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Interview with

ARCHIE GANTT

August 31, 1999

Place of Interview: Jewett, Texas

Interviewer: Peter B. Lane

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Open
Archie Gantt
(Signature)

August 31, 1999

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Oral History Collection

Archie Gantt

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Dr. Lane: My name is Peter Lane, and I am the interviewer of Mr. Archie Gantt. The interview is being conducted in Jewett, Texas, which is in central Texas. Present during this interview is Mr. Gantt, who is a World War II veteran of F Company, 335th Infantry, 84th Division, myself, and Mr. Troy Thomason is also in the room. He is a friend of Mr. Gantt's and a fellow veteran, as well as an interviewee in the Oral History Program of the University of North Texas.

Good morning, Mr. Gantt. It is my honor to be with you here and spend some time reflecting on your experiences in the war itself.

Gantt: Good morning.

Lane: I would like to ask you to perhaps take us through your early life, discussing your family and your life on into high school, if you would.

Gantt: I was raised in this community. I was born here on July 4, 1922. I went to grammar school at a little place called Farrar, where I was born. When I finished grammar school at Farrar, a new high school had been completed in this part of the country. It was called Fair Oaks. I went there for four years and finished there in 1940.

Lane: Archie--if I may call you "Archie"--could you say a little bit about your father and mother and your siblings in your early life?

Gantt: My father was a good business manager, even during the Depression, and my mother was a hard-working lady. I had a brother who was two years older than me and was drafted somewhat earlier, in 1942. I had a sister who was two years younger than me and one ten years younger than me. They lived on the farm and worked hard. My brother, sisters, and myself all went

to school at Fair Oaks.

We worked hard. My brother left pretty soon after he got out of high school. He went to Westminster College [in Westminster, Texas] for one year.

Lane: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

Gantt: Well, since I didn't know anything any different, I thought it was a matter of life. Times were hard, but we had plenty to eat. There were plenty of people in that part of the country who were hungry and who were very much in need. I saw lots of needy people. We thought that we were pretty fortunate.

Lane: You always had food on the table?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: Do you remember in the 1930s how you, as a young man, became familiar with events going on in Japan and Germany and Italy? Do you remember how you came to know about [German Chancellor] Adolf Hitler?

Gantt: Most of the information that we got back in those days was by a battery-powered radio. Newspapers weren't very prevalent back then,

and neither were magazines. So, a lot of it was just word-of-mouth. We pretty well took what we heard on the radio as being solid facts.

Lane: Was Hitler portrayed as leader in Germany, or was he somebody that the United States opposed even in the 1930s?

Gantt: He was presented as an evil influence because of his repression of the masses.

Lane: Did your father and yourself support Franklin Roosevelt as president?

Gantt: Oh, I was not of voting age at that time. My daddy was a "Yellow Dog" Democrat.

Lane: Would you define what a "Yellow Dog" Democrat is?

Gantt: A "Yellow Dog" Democrat is a fellow who would vote for a yellow dog if it was on the Democratic ticket, rather than vote for a Republican.

Lane: So, your father was a supporter of the New Deal and the efforts of President Roosevelt to take the country out the Depression.

Gantt: There is no doubt that he was one of the greatest men of our time. Franklin Roosevelt was one of the greatest men of our time.

Lane: Do you remember the conflict in America between those who wanted to take a stronger role in opposing Hitler and others, such as [Charles] Lindbergh, who were opposed to American involvement in the European conflict?

Gantt: I know that there were a lot of people who were pacifists. They didn't want to get involved anywhere. I didn't really know anything about what was right or what was wrong along that line. I had some moral values I cherished, but I didn't know how to cope with political ideas.

Lane: Did you follow the religious beliefs of your parents and attend their church?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: What denomination were you a member of?

Gantt: I was a member of the New Salem Baptist Church in this community, and other Baptist churches since then. I used to aspire to be a song leader, and I got to be one after a fashion. I used to be a music director for churches for a good long while. When I had a stroke, I lost my voice, and I lost my singing ability.

Lane: You finished high school in 1940?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: What were your plans for your life after high school? This was before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. What were you going to do with your life after coming out of high school?

Gantt: I didn't really know. I didn't want to be a farmer. I went to Fort Worth, Texas, and went to work for a fellow at a service station for a little while; and I went to West Texas for a little while, but I got homesick and came home. I stayed on the farm until I was drafted.

Lane: Tell me how they picked you, of all people, to join the U.S. Army.

Gantt: I'm not sure exactly how that draft worked, but there were a lot of men who were drafted in 1942. Nearly all of the men who were twenty years old or older went.

Lane: Why didn't you enlist in the Army Air Corps, or in the Navy, or in the Marine Corps? Why did you wait to be drafted?

Gantt: I don't know that. I just put it off as long as I could, I guess.

Lane: So, unlike many young men after Pearl Harbor, you didn't rush to enlist in the service.

Gantt: No. I was never a superpatriot.

Lane: You decided early on to wait until you were drafted?

Gantt: That's right.

Lane: Did you ever oppose service in any way?

Gantt: No.

Lane: So, like many people, you were willing to go when you were called.

Gantt: Sure. That was my duty.

Lane: Tell us about your official notice to report and your first few days in the military. What did "Uncle Sam" do with you?

Gantt: We went to Camp Wolters [Mineral Wells, Texas] for induction, examination, inoculation, and for our clothes.

Lane: Were all the people sent from Camp Wolters to one place, or did they get assignments all over the country?

Gantt: They were sent all over the country.

Lane: Tell us about your assignment and your reaction when you received it.

Gantt: We were sent to Gainesville, Texas, to Camp Howze. It was a new camp.

Lane: What do you mean by "we?"

Gantt: There were several men from Limestone County. There were six of us who went there. Some of them went to the 45th Division, some went to the 104th Division, and some went [here] and some went [there]. Six of us from Limestone County went to the 84th Division. Later, some of them left, but the other three served through the war.

Lane: Did they ask you if you wanted to be a mechanic or a supplyman or anything?

Gantt: Yes. They asked you what branch you wanted to be assigned to, but they put you where they wanted you.

Lane: What specialty did they give to you?

Gantt: I don't remember what my specialty was, but I was put in a rifle company and in a weapons platoon. As time went along, I got to be a section leader. It's got an MOS number, but I can't recall what it was.

Lane: So, you moved from Mineral Wells up to Gainesville, Texas--which is just north of Denton, Texas--part of the early cadre of the 84th Division. They were named the "Railsplitters."

Gantt: That's right.

Lane: Where did that name come from?

Gantt: It was called the "Lincoln Division" in World War I. It has to do with Abraham Lincoln's ability to split the rails. President Lincoln was known for being a rail-splitter in his youth. [Editor's note: Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky but made his political career in Illinois, and he served in the Illinois militia during the Black Hawk War of 1832. The 84th Division was formed in 1917 from federalized National Guard units from Illinois, Kentucky, and Wisconsin. The division was dissolved after World War I ended in 1918, but was reformed in 1943.]

Lane: Describe what Camp Howze looked like. Was it a sophisticated base, or was it just getting built at the same time the unit was?

Gantt: It was just getting built. All of the buildings were tarpaper barracks. There was a heater at each end of the barracks. Gainesville, Texas, is a cold place. I got pneumonia. I went on sick call, and they didn't examine me. So, I went back out to the drill field, and I had a

good-hearted lieutenant. I said, "Sir, I'm sick." He said, "Are you really sick?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Come with me." So, we went to the aid station, and he said, "Examine this man." They did, and they said, "Go back to your quarters and get your toilet articles. You've got to go to the hospital." It turned out that I had bronchial pneumonia, and I stayed in the hospital for a few days before I came back to my old company. I always had a lot of respect for my lieutenant. He always treated me fairly.

Lane: Tell us about the relationship between the enlisted men--most of whom were draftees--and your NCOs [non-commissioned officers] and your officers during this period at Camp Howze.

Gantt: I always thought that I was treated fairly. We had officers and sergeants who were "men of heart." They wanted you to get the job done, but they wanted to treat you fairly. I saw very few inequities in the service during all the years that I served.

Lane: Did you see any physical abuse by the officers?

Gantt: Never.

Lane: Tell us about your food. Were you satisfied with it?

Gantt: It was pretty good food, and there was plenty of it, and it came regularly. I have no complaints about it.

