boy Scouts had, so I have to recommend them. But, I had none of the current problems with them. We hear about, I've heard about, I have no idea. It's not possible. So I uh, we did all the things kids did out in Kansas. You get a .22 rifle and you go shoot squirrels. That was considered, okay. I couldn't imagine giving a kid in grammar school a .22 rifle now. You'd be in the headlines of the **Chicago Tribune**, I'm sure. [laughter] Uh, I, summer times were a, playing a lot of tennis. I was a good tennis player. No golf, that was for rich people. We only had one golf course in Topeka, Kansas anyhow. [Laughter] That I know of. [Clears throat] Excuse me. I had friends, good friends. Across the street my friend, Barrett Silk who could talk me into doing almost anything, including riding our bikes from Topeka to Lawrence, Kansas which is twenty-eight miles, on a nice summer day. Uh, and we got about there, and I find out that Barrett didn't have her address, he just met her at a meeting. We got home, uh, my father found us on a back road. I delivered papers. And, papers in those days, because it was Topeka, Kansas, you could fold it into a small square and throw the thing. Well, one of little throws, it was latter in the library, I would fold these papers up and put them in a basket on a bike and ride the bike around. I hit a little, uh, rut, and dumped the newspapers all over the lawn and this nice gentleman came out of the porch to help me. His name was Alf Landon, and he ran for the presidency in the United States later on in life, but you know at that point, he was a governor, I believe. And there wasn't anybody following him. There wasn't any bird dogs. There were no FBI or any of that sort of thing. I think of what often when I hear that there was a man who became a candidate, but very unsuccessful, the most unsuccessful candidate. He only won Maine and Vermont. I know that because I was selling, trying to sell subscriptions to the literary digest in Topeka, Kansas. Uh, while it was a very literary magazine, well, it didn't, it didn't do well on Maine and Vermont. [inaudible] So it, the newspaper or the magazine subscription business was not good for me, so back to paper boy. [laughter].
Want to hear what we do for fun?

Cohen: Yeah.

Eberle: Oh, okay, Boy Scouts would take us camping, go visit my parents, er grandparents. They have a small farm outside of Emporia, Kansas. Uh, I, my sister and I, I had one sister, thought that it was our vacation, we realized later

on that it was our parents' vacation. That's fair. They were entitled to get away from us too.

Cohen: Was your father, or any other relatives um, in the military? Like, had they served in World War I?

Eberle: My grandfather, Eberle, uh, in the German Army. Uh, not, probably not the shooting part of it, but he did have the misfortune to uh, he was driving a large horse drawn unit, and he side swiped a house in some of the villages, and some were in German, and they told him he'd have to stay in for two more years to pay for the damage of the house. Well, the Rhine river froze up and he went... [chuckles] he came to the United States. He didn't propose to spend two more years in the German army. So that was his military career. My father tried to get into World War I at the age of sixteen. He was about 6 foot 1, and a big farm kid with lots of muscles because all he did was work. That's all grandfather knew, was work. So my father got in briefly, but they sent him back. He was too young. Fortunately, for me. Some other name... um. So, that's the military career that my immediate family had, which was none.

Cohen: When you were growing up, were you and your family aware of the events in Europe or the rise of Nazism?

Eberle: No. I was a great reader, but I was more into the *Three Musketeers* and things like that than history. And my grandfather, Karl with a K, was a, a tyrant. That's the way that German fathers were, and he had seven kids, and they didn't eat until he came home. I don't care how hungry they were, they waited. Grandma, my grandmother was about three years old when she came to this country. Grandfather was twenty-five when he came over here. So my father and his brothers were not fond of their father because of the way he treated their mother. Whereas they were raised here. They didn't understand the German, dictatorial process properly, I guess.

Cohen: Was there contact with relatives in Germany?

Eberle: Not that I'm aware of. I was aware of them. There was a couple photos of Uncle Johann in Berlin. Not my uncle, my father's uncle, of course. So, uh, but that was the extent of it. Did I have any idea what was going on in Europe? No, not really. My history was strictly American History. It was a pretty decent educational system in Kansas. I wound up in Topeka, Kansas for several years. That had a good educational system. I found out from my sister from going to Los Angeles, and uh, that, that she found the system there, it was a good college and it had college training. They had a college prep program. And so we got Latin, Algebra, and all the good things. So in that sense, I was fortunate there, to have been in

Topeka. I could have been out in a one, one room school out in a small town in Kansas.

Cohen: So you had luckily, a good education that prepared you for college, and where did your interests lie? Like, what did you choose to study, when you, both in high school and later at the University of Illinois in Champaign?

Eberle: Well, I went to the University of Illinois for chemical engineering, specifically. It was a growing field, and it looked good. Uh, it was a great Idea until first semester of my sophomore year when uh, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Actually, uh, I do remember on Labor Day of 1939 I was in a new high school in a small town in Kansas, called Arkansas [i.e., last "s" pronounced] City, except that everyone else calls it Arkansas City. Because it's Arkansas. If you live in Kansas, it's Arkansas. If you live in Arkansas, it's Arkansas, but anyhow, Arkansas City. But the teacher announced to us, and he said, "Gentleman." He said, "Your lives will be changed strongly." The Germans had just gone into Poland on Labor Day of 1939. Well I, he said... he was right. [inaudible] I was more interested in the new year ladies than the [inaudible] Sixteen-years-old you know. What do you want world history? So uh, that was my, uh, and the debate team subject was government control of railroads or something like that. I tried to play football, but I was a better tennis player, and besides that, there were girls on the tennis team and the debate team. There were no girls on the football team. All right so, so, I went to one year there. I picked, as I said, either Georgia Tech, or Illinois, and since my father came to Chicago, we picked Illinois for the \$50... That was out of state. In state was less.

Cohen: Would you say that the attack on Pearl Harbor had the effect of making it come home to you more?

Eberle: We were playing football in the side... I had joined a fraternity. We were playing football on the side yard of one October [i.e., December] Sunday. And somebody stuck his head out the window and said, "The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor." We all said, "Where the hell is Pearl Harbor?" We don't know. We had to go find a globe. Literally. I wasn't into Pearl Harbor. Well, I should have been, or I found out. Not directly. So uh, it really didn't affect us a lot at that point because the government wasn't prepared to take us in. But when I went after two more years, at the end of my Junior year, which was pretty much a disaster academically, because I was so busy saying goodbye to my friends and we had to run and have a few beers, although fifty-two guys at the end of the year, there were only nine left. They made it about... six other guys were already had our orders means you were going in. So uh, they shut the fraternity house down and the Army took it over for a couple of years. So uh, but, I stayed in the fraternity house until June of '43.

Cohen: Were you part of an ROTC program?

Eberle: Yes, I was.

Cohen: And how did that come about?

Eberle: Well, the first two years were mandatory. ROTC at land-grant colleges, you had to take the first three years. When I took the third year, that would lead you into officers training. Uh, but by that time the war was on, and I've got friends who are going in. Um, so they took me in the Advanced ROTC, and I went through it. Unfortunately, unfortunately, whatever, the Army, the training was for Coast Artillery [Corps]. Well, Illinois is not the center of the Coast Artillery. How we got to that I don't know, but it helped. When I finally got into the service it was an anti-aircraft. Our Coast Artillery had become Anti-Aircraft [Corps].

Cohen: So what type of training exercises did you do during the ROTC period?

Eberle: Oh, march, drill, and then we had mathematical problems to figure out how, on the, the arc of a 16-inch shell being fired so many miles. Uh, the math was pretty good. It wasn't useful, because I served, Coast Artillery and I wound up in the Infantry. It wasn't too useful. Except I did know my right foot from my left foot, and I could do a left flank and a right flank and all that good stuff, which we all had to learn.

Cohen: So when were you actually drafted?

Eberle: Well, because I was in the ROTC, they considered they had me. Uh, so uh, I didn't have to be drafted. I didn't have a draft number. Uh, so that I wasn't sweating out, I was just sweating out when they decided they needed Myron, more than the girls in Champaign did. [Laughter]

Cohen: So just so I understand, um, because you were part of the ROTC, it meant that the Army could call you up whenever they wished.

Eberle: And they did, and they, they sent me to basic training. Well initially, I went into, Rockford, Illinois was the introduction. So I went there for two weeks. And the only things grim probably about that part, because I had been in the ROTC, advanced ROTC, the big ten had a deal with the Army, if they took us in, they took us in as sergeants pay, a buck sergeants pay. Well a buck sergeant in that day was \$78. Well privates were getting \$50, and PFC is \$52 and corporal is \$66. Well, the people in Rockford found out that those of us that were there were getting sergeants pay, I did nothing but dishes for two weeks; all of us, when they found out. You're going to get that \$78 we going to... a little [inaudible]. So

uh, I was happy to be shipped, and I was shipped out to San Diego, an outfit called Camp Callan. Well it was an anti-aircraft basic training. So that's when I went to my thirteen weeks of training at Camp Callan, interesting part about that is it's now the Torrey Pines Golf Course. [Laughter] Uh, I didn't know it then, of course, but uh, so that was thirteen weeks and they shipped me back after I finished through an Army Student Training Program [ASTP] at, of all things, University of Illinois. They sent me back to my original... Which was great because I could pick up a couple hours of credits, on the courses I took there.

Cohen: Why did this they send you back to the University of Illinois? Was this part of the ASTP, the Army Specialized Training Program?

Eberle: Yes, and the reason they did it, I realized later was they, because they were going to send me to Officer's Training, [and] I had to be twenty-one to go to officers training. So I, they sent me back in September so by the next January I would be twenty-one. So uh, next January... By that time, they had called me, of course by then I was wearing uniform and marching around campus, uh, in my uniform with umpteen thousand other guys, and uh, they waited, we... I went in the Army, they called me in, and they sent me to Camp Davis, which is Anti-Aircraft training camp for officers training, officers training program, Camp Davis. Well Camp Davis was the most chicken operation in... I won't, yeah I can't finish that word properly, I suppose, but uh, it was um... They had no, they didn't need 2nd Lieutenants in anti-aircraft. They never got hurt. They were never that close to a combat area. So they announced that they were shutting down the program, and we could, now when I saw chicken, I mean, we, we, we had, you could eat off the floor of our barracks. We never wore shoes in them. And if you had, every morning you got up and you took your bedding and you stacked it, and you stacked it with a ruler, square. And they had to be able to bounce a quarter off, the way that, how tight your sheets were. Oh, it was wonderful. So when they said you could either go back into the, back to anti-aircraft as a corporal, or you can go to the infantry training school, officer training school, and then, in a week moment [inaudible, 21:12-21:16]. I said I'll go to infantry. So I was shipped to the infantry school, which was a very practical school, you didn't have to make your bed at all, just tighten it a little bit. They wanted you to be able to fire guns; your guns, and enemy guns, and all that kind of good stuff. So it would, very... incidentally, almost all the training officers, the bird-dogs they were called, had been in combat, by this time so we got good information. We didn't get the book information, which is sometimes good, and sometimes not so good.

Cohen: So you were being trained by people who had already fought? Did they fight in Italy?

Eberle: In many cases they had, yes. And they had, they had some non-commissioned, and that's when you first learn something about the military. Military wars are

not fought by officers; they're fought by the enlisted man. Don't ever figure that's not true. I'd go to outfits ... has good enlisted men. Good non-commissioned officers, sergeants, corporals. Those are the people who run armies, and if it's a good Army, they do a good job. And one of the things that the Army wound up admiring the Marines about if nothing else, they had the non-coms and they pounded it into, they went to bed knowing the serial number of their rifle. We didn't have to do that, regrettably, or whatever.

Cohen: Where was the infantry training?

Eberle: Fort Benning. The Fort Benning School, The Benning School for Boys it was affectionately called. It was actually called the infantry school, and it is still there, and they still produce 2nd Lieutenants. That took thirteen weeks.