Lane: Were the men of your unit all Texans, or did they come from all areas of the United States?

Gantt: They came from everywhere. A lot of them came from California, and a lot of them came from the Carolinas and Pennsylvania and New York.

Lane: What did you learn from all of these different people?

Gantt: I learned that everybody has got a different song to sing.

Lane: Did you find them very different from yourself, coming from this rural Baptist community in Texas?

Gantt: Yes, there were a lot of differences between the different states. I developed friendships with people from all over, all different states. I found that there are good men everywhere you go.

Lane: I guess that when you go through adversity, you can unify with people of very different

backgrounds. I don't know if you would account for any other reason why you had an ability to get along with all of these other people.

Gantt: Oh, sure. Hard times bring people together. Hard times will meld you together.

Lane: You indicated earlier that you had moved up, and you were now a squad leader.

Gantt: I was a squad leader, and not too much later I got to be a section leader.

Lane: Tell us what a section leader did, what his rank was, and what his responsibilities were.

Gantt: When I first got to be a section leader, it was the rank of buck sergeant. He had three squads of five men each and a messenger. About the time we left Gainesville, they upped all of the ratings from buck sergeant to staff sergeant. So, I got to be a staff sergeant.

Lane: How old were you when you became a staff sergeant?

Gantt: I was twenty-one years old.

Lane: Did a staff sergeant have four stripes?

Gantt: A staff sergeant's insignia stripes were three [chevrons] down and one ["rocker" chevron] up.

Lane: You are twenty-one years of age, and you are

supervising sixteen people through their training. That says something for your leadership abilities, and, obviously, you won't admit it, but you were probably a pretty good soldier.

Gantt: I tried to be. I think I was a pretty good soldier.

Lane: Did they tell you whether you were training for action in the European Theater or for the Pacific Theater or for some other theater of operations?

Gantt: They didn't tell us, but we assumed that it would probably be Europe because the biggest majority of our training was along that line.

Lane: Describe a typical day at Camp Howze.

Gantt: That will be kind of hard to remember. We got up in the early morning, and as soon as you got through eating, you had to go to the toilet and get your shaving over with and be ready to fall out when they blew the bugle. You learned to fall into the time schedule pretty soon.

Lane: What dates were you at Camp Howze, and where did you go when you left?

Gantt: I believe we left in August, 1943. We went to

Louisiana for maneuvers.

Lane: Where did you go in Louisiana?

Gantt: We went in around Leesville. I remember one time that I was on a pass, and there were soldiers backed up clear down the street, trying to get into the liquor store.

Lane: What was the name of the camp?

Gantt: It became Fort Polk. It was Camp Polk at the time.

Lane: Camp Clayborne was next door or close by?

Gantt: We weren't stationed at Polk; we were just close to where it was. We were stationed in Camp Clayborne. When we got out of maneuvers, we went to Camp Clayborne.

Lane: Did you enjoy life more at Camp Clayborne than you did back at Camp Howze?

Gantt: Yes. Camp Clayborne had gas heat.

Lane: You weren't in tents out in the field?

Gantt: After we got out of maneuvers, we were in Camp Clayborne.

Lane: There you were in regular barracks.

Gantt: Yes, and they had gas heat.

Lane: That was something special?

Gantt: Yes. It was better than coal.

Lane: It knows how to get cold there, too.

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: At Camp Clayborne and Camp Polk, you were just doing larger unit kinds of training, getting ready. Did they tell you where you were going to go?

Gantt: No.

Lane: Is there anything more that you would like to mention about life in Louisiana?

Gantt: It was pretty hot down there.

Lane: It was hot in the summer and cold in the winter?

Gantt: It wasn't cold compared to Gainesville. We lost a lot of men because they were sent overseas. In June, 1944, we got 4,000 of these ASTP boys.

Lane: Could you define what ASTP is?

Gantt: ASTP stands for Army Specialized Training Program. I can't tell you exactly why it was established in the first place. They gave you a pretty good idea that you were going to be an officer when you came out of that program, but you lost your rank when you went in. A lot of these men hadn't had infantry training, so we had to give them infantry basic training. They

worked in real well with us. I have to give them credit. We were a little bit leery of them at first, but they did well. [Editor's note: The ASTP was originally composed of recruits and draftees who scored high marks on the Army's standardized intelligence tests. They were selected for training as officers and were assigned to a rigorous academic program designed to ensure their success in their future commissions. As the war went on and the need for front-line soldiers increased, the ASTP was dissolved, and its participants were assigned as riflemen to infantry units.]

Lane: These were young men who may have scored fairly high in their initial testing, and they felt that they could absorb college material. I say this guardedly, but they might have been a cut above, in terms of potential, at least.

Gantt: They had a lot of potential.

Lane: They probably still needed the discipline and training that you provided. Did they help improve the unit in terms of capability?

Gantt: They were out to learn. They did well.

Lane: So, you were at Camp Clayborne up until what

date, approximately?

Gantt: We were there until August, 1944.

Lane: Do you remember the landing at Normandy on June 6, 1944? Were you following the events in Europe at that time?

Gantt: Yes. We had a full field inspection that day.

Lane: Why would they have done that? Was it just by accident?

Gantt: It just happened. It was an accident. It wasn't planned that way.

Lane: What did a full field inspection mean to you, the NCO section leader?

Gantt: The lieutenants checked your locker and your bed.

Lane: So, it was in the barracks, not in the field.

Gantt: Yes. If you had a jacket over a shirt, they checked to see if that shirt was buttoned properly, too. They also checked your weapon for cleanliness. As a whole, second lieutenants got a bad name that they really didn't deserve. Some of them were pretty haughty, but as a whole they were pretty fine fellows.

Lane: Who did you work for directly? Who was your direct supervisor?

Gantt: I worked for Captain Cecil E. Johnson.

Lane: Was he a company commander or a platoon commander?

Gantt: He was a company commander. When we got to Camp Clayborne, Lieutenant Jenkins got mixed up in some gambling, as I understand it, and he shot himself. So, we were without a lieutenant for a long time. The platoon sergeant accepted all of the responsibility. He was an older man, and he was pretty well-qualified.

Lane: You mentioned earlier that there was a cadre of NCOs from the 4th Division who provided initial leadership until the unit got on its feet.

Gantt: Yes. The 4th Division was Regular Army.

Lane: They were Regular Army, and you all were mostly draftees. They stayed with you as you shipped out?

Gantt: That's right.

Lane: Tell me about when you were notified that you were finally leaving and where you were going.

Gantt: They just told us to get ready to get on a train. They didn't tell us where we were going.

Lane: Was this the summer of 1944?

Gantt: Yes. I don't recall that they told us where we

were going. We knew that we were going to the East Coast.

Lane: You knew that you were going to Europe.

Gantt: We assumed that we were.

Lane: They put you all on a series of trains, I guess.

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: Tell me about the trip.

Gantt: It was pretty nice, in a way. We saw land we had never seen and had never expected to see. A lot of people would say, "That's my home over there," or "That's pretty close to my home." There were a lot of people who would have liked to have gotten off that train. When we got to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, they got us ready to go overseas. It wasn't many days before we got on a ship, called the *Sterling Castle*, which was a British ship.

Lane: Did this British ship take the entire division on it?

Gantt: No, it wasn't that big.

Lane: Was it just one or two regiments?

Gantt: I can't recall that. We had two meals a day, and they weren't very good. On the second day

out, another ship ran into us.

Lane: It collided with you and your ship?

Gantt: Yes. I was on the deck with a friend of mine, and I said, "That ship over there is going to run into us!" I was just cocking off, but we went down where my quarters were, and in an hour or two, it plowed right into the side of our ship. Our ship had to turn around and go back to Camp Kilmer, until it was repaired. We were supposed to land in France, and they landed the rest of the division in England; and when the ship was repaired, we joined them in England.

Lane: Did you have any free time in New York City while you were at Camp Kilmer?

Gantt: We had a pass. I went to the Empire State Building. I had never seen it.

Lane: That was the first time you saw it? Was it very exciting to see New York City?

Gantt: Yes, it was pretty exciting.

Lane: Did you wear your uniforms when you were on pass?

Gantt: Always! We didn't have any civilian clothes until after the war was over with.

Lane: Did they give you a lot of safety briefings in terms of U-boat [German submarine] attacks before you actually left port?

Gantt: Not that I can remember. We were in a big convoy. They had those minesweepers running at the edge, and you could see them. Once in a while, you could hear a depth charge, but there were no casualties, as far as I know.

Lane: There were no U-boat attacks on your convoy.

Gantt: Not to my knowledge.

Lane: After the repairs were made, you shipped out again and arrived in England. When did you arrive in England?

Gantt: We arrived in England sometime in October, 1944.

Lane: How long did you stay in England? I'm sure they let you off of the ship.

Gantt: We were in England for three weeks, and we had some passes. I got into London on a dark night. We stayed there for three weeks, and then we shipped out through Southampton.

Lane: What was the morale of the troops like at this time?

Gantt: It was pretty good.

Lane: So, you were in the Southampton area for approximately three weeks, and then you received orders to head for the European continent. Do you remember what the date was on that?

Gantt: It was sometime in November, 1944.

Lane: How did you get from Southampton over to the continent? Where did you land?

Gantt: We landed at one of the beaches, but I can't remember the name of it.

Lane: It was not at Cherbourg.

Gantt: I don't think so. It was already cleaned up when we got there. They had the red tape showing you where you could and couldn't go so we could avoid unexploded enemy mines. We went in and spent one night...

Lane: There was no enemy opposition to your initial landing?

Gantt: No. The Allies had already taken Paris.

Lane: Was there a certain measure of excitement to land in France?

Gantt: Sure! It would get your blood circulating pretty good, because of all of the new things that you would see and all of the danger that

you knew that you were facing.

Lane: What did your senior officers and NCOs tell you about what you were going to do?

Gantt: They didn't tell us anything.

Lane: They didn't tell you the division assignment or where in France you were?

Gantt: No. They didn't know that, themselves.

Lane: Did you bivouac for a few days near the beach, or did you immediately go forward to the front line?

Gantt: If I remember correctly, we marched nine miles inland and spent the night. They got us in the position where we could get on the "Red Ball Express." The "Red Ball Express" was a trucking outfit that hauled troops to the front lines. [Editor's note: Because the French railway system had been almost entirely destroyed by Allied bombers or by the retreating Germans, all supplies to the U.S. forces had to be transported by truck convoys. For this reason, the "Red Ball Express" was organized. "Red ball" was railroad slang for a non-stop freight train.] We drove and drove and drove. We got off and spent one night in

our pup tents, and then we got back on the "Red Ball Express" again.

The next time we stopped, we were on the edge of Germany. The night we pulled in, you could see the artillery flashes in the distance. They put us [335th Infantry Regiment] in behind the 30th Division--my regiment--and left us for a few days, and along the front lines you could hear an American-sounding voice say, "Help me! Help me! Help me!" The old-timers said, "If you go out there, you are dead. That is an English-speaking German, and he is trying to lure you out there."

So, we sat down at the edge of those guns and heard those guns firing for a few days, and then we pulled around to go on the attack. Some of our units--the 333rd--had already been in combat, and we hadn't been in combat. They put us in there to breach the Siegfried Line [the fortified border between France and Germany] as infantry. We were supposed to take this pillbox before daylight, but we got pinned down. The company commander sent word for me to come up there to where he was. He was a little

ahead of me, so I got off in a little stream of water to keep from getting shot at by machine guns, and that water was cold. I went up there and sat around with him all morning until after lunch.

I knew that he didn't know what he was doing. He wanted me to put some mortar fire on top of that pillbox, and I thought it was one of the silliest things I had ever heard. You ought to have put some artillery on top of that pillbox.

Nonetheless, as the day went along, I looked down behind me where my men were, and a shell came in, and two of them rolled off in that water. I've got a picture of them in that book right there [gesture]. Later on in the day, somebody in the company evacuated them. One of them was seriously wounded, and one of them wasn't wounded too badly.

Lane: This was in late November or early December, 1944?

Gantt: It was the November 29, 1944. The battalion commander saw what was going on, and he was somehow able to send a flanking movement for us

to go on top of that hill. I don't remember what happened to the captain in the meantime.

I went back through that water where my men were--for the second time--and I led them out to go on top of that hill, and we pulled into a tank trap. There was a haystack over close to the tank trap. I told my men: "Dig a hole as fast as you can and go over there one at a time, and get an armful of straw [to sleep on], or you will freeze tonight!"

In the night a rifleman came back, and he had been shot through the chest. I dug him a slit trench and got him a load of hay to warm him up. He was evacuated the next morning. I asked him if he had taken his sulfa pills, and he had.

Lane: He was in your section?

Gantt: Yes, he was in one of the rifle platoons ahead of me. That was on November 29, 1944.

On December 1, 1944, all hell broke loose. They shelled us day and night. After each barrage, we would hop around from hole to hole, and this boy from Dallas came in from the mortar platoon. I didn't know where they were.

There wasn't one man in there. I helped him out of the hole, and the other man had been blown to pieces. We had to salvage the mortars. When we got relieved, he had to certify that on [a certain date] one person was killed. After the war I've been told that it was determined that he was hit by an armor-piercing shell, and it just exploded him.

We picked my lieutenant up in England. He'd say to me: "Sergeant, what's the situation?" I'd say, "I don't know what the situation is." He'd say, "Will you bring me something to eat?" I'd say, "Sir, I don't have anything to eat, either. I'm hungry, too."

The company executive officer got "cold feet" [was scared].

Lane: These were the first combat experiences that you had as a unit, I guess. Do you feel that your lengthy training prepared you for what you ultimately experienced, or was it really much worse than you expected?

Gantt: No, it doesn't prepare you for it. Nothing prepared me for the breakdown in leadership. The first sergeant was wounded. The first

platoon leader was killed, and the second platoon leader was wounded. The company's executive officer got "cold feet."

Lane: Would you explain what you mean when you say that someone got "cold feet"?

Gantt: That means that their nerves ran out.

Lane: It happened very quickly, then.

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: Did they ask to be relieved, or were they just relieved by a senior officer?

Gantt: The senior officer just relieved them. After we got through the first battle, the first platoon leader failed to build himself a perimeter defense. An infantryman knows what a perimeter of defense is. You don't know who is on your flank. If you don't know who is on your flanks, you build a flank. He lost two squads that first night. So, in a day or two, after all of the officers were gone except him, and we got an attack order. The acting first sergeant took over, and we went to where we were supposed to go.

When we got relieved, we went back to the rear, and somebody wanted to know who was in

command of F Company. Lieutenant Pennino said, "I am!" He came over there where I was, and I had billeted my men and myself in a pretty good little ol' building, and he told me to get out. I told him that I wasn't getting out. So, we didn't have an officer left.

Lane: As the senior folks got "cold feet" and were relieved, what did this mean for your personal responsibilities?

Gantt: Well, it meant that you had more responsibility. You still had the same number of men that you had yesterday.

Lane: You still had sixteen men assigned to you?

Gantt: I only had fourteen men because two of them were wounded.

Lane: Do you remember what town in Germany or Belgium or France that you were in during these early engagements?

Gantt: We were supposed to go down to the Ruhr River and cross it. That was the plan before we went to Belgium.

Lane: In terms of life in the field, where did you sleep most of the time? Was it in the open field, or were you able to find buildings or

cellars where you could stay?

Gantt: Sometimes, after we got out of the Siegfried Line, we might be fortunate enough to get into a building. A lot of times you had to stay outside. Actually, we threw our pup tents away. All we had left was our food, water, ammunition, guns, and one blanket.

Lane: Did you have any interaction with the civilian population as you moved through the countryside?

Gantt: We never saw them. They were gone.

Lane: They were just not there.

Gantt: The town was leveled before we got there in Germany.

Lane: What town was this?

Gantt: When we got far enough inland to be in a town like Krefeld, Germany, there was only half of it still standing. It was a big city. But I didn't know the names of most of the towns that we went through.

Lane: Tell me about the coordination between an infantryman and artillery, or his mortar support and his artillery. Is that something that had to be learned in the field, or did you

have a good system?

Gantt: We had a good system. I should have had a forward observer. The 81-millimeter mortar companies had a forward observer. There was one in each company, or at least in each battalion. If the company commander had a target that he wanted to wipe out, he'd tell that observer, and he'd plot it on his map and do it for him.