Cohen: So what was a typical day like when you were there, at Fort Benning?

Eberle: Well you got up at 5:30 or 6 or whatever it was. Make you bed and eat, fall in for reveille, at 6:30 after you made your bed you fall in for reveille, then you'd go breakfast. Then you'd go into formations or whatever, whatever your activities were. A lot of marching, a lot of hiking. A lot of firing guns. That sort of thing, very practical stuff. Practical stuff, and I mean we were training on some of the German equipment, on some of the British equipment, in case you ran into that and you had to use it. Uh, so you know how to fire it, how to load it.

Cohen: Was there a focus on a particular gun, or a particular ammunition?

Eberle: I was, uh, infantry, oh, rifles and machine guns, where our—excuse me [pause]—where our uh, and then hand grenades, we had mortars. So basically it's a, I mean wicked weapon of World War II was the machine gun, but it started out in World War I. You read about these swatters in World War I and they marched these troops into these machine guns. They unloaded their rifles, so they'd have to use a bayonet to get to them. By the same token, the Germans, where were, um, what am I trying to say, loaded, locked their machine gunners into those machine guns. They handcuffed them to the machine guns so they couldn't get out either. So it's got, [inaudible] a bunch of losers. And the guys behind machine guns were guys trying to get at the guys behind them. I was always grateful I wasn't in World War I. I was grateful my father wasn't in World War I because he probably wouldn't have survived it. So uh, that uh, but the infantry, we learned about hand grenades, learn three separate devices, when you're trying to, on the first night of combat I got very familiar with it, when you got done with all the handles and safety devices, you had four and a half seconds before this thing went off. Well I thought I was... I'm holding this, I've got two Germans on a machine gun behind me, and they didn't see me crawl down the ditch. Uh, and I stuck my head over this pile of dirt, and I'm look down the barrel of the German

machine gun, and these two machine gunners are talking to each other. They didn't see me obviously. What a story. So I um, hand grenades are supposed go off in four and a half seconds. Well, I wanted to make sure mine was about four, so, "One thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three." Well, my hands had flipped, and I had to flip it right [inaudible] about four feet over my shoulder. Has to be one of the shortest hand grenades throws in the US Army records, but it was too soon. It went off and I charged around the hole to get at these two guys, and they're running down the ditch. [laughter] Oh I gave them about a, I must have given them a second and a half. I'll tell you, to this day, when I use a microwave, and it gets to the last four seconds, I'll say, "One thousand one, one thousands two" to see how close I can get. I'm still trying to get it right seventy-five years later.

Cohen: Do you think that the training at Fort Benning helped you?

Eberle: It was excellent. I'll tell you why it was excellent. The first night in combat, the first time you hear machine guns going off over your head, I knew what it was, I knew where they were from, the sound that they were German machine guns, not ours. They fired at different rates of speed, so in that sense it was good training. Uh, I had some idea of what the hell was going on. Not a lot. I remember thinking to myself, "Gee there aren't any girls or any bands playing or anything. This is not much fun, let's get out of here." It doesn't work that way.

Cohen: Yeah, yeah. So we were reading that the 75th Infantry Division was first activated in April 1943, was that when you became part of the 75th Infantry?

Eberle: No, I joined the 75th from Fort Benning. Um, by that time they had moved up... they had been through a couple of phases but they're getting ready to go overseas, until I was moved in, about the fourth of July weekend. Uh, and they were in Evansville, near Evansville, Indiana, Breckenridge was the name of the camp, a good old Civil War General, of course.

Cohen: So you joined in around um, July of 1944, is that correct?

Eberle: This is January of '44. I had been a year in the army. Uh, thirteen weeks in the basic training, and then the ROTC, er, ASTP, and then back down to Fort Benning for thirteen more weeks, and by that time my year finally comes up and they can make me a second lieutenant. I don't know why they thought sense of me being twenty-one.

Cohen: When did you learn that your unit was going to be sent overseas?

Eberle: Well, I knew I was going to be sent overseas, eventually, there wasn't any question, I mean, they kept putting us together now. We were a real draftee outfit. We were not one of these regular Army people with all sorts of history behind them and so forth. We were a bunch of kids, from seventeen to twenty-five, I would say. Majority of us, and since I was twenty-one, I was, and I had three years of college, uh, Man, I was pretty senior. Well, I didn't know what was going on in the world either, but I found out from some of my, you get a great education when you start working with the troops, and I had a bunch, several, uh, Italian boys from New York. They must have thought I was the most naïve thing they'd ever met, and I thought they were because they didn't know a horse from a cow, so we were about even, except I had to go learn? [not sure of word]. Which was the lowest rank in the armed forces is a green 2nd Lieutenant. Everybody knows more than he does. Everybody. I could promise you, and they know it, so your job was to get smart quick, as quickly as you can.

Cohen: So how did you get smart quick, and dealing with people of many different backgrounds?

Eberle: Well, the Benning training was very good, as I said. I felt like I had some idea of what I was supposed to do. What I supposed to do was to take care of. To feed and clothe and help lead a group enlisted men into combat. The bad part of this is, it says lead, it doesn't say push. So if you want to lead troops, you've got to get out of the hole first. You start moving first. So they uh, longevity on 2nd lieutenants of the infantry is not great. In some areas it was just unbelievable, Italy for instance. It was terrible. And people, we, we don't seem to realize that it was an ugly, ugly war that was fought in Italy in World War II, and for no real good reason that I'm aware of, but whatever. I was just happy I wasn't in Italy. I was happy I wasn't in Japan, in the Pacific, because the Japanese didn't surrender. The Germans will surrender. You have proper sergeant that says, "I recognize that you've got the guns or the whatever, and they should surrender." And they will surrender, and somebody, somebody asked us a for a little [inaudible] didn't want to surrender, and some of them didn't, so we shot them. We didn't have any trouble doing that. We had no trouble killing. I didn't hate them, just wanted to kill them. That's our job, go kill them, or move them. Get them out of that position, you get them out of that position by shooting them. We had help, we had artillery, and later in the war we had the aircraft. They didn't do much for the infantry except every now and then they'd strafe us. We were pulling out of the Battle of the Bulge and we got strafed by two British spitfires. Well, they killed a couple of guys that just finished a month of a pretty ugly war, uh, and that's war.

Cohen: That kind of confusion.

Eberle: The dead are there because they're in the wrong place at the wrong time. It doesn't have much to do with your training, or how brave you are. You're just in the wrong place.

Cohen: Maybe I'm jumping ahead, but um I noticed in the article in the **Keenager [News]**, [D-Day Commemoration] included write-up of veterans, Mike Eberle] that you go to mass every day, and I do wonder how your faith played, or did not play a part in being in combat.

Eberle: I didn't, didn't come out of college as a great Christian, or a great believe in much of anything expect have a good time, and learn. That's what you're supposed to do, so uh... Where were we? What did you want to know?

Cohen: Oh if faith played a role in your life when you were in combat.

Eberle: Well, I, I, when I got into combat I started praying. I prayed at night time to see the sun come up and in the morning I would pray to see the sun go down. I didn't want to get greedy. Just give me another half a day or so. Just kind of went with that. And uh, I think most of us did. I, specifically, I was taking, taking patrol across the Rhine river, it was pretty late in the war, February of 45, and uh, I was uh, we went in the dark room to get our eyes adjusted it. Had to pick a night when the stars weren't out, the moon wasn't out and... And uh, so were in a dark room, and the door opens, and the light screams in and I said, "Shut the 'blankety,' blank door you 'blankety,' blank idiot." And heard from the other side, "Well this is Father [35:07-Hagener -unsure of the name.]" I said, "Well, come in, Father. Close the door." Well he said, "Well, I heard you were taking patrol across the river and so I thought I would come and I'd offer the Catholics absolution and if you're not Catholic, I can offer you contingent absolution." And I said to myself, "That sounds pretty good. Give me a little help." So uh, so uh, and he was around. This was a good chaplain. He was there on the front lines on Easter, Easter of 1945, Easter Sunday. The afternoon, and we're moving down the road, not underfired, and a jeep pulls up and it's the chaplain's jeeps, and it had a cross on it, and, and uh, he said, "Could he say mass at the farmhouse up the road." And I said sure, go ahead, we've got time. So he's the chaplain for uh, um, a regiment, what was a regiment, I doubt that it was the whole division. He was trying to run down about thirty groups to give them, uh, Easter Sunday. Um, so he knew more about where our outfit was, than our outfit knew where they were. Uh, he was nice. He was nice, a great guy. He turned out to be a pretty good ping pong player. You can never tell when that's going to be useful.

Cohen: He sounds like he was very much there for everyone.

Eberle: He was around yes, and he had some nice stories, then the other story, the wonderful story about this um, chaplain, this young chaplain, he had, he had

learned the Jewish traditions and would hold services for them on feast, on days of obligation, whatever you call those or anyhow. Which reminds me that as a green 2nd Lieutenant, I went out in front of the rifle company to call reveille in the morning, you got to send the youngest officer out there. Nobody else wants to get out of bed that early. So I went out there, and that, I said, have announced that the next day was a Jewish holiday, and, and I went, [and said] all those who are Jewish, step forward, Well, Reilly, Monahan and here they are they all step forward." Oh you know, I don't know, I'm green. I don't know which one was which, I knew I was being had, so I put them back in formation. And I pick out their sergeants to sort them out for me. You know, they got a day off, a day off of maneuvers. This was in the States. This was in Kentucky.

Cohen: Okay, so, I'm sorry were going to jump back a little bit. So at what point were you sent to England, or to Wales? I'm not even sure.

Eberle: Uh, October of '46.

Cohen: Uh...

Eberle: I'm sorry, October of '44.

Cohen: Do you have recollections of the sea voyage over, or what type of ship it was?

Eberle: Uh, it was the *USS Brazil*. We were stacked, every deck and they had the bunks about this far apart. You could roll in them. Well, when guys got sea sick as they did they would, lean over and out of the bed. There were about four or five people and as an officer my job was to go down every so often and tell them to clean it up. So I got up on top, take a few deep breaths, plunge down to the bottom, and we were in the bottom layer, of the... So okay, "You and you and you and you. Here, get this, swab, swab, swab, get this stuff out of here. "I was as bad as they come and off I went before I threw up. So it was not a great trip over.

Cohen: Were you yourself seasick?

Eberle: Almost. I stood outside and [breathe deeply] and breathed deeply a lot. Yes, I was not comfortable. It was not. And of course, it was quite slow because we had tankers and other things in the convoy, but the tankers are on the outside of convoy. They put us troops in the inside so if they're gonna blow anybody up, they're gonna blow up the tankers. That's my idea of a bad job, to be on a tanker in World War II. So uh, so it took us two weeks. We landed in Wales. Um, we wound up, my company wound up in Porthcawl, Wales. It's a little village. The only thing that I know it's noted for, was many, many years later the British Open was held on the golf course, at the Porthcawl Links. Well, I had run up and down

those damn Porthcawl Links with maneuvers and so forth for about six weeks, and I knew there was a golf course there; had been. But you have to remember, this was 1944, they'd been at war since 1939, and they had, well that had some rules for when you're playing golf, and of course, if the Germans come over, what you do. You want to play golf, you want keep on playing golf, you played golf. The British were stubborn about some of their things. Now, I, I didn't cheat and play golf, but they apparently could, but they couldn't, because the greens were all grown up. I knew they were greens, and that's how I recognized they had to be. The other thing about the English was, one of my favorite moments, uh, when I found out we got overseas we started taking mail. We had to send some mail to some of our troops. One of my men had two wives. Well, nothing in our regiment says you can't have two wives. As long as he doesn't send classified information, it's okay with me [laughter]. Until later on he wrote... there was the beauty queen showed up on the **Sergeant** [unsure of name] **Magazine**, he uh, wrote her a letter. So I call him after reveille, I call him aside and I said, "Well son, you can't write this when you didn't know her." Oh, oh, I didn't, I didn't say that besides that you got two wives... That was his problem not mine. So, so I gave him back. About four days later, he writes her again, the same beauty queen, well now my power is being challenged, and I called him out. Now you never chew your troops on in front of other troops. So if you really get mad at a guy, you take him aside and you chomp on him. Uh, however you handle it, but in any event, I got him aside, and this time I'm really upset. And I said, "How the hell? How could you? I told you not to write her!" And he said, "Well, I wrote her before." Oh he was, I could write a book on that man. He finally did get wounded, and unfortunately, for his platoon sergeant, his platoon sergeant was in the same hospital, and, Lawson, the boys called him Radio—you always had to be careful about nicknames because they, he never stopped broadcasting. So he was known as Radio. And another guy was known Glut, glut, well I found out watching Glut at chow line, when there wasn't anything left but mashed potatoes, he'd... mashed potatoes, eating mashed potatoes, that's why he got the name Glutton. He made the bad mistake... we were able to get us some condensed dehydrated food, rice and beans mixture. Well, he got ahold of the can. It was meant for armored force troops not for infantry. He got ahold of the can and started eating it himself. I thought he was going to die. Fortunately, his stomach had been stretched. By his previous, overeating, that he survived it. Being with troops is wonderful.