The 60-millimeter mortars targeted visually. He'd send a forward observer up there, and he'd call back the range, and they'd fire one shot. If it needed to be corrected to the right or to the left, he'd correct that. He could tell by looking through his field glasses how many meters it needed to be corrected. If it was over or under, he could correct that.

Lane: As an infantryman, were you always pleased to have that artillery support with you?

Gantt: Oh, yes. Anything helps.

Lane: Did you have any short rounds at all through your service?

Gantt: One time in Belgium we thought we were shelled by our own artillery company, but we couldn't prove it. As far as I know, it didn't kill any

of us, but it sure did "warm us up" [get our attention].

Lane: How about your interaction with aircraft overhead? Was that something that was important to you?

Gantt: We never had any air support, except for the day after Christmas. I'll tell you about that.

Lane: Was there any German aircraft in the area?

Gantt: No, none that I saw, except for old "Bed Check Charlie." He came every night looking for a light. He flew one of those Piper-type planes [Fiesler *Storch* observation plane], and he'd come down pretty low and zoom over us to see if he could see a light or something so he could blow you off of the map. When we crossed the Ruhr River, "Bed Check Charlie" was still pretty close, too.

Lane: Do you remember--I guess it was in mid-December--when the German counteroffensive that has been known as the Battle of the Bulge really began?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: Tell me your early reactions to that, as well as where you were and how you reacted to the

German offensive.

Gantt: We were up in the Siegfried Line. We got relieved one night at about twelve o'clock. We got back about four o'clock to see if we could find some hay to make some pallets. That concrete floor gets mighty cold.

Before daylight they rolled us out and put us on trucks. We rode and we rode, and about four o'clock they de-trucked us. It started snowing about that time. We pulled into a town called Marche-en-Famenne. We got there one day ahead of the Germans. We built our defenses as best we could. So, I sent Sergeant Enzor off to the front lines in order to see if my mortar direction was correct. By that time a new lieutenant walked up. He'd come from G Company. His name was Lieutenant Harold Hassett. He wanted to know what my range was, and I told him. He said, "Bring it in 100 yards." I said, "But [the mortars] will fall right on the front lines." He said, "You heard me!" I said, "Crank it up." My forward observer said, "Don't fire anymore! You're hitting the front lines!" He was taking a responsibility that wasn't his.

He wasn't a mortarman. I will tell you more about him later on.

Lane: Did you have close contact with the Germans at this time?

Gantt: They were right over the hill. You could hear them. In a day or two or three--I can't recall when--the sun came out, and the P-38s [Lockheed Lightning twin-engine fighters] came. According to that division history book, General [Alexander H.] Bolling told his troops to hold that town at all costs because it was a major road junction. We were able to do it with the Army Air Force, the artillery, and the tank destroyers. We held it. When the sun came out that day, it was a happy day for us.

We were billeted in a building with some French civilians. They had a barn and a house all built under one roof.

Lane: You were in Belgium now?

Gantt: Yes, this was in Marche-en-Famenne, Belgium. We got a "ten-in-one" ration, or two. They included cigarettes and soap. [Editor's note: The "ten-in-one" ration was supposed to be one meal for ten men, or ten meals for one man.

One man could not use it unless he opened one can for each meal. The "ten-in-one" was packed in a heavy, bulky cardboard box and required a fire to prepare it, so it was useless for combat troops in the field.] The old people shared their bread and butter with us, and we shared our rations with them. We gave an old lady some soap, either Lux or Camay, and she cried. It was the first time that she had good-smelling soap in four years. That's the only time that I was ever billeted with civilians, and from then on we didn't visit with the civilians.

Lane: You didn't visit with the civilians after that?

Gantt: Never. There might have been a few times, if they were in a town where we were, but we usually didn't have anything to do with them.

Lane: Do you remember when the offensive for the Germans sputtered out and stopped, and then we kind of took the offensive in closing the pincers at the Bulge?

Gantt: Yes. The British relieved us. They put us on trucks and took us to a different sector, and we started in the attack. My company went

cross-country. The 2nd Armored Division went down the road, and we went cross-country. It was so cold that when you wiped your nose on your sleeve, there was ice. I weighed 175 pounds then, and I was pretty much a man, physically. Those boys of mine, who were carrying their mortars and stuff, would slip and slide in that snow. I'd just reach and grab them and pull them up. They had more weight to carry than I did. As time went along, it began to take its toll on us, physically. There was no water and no food.

Lane: You just ate snow for water?

Gantt: We didn't have anything. You can get dehydrated from a lack of water in the wintertime just like you can in the summertime. Before it froze we just got water out of the ditch and put a halogen [purification] tablet in. When it froze over, unless you had the company Jeep somewhere close to you, you didn't have any water. You had to do without.

Lane: Did the Army do a good job of providing clothing, such as gloves and fresh socks? Was that important?

Gantt: Fresh socks were very important. I always got two pairs when the "sock sack" came by.

Lane: What do you mean by "sock sack?"

Gantt: It was a sack filled with dry socks. They were at a premium. I'd get a pair and put them in my jacket. When I got to where I could, I'd take off my old socks, wash them out and dry them. I got in bad trouble with my feet. A lot of people got trench foot.

Lane: Were these the most difficult conditions that you experienced in Europe, during this period in December, 1944, and January, 1945?

Gantt: Yes. We went for forty-odd days without a change of clothes or a bath. Toward the end of the Battle of the Bulge, we had gone so long that I had become physically worn out. We stopped at the edge of the woods, and I found a little hole there, and I was just exhausted. Some of the men got me up and started walking with me. They kept me from freezing to death. I thought that I was pretty strong, but I had had all of that cold that I could stand. Those northern boys could stand the cold, but I couldn't stand it. As an ol' southern boy, I

could take the heat, but I couldn't take that cold.

Lane: Of the original sixteen troops in your section, how many were still with you at this point?

Gantt: There were eleven who were still with me.

Lane: What happened to the other five?

Gantt: One had trench foot; one was killed; two were seriously wounded; and one of them was pretty well wounded. Whenever we got a replacement, he didn't know anything [about what we were doing]. So, whenever we got into a town where we could train him, we gave him some on-the-job training. We'd have to show him some of the points of operating a mortar as best we could.

Lane: The replacements oftentimes came in, and you hardly knew their names.

Gantt: That's right. I didn't have but two replacements in my section who were killed. I'd have gotten acquainted with them by then.

Lane: Was it an important responsibility for you to keep your men alive? Was that the primary thing that you were trying to do?

Gantt: I think that we were all trying to stay alive. If I saw one of them doing something that I

didn't think he ought to be doing, I'd call his hand on it. But most of them were seasoned soldiers. You didn't need to give them any instructions.

Lane: Is there anything more that you would like to say about the Battle of the Bulge? It was kind of the last-gasp offensive for the Germans, and it must have been a very difficult time for the American soldiers as well.

Gantt: One of the things that I remember is that, when we got through, they took us to a Belgian town where there was a mine of some sort. They let us use their bathing facilities and showers. We stayed there for a few days, and then we went into Holland. We thought that we were going to cross the Roer River soon, but they opened the dams and flooded the whole area. So, we stayed there in Holland for quite some time. When we got ready to cross the Roer River, we went back to the same area where we'd fought before and crossed the Roer. You ought to know about this because you said that your uncle was in that crossing.

Lane: I had a picture of the dam. I'll get it at the

break. There is one other thing that I would ask you about, and that would be the massacre at Malmédy, where American troops were massacred by German units. Did that news spread among the American GIs at the unit level, or was that something that the colonels and generals worried about? Did you hear about it quickly?

Gantt: I don't recall, but I missed one of the best stories that I wanted to tell you. The 4th Division was in Belgium to hold the line while the rest of the troops were off for rest and recuperation. The 106th was "green" [inexperienced]. From the time we got to Belgium until we started up in those mountains, it had snowed quite a lot. We'd come up to one of those crossroads where the Americans tried to make a strongpoint, and you might see ten or twenty dead American soldiers. One would have his arm sticking out of the snow; one would have his leg sticking out of the snow. Then I went over to see if I could recognize what unit they were from. I don't like to see dead people. I'd seen a lot of dead people. I saw

more dead Germans than dead Americans, but it did something to me to see a dead American. While we were in Belgium, the Germans deliberately killed our aid man, who was treating a wounded prisoner. They shouldn't have done that because we got mean then.

Lane: Did that change the attitude of the American soldier toward the Germans?

Gantt: To be successful, you've got to be bloodied a little bit. You've got to be up there and see your men and your friends die, and then you get mean. I hated every German and every Japanese that ever lived. I'd have killed them all if I could have. I thought that I was a compassionate man, but I lost my compassion.

Lane: Do you have it back now?

Gantt: Not all of it. Some of it never came back. Years ago, I thought that I had a calling for the ministry. They said that a man who doesn't have any compassion hasn't got any business being a minister.

Lane: Did your unit take many German prisoners?

Gantt: We took a good many.

Lane: Some of them were surrendering fairly easily,

but some weren't, I guess.

Gantt: After we crossed the Roer and Rhine rivers, they'd come across pretty easily.

Lane: Did you see any maltreatment of German prisoners by American soldiers?

Gantt: I heard of some, but I never saw it.

Lane: Your emotions were changing at this time, weren't they?

Gantt: Yes. I heard of some maltreatment of German prisoners, but I never saw it.

Lane: You never saw a German soldier shot or maltreated?

Gantt: No.

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Lane: We finished side one of the tape talking about prisoners, the Malmédy Massacre, and some of the emotional feelings of the soldier during that time of the war. Archie, you said that you wanted to go back and talk about something that happened previously in Belgium.

Gantt: In Holland. When we had been there for a few days, a messenger came out to my platoon and told me to come to the CP [command post]. I wondered what I was needed down there for,

because I never did hang around the CP. I didn't have any business down there. So, they asked me, "Do you want to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School]?" I said, "I'll go anywhere to get off of the front lines for a while."

In a day or two, they sent me down to a board comprised of three majors, and they interviewed me, but they didn't tell me anything. Later on, in Krefeld, they sent me before three different colonels, and they didn't tell me anything. Finally, when we got to Hannover, Germany, they sent me back there. So, that will give you an idea of how I got to OCS. They sent me to Fontainebleau, France, for eight weeks.

Lane: Approximately what were the dates of the eight weeks that you spent in Fontainebleau?

Gantt: It started on about April 15, 1945, and I finished up on about June 15, 1945.

Lane: So, the Germans had already surrendered by this time.

Gantt: Yes. The war was over with in Europe while I was back in Fontainebleau. The only great battle that my division made was when they took

the town of Hannover and went to the Elbe River. My platoon didn't lose any men, and I was always thankful for that.

Lane: I'd like to stay with the Battle of the Bulge, if we could, and we'll come across that other battle in just a second. Did you have any interaction with the British or other nationalities? Were you close to the Canadians at the time?

Gantt: No.

Lane: There was no contact at all?

Gantt: No.

Lane: Overall, in this very difficult period of combat, were you proud and pleased with the reaction of your men, their discipline, and how they conducted themselves?

Gantt: With the exception of the officers in my company, the men did well. I told you about the officers.

Lane: Yes, you were really disappointed in the officers.

Gantt: Yes, but I was really proud of some of the men. There was this young man who was the acting first sergeant, and they commissioned him in

two or three days. He had "ice water in his veins" [was calm and fearless]. He stayed in the service for five years and came out as a captain. He came to see me twenty-five years ago, but he is dead now.

Lane: When a soldier was killed in a unit, there probably wasn't much time to grieve. Tell me the human reaction when you lost one of your men.

Gantt: You were glad that it wasn't you.

Lane: It was an attitude of pressing on with today's mission and get through it.

Gantt: If you didn't know whether the man was dead or wounded when he was behind you...I'll tell you about this later on.

Lane: As a section leader, did you write a letter to the parents when a soldier was killed?

Gantt: No. Somebody else did that. I didn't have time for it.

Lane: You didn't have time for that. That was done by adjutants or other officers. If you don't mind, will you talk a little bit about the crossing of the Roer River? For the benefit of the listener, the Roer River is the small river

prior to reaching the Rhine. The division was there in mid- to late-February and executed this crossing. You said that for many of these small rivers, the Germans opened the dams to make it more difficult for the advancing Allied troops.

Gantt: Yes. That's the reason that we stayed in Holland for so long. The Roer had to go down. It was a small river, but it could be at flood stage. As you already know, the 334th crossed it in force, and that night we crossed it on a pontoon bridge.

Lane: So, the bridge had already been built?

Gantt: Yes. The bridge was about this wide [gesture]. We got across it, and we kept going for I don't know how long. We got pretty far inland before we stopped. From then on, the battle was not so difficult. There'd be skirmishes, and once in a while we might get on a truck and ride a little ways.

After we got to Krefeld...between Krefeld and the Rhine, we were going down a railroad track late in the evening near a little town. Right behind me, all hell broke loose. They

passed up the word that two of my men were down. I said, "Well, aid men will get them."

When we took that town that night, I started counting heads and found out that the aid men didn't find them. The artillery fire had gotten so intense that the rest of the company had gone over to the other side of the railroad track.

So, I told the company commander: "I'm going back to find them." So, I took a big, strong fellow with me, and we went back. There was one who was wounded and one who was dead. I knew who was missing before we got back there.

Adjacent to this position, there was another little town that another battalion had taken. We went over there and got a stretcher and took that [wounded] fellow to the aid station that night. He probably would have died from exposure if we hadn't got him. But we got him. We got back out on the road and headed back to our company, and our company Jeep came along, and we got on it and rode it on in.

On the day when we got to the Rhine River, two of my men were drunk, including this man

who had gone back with me to help find those men. I told them in no uncertain terms that it wouldn't work--war and alcohol don't work together.

The next day we got orders to move out and to get close to the Rhine River--for some reason. I can't recall what the reason was. They were the last two out of the building. They came out carrying a white mattress so they would have something to sleep on when they got to that new building. Well, they never got there. They were shot from across the river by a tank or by a field artillery piece, and it killed them instantly.

They passed the word to me, and I went down there and stuck my head around the corner of that concrete building and said, "I won't go down there for a dead man. We are not going down to get them--not for a dead man. Let the graves registration people come by." I made the mistake of corresponding with one of those men's parents. They lived in Lima, Ohio, and the other lived in Peru, Ohio. They pleaded with me to come see them, but I couldn't go.

Lane: As you crossed the rivers, it caused special problems for your combat engineers. The Army is not used to amphibious warfare too much, so with the dams flooded there was a special problem in terms of finding boats and training people to ford a river, to build pontoon bridges, and all of these things. Did you acquire a special respect for the combat engineer?

Gantt: Oh, definitely! They were outstanding! They have to work under some of the most adverse circumstances that have ever been created. They have to work under fire. An infantryman could dig foxholes, but combat engineers couldn't.

Lane: Okay, we are back again in late February, 1945; we are crossing the Roer River around the German town of Linnich. Archie has talked a little bit about the value of the combat engineers and their great challenges under fire while building bridges and seizing beachheads. You might continue in terms of your recollection of crossing the river and some of the special problems. Then we will move to the

Rhine, which is, of course, a major river.

Gantt: I never was close enough to that operation, when it was going on, to know much about it. I know that they were brave men, and they worked under very adverse circumstances because there couldn't be a crossing with just plain infantry. You had to have the demolition crews, and you had to have the barges and so forth to cross. The Rhine River was a different story altogether.

Lane: Approximately when did you come upon the Rhine River? Can you tell us the first time you saw it?

Gantt: We crossed the Rhine on Easter Sunday. The 17th American Airborne jumped across the river at Wesel, and there was such destruction as I have never seen. There were C-47s [Douglas Dakota cargo planes] and gliders everywhere you looked.

Lane: You saw them overhead? You are still on the west side of the river at this time.

Gantt: I saw them after they crashed. They jumped across and secured the east side of the river.

Lane: They did this with gliders and C-47s?

Gantt: Yes. This was the 17th Airborne. The British built a bridge, and all of the forces in northern Germany crossed the same bridge at Wesel. We crossed on Easter Sunday. I'm sorry to say that there wasn't much thought of [Christ's] resurrection on that day. We were thinking about staying alive.

Lane: Were you under fire when you crossed the river?

Gantt: No.

Lane: The bridge was pretty much secured on both sides?

Gantt: The 17th Airborne had secured it. They must have lost a lot of men.

Lane: It was just a matter of getting your equipment with you and keeping the unit together?