Cohen: It sounds like there's all sorts of challenges leading men in just these human situations, not even in combat, you know.

Eberle: Oh well you, yeah, after all combat is. Uh, our outfit is... Christmas eve was our first combat. Uh, and the war ended on May 8th, so we were, we had ninety or ninety-one days of combat, they said. Well, combat is, ah, combat can be playing Cowboys and Indians with real guns; shooting at each other or jumping around

through trees and this kind of things. That's very exciting. It can also be pretty, really, you can just get hit by a patrol, a German patrol will hit your front lines. So, you'll have thirty minutes of excitement. Uh, and you'll lose a couple of guys, get killed, and you'll kill a few Germans, and that'll subside. Well, that's also a day of combat, but it's thirty minutes if you want to get specific.

[0:45:28]

Cohen: How long were you training in Wales? And did you go through France afterwards? Like, what was the order?

Eberle: Okay, uh, we were supposed to, 75th Division was supposed to replace the 106th Division. The 106th Division was placed in a section of the front of the Ardennes Forest, uh, because it would be a quiet spot. Now, the stupid part of this is, that this same Ardennes forest historically had been charged, had been, Germans had used it as a path into France. And you know, they used it again, but the 106th was a Green outfit, and they don't, they don't tell them that. This was when Hitler amassed all these troops and started the Bulge. Well the 106th caught the Bulge, and their commander actually surrendered them. That's just, they never told you that in history of the US Army, a division surrendered. But uh, so...

Cohen: So was the 75th supposed to replace the 106th in the Ardennes?

Eberle: We were supposed to replace the 106th, but all of a sudden the Bulge breaks loose and all hell breaks loose, so we were just shipped to France, or where, uh... We got off, actually, we're in France for a while outside of Le Havre, that's where I learned to drink Calvados, eh, which was not one of my great discovery's.

Cohen: I'm sorry what did you learn to have? What did you learn how to do?

Eberle: Drink calvados. It's apple brandy that the Normans make, in Normandy. It's more famous for the brandy than anything else as far as we were concerned. Well, we were pulled from there, and... Then they realized they got to get troops on line. I had no idea what our route was, but, finally we were on trucks, and uh, well we had a night... We were, didn't know exactly where we were. I remember I had the troops sleeping. It was cold uh, snow, and I had the guys sleeping in a row, much like this. So the two guys in the middle when it was their turn they had to get out, and go, everybody else could roll over, just trying to keep somebody warm.

Cohen: Keep rotating.

Eberle: Yeah, rotating. It was nice, the next day we got loaded onto these trucks, and, and, the company commander, now he had, he's in charge of the whole rifle

company, just four platoons. Three rifle platoons, one weapons platoon. A weapons platoon consisted of mortars and some machine guns. Uh, he had those, we got off the truck, and there's and where there's an open space in front of us, and the woods up ahead, and he said, "Mike, take the first platoon on the right, and the machine gun section will follow you, and get up to the woods." So I got off the truck and I said, "Man, I'm not going to stand here in this open ground. So, 1st Squad here, 2nd Squad there. Third squad here. Let's go. Move." So into the woods we went. Well happily, I did that, because on the other side of the road, the other two platoons, the one platoon leader called his sergeants together, and a German machine gun caught them all, killed every one of them. So they were essentially a lost platoon from that point, for a couple of weeks. Uh, anyhow, I was lucky. We were lucky on our side. We got into the woods, and uh, I had my little, one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three happen so, and then I stood up. I fired. I tried to kill the two Germans. I had got them lined up and "Bang, bang." I missed them. I said to the sergeants behind me, I said, "I missed them. How the hell did I miss them? I couldn't miss them." But I did miss them. And the damn gun jammed. Well, that was my fault the gun jammed. I could only fire one round, I couldn't fire a second round. It was two weeks later before I found out why I missed them. I missed them because the butt of the rifle is jammed up here. A German bullet had hit it and slammed it into my jaw. The German was a sniper up in a tree. Well, I had scout over here who found the sniper in the tree, and he said, "He won't bother anybody else." But uh, it was two weeks later, and I shook.

Cohen: So you didn't feel it consciously at the time?

Eberle: No, no, I knew I had been... You're pretty keyed up... So uh, later on, what I was trying to get at was a tank that was firing down the road. Well we had white phosphorous hand grenades which would burn when exposed to the air, so if I could get that white phosphorus hand grenade onto the tank, it would start a fire, and tanks in those days were lubricated with grease, and the things burnable. Uh, so if you could get a tank, burning it would burn for hours. So I was trying... So I went on down this ditch and I had to go through some water. Well, I got about up to here in the water and I turned and said to the Sergeant behind me, that my naughty bits were getting cold, you know. And as I said that I looked down the road and there's another German machine gun only he's facing the other way. So he looked at me, and I looked at him, and he pulled a pistol and he started shooting at me. I went into the water. Burr. Right up to here. When he stopped shooting, I had a hand grenade. I put that hand grenade right on top of him when it went off, and there were two of them down there. uh, so it was fun and games on Christmas eve.

Cohen: Was this the terrain around Bastogne, and around that area?

Eberle: Yes. Yes, it was, around that area. Yes, we were north of Bastogne. We knew nothing about it, uh at that point. We were, we were assigned to the British, the division had been assigned over to Montgomery, which had, has no effect at all on our rifle company. We don't care who the generals are and that's part of our problem.

Cohen: That's something that I was wondering about. As 2nd lieutenant, did you have access to a little more information as a foot soldier like maps, or any other picture of where the other units were in relation to each other?

Eberle: The first month, because it was the Bulge, the answer is pretty much no. You just, uh, I, I was 2nd Lieutenant. I became company commander very shortly because there was nobody else left in the company. So you become company commander. Well, it didn't occur to me that I'm a twenty-one-year-old 2nd Lieutenant out here telling a bunch of guys, "You go here, and you go there." It's what we did. I had the rank and they obeyed the rank. I never asked whether you liked me or not. I didn't have to ask, and I'm sure I would have gotten all positive. [laughter]

Cohen: You know you say that it was luck, but it seems like you also made a lot of smart decisions, like to look for cover right away for your platoon when you, you know...

Eberle: It's a survival process. Uh, your, your right, and uh, most of the, heroics, if they're called heroics, were, were trying to get out of a situation. Out of a sticky, stickywicket, as the Brits used to call it. Uh, how did you get out of that? I mean when I'm looking down at a German machine gun, at these two guys, that wasn't at Fort Benning. Give me the program [unsure of word?] on that one. So you do what... I remember thinking to myself, my mind went through... I would have to... One of the things you worried about as a 2nd Lieutenant leading troops that you would freeze. You didn't know. Might you panic or something? Well, I was happy to say my mind worked faster than it had ever worked in its life. Trying to think, evaluate the situation. What can I do here? What can I do here? What's good and what's bad? You know I wound up throwing a hand grenade early, for which those Germans are still thankful, if they survived the rest of the war. Uh, it was a great privilege, really, to be an officer. The other thing was you had a lot of things to worry about. The guys, the troops, the enlisted men, didn't, the sergeants did, they're the guys running the Army, anyhow. You're getting the orders and they see if they're executed. But the guys who are not sergeants, now they, they're just cattle to be pushed around. Except they're not, and they're names are Cohen or Beverly who, whatever. You tend to... And you can't uh, I never saw, if you hadn't believed in souls, I think I would have uh, because you look at the guy who's dead, and the guy you know is not there. Something's gone, and as far as I'm concerned that's the soul. That's what's gone. The part I

knew that part is gone. And, and so you, you get pretty hardened, and...
Hardened is probably not the right word, you just, death was part of the process.

Cohen: You just keep thinking and evaluating and...

Eberle: I mean it's part of the process. It's just... Uh, and it's just, if you survive, you're a survivor. And essentially we always said, I think almost all the guys you interview it uh, they're uh, we buried the heroes. The rest of us are survivors, basically. I know damn well that I wasn't a hero. Uh, as a matter of fact, talking with my two friends, later, after the war, we talked. We were trying to figure out if we had a real warrior in our outfit and we figured we might have one guy who liked war. I mean, I can't tell how much he liked it, but that first night when those two Germans ran away from me, they left this machine gun sitting there with all this ammunition. This guy comes out of the woods, and he'd been shot just in the shoulder, here. So I patched him up. He picks the machine gun up and off he goes into the woods. Now that's a warrior. That guy wanted more war. [laughter] Uh, uh, I could, I could have written a book on him too. He wasn't too big on regulations, which may not surprise you.

Cohen: I guess um; you need different types of people for a war.

Eberle: Oh yeah, and we had them. We had every language you could think of. The worst we had was a German kid who thought he spoke German from Arkansas. Well, I took him out once when we got into an area, a crossroads, and um, I wondered which hill, to tell all the people around the crossroad, there are a few houses, "Stay in the house after dark, and nothing will happen to you, but anything that moves after dark, we're going to shoot. So stay in the house." So I took this fella and we go to the first house and he starts saying to them [imitating "German"] and the woman says in very good English. "Would you mind not translating that for me?" He starts all over in German. She couldn't understand his German. Well, I realized nobody else was going to understand it either, this was Arkansas German. I had better German than that because I had had it college as part of Chemistry – it was a course, so I'm, and I had a very German name. Eberle is a very German name, uh, uh, an Eber is a wild boar and Le is the diminutive and as I explained that to my wife one time she said, and I know how to spell boar. She had a very Irish sense of humor.

Cohen: Oh my, wow. So Christmas Eve, there's fighting in the woods near Bastogne. What happened next that was remarkable? Also, I believe that in early January, the 290th was attached to 84th Division for the counter-offensive...

Eberle: What I would have known is that Company C is going to fall in here and there'll be truck [audio glitch] or you're going to march. Uh, that's what I would have known...

[0:59:42-1:00:01- Audio adjustment break]

Cohen: So, I'm trying to go back and in, on Christmas eve you were fighting in the woods, near Bastogne, in Belgium, I see that in January 1945, the 290th was attached to the 84th Division, and I was just wonder if you'd like to talk about either one more. Either...

Eberle: Let's talk about coming...to the end of the Bulge. At the end of the Bulge, C Company had nineteen men and two officers left.

Cohen: Out of how many?

Eberle: Out of 180. Uh, now they were... Some were dead. Some were captured. Some were wounded. Some had pneumonia, and probably two or three had cowardice problems – we'll never know, but there were nineteen of us left, and the Army doesn't recognize the fact that you've got casualties when they're assigning you areas to cover. They assumed you got, 100 and 180 men. Well, once you're in combat with the rifle company, you're never at full strength. You just never, never get quite back up to full strength. Uh, uh, um so there we are with nineteen guys. Well, we were so happy when the trucks came along and said, "You, you're pulled out. You can come out of here." Uh, now we had not been under fire at that point. We were not in contact with the German army, we had been, but they decided to leave us, fortunately. They went back into Germany.