Gantt: Yes. From then on, we'd attack for a while, and then the division formed a task force, Task Force Church. The brigadier general and his assistant commander had taken some of the infantry with him on some tanks and trucks, and he tried to break through. Sometimes they would get it. He always told us: "Don't worry about your flanks. Somebody else will mop up behind you, so if you can keep going, keep going."

Once in a while you could get on a truck convoy and have black driver. I was told--and I don't know who told me--"If that driver runs, shoot him and put a white driver on that truck." I never saw him run. If I'd have shot him, it would have been in the leg. We'd get bogged down at a town, and we couldn't get off of that truck. That black driver would jump out and go get in an empty building (chuckle).

Lane: Were you part of some of the operations of Task Force Church?

Gantt: I never was on the task force. We came to the Weser River. The 3rd Battalion crossed first, and we were supposed to be across before daylight, but nothing operates according to schedule in the Army. It was daylight when we started to cross that river, and we crossed it in rowboats. There were artillery shells falling over [here] and falling over [there]. As far as I was ever able to determine, nobody was injured.

Right across the river a little ways, the Germans started retreating. Sergeant Cowen was right ahead of me. He was the platoon sergeant

of the 3rd Platoon. He had been a private first class and got to be a platoon sergeant. He was brave. There was a German retreating, and he started to climb over a picket fence. Sergeant Cowen impaled him on that picket fence. We laughed about that. We thought it was funny.

Lane: Did you notice a change in treatment by the local population as you moved further and further into Germany? Were the civilians gone, or were they right there in town as you moved eastward?

Gantt: They moved out of the way.

Lane: Did you have any interaction with German civilians?

Gantt: No, but I will tell you one thing. There would be thousands and thousands of displaced persons coming west.

Lane: You were starting to meet them now as they were coming west?

Gantt: Yes. There were thousands of them.

Lane: Who were they?

Gantt: They were all displaced persons. They were slave laborers from every nation in the world, I guess. I've got pictures of them out there.

Lane: Did you have ethnic soldiers in your units that could speak foreign languages and talk to many of the refugees?

Gantt: Yes. I had one who could speak French and one who could speak German.

Lane: Did you have any Jewish soldiers in your units?

Gantt: We had Corporal Stein. He was the head of the graves registration unit. He was a replacement whom we got in from somewhere.

Lane: I was going to ask you if you had heard anything about what was happening to the Jews in Germany at this time.

Gantt: I hadn't heard too much about that. We had another one of those ASTP people, named Shockett. He was Jewish, and he was a brave man.

Lane: Did you hear any rumors?

Gantt: Yes, there were rumors that the occupied countries had been mistreated.

Lane: So, you don't have much memory of German civilians?

Gantt: I don't hardly have any at all. Late one evening, when we were between the Roer and the Rhine Rivers, I was told to go out to a farm

over yonder and spend the night at an outpost. I got over there, and there was a German farmer, and he wanted to milk his cows. I told him to get in the basement, but he hesitated, and he didn't want to go. I shot in the air, and he went in the basement and stayed there. I told that German-speaking soldier to tell him to get in the basement, but he wanted to milk his cows. I told my men: "I will tell you what to do tonight. Anything that moves, level it. Don't ask any questions. If you see movement, just shoot." It turned out that nothing transpired that night, so I joined my company the next day. That's the only time that I had anything to do with the German civilians. They were already scattered when we got there.

Lane: Did you find an increase in German soldiers starting to surrender? Were these top German troops? Were they old or young? Did you notice any change in the enemy?

Gantt: To tell you the truth, I didn't see that many...I was in the second wave. I didn't see what was going on up front. I was marching at the back. I saw a lot of them marching west.

Most of them were young, is all that I can say.

Lane: What rank were you now?

Gantt: I was still a staff sergeant. I hadn't been commissioned yet.

Lane: The remainder of the war is on into April, 1945, with Hitler's death. Were you notified about that right away?

Gantt: Oh, yes. We knew all about it. Back in France we were told when Roosevelt died [on April 12, 1945]. We were told the day the war was over with. We had to keep on training.

Lane: Do you remember the day the war ended? It was on May 8, 1945.

Gantt: Yes. I will never forget it.

Lane: Do you remember where you were at time?

Gantt: Yes. I was in Fontainebleau, France, going to OCS.

Lane: That's right. So, you were pulled out of your unit in April, 1945, and sent back for officer training. Like you were saying, there were certain NCOs that were given battlefield commissions. Would you call yours a battlefield commission?

Gantt: No. We had two in my company, which is unusual

for one company. They were a cut above me.

Lane: I don't know if that's true.

Gantt: Yes, they were. One of them was the platoon sergeant in the 2nd Platoon, and the other was this young man who took over, and he had nerve.

Lane: Do you remember saying "goodbye" to your section? I guess that you had been with them for over a year by now.

Gantt: I was with them for over two years.

Lane: Was that an emotional time for you?

Gantt: It was a little bit emotional, but I've got another story to tell you. I got back there one time after I was commissioned.

Lane: Your farewell to them was in April, 1945?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: Tell us about the training back in France. Was it rigorous, or compared to combat, was it very easy?

Gantt: They had men back there from all branches of the service trying to be infantry officers. Before graduation day there was some fellow who came around saying: "Hey, Gantt! Do you think that I'm going to make it?" I said, "I don't know. I don't know if I'm going to make it or

not." They had all branches of the service there. I assumed that they would pass me because of my experience. I was in Class 21. They had twenty-three classes altogether. It was about 200 men, and they were in platoons organized alphabetically. There were some mighty fine soldiers with lots of combat, but most of them hadn't had any. Experience doesn't make you or break you. We had lots of good men. I was in a little, small room with Fuller, Gillespie, Galassi, and Gantt. I remember that.

Lane: What did the training consist of in taking an NCO and making him an officer?

Gantt: Well, it was the same old thing. I hate to say this, but the only thing I learned was some advanced map reading and how to plot artillery fire on a map. I learned a little bit about a new system that I hadn't heard too much about: fire and advance. In other words, if you have ten men who were abreast of one another, you would have one of them firing all of the time to keep the enemy pinned down. I'd never been subjected to that before. It wasn't new

training, but it was new to me. I can quite honestly tell you that I didn't learn anything else.

They made me get on that infiltration course again. They had an old lieutenant colonel who had been in Japan, so they said. Those guns fire pretty high. We had to crawl on our hands and knees, and he said, "Get down! You are going to die! And forty men are going to die with you!" We just thought that was hilarious. He wanted us to come through on our stomachs.

Lane: Do you remember when you finished the course?

Gantt: It was June 18, 1945.

Lane: Were you commissioned that day?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: What was the ceremony like for graduation?

Gantt: Well, it was a speech by somebody, but I can't recall what he said. I've got a picture of my graduation classes. There were five platoons.

Lane: Were you assigned back to the 84th Division?

Gantt: They told me that I would be, but I wasn't.

Lane: You were a second lieutenant now?

Gantt: Yes. They put us on a train and sent us down

through Rouen, France, and we stopped at Worms, Germany, at the 2nd Replacement Depot. They told us: "If you've got a staff officer request, we will grant it." So, I said, "Well, the 84th Division is over that way." They told me to go see Captain Price. I knew Captain Price when he was a regimental S-3. I said, "I'll go ask Captain Price to ask Colonel Parker for me." He said that he'd do it.

But they shipped me out the next day before he had time to do the paperwork. So, I wound up in the 83rd Division, and we went down to that camp where Hitler had planned his breakthrough in the [Ardennes] forest.

Lane: Are you talking about Berchtesgaden?

Gantt: No. He had a regular army camp down there in the forest that he used to conceal all of his stuff for that Belgium breakthrough. They had turned it into a replacement depot and a PX [post exchange] when I got there.

So, one night they put us on trucks and took us out there somewhere to meet somebody, and the officer who was doing the talking needed [so many] riflemen, and he needed a

mortar section leader. Somebody said, "Gantt's a mortar section leader." So, they sent me to the 81-millimeter mortars. I was sent to H Company in the 330th Infantry. I was the junior officer. There were two first lieutenants and a captain, and the rest of us were second lieutenants. Some of them had been to OCS back at Fontainbleau.

Lane: The war was over at this point?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: Do you remember the reaction in Fontainebleau when the war ended? Do you remember the reaction of folks? Was it a great relief to be alive at the end? What was your personal reaction at the time?