Cohen: Where did they take the nineteen of you? Were you given a rest period?

Eberle: Oh, sure. You go back, and then they start, people start coming back from hospitals and other things, and, uh, and then they assign replacements. Uh, um, not the best job in the world to be a replacement, but the guys would come back to their own old outfit, and there's another, it's a truth, a truth that uh, if you are moving up to the front, and marching, and sometimes you have to do that, anybody driving that way, colonels, generals, ask you where you going. You say, "I'm with the 35th." [or] "I'm with the 75th." And they say, "Okay, hop in. They're up ahead." And so he would know -- a general idea, so he'd take you up, part of the way up the road, they'd drop you off if you're going the right way. If you're going the wrong way...

Cohen: Forget it.

Eberle: They wouldn't do it.

[1:02:41]

Cohen: So after the rest and after the replacements arrived, where was Company C sent next.

Eberle: Company C was then sent down to the Colmar Pocket, in the Alsace-Lorraine area. After the Bulge, this cropped up. So we were now the 75th Division is assigned to the French. Now I could never quite figure out, we went from the, from the British in the Battle of the Bulge, and now we're going home, and they sent us back to France. Either we were a very good outfit, or we weren't a very good outfit. Nobody wanted us. I was quite sure. I didn't want to; I didn't want to check. Anyways, onto Colmar, they put us on trucks, or forty-and-eights, boxcars, and they drove us down to Colmar, and we got off at Colmar, and went to dig in. Fortunately, we were C Company on the 1st Battalion, we were in reserves, so we weren't under fire or anything, which was one of my more harrowing military experiences. Uh, we, we're digging in—foxholes— and you have to dig them, slit trench, slit trench for sanitation reasons, um, so we can pee and poo-poo. uh, well, I have assigned the foxholes and so forth, and I have, have a guy with I figure out one of the Italian boys took them. I should have known better. [1:04:18—Name inaudible] Was his name, and I said, "Okay you dig." And he, he, was digging. When I came back he said, "Now, you got to dig, I've got to relieve myself. I got to take a crap." So across the road he went. Well, shortly thereafter, I hear him calling me. "Lieutenant! Mike! Lieutenant!" "What do you want?" "Lieutenant." Well I walked out through the woods, and here is a brigadier general. Oh, [audio glitch], and here I am. So I salute and [say] "Sir. 2nd Lieutenant. Lieutenant Eberle, commanding C company." They said, "Who?" I said, "Lieutenant Eberle." He said, "I don't see any rank on you. where's the gold bar? Uh, is this your man?" "Yes, Sir." Do you know what I caught him doing?" "No sir." "I caught him taking a crap over here. We, you have trenches that are dug specifically for that reason." He had a valid... He had a good point, but the point is, even though, we were just moved in, he was still upset with him. He really chewed on me a good bit. And at that point [His man's name] decides to help the situation out by saying, "But Sir, that was A company, Sir." He didn't do it in our area, he did it in A Company's area. "I'd never do it in your area." [laughter] For heaven's sake. Well I thought that was kind of a good line, and the general had an aide who went with him as a Jeep driver. They thought it was a good line. I could see them over the general's shoulder. And they're big smiles. And I tended to kick into a smile, and the general really didn't [audio glitch] that one. So I got another bit. I wound up... I... offering to reclassify me. And I smiled. "Where in the hell are you going to the send the 2nd lieutenant of a rifle company that's worse than where he is?"

Cohen: Right, right. It can only get better.

Eberle: He had no threat there at all. You can take me out of here, Buddy, right now. He didn't. He didn't, I stayed.

[Media interrupts to adjust the microphones 1:06:33-1:07:10]

Cohen: What was the terrain like in the Colmar Pocket versus the area around the Bulge?

Eberle: The area we were in was flatland and it had grapevines. Oh, it had grapevines. Well, we got assigned to attack a, a, a village, uh— C Company that is—we had to go right through these grapevines, at right angles. We couldn't get through those damn grapevines. We needed explosives to blow the damn... these had been there for fifty years, one-hundred years, I don't know, but they were there, and we could, after a couple of hours of trying to climb, I said, "This is stupid, we can't. Let's go out to the road." There's a road that were... We're at the road I put scouts out and all that good stuff, and we got on the road. Well, we got on the road and nothing happened. No Germans. We got to the town we were going to, and we're marching through it, and there's a French officer standing on the steps of the church there, and he said to me, "Congratulate your artillery on their accuracy." Well, every half hour we'd been throwing one round into this town center so we could locate ourselves. He wasn't real happy. I didn't much blame him.

[laughter]

Cohen: Which town was it? Which town was it in...?

Eberle: I didn't know the name of it, obviously.

Cohen: That's okay. That's okay.

Eberle: It'll come back to me and I'll call you later.

Cohen: You'll call me at two in the morning. [laughter] And, as we know the winter of 44/45 was particularly cold, how did you and your men fair in terms of hypothermia, or frost bite, trench foot?

Eberle: We froze. I have... The big toes on both my feet turn white when it gets cold, still. Uh, uh, you just, you... I don't know how the hell we got through it. That Christmas Eve I went into water up to here [gestures]. Came out of it, and I must have walked myself dry in a couple of days, because I don't remember any particulars except I went into the water, because he was shooting at me, and it seemed like the sensible thing to do.

Cohen: Was it a very swampy area, so was the water...

Eberle: No. No it was not swampy.

Cohen: So what was the water from? Was it a little pond?

Eberle: Oh, it's just a pond, a ditch and a wide spot. That's where this water was, and then of course, the snow will melt, but uh... Beware of yellow snow. [laughter] You've been camping; you know what I mean. Okay, we had a problem...

Cohen: What type of clothing did people have?

Eberle: Unfortunately, some genius in the supply corps, had decided that war was going to end by Christmas, and he didn't have to ship out the winter clothing, so we didn't get it.

Cohen: You didn't get winter clothing, at all?

Eberle: We got winter clothing at the end of January. I got some nice boots, but fur, uh, nice lining, and a warm coat. So damn nice L.L. Bean still makes the things. Uh, I wouldn't turn them in. We were supposed to turn them back in, I wouldn't turn them in, but I had to because my feet started perspiring so much that I was starting to strip... I had to. A layer of, of, of, not fat but um, what do you call it, the heavy stuff, callus. I had, I started stripping the calluses off. Well, I can't do that, so I had to turn the compounded boots back in. We had... I wore at any given moment, uh, a T-shirt. More probably a dago [unsure of word?] tee, a t-shirt. A wool long sleeve... then a wool long sleeve shirt over that. Over that a wool, kind of, sweater, field sweater, and all of that, underneath an overcoat. And my feet froze, because I said, my socks, your feet, you move, your feet sweat, and then they stop, they get cold, so we had, we had foot problems uh, constantly. Trench foot is what it's called. We weren't in trenches, we were in fox holes, but it's the same problem.

Cohen: What kind of boots were you wearing before you got the compounded ones?

Eberle: Combat boots, which were shoes with a leather strip on top which you could blouse your trousers in. They weren't real, real fancy boots. I went through two pair, I guess just walking on the damn things. Uh. I don't, I didn't want those German, or those British hob-nailed things. My god, they were terrible. You've got German prisoners who couldn't take their shoes off. Because they were all... They had not gone on bare feet. They were used to wearing these armored boots, and you put them at bare feet and they don't walk so well. So it, was a, it's not Geneva Convention, but it worked. Oh sorry, you have to keep asking me.

Cohen: No, no, no. I'm sorry. No, no, I'm sorry. I keep um, okay. Just give me one moment please. So when you're in the Colmar pocket, is your role at this point to be part of the offenses, like to push the Germans back, and how...

Eberle: Yeah, back to the Rhine river.

Cohen: And how did that come about or are there any particular incidents that you remember of that period?

Eberle: Well, what I remember about it is we had a troop of Moroccan goons next to us. Now these were French troops from North Africa. Uh, okay. They had a couple interesting characteristics. When they pulled a knife, they drew blood. So they would nick themselves if they couldn't do anything else, uh, on the other hand, if they could get a German here, or something like that. They were big at cutting ears off the Germans. So they were tough, Germans were afraid of them. So were we. How did the hell do you tell a German ear from an American ear? [laughs] We literally, defended ourselves against the Moroccans, as much as against the Germans. No, I know that's not that... probably not the way that they would have liked it. It's a way of worked it out for us. And these, but these Moroccans later on, they moved out. They went by us, they were in trucks, and in these trucks they had armchairs, and sofas, and girls. Girls! [inaudible 1:15:15-1:15:17]. We kind of wondered, who's fighting the right war here. You have to have humor in the military life, you do [inaudible]. One of my, he'd tell me a little bit about war between the officers and the enlisted men, there wasn't, wasn't vicious. I was never worried. I was asked down at Loyola University many years ago, we'd sit down and talk, asked me if I'd ever worried about getting shot, and I said, "No, it never occurred to me." I said that I'd only ever got threatened once. And I got threatened because we were down in Colmar, and we were moving out of a village in leapfrog style. We'd sent twelve men out. They'd go out one-hundred yards, and then the next twelve come out through them. Well, this guy's in the second row and he's not moving, and I came up behind him, and I kicked him in the butt, and I said, "Get your ass out there." And he said, "You can get shot Lieutenant." And I said, "You're going to get behind me first. Now get your ass out there." And you know, I didn't, that night it never occurred to me. I don't, I don't know if it bothered him. He was nervous he just – he was scared didn't want... I understood that, but I wanted him in front of me in this case. So uh, those are the kind of things that uh, these guys are uh, oh we, we're in [1:16:46 inaudible] story about troops. We had a general, who liked... singing troops were wonderful troops.

Cohen: Singing?

Eberle: Singing troops, you know. ever hear of Nelson Eddy? Well anyhow, that's what he liked. Well, we were marching through this town of Wales, and some smart,

kid in my outfit, things that that, tunes and an old sound, an echo in the valley, yoo hoo, but it brings back sweet memories of, "Yoo hoo, hoo." Well, I got a whole damn rifle company, "Yoo hoo, hoo." Well, the girls loved it. Every now and then a country woman would go by on a [inaudible]. "You guys are going to get me shot."

Cohen: So it sounds like you say, you were, a tool just to help everybody get by? You know?

Eberle: Well, I thought that, I thought I had a pretty good trick, myself. I... They were clever, so I would say... very clever. Uh, but they didn't, all they had to do was go when you said go, and they went, when I said go. And then, of course, I had to lead them. I mean it was my job. You, you can't say go and then you don't go. Not at the rank I held. Then over time, I got to be a 1st Lieutenant.

Cohen: You got to be a 1st Lieutenant...

Eberle: Yeah, that meant I got to have a silver bar, instead of a gold bar, but at least I was no longer a 2nd Lieutenant. It was not, it was not, it wasn't a position of disrepute or anything like that, it was just kind of a joke. Second lieutenant, that's, who needs them? Everybody needs them but nobody wants them though. We didn't know enough.

Cohen: Well it sounds like the positions—

Eberle: You had to go to combat to learn, you know. That's where you learn, it's in combat, and you don't know when you get there, and you don't what your troops are going to do until you get there. I had one guy who was a minister's son, and it, what you would think of maybe perhaps of a Protestant minister's son. Didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't drink, didn't go with girls that did, and all that sort of thing. We got to the shooting part of the war; he was a hell of a soldier. I had a great... I had an all American guy with all the muscles, and everything else. We couldn't find him. So you didn't know when you got to combat what we were going to do, and of course, you didn't know yourself.

Cohen: You didn't know, you didn't know how your men would react, or how your men would react in combat itself.

Eberle: Well, I knew that if I didn't react well, they weren't going to react, they weren't going to react well. I couldn't expect them to. You want to know the best, the best war movie, I've seen? It's [HBO's] *Band of Brothers*.

Cohen: Why do you think it's the best?

- Eberle: Well as far as, you know, a rifle company and the kind of thing that rifle companies go through, it's excellent. Some parts were so good I was almost ducking. I was watching, uh.
- Cohen: I think you mentioned in one of the interviews that there were medical corpsman who were with you in combat. Like how was that organized, that whole medical evacuation, etcetera?
- Eberle: It's a disgrace. What I remember about it, is it's disgraceful. It's not good. Our corpsmen were not well-trained. Whatever you say about the Marines, they had those Navy Corpsman and they were trained, and they were really trained. God bless them. I had a, I had a corpsman named Goodman. Goodman was a corpsman for the platoon. After about a week of combat, he said to me, "I'd, I'd rather carry a gun. I'd rather carry a gun." He says, "These Germans don't recognize the damn Red Cross anyhow." I said, "Well, if you want to carry a gun, you have to find somebody who's going to be willing to take over the job." Well, he found somebody. I should never have let that happen. I'm say to myself now, because I knew more first aid from the Boy Scouts, than these guys did. I knew about shock. I knew about pressure points. I knew several of these things. You need to know that shock is a strange thing. We had a, we're moving forward, had some replacement, moving and the replacement comes back to me, and he's got a million-dollar hole right there, middle of the hand, and he's pretty upset, and getting kind of shaky. By the same time, I've got a sergeant who's got a hole through here, through his thigh. I said to the sergeant, "Can you get this kid back to the aid station." He said, "Yeah." He had a million-dollar hole, and he knew it, and he was happy about it. He wasn't at all upset, I'll tell you right now. Hey, the whole point was you didn't want to let your buddies down and you didn't to chicken out on anybody, but if you could get yourself shot and not too badly hurt it wasn't a bad idea at all. Uh, so anyhow he took this guy back, this two-day old uh hand wound, these guys, it's all on your mitten. It's up here.
- Cohen: How, how far away was a medical tent from the fighting itself, and were there vehicles and was there carrying by stretchers--?
- Eberle: We had a couple of stretchers, but we, you could make a stretcher out of a couple of overcoats, if you got a little wood to run through the sleeves. So I don't, we didn't, we weren't, in, in, not miserable a war I guess. After the Bulge, we never saw, about, the Bulge we had the one platoon literally wiped out. We uh, we would lose one or, one or two guys here. Two guys here, one guy here. Some dead, maybe, maybe they weren't both dead, or they were all dead. Maybe just one dead, two wounded. Oh that's hard to think, uh it's getting kind of, of... It grinds you up is what it does. You have to keep moving forward, and when you're moving forward, you have to take, you have to expose yourselves. There's no other way to do it, and exposing yourself... Somebody I saw, read the

other recently, the Germans said the Americans were afraid of machine guns. He's damn right. [Laughs] I was afraid of those machine guns, but that's all right, but that's all we ever tried to get, was to get at the machine guns, to kill their machine gunners, get rid of the machine gunners.

Cohen: You've got to be out there. Yeah. So how did they evacuate all the wounded and dead at the Bulge, from the Bulge?

Eberle: At the end of the Bulge, I remember the truck was loaded with frozen bodies. And they pray [unsure of word] -- Guys die in, uh, God-awful shapes. They don't die like this. Now these were our guys. A whole truckload of them. They dug them out of the snow and ice and so forth and threw them in a... I had southern boy who was a sergeant. He saw that truck go by and he, he got his rifle, and he was ready to shoot those bastards for the way they were treating those troops, those GI's. Well, he was upset. But we, we took the gun away from him. He didn't go on to shoot them, but it was tough to see, but it's-- You could march troops past [audio glitch] a dead German soldier and they wouldn't stop talking. You march them past an American soldier and nobody's talking. Now, we're all thinking, "Uh-oh, uh-oh. Now it's getting serious." Yeah, so we, we could, we could handle their dead, but not our own dead. We didn't like it, but it's there. Guys, there's two of them on a road just having [inaudible1:26:14-1:26:17] My friends told me on some road, mortars went, mortars came in. He got up to move, poked his buddy, and said, "Hey fellows..." His buddy's dead. I said to him, "Death comes, there's no explainable, it doesn't make sense." I cried one time I was so frustrated. I had a sergeant who had driven off a German patrol, we had a BAR, Browning Automatic Rifle, we had it with a gunner, and next to him was a foxhole, and this sergeant, BAR mounted working, and the Germans killed him. Part of the problem with our ammunition was it flashed. Every time a rifle bullet went out of a muzzle, there was a flash, so we couldn't fire without them knowing where we were coming from. So this poor guy with his automatic rifle, they knew where he was and they killed him. So the sergeant next to him pulls him out of the hole and jumps in, and he takes over for him. Well, they drove, they drove off the, we drove off the patrol, uh, and so the next morning this guy comes up and he's laughing, and they shot the what do you call it, the stripes off his sleeve here. Somebody pulled all of it off just that one area. We thought that was pretty funny. He went back to his foxhole, and an artillery round came in and it killed him. He was in the wrong place in the wrong time. I was telling a few young I met not too long ago and they said it's the same thing with the IED's -- he says of Afghanistan. He says, you're in the wrong place... the front seat, you're dead, and the back seat you survive. So you become very much a fatalist. I was a praying fatalist, but um that was...

Cohen: So, I think in the middle of February, the 290th was sent to Panningen, Holland. What was it like? Was it by rail, or through marching or both? Was weather still an issue?

Eberle: Well, it wasn't. It wasn't as bad. The weather wasn't as bad. Holland was uh, you know it was, I admired the Dutch. Boy, they hated the Germans. They didn't just dislike them, they hated them.

Cohen: The Dutch?

Eberle: Oh, yeah, I mean there wasn't a question about that. I took a patrol across the Maas River one night and all I was doing was...delivering German civilian clothes with a sack of explosives over his shoulder. Now if they, the Germans had caught that guy, then God knows what they would have done to him. I said, "There was a brave man." There goes a real brave man, as far as I'm concerned. I might add that all the way across the river, we saw a German patrol going the other way. Going to our side.

Cohen: Oh, you're crossing this way, and they're crossing that way?

Eberle: Yeah, we're going this way and they're going that way. One of the guys said, "What are we gonna do?" I said, "For God sakes, don't shoot." I said if they shoot, we shoot. Keep your guns on, but don't shoot, 'cause if we in the middle of this river and it's running pretty good at this point. So we didn't shoot. They didn't shoot. And that result was they when we tried to get back to our own lines, our boys were a little uptight about the German patrol having been there. That was another of one of those Army things. Military things. We wound up in Holland right next to the British. I mean C Company is, the next company to us is a bunch of Limeys. They're nice guys. They're good soldiers, but they're, they're British. They're Brits. So uh, if we were taking patrols out we had them go down here, and then let the current drift them to get back. You weren't supposed, so you wouldn't have to know their passwords, but we were taught their passwords, too. Well, on a river bottom on a quite night, sound travels, uh, and you hear, "Halt." Well halt is the same in German or English. We didn't even know which side we were on, it just a [makes rumbling noise to indicate what was heard in that situation] and then we, "How the hell, how the hell? I don't, who the, who knows, what the hell, what the hells the password?" The British would advance, the officer didn't know the password. "I didn't like the like way you said it, I cleaned it up for you, Bill." [laughter] You know. The passwords were, well uh, the same. A few days later I took a patrol across the river. We ran into a German machine gun, so we didn't ever land, and we came back under a very foggy night, and we don't know which side of the river we were on. The boat had turned around in the middle of the river. We don't know which side of the river we're on. We've landed, but we don't know which, whether it's the

German side or the Allied side. So I said, "Okay." I said, "I'll get out. I'll lead. I'll get on the dyke. You guys get behind me" and I said, "If you see me jump, you'd better jump." So I started down the dyke, and the next thing I hear about, "Halt." And now I've got the same problem. Is that a German Halt or a British halt? Well, I gambled. I said, "Yank, advance, Yank." "Where you from?" "Chicago." "Okay, come on in." [Laughter] So if it had been the wrong side of the river I supposed I'd have been over, uh. That's, that's... Those are big decisions.

Cohen: So I have to admit, I'm a little bit unclear why there was this back and forth over the Maas River? Why is...

Eberle: Patrols. There... Well, for one thing, they were sending these guys with these explosives, or were, that's the one we took across, that's why he was going across. Now, the Dutch were, by that time, they couldn't have had that many soldiers left. The Germans hadn't shot, hadn't, whatever, so uh, they didn't ahh, they didn't have much food, the Dutch didn't. We'd would go marching through, through, and they'd come running, these Dutch, they would come running out with coffee for us. They had Ersatz. They had terrible coffee. We had real live coffee. It was like these poor souls were so happy to see us, they would give us coffee. I would say, "Thank you very much, get some of our coffee."

Cohen: With whatever they could.

Eberle: Whatever we could. We could. We got the good stuff to them. Uh, but uh, they were uh, they uh, where the hell... Holland, Holland, Holland.

Cohen: Were you able to get food and other provisions from the time you were in Belgium to the end of the War?

Eberle: There was a three-day stretch from the end Bulge when we didn't. We ran out of rations, and uh, we had two rations, a C-ration and a K-ration. C was canned. K was boxed, and uh, waterproofed and uh, more, newer. Better combination. The C-ration had meat and vegetable hash. Meat and vegetable beans, and meat and something else. And that's it. Those are the three choices you had. Well, being an officer, I got my choice. [laughter] They'd get jealous. Uh, but these things, they would freeze, these cans would freeze. So you'd have to, they'd have to thaw them. Well, if they didn't take the top off when they thawed them, what they were doing was thawing a little old hand grenade, only it was a spaghetti grenade. And, these cans were made of very light material, fortunately. They weren't steel, they were uh, kind of aluminum, so they would uh, we would uh, if you were smart you'd take the top off, and then you'd take your bayonet and shove it down the side of the can so the steam could get out, and that might... Otherwise, if you didn't do that, you might wide up chasing your... those go poof. Which was sort of exciting. If you got new troops, do you think they'd tell them?

No. They let them do the same damn thing themselves. I don't know what that was. But it doesn't seem to be real friendly-like but that's the way it was.

Cohen: Um, did they um resent the new recruits because they hadn't gone through all the fighting and difficulty that they themselves had been through?

Eberle: I don't know that we had enough of that going on. If you, if you watch that movie I told you about, the, the *[Band] of Brothers*, they have a sequence there when some guys come back, and, it's like, "Where the hell were you?" I mean, you missed it. You missed some of it. Well that's too bad, you know. Not, we didn't really have much of that. I, generally speaking, I remember going one night to the river and one of my squad leaders, sergeants, technical sergeant, hollered at me from the... we had a crowd of replacements there, Repo Depo people, Replacement Depo, they'd train them. They'd ship them up the front and then they would sort them out. Well, if you could find your own outfit, you could go to it. Well this guy hollered at me, "Hey Mike!" "Yeah. Max. Hey, company car. Step into my car." He says, "What about my ride?" I said, "They'll pick him up. We'll pick you up. Don't worry we'll put you on record, you aren't going AWOL. You're going back to the outfit you dummy, where you got wounded in the first place." But they always wanted to go back to their own outfit. [inaudible] At the end the war when the, the guys that start coming back and you wind up with squads of twelve, and they'd be twenty, twenty-two, and we had more than enough sergeant. All sorts of little problems. Which were good problems because the war was over.

Cohen: So going back a little bit to the war, you're doing patrol at the Maas River, um, when do you first enter Germany? What happens next?

Eberle: Well the first thing we did was go down to Colmar. Went down and pissed in the Rhine River. You had to do that. [laughter] It was sort of the thing to do. You had to be a little careful [of] the guys across the river. But I don't know anybody that really got wounded after we did that. That way with the... Uh, and the Colmar, you were in Holland, you want me in Holland don't you?