Gantt: There really wasn't too much at Fontainebleau, but I remember what it was on V-J [Victory over Japan] Day.

Lane: Not much on V-E [Victory in Europe] Day?

Gantt: Not where I was. I'm sure that there was a lot going on, but I was just out with all of those soldiers. We just took it as it came.

Lane: Let's go back now to your 83rd Division unit. Approximately where were you assigned? You

didn't move from the forest area where you were?

Gantt: Yes. We moved down toward Pasau, on the Danube River. It's the biggest town in that area, that I know of.

Lane: Was this in Czechoslovakia, or was it in Germany?

Gantt: It's in Germany. They sent me to Waldkirch, which was the battalion headquarters. The next town was Freyung, and that's where regimental command was. They had a prisoner of war camp at Freyung. They sent me out there as a provost marshal. They had thirty enlisted men to man the machine-gun tower, and they had a staff sergeant and interpreter.

Lane: Who were the prisoners?

Gantt: They were Germans.

Lane: Were they SS [*Schutzstaffel*] battalions?

Gantt: They were just plain German soldiers, German women, and Russians.

Lane: There were some Russians who were prisoner there?

Gantt: Yes, they were deserters from the Russian army from about the time of the Battle of

Stalingrad.

Lane: Why were there Russian prisoners if they were allies of the United States?

Gantt: They thought that the Germans weren't as bad as the Russians, so they deserted the Russian army and joined the German army. The camp commander said, "We want to be on special alert because the Russians are coming to get their men." I saw them drive off with them.

Lane: We turned those prisoners over to the Russians?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: Did you ever hear what happened to them? You probably know what happened to them.

Gantt: Yes, I know what happened. While I was there, they sent me back to a school close to Frankfurt for a few days. I had my own Jeep and driver. They didn't give us any rations until we got to Frankfurt, and we stopped at a place where a company of American soldiers was having its evening meal. I introduced us to the mess sergeant and asked if he would feed us. He said, "Sure." So, he gave us a good meal, and he wanted me to sign a ticket to show that we'd gotten two meals from him. That's how good the

relationship was. There was a big sign that said: "Hurry to Hell! Hurry to Hell! Drive slowly and spend eternity with the world's best general!"

I went back to that school and got it over with, and I found that lieutenant from the 84th, who was back there. So, I spent the night with my old company, and they "rolled out the red carpet" for me [treated him well].

We went down to company headquarters, and there was a captain that I had known. He had come back and had taken over after the war was over. The men resented him greatly because he bumped my friend for his job. He humiliated Jim Hodges because Jim couldn't do close-order drill. He didn't have the voice for it. He sent Jim out to drill troops, knowing that he was going to make a monkey out of himself. So, he humiliated Jim in front of the troops. He said, "You are welcome to come down and spend the night in the officers' quarters." I couldn't do that. I stayed with my men.

Lane: You stayed with the men, even though you were wearing gold bars then.

Gantt: Yes. I went back to my company. Always before, I had checked the guard before or after midnight. G company had the gate guard and walking guard. I had machine-gun towers manned with my own men. There was an excellent staff sergeant. Something told me that night when I came back to check that guard. The relief had already gone. So, I went over there, and there wasn't anybody in the guardhouse, and there wasn't anybody manning the gate. The only guards we had were those in the machine-gun towers.

I don't know what happened between then and daylight, but when daylight came I told Captain Allen--he was the camp commander--and he called regimental headquarters. Here came Colonel Montague, who was the regimental commander's assistant. They court-martialed those men. They said that if I'd checked the guard before midnight...they didn't pull the last guard. If I didn't check it the first time, they thought I'd never check it. They knew I wasn't going to be there. Lieutenant Peterson was the company commander. He got real mad at me

because I didn't notify him. I said, "Well, I'm sorry, but Captain Allen is my superior officer. He's the man whom I'm responsible to." He was a Boston lawyer.

He was the greatest motivator I ever served under. One day he told me: "There's an opening over in regimental headquarters for a company's executive officer. I'm going to send you over there. It will be a promotion for you." I said, "Sir, I don't feel too good about this. I don't know anything about this." He said, "You can learn." I got over there, and they had two first lieutenants in the company. One of them was fixin' to come home. He came in, and I served with him for a long time in Germany, and in Linz and in Vienna.

We had lost our first sergeant or supply sergeant, and we started hunting around for somebody. Our lieutenant came out of the 89th Division. I asked that lieutenant: "Do you know anybody who would make a good first sergeant?" He said, "Yes, I know a man. He is a buck sergeant." The company commander and I interviewed him and gave him the job. We picked

out a supply sergeant. So, I kept hearing the company commander saying, "That's promoting your men!" He had never been an enlisted man.

So, he went to Switzerland, and I took over the company while he was gone. I called the adjutant and said, "Will the colonel promote a man more than one grade at a time?" He said, "I don't know, but you can try." So, when Fred came back, I had a new first sergeant and a new supply sergeant. They got promoted. I kept telling him: "If they are going to do the work, they deserve the rank." They did a good job. Soon after that, I got sent to Vienna.

Lane: Was this Vienna, Austria?

Gantt: Yes. I stayed there for three months. I was with the 42nd Division at first. The 42nd broke up, and I went to the 5th Infantry Regiment, which was Regular Army. They sent me to battalion headquarters and made me a communications officer. I tried to tell the company commander that I didn't have any ability in communications. I could serve in any other capacity, but that's where he sent me, anyhow. They told me that his daddy was a

general. Over in the headquarters company was Captain John Eisenhower [the son of General Dwight D. Eisenhower], and they were big friends. I talked to John Eisenhower on numerous occasions. I was just over there on temporary duty until I could leave. I said to the company commander: "Sir, I know that you want to have a good, snappy company. But I'm a draftee, and I'm fixin' to go home. I can't mold into your pattern as fast as you want me to." So, I was glad to get away from there. That's when I left.

Lane: At the end of the war, the Army came up with a point system for rotating GIs back home. Tell me about that.

Gantt: You would get one point for every month that you were in the service. If you had any dependents, you got [so many] points. A Bronze Star was worth five points; a Purple Heart was worth five points. That's about it. You could get points for each decoration.

Lane: How did your points come out, then?

Gantt: I had three battle stars and a Bronze Star. All I had was my months in the service and my

Bronze Star; it was worth five points.

Lane: How did you receive the Bronze Star? For what particular feat?

Gantt: I didn't recognize it by the time that they got through writing it up. I'm always leery of write-ups. If I wasn't due for it just like it was, it was a farce. Because of the way it was written up, I was made out to be much greater than I was. It wasn't like that. I was proud of the five points that it gave me, but that's about all that I was proud of. I never did wear it with pride.

Lane: What was it awarded for? Do you remember?

Gantt: It had something to do with one of the battles we were in. They gave the Bronze Star to just about everybody who needed one, just about.

Lane: Did your points come out in the middle? You got points for months spent in combat, too, correct?

Gantt: No, I don't recall any. You got time-and-a-half for duty overseas. I hadn't been in the Army long enough...after the war was over with, they froze promotions. You had to be eighteen months in grade. I got back to Fort Sam Houston

[in San Antonio, Texas].

Lane: Let me get you home. You were anxious, like everyone else, to get home. Everyone thought that as soon as the war was over, especially after V-J Day...where were you on V-J Day?

Gantt: I was in Paris. I was in a building that overlooked one of those thoroughfares, and they were marching at midnight, and they were still marching at daylight.

Lane: It was just a parade of celebration.

Gantt: Yes. The French were the happiest people you ever saw in your life.

Lane: Did you enjoy your relationship with the French people?

Gantt: I didn't have any relations with them.

Lane: Not much? How about the Germans?

Gantt: I didn't have relations with them.

Gantt: I went to Rome, too.

Lane: And Vienna.

Gantt: I stayed in Vienna for three months. I had nothing to do with the civilians there, either.

Lane: You had very little to do with them.

Gantt: I didn't have anything to do with them.

Lane: Did you expect to possibly be shipped to the

Pacific Theater to help defeat the Japanese, or were you going to muster out beforehand?

Gantt: We began to train for it before V-J Day. We had already begun to train for guerrilla warfare.

Lane: Do you remember your reaction when you heard about the atomic bomb? Were you for the dropping of the bomb, or did you oppose it?

Gantt: I thought that God was going to use it to destroy the world. I decided that the bomb was man-made and that God was going to use spiritual means. So, I was glad they dropped it. I said, "Why not drop it and get it over with?" How many hundreds of thousands of men would it have taken to conquer Japan?

Lane: Did you consider the possibility of making the Army your career?

Gantt: Never.

Lane: You were ready to get out of the Army as soon as you could, whether you were an officer or an enlisted man. How did you get from Vienna back to the United States?

Gantt: They formed a packet of men in Munich.

Lane: You were in Munich at the time?

Gantt: They sent us from Vienna to up close to Munich

to a replacement depot. They formed a packet of 200 men and five officers, and they sent us to the port of Bremen, and they shipped us out from there. We came out through the North Sea, and I was sick all of the way home.

Lane: Why were you sick?

Gantt: It was nausea from being on that Liberty ship.

Lane: Was the ship that large? Was it a very rough sea?

Gantt: Oh, it was rough through the North Sea.

Lane: What month did this take place?

Gantt: That was is May, 1946.

Lane: So, you were over there for almost a full year after the war actually ended.

Gantt: Yes, I was. We came to Camp Kilmer.

Lane: Did you receive regular mail from your loved ones and from your family when you were in Europe?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: So, they knew that you were okay.

Gantt: I used to send my brother a V-mail letter quite often. [Editor's note: V-mail, or "Victory Mail," was a means of condensing short letters to and from the front by microfilming them for

ease in shipping and posting.]

Lane: The trip back was a rough one?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: It took about two weeks?

Gantt: Yes, or less. As soon as we got to Camp Kilmer, they said that we could have anything that we wanted to eat. That was the biggest kitchen that I have ever seen in my life.

They put us onto trains that night, and we started down through mid-America. We went through Indianapolis [Indiana] and down through that way. We came down through that part of the country, and we stopped in Denison, Texas. We had to layover there for so many hours. A major was the company commander, and he was going to make us sit on that train for four hours, and we told him, "Sir, they won't stay on here."

Lane: It was a troop train, and there were no civilians on it.

Gantt: Yes. This guy had to take the officers off to the side for a while, and we said, "They won't stay on here. If you will give us permission [to let them off of the train], we will have them all back here [on time]." So we told the

men that they were on their own honor and that they had to be back here. Every man came back after the four hours were over with.

We were supposed to have been going to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, but it was closed. So, we went to Fort Sam Houston. We got down there, and I called my people and told them when I was going to be able to come home. Back then it was hard to get a telephone, and transportation was pretty scarce. So, the day before I was supposed to leave, one of clerks told me: "Lieutenant, if you want to goof off for a day, you will be eligible for a promotion, and you would get a term of leave." I said, "I believe that I will go on home." Actually, I wished that I had stayed for one more day. I would have automatically become a first lieutenant.

Lane: So, you mustered out at Fort Sam Houston?

Gantt: Yes. I mustered out as a second lieutenant.

Lane: Then you came back home?

Gantt: Yes.

Lane: Had you thought about your future life? You knew that you were getting out of the Army.

Gantt: It is pretty frustrating to know what one might

want. I was at loose ends for months. I knew that I didn't want to work for anybody else because...I wasn't shell-shocked, but I had somewhat of a condition. My mother would come in and check in on me at night, and she would open up that door, and I was awake before she ever got the light turned on. You can't do that.

Lane: So, you had some lingering effects from the war.

Gantt: Yes, I had lots of lingering effects.

Lane: Such as? Did you sleep well?

Gantt: I had a lot of health problems. If you ever sign that dotted line [to re-enlist], you are stuck. I had a hemorrhoid operation, which was Army-related, and the Army paid for it. I got pretty sick in 1963, and they never did find my problem. They weren't looking for it much, so I dismissed myself and went to a private hospital and got some help. I've had lots of things. A trigger mortar got me on this leg right here [gesture]. It was a new, experimental mortar. I told my friend: "Don't let it kick you, now," and it kicked me. When I went to OCS, that leg

was a big there as it is from here to here [gesture]. I was a casualty in the company, and it never was put in my records. So, I never did get a cent. I needed some money a time or two, but they turned me down. So, I didn't hassle with them. I don't have to have their money.

Lane: So, you came back to Jewett and back to your family.

Gantt: I lived in Groesbeck with my daddy for a year-and-a-half. My future wife moved across the street from me, and I got interested in her on the first day I saw her (chuckle).

Lane: You met her in 1946?

Gantt: Yes, it was in about August. So, I courted her for the rest of that year and for the next year, and then we got married. My daddy had quite a bit of land, and he fixed up a little house for us. We lived there for five years. He bought this place over here [gesture] and built a little shell of a house, and I bought it from him. I bought that house and eighty acres of land from my daddy through the Farm Home Administration.

Lane: Did you use the GI Bill at all to get started in your life?

Gantt: I went to agricultural school, and I learned a little bit, but not a whole lot. I used to say that I'd never be a farmer, but I've been everything since then. I've been an oilfield and gasfield worker, pipeline worker, a cotton gin worker.

Lane: What year did you have your stroke?

Gantt: It was twenty years ago this November.

Lane: You have done a miraculous job of rehabilitating yourself.

Gantt: Well, let's put it this way. I thought I had a lot of faith and a lot of grit. I determined that I didn't have much of either one. It is the hardest thing that I have ever gone through.

Lane: It was harder than the Battle of the Bulge?

Gantt: Yes. The day that my wife took me back to the doctor to have a checkup, I asked the doctor: "How long will it be before I'm able to go to work again?" He said, "Let's face it. You will never be able to work again." So, when I got back out to the car, my wife said, "What's the

matter with you?" I told her what he said. She said, "He shouldn't have told you that yet. You are not ready for that yet."

Lane: How many children did you have?

Gantt: We had two children.

Lane: They are both grown now.

Gantt: Yes. I've got four granddaughters and one grandson and one great-grandson.

Lane: That's wonderful. Archie, as we conclude our interview, you really spanned so much of World War II in your experiences. Do you have any final reflections as you look back that long ago about the war and the men who fought with you?

Gantt: I believe that I was in a position that I saw the beginning of the downfall of the American nation, morally and spiritually. The Germans had been taught that free love was just fine. When I was together with three lieutenants, I told you about those German girls. I want to say something off of the record in a minute. I don't want it on this tape. The American soldiers "let it all hang out" [let loose their inhibitions]. I was in the middle of Rome, and

a friend and I were by a restaurant; and you could take a guest to supper, if you would pay for it, once a day. These two Italian girls joined us, and we talked to them a while, and we invited them for supper. They were ready to eat. We got through with the girls, and they said, "You can spend the night with us for ten dollars. I'm trying to get enough money to come see my boyfriend who is in the States." So, I told her that I would have to pass. My friend went, and we were stationed at a building with a Catholic chaplain. The next morning that Catholic chaplain "raked him across the coals" [berated him]. He really had him going.

Lane: Have you read the book *Citizen Soldiers* by Stephen Ambrose?

Gantt: No.

Lane: You would enjoy reading it. One of the points he makes is that the American soldier acquitted himself very well in World War II, compared to the professional German soldier. The citizen soldier--a person like yourself and others like you--ultimately never loved the military. They accepted it and tolerated it, but they had the

ability to make independent decisions; and you had a sense of purpose, and you fought very well.

Gantt: I was proud of our Army's stance on treatment of prisoners-of-war. The worst punishment that you could give a prisoner was solitary confinement for two days with bread and water. We could never touch a prisoner-of-war. I wouldn't have wanted to. That was humane treatment.

Lane: Yes, it was humane overall. I'm sure we weren't perfect, but I think that overall our treatment of the Germans...

Gantt: On the front lines and during the heat of the battle, there were probably a lot of people who shouldn't have been killed, but I never witnessed it.

Lane: I think it was much different in the islands of the Pacific, with the Marines and the Japanese. There was a much greater emotional hatred, I think, than there was in Europe.

Gantt: I only missed going to Korea by the "skin of my teeth" [barely].

Lane: I know that you went on to a distinguished

life. We will close the interview at this point, and I want to thank you for your service in the years that you gave to the United States. I'm glad to see you so healthy, and I've enjoyed getting to know you a little bit better.

[End of Interview]