Cohen: Yes, like after Holland, and you're approaching the Rhine River, what's going on at that point?

Eberle: Good question. Uh, the, V-E day was May 8th. Uh, I was, had just been relieved and was on a pass back to Paris, when, when V-E day hit, when May 8th hit. Well I got there the day after, and Paris was under one giant hangover. I was, boy. There were three of us guys, three lieutenants who had come back. Well, we'd sit on the Champs-Élysées and the American Air Force was bombing the Arc de Triomphe, I mean they were just buzzing by, and we got to worrying about who was running the traffic because you'd have four engine bombers at 200 miles an

hour, and 400 miles an hour fighter planes and all sorts of things, all of them going down through the Champs-Élysées. Which was kind of exciting. Watch the Air Force, we had a whole display there.

Cohen: So you happen to be on leave in Paris, when the V-E day happened?

Eberle: Yeah. Well, I was just happy. We were at that stage in war which was a very bad stage in the war for your troops - for morale. You have to keep attacking; they keep pushing you. But you know that the war is going to end pretty soon and you don't want to be the last casualty. Nobody wants to be the last one, so it was kind of tough getting people to gear up and really charge up the hill and this, we kind of oozed up the hill. Not so much as charged up the hill. [Laughter]

Cohen: Which hill?

Eberle: Well, we were at a series [of hills] up there in Belgium. There was a series like this, so when you got to the top, that's fine. But you had to go down to the bottom and at the bottom you had to fight your way up the next one. That was not... We were really hoping that this war would end. We knew it then that it was going to end. It had to end because we were just pushing into Germany. Uh, and I, I moved into Germany, uh, little German girl stepped out of a house, looked at me, and where, troops moving down the street. She looked at me and she said, "Chicago." And I'm standing there. She says, C-H-I-C-A-G-O. Where does the Chicago come from? Finally, it dawned on me. I'm carrying a Thompson sub-machine gun. Al Capone. Like Al Capone. That exactly what she thought she was saying. It was, I've got Chicago. Well, it was, I was a guy from Chicago. I did have a submachine gun, but I wasn't after her. Uh, so, those, that baffled me for a moment.

Cohen: Once you were in Germany, was there anymore tough fighting like in the Ruhr Pocket? Or in general, did you find the troops to be surrendering, or the Civilians, were placid, like what was going on?

Eberle: Right near the end, if the troops got the chance, they would surrender. Their troops would surrender. Now they had to get a chance, had to get away from their own non-coms, because the British... German non-coms wouldn't let them surrender. But they would surrender. Once they surrendered, all we'd said, we would say to the infantry was just, "Give us your weapons, and, and, head to the rear and they'll take care of [you at] the rear." So the guys in the rear got the credit for all the prisoners. We didn't care, as long as they weren't bothering us.

Cohen: So, surrender, gather the weapons, and the other...

Eberle: Well, make sure, make sure they didn't mean any trouble to us.

Cohen: Who were the German soldiers at that time. Were they the old, the young, the, the um conscripted prisoners of the Germans...?

Eberle: Well, because I know history, and because you know history, the cream of the crop were in North Africa, and they were surrendered when the Germans... And so that's why all the guys we have on the North Side of Chicago came back. After the war, they were the ones who were up here working on farms and things, recognizing that they didn't want to go home. They wanted to come back over here, where they had a chance to do something, so most of them did. An awful lot of them did come back here. So no, I didn't meet any guys in old SS that I'm aware of. There were some, I, I read, but they didn't bother us that much. Actually, if you're a rifle company, nobody bothers you much because you got the rifles, you've got the sub-machine guns, you've got hand grenades and all this stuff, so who wants to mess with you?

Cohen: Were the soldiers young or old or?

Eberle: There were some of them young at the end. There was, um, some of them were pretty old at the end too. It was, I can't remember where the hell this was. It was a [pause], but I can't place it now. Look, I can visualize the scene. There's a river through here and on the far side a couple of houses, and we're on this side. The river is not real big, fifty yards or so, uh. I uh, artillery came up and they and they said, [1:44:47-49 inaudible??]. And they said, "Well, so pick something for us to hit." I said, "Well, hit one of those two houses over there." "Okay." He says. So he calls it in. He dropped a shell between the two house and just blew the houses flat. But then, these kids were showing, up, and uh, we just, all we did was disarm them. They may have been more a problem because they were still Hitler Youth. It could have been. They weren't to us, that's like, we were rarely ever bothered by snipers, because snipers knew that if you took an infantry outfit, they're going to send three guys to get rid of him, and so they didn't shoot at us. They waited for the guys behind us who weren't so accustomed to this sort of thing. Running around with rifles and hand grenades and all that good stuff. Uh, yeah, the one thing I wear is this; is the Combat Infantry Badge. That was issued in WWII. Now...

Cohen: Do you wear it because you feel proud of combat infantry?

Eberle: It's a, it's a, it's a brother, it's a, "Band of Brothers". I've met some guys from Afghanistan and so forth. If I've got that, it's okay. You're okay. You know what it's like. It means you've seen the elephant.

Cohen: The elephant, eh. I was going to ask you about another elephant. I know that the Ruhr Pocket was one of the last holdouts in the campaign. Were you and Company C fighting in the Ruhr?

Eberle: Yes. A couple of quaint towns named Witten and Wetter. I can't remember which one now, but uh, we, we, we got into it, and I don't remember, it was not, it was not heavy, it was not heavy combat, no. By heavy combat I mean, I'm talking about losses. You didn't take many losses. Eh, I remember, mostly because, after the war, I had been shaved by a German soldier. Turns out he lived in Witten, and he wants to know what the town looks like. I didn't want to tell him that the Air Force, what the Air Force had done to his town. So I lied. Oh of course, disassembled. I really didn't want to say it.

Cohen: It's a hard thing to face.

Eberle: Well, it was.

Cohen: You know, yeah.

Eberle: It is. I felt for him in that sense.

Cohen: You know, you mentioned somewhere, I don't remember where, that part of your job of being an officer was keeping your men out of trouble, like from fighting, or I guess too much drinking. So how did you manage that?

Eberle: Oh, by court martials, mostly. Uh, I had, when we were shipping overseas, Sergeant came in from Reveille, the morning call, and he says, "Cadell. He won't get up. They won't..." We're outside. He, he, Cadell is. I said, "Well, go get him." He came back and he says that he won't. I said, "Go back and tell him that it's a direct order." Bang, bang. Cadell says, "No." I said, "Ugh, I'll tell him." So I go. Well, he says, "I don't think so, Lieutenant." So I said to the Sergeant, "Well, call the MPs. We'll put him in jail." So they put him in jail for failure to obey an order. Well, we shipped overseas in about two weeks. I don't think he might have known that because non-com... troops know things that officers don't know. Well, he went overseas in the brig, in the Navy's brig. So he was in jail, anyhow. Well, we got overseas, and we got to combat, and we released him. Yeah, he came back to us. I remember. We finally released him because we got word that his brother had been killed and that he was the only one that was left, so he [used] his Private Ryan rule, uh, so, so we sent Cadell back. I was so happy to send Cadell back, because he was a foul ball, or as the boys from Brooklyn would say, "He had two left feet." Uh, it was useless. You know, at reunions, reunions later, he apologized to me. He was an alcoholic, and I didn't know it. I didn't know what an alcoholic at that point.

Cohen: You just couldn't figure out why this guy wasn't functioning properly?

Eberle: Yeah he wasn't functioning, he was obeying orders. So I didn't know, as to why, I didn't... It wasn't my job to analyze him. Either obey them or go to jail. Uh, and he chose. Uh, the story goes a lot longer. He lived near my parents, and he knew my parent's address. So he started checking with them to see how I was doing, from my letters. When I finally got home and I met, I met, I had a met, and I was going to marry my wife, which is one of my great memories, Cadell calls my parents and says he, "Tell him he's got to talk to me first before he gets married." Well, I'm thinking. Of all the people I don't want advice from its Cadell. So I met him. We met him at a bar somewhere in between his house and our house, and we have a beer, and he explains to me, he met this nice girl on Wednesday, married her on Friday, and she filed for divorce on Monday. That's about the sequence. Well, then he goes back up to the bar to get another beer, and he gets out in a fight with the bartender, that's how I remember Cadell. He could, he could get into more damn trouble. But it was the alcohol. It was the booze. I had no idea he could get that much. We, we, every outfit had somebody, a bootlegger. You had to have a bootlegger. Some guy who could find booze. Good booze, bad booze, just booze. I know, this story gets confusing, and it's almost confusing to me now, but it's the secrets of some of these things. So you're asking questions and I'm jumping from one sequence to another. I'm trying not to.

Cohen: No it's fine, it's fine, and it's also normal, and I've also jumped around with questions so it's all, it's good, but I'm wondering if now is a good place to talk about where you met your wife. Like when and where you met your wife?

Eberle: I was home; I had just gotten my gold bar. [laughs] I got a two-week leave, yeah. Well, everybody was in the service then, in 1941. I mean there was, anybody that wasn't in service, we felt sorry for them if they couldn't go. We really did, even if we knew they were left behind with a girl, we felt sorry for them, because everybody would say to them, "What's the matter with you?" Yeah, so uh, so we did. I, I, a buddy of mine, actually a very good buddy, he was, he was a friend from [inaudible?] and then uh, he wound up a fraternity brother of the same fraternity I belonged to so um. He was in town. His mother called my mother and somehow my mother found out from his mother that he was in town. So I got together with Bob, well we met at the Blackhawk Cafe. It's at the north end of the loop, uh. Well, I'm in uniform, he's in uniform, it's war time. Everybody, we met about 11:15, 11:30, everybody who came in the bar sent us a drink. Well, we got these 10 cent beers and drank them up, after them, we got through the first three or four... We turned "Thanks guys, enjoy the day." Chicago was known as a good service man's town. If that's any indication, it certainly one. Finally, we got to the point where Bob says, "I think you better go home with me." And if it would be okay with his parents, we knew it, because he had moved and gone to

Evanston by that time, so they would take the L up Evanston, so he said... and I know some Kappas up there, and I had hung my pin on the Kappa house. It's still there, as far as I know there, I bought a second one for my wife. Incidentally, my wife said to me, "Oh," Oh she says, "Great. Where did I earn it? Should I wear it on my ass? That's where I've earned it."

Cohen: So you met her that night?

Eberle: Yeah. She has that Irish humor. So uh, I met her, and it was, boy, bang, and whap, this is the right woman. Forget the fraternity, [not sure of word 1:54:27] if this is the right girl. So, I had about four days with her, probably, and uh, we went down to Evansville, Indiana.

Cohen: So you had...

Eberle: I was on duty. I was assigned to duty, Breckenridge, Camp Breckenridge. So I could come home in Breckenridge, after I, after I got my 2nd Lieutenants bars, I reported to the 75th, at Camp Breckenridge, and they assigned me to Company C. So from that point on, I belonged to Company C.

Cohen: So was this the leave that you had back in Chicago after V-E day, after the...?

Eberle: No, no, no.

Cohen: This was earlier before you had gone overseas.

Eberle: This was before I went over.

Cohen: Gotcha, okay, that makes more sense.

Eberle: So uh, she had just come from New York.

[Phone alarm goes off]

Cohen: Sorry.

Eberle: It's quite all right. She had just come from New York, and her boyfriend had graduated from the [US] Merchant Marine Academy and was a mate, and a bunch of his buddies, they had a big party, and so she said, "I spent the whole damn night going, I had to have a date so I go and bring one them. I go in and go out, find another one, come back out, go in with another one. I went with half the class". They didn't have dates there. They weren't from New York, I mean, it's war time, and travel was not easy in those days. So I had, I met this McGee, Maryann McGee. I met Maryann and uh, we agreed that it was a good idea, but

uh, I didn't want to get married before I shipped over, because -- dead. She'd get ten thousand bucks but that wasn't... So anyhow, so we corresponded. I had one final date in September, October. Probably in uh... So uh, went overseas. Well, we didn't get any mail overseas in the ships. When we got, got to Wales, got located, then they started distributing mail, so the first mail I got are a couple of letters from McGee and the first one says, "Dear John." Well, turned out the second one says, "Forget the first one." Well she said, she sent... "I went to the mail, I decided to change my mind. I went to the mail box and they wouldn't give it back to me. Said it's the federal governments property, now." So I had to write you the second letter. So for a couple days there I wasn't too sure.

Cohen: But luckily, the second letter came soon after.

Eberle: Yeah. Fortunately for me.

Cohen: Well. one thing um, you wrote on the pre-interview questionnaires um, you said, the military taught you to keep your opinions to yourself. Can you give an example of that?

Eberle: Oh. [pause] Well, yes. Let's see. What's my classic illustration? Oh, the war is over, I'm an officer at a redeployment camp. They call them Cigarette Camps, in France, and this one is being closed down, and I'm, I'm officer of the day, or officer of the guard, I don't know which one. I had a midnight run to make. Uh, I uh, decided, I won't bother the driver, because they're [inaudible 1:58:30??] So I just hopped in the Jeep, took a .45 [gun] in my hip pocket, non-regulation but it works, and I started out and I got to the Red Cross Club, Red Cross girls. I bang on the door and this girl opens the door, grabbed me and pulled me inside. I said, "Wow, finally somebody responds with..." She said, "Block the door! Block the door." I said, "All right," I'm looking at the door, "What do you mean block the door?" She just, I go to the door, kind of just put my hand on the knob and the door start... I pulled the doorknob through the open door, sliding on his stomach is a full colonel holding a full bottle of cognac; a full bottle of cognac, and he looks at me, and I looked at him, and he says, "Who the hell are you?" I said, "Lieutenant Eberle, officer of the day." "Oh. Get the hell out of here." I said, "I think I'll leave when you leave." Well, uh, you know what that cost me? I think that cost me a year in Europe, because he was West Point. These girls, these Red Cross girls did not have to go through channels. And they went but they complained to the inspector general, and so one came and interviewed me, and I gave him my side of the story, that this guy, had apparently, been chasing them all through the-- Red Cross girl. And I felt sorry for his jeep driver, the poor guy is following behind him, and he has no rank and he can't do anything, unless the colonel passes out. So uh, anyhow, when we, he got up and he sat in the chair, and we had little more, "Get out of here," and I, "I leave when you leave, Sir." That's the only thing... I tried to call the MP's. I tried to call the executive officer.

They wouldn't touch it. They wanted to stay in. I didn't want to stay, so "Out." So uh, that probably a long time, sort of disobeyed. I never really thought that was much of an order. There was a time I didn't give an order I should have given. I, I, don't know, if I want this on record or not. I guess I do. I had a man who outranked me, who should have been charge of, in charge of the C Company. He wouldn't take the job when it came up. The original company commander was wounded he wouldn't accept the job. So he turned it over and he said, "Eberle, you take it over. Eberle, being German, they take over everything." I said, "Okay." Anyhow, were going do the road, and we got a couple guys, prisoners, surrendered. So we check them out, I said, "Just send them to the rear." This lieutenant who had turned it down, said to me, "I think I'll take them back and shoot them." I said, "Okay, what the hell are you doing with them, just get them out of here. We're fighting a war here." Uh, I wished to this day, I had said to him, "Oh come on, Bill, don't be stupid." That's all I think I would have to say, really, because he knew it was stupid. Why did you shoot prisoners? They're done. You don't want the word to ever get back that you're shooting prisoners. I still feel badly what I didn't say there.

Cohen: Yeah, you always have...

Eberle: Yeah, so I, that man, I might add that the next day told me not to do that, he said he couldn't get him out of his mind. And the next day, he shot himself in the hand. And we could tell when they shot themselves in the hand, because they never took the bullet, never hit the bone, and he was gone, never came back. Happily, no I didn't see a lot of war. I saw six months, ninety days. Uh, there are guys... You're talking to guys who fought this war for years. I always felt like an amateur.

Cohen: I think you've seen enough; you know.

Eberle: Well, some parts are over exciting.

Cohen: And um, I believe you received a Bronze Star Medal?

Eberle: Yes.

Cohen: What was that for, in particular?

Eberle: It was actually for that first night. Those two German Machine guns that I disrupted, uh, disrupted is I guess the best I could say for. If I had of killed them, I'd have feel better about it. I guess I'm glad I didn't kill them, who knows. I'll tell you what. You remember somebody you kill. The first German, the first German prisoner we killed, I could tell you his name, now. He was seventeen years old, from Vienna. He shouldn't have been; he shouldn't have charged into our midst.

The German patrol hit us, and he got excited and went charging in, and after we got done throwing hand grenades, he tried to surrender, and one of my sergeants said, "Surrender, you son of bitch." He killed him. Shot him twice. Well, what, what does he expect? I could have there again, could have screamed, "Take him for prisoner, grab him for a prisoner." That will probably got me more brownie points than just killing the poor guy. I wasn't into brownie points; I was into survival.

Cohen: Yeah, and like you were saying...

Eberle: Speaking of which, in the same location, one story leads to another, sort of. It's night time. There were always two in a foxhole. So the guys that get a long went in. It's my turn to, you sit with your head just about the ground height. I heard a German patrol coming in. I could hear the crick, crick, crick [mimics walking noises] but I'm not quite sure. I listen in. One of the first things they teach you is you never look directly at something. You look away from it, then you can pick up motion. If you look away from it, you'll pick up the motion. If you look directly at it you'll... Anyhow, I'm trying to... I can't find this damn German patrol. Well, it took me all of ten minutes to find out it was a cricket crawling up a branch right beside my ear. Crack, crack, crack, crack, crack. I was happy I hadn't awakened the whole outfit. I'd have never heard the end of it. [laughter]

Cohen: My goodness. So after V-E day and you're in Paris, was there a plan to send the C Company to Japan, to the Pacific?

Eberle: Originally, there was, of course. I've, I've seen some of those plans somewhere. Oh, when, when, when the V-J day happened, we went, boys, we were running around shooting in the air like Arabs, you know, "Bang, bang, bang, bang." You had to put a helmet on because the bullets come down. Bullets go up, bullets come down.

Cohen: Where were you at that point on V-J Day?

Eberle: In, in, in this cigarette camp outside of R, outside of Le Havre, outside of Reims, "Rhams," Reims. Uh, uh, and uh, just, killing time while the Army was trying to figure out how to get all of us across the Atlantic, then across the Pacific, and they wanted to keep us together, because we had experience, we had good combat experience. We knew each other and so forth and so on, so it made sense to them, but it had to be tough on the poor French, uh [laughter] or the Belgiques, because we were... A bunch of guys without a lot to do. Who'd been trained to do quite a bit, are not what you want to turn loose, really. Uh, see...

Cohen: So after V-J day, how long was it until you were shipped back stateside?

Eberle: Well, [brittle? – unsure of word] the number of points I had and so forth, and so I probably would have been a couple three, a couple months. Figure three months because of this general, this Colonel, and the Red Cross girls, I didn't get home. Finally, my father had a friend, he happened to know a guy who was the senior senator from Illinois was the head of the Senate, and he mentioned it to him that I'm home in a week. Boom. They stopped covering for this colonel, but he'd covered for him for... His problem probably was that he had never been in combat, and there on the, therefore he's not going to get promoted any further, because they've got all these guys who've been in combat, who got experience in war... I, now I'm, I told you what he thought. Well, I figure, he thought, if he thought, uh, I could tell you his name, but that doesn't make any difference, he's long dead. They're all long dead.

Cohen: Which reminds me, what were the stages that you were promoted? Like from, like 2nd Lieutenant to 1st Lieutenant, or if there were other promotions too?

Eberle: Oh somebody came up to me, "Uh, said you've got orders. You're a 1st Lieutenant now." And one of the other guys had a 1st Lieutenant bar and I said, "Okay, give me a bar." So, that's it.

Cohen: Were you in combat at the time?

Eberle: Yes, yes, we were down in Colmar. At that point, I'm, I was company commander, still. And one of the great things about being company commander was when we got up to Holland, to the Maas River, we're, we're replacing a British Airborne, up in uh... I had a great deal of respect for the British, for one thing they'd been fighting war for four or five years now, and this airborne, this leader was a major which was typical for a company commander in the Brits. Told me what it uh... "Normandy wasn't so bad," he said, uh, "Nijmegen was a bitch," uh, uh, was a pukka shell they put him in, he said. P-U-K-K-A. Well uh, he's a whole other story. We came to replace them. So, we, what we did know was I had six sergeants with me. We're going to move in at night. They're going to move out, we're going to move in at night. We're not under fire. The Germans might have thrown a couple of mortar rounds in, but that, um, they did, uh. So, we were um... Helping out. Where was going with this story... Oh, I know, there was this British major said to me, "Are 2nd lieutenants customarily company commanders?" I said, "No, I'm just the only officer left." Well see, the only thing I could have that made a, that would have registered with a Brit, these guys have been through a lot of war. They've seen a lot. They've made some jumps. So I didn't have to tell him any story's, and then he said, "Do you have a batman?" Do you know what a batman is?

Cohen: I don't, so, sorry.

Eberle: Well, I've... There's a series of books by a man called Wodehouse, P.G. Wodehouse—pick up one of his books, because it's humor, in a very old sense—but a batman was a valet. A personal valet. Well, all I could say was, I can't figure who in my outfit I like to ask to be my valet. [laughs] We just don't have 'em trained that way. All I said was that we don't have such a position. So he said, "Well" he said, "I can, I loan you, I can loan you everything," He says, "But it's [inaudible 2:10:42-46]" So I, they had, he'd made some jumps, and he'd seen some war, and he was a regular. So they put up with me. But I figured it helped a lot that I was the only officer left. If I had said, "Well, I've had three months of experience, I don't really know." Every, every, oh, and they had a couple of Etonians. One of their 2nd Lieutenants was an Etonian. They rode him. It was just merciless. They rode, he could have given him, I probably for my benefit to some extent. He was their 2nd Lieutenant. Well, we, that, we got called back from that position, back off the Rhine during the, just leave us, a shell, troops up there, bring the troops back for entertainment. So I march them back two miles off the Rhine, off the river. Up goes a Jeep, oh there's a Red Cross, a couple of Red Cross girls with coffee and donuts are well up. That was wonderful. Up goes this jeep and we're going to be sung, entertained by a boy tenor, named Bobby Breen, and just what the we all needed. This is what we marched two miles for, to hear a boy tenor. [laughter]. Fortunately, the Red Cross girls saved his life.

Cohen: So that's [not] the kind of entertainment people were looking for.

Eberle: Those were the little military things that... You think, think humorously.

Cohen: So, when you were arrived home, were you met by your family? Were you discharged right away?

Eberle: Well, I didn't get home until October of '46. [long pause]. So I spent a year and a half in France after the war.

Cohen: In the Cigarette Camp?

Eberle: Huh?

Cohen: In the Cigarette Camp?

Eberle: Yeah, well, well, then I got all sorts of goofy jobs. I was commanding a battalion of anti-aircraft which is only on paper. Uh, and those kinds of stuff, just to keep you occupied, I guess. I uh, the only thing I got out of that was, I uh, they shut down the officer's club, there were about forty bottles of champagne left over, so I called up the, the, bunch of sergeants. I said, "Could you use these at the non-com's club?" "Oh yeah." So I was still trying to build a little good will with my men. So I could go and get a bottle, I could go get a drink.

Cohen: Um, so when you returned home, did you go back to your parents' home? Back to school?

Eberle: I got home in October so I lived with my parents. They lived in Chicago, and then I went back to school. The semester started in September, or at least December, might have started in January. So I went back and I had one semester to finish. I didn't finish what I started out in, but I finished.

Cohen: So you switched from Chemical Engineering to something else?

Eberle: One-hundred of twenty-eight hours of something. Mostly engineering, mostly chemistry, quite a bit of math. It wasn't... It was a department, of special services for war veterans. They had so many of us in college that they couldn't get rid of us fast enough, but here I am, I've only got one semester to go, so boom. So I took it, but I had a, a job, and a wife, I got a girl to marry. I want to marry. I didn't want to marry her without a job. So I got the job, I got the girl. Off we go.

Cohen: Did you use the GI Bill for education?

Eberle: Yeah, a semester of it – a thousand bucks. Uh now it, it was a wonderful thing, the GI Bill. I remember a Jeep driver showed up at a reunion, and he was the vice president of engineering for Bremen Aircraft. I said, "How did you--?" I said, "It was great." He said, "Listen, I saw you, and if they're 2nd Lieutenants, and I figured, hell, if they could do it, I could sure do it." Well, he was right.

Cohen: Um, did you keep in touch with your friends, that you were in combat with, like upon your return?

Eberle: Some of them. Well, I had these two friends. Both of them became college professors. The three of us, uh, now we had a, uh, reunion group which would meet almost every year, and we had um, all early on -- that didn't start well until about, until I was about um, sixty. So that was forty-two years ago, that's far away anyhow. Not forty-two but-- We were then at that point, we had kids out of school, our, they weren't around, so we could go to reunions. Reunions got big for a while. You'd have a thousand, or two thousand in St. Louis and things like that. And we were just a lousy little draftee division from April of '43 to probably October of '45, so that whole division, boom. It's still alive however. Somehow, somebody liked the 75th, and there was an outfit called the 75th Rangers. Well, they were among the elite rangers. And then after that there's an outfit, the 75th something or other, and they do, what am I trying to say, internet type battles. Set them up experiences for these guys. Which is kind of, for them it's kind of Mickey Mouse. It isn't a real bullet. [Laughs]

Cohen: It's interesting to know this training will be...

Eberle: Well, the idea I guess is if they ever see two guys with a machine gun, they'll know what to do with it. They'll count to four, instead of three.

Cohen: Wow. When you came back were you able or did you want to talk about your wartime experience with family, friends?

Eberle: Oh, for God sakes, no. Everybody had those. I had them. Mine were puny little experiences compared to the guys that... I had a brother-in-law who flew 125 carrier missions in the South Pacific. I'm going to tell him about the war? We would, if we could drink a little bit, we might talk a little bit, but I found out how many times he got shot down. Little things like that, but No, and the other thing is you had to explain so much. All, all the acronyms. B-A-R [Browning Automatic Rifle], M-L-R [Military Line of Resistance], what does that mean? You tell a war story to your wife, you got to explain all this!

Cohen: You have to define every term. Kind of.

Eberle: She said she got so she could tell them better than I could. [laughter]

Cohen: Un, so nowadays they talk a lot about PTSD, do you think you had any traumatic effects from being in combat?

Eberle: I don't think we had enough combat, to tell you the truth. I can see, I can, I can see in these kids stuck down in the jungle in the Pacific. I, I, I feel for them. They, there isn't another place to go. They're on a lousy little island. If they, they get lucky, they're going to [an] island that's not so lousy, for rehab, and retool, and re-equipping and so forth, and then they're going to be sent to another island. Now they were not in a big war, they were in a bunch of little wars, but you get killed just as dead in the little wars. Uh, and uh, I uh, no, we uh, that's why, when we, V-J day came along in August the 14th, I guessed the right day, in Europe it was all through. Now, we aren't going to have to go to Japan, because we didn't want the casualties they were anticipating. They were figuring it would take a million dead to get us ashore in Japan. So those people weren't going to give up easy, not at all. So uh, we were happy we didn't have to go.

Cohen: How many children did you have, and did you want them to become part of the military?

Eberle: Oh God, no. My oldest son could have made Vietnam. U and he said something about going to Canada, and I said, "Well, if you go to Canada don't come home." Well, he didn't go, so we're fine. We're friends. We're going to have dinner tonight. No, but it was, oh I was a little bad. That was a terrible war. Because the

more I read about it, the more I talk about it, I've hired some people that were in it. That's was, the infantry like I was in, you attack, you go up a hill, you take a whole of a hill, you lose two guys, killed and one wounded. And maybe. So you hold the hill. You hold up there a week, ten days. They say, "Come down, get back down the hill", and then a week later, two weeks later, they might decide they need that damn hill, again. Now this, this got, going to drive anybody bats. I, mean it's just totally nonsense. It's, it's, uh, where, I uh, we, we, I even just ask [inaudible 2:21:31] these, these kids that are there now, some of the kids are pretty hard, pretty on in years, but uh, they go out on patrol and they come back. When they come back they eat well, they sleep on cots, probably by the air conditioner, so on and so on. So until their own patrol, there's not much stress, really. Well, on patrol it's all stress. It's you got, everything turned in your head that you can think of. You're trying to see everything and hear everything, and they're over there where they can't tell the good guys from the bad guys, in Afghanistan. Vietnam was pretty much the same thing. They couldn't tell the good guys from the bad guys. And of course, they too much access to drugs in Vietnam. Uh, they were just quite, there were a lot of stoned soldiers there. Uh, if I offended anybody, then I apologize.

Cohen: No, no, no, you didn't offend, anyone. Um, so one of the focus of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library is to share the stories of the Citizen Soldier, so how would you understand the term Citizen Soldier, or how do you summarize your feelings about having served the country during World War II?

Eberle: Oh, oh, I'm happy with it. As I said, I would have felt badly, we felt badly for the guys who couldn't go, even though we were leaving the girls behind with them. We knew that we would be back, but um no. You wanted to go, your friends were going. You weren't anxious to get yourself shot, you found out, uh, but uh... So, I would say that's uh, for most of us, yeah, and, if my sons didn't want go volunteer, okay. Um, uh, my oldest the son did wind up in a Marine reserve unit...He's never gotten over it. He still says that the Marines are only... I say there a wonderful fighting outfit, if all them fought they'd be wonderful, but 25% of them are taking photos and taking pictures and writing notes. Seventy-five percent are fine fighters, the other, 25%, they'd do a lot more if we kept all of them. I like to tell him that every now and then. They have, they do have a wonderful, if you see those, some of the stuff, DVD's out of the Pacific, it's incredible. It's good, and they were very brave men taking those, handling those cameras. We didn't have that, then.

Cohen: What about the rest of your family? Did they land, were they in the military, at all?

Eberle: No, uh. My sister was not quite old enough. I had three brother-in-laws, all of whom were Naval aviation. Two were pilots, one was an engineer. Uh, and two

of them saw a lot action. There was one, 125 carrier missions, he was on his way out there, when Pearl Harbor broke. So he was... They wouldn't, they wouldn't even play bridge with him the regulars, until they needed him. Until they lost, they didn't have, they couldn't fill the bridge table out, you lose piles. Something I didn't fully appreciate that I should have, was the tremendous casualties in the 8th Air Force. Flying out of England with the first, the first year and a half, there. They took terrible casualties. They took casualties almost as bad as we took in the rifle company. There were, and uh, sure, they got to go home, and [got] good meal, and bed, but uh, I have two friends, both of whom were shot down, and one of them the twelfth mission, one the fifteenth mission. Nobody got to the twenty-fifth. They had a twenty-five mission thing. One airplane made it. It's on Netflix. It the **Memphis Bell**, is the name of it. It's the story of the Memphis Bell. It was a bomber that the crew managed to survive. Unreal. The statistics were just terrible on those guys. So they, it took a lot of guts to go up there. All I had to do was crawl around. Stay low.

Cohen: You did more than enough.

Eberle: The first thing you have to teach your troops, troops is, "It's okay to keep your butt down, but you've got to keep your head up. You've got to look for the other people. You've got to look for the bad guys, the guys who are shooting at you. The other ones, you want them, that's what you're looking for. You're in, your inclination to keep your butt down is hard, is natural. Don't worry about it. You'll hug the ground."

Cohen: Well, one thing that's kind of fun, is that uh, I saw that you were honored at uh, a Blackhawks game in 2017; how did that come about?

Eberle: My daughter-in-law is my PR agent. She wrote in and found how, "I've got a father-in-law who is a World War II veteran." So they called up and I said, "Yeah." Asked me a few couple questions, and I said, "I was there." So that's how I got, so he said, "Okay, show up," So I did, met a nice young man, yeah, had an escort. This guy had been in Afghanistan three times. He's twelve years in the Army, and he one that stays in. I said, "Okay, only [inaudible 2:28:02-03]." That's, that's a whole new war. We were, we were lucky in our war. We knew who the bad guys were.

Cohen: Yeah, they made it clear.

Eberle: Yeah, so we shot them, and as I said, I didn't hate them, I had no trouble trying to shoot them, or killing them, because that was the job.

Cohen: You had to do it.

Eberle: When I got to thinking about it later, about my, about the friend of mine murdering two prisoners, that's, that's terrible. It's bad, bad, bad. On the other hand, as a company commander, I called artillery in on the next village, that might be ten miles down the road, because we were having trouble fighting our way into it, so we tried to blast our way in, in the artillery. I didn't worry about the, what do they call them nowadays, the non-combatants?

Cohen: Civilians?

Eberle: Well, they're the people who can't help it. If you want to see something I saw in spring of 1945, it's a Belgian farmer plowing a field, and shells were going both ways. This guy's got to get his crops in. I mean that's his urge. He's got to get his crops in. Get his crops in, in order to eat. Now that's a, that's another war, a real [unsure of word] war... Now, what have I got here? I've got this stack of news, photos which I'll talk to your friend about.

Cohen: Do you mean, like the um, that's a whole other story of the civilians that are going on with their lives despite the war?

Eberle: Oh yeah, well, I mean, I worry for fathers with children. Oh, trying to get them where they're safe, with what's going on in the Near East. It breaks my heart. I don't know what to do about it. I can't do anything about it, personally, at this stage. They probably wouldn't give me a gun. They probably wouldn't allow [me] to handle it. [Laughs]

Cohen: I don't know – probably would. Is there something else that you would like to talk about that we did not touch upon?

Eberle: Well, I told you about it but the shooting of the prisoners, part of it. It is not the sort of thing that I'd go run around telling people. It doesn't surprise anybody who was there, I don't think.

Cohen: No.

Eberle: But by the same token, it's not something that I'm proud of and I feel badly about it because I think I could have stopped it, perhaps I should have, but I didn't. Look, there's nothing fair about war, nothing good about war. You want a one-word description of war, to me, it's, "chaos". Nothing is ever where it's supposed to be, when it's supposed to be, I promise you. That's just the way it is, and you learn to live with the fact. You need dry socks and you get ammunition. It's true – they don't dry free. You need food, you get ammunition. You always get ammunition. Well, I should be happy, I guess. I didn't have a choice. I've had a long life and I've learned to recognize that almost everyone knows more about something than I do. It may not be a subject that I'm interested in, but he knows

all about this subject. He might be a carpenter, he might be a plumber, he might be a what. He knows he has some skills and he can do some things better than you can do, College Boy! [Laughs]

Cohen: Well, it sounds like you were an excellent leader, right? Being able to see people's areas of knowledge and although you might have made a mistake, you also made a lot of good decisions that saved the men, you know.

Eberle: I hope so but as I said, I guess we never took [inaudible?] It was --Everybody was good, bad or indifferent. Are you on your side or on their side? You kind have to -- you have to assume, as I said the thing about getting shot in the back, I didn't. Because we all had one thing to do. I'm not sure that that was true of Vietnam. I wasn't there so—

Cohen: --you don't know. On behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, we thank you for your service and for sharing your story here, today.