

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Veteran's Name: Willis Young

Meyer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

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Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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David Meyer: This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379th, 95th Infantry. Today is July 30, 2009. It's 7:05 pm. We're in Oklahoma City, in the Oklahoma Biltmore, room 320. And today I have the great privilege of talking to – sir, could you say your name and spell it?

Willis Young: Willis Young. Real simple: W-i-l-l-i-s Y-o-u-n-g.

Meyer: Okay, and sir, just some questions at the beginning ... autobiographical questions. When did you join?

Young: I joined the 95th Division at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. In fact, they gave me my basic training.

Meyer: When did your service begin? When did you join the service?

Young: About two weeks ahead of that.

Meyer: About two weeks ahead of that? Okay.

Willis: I joined the service about the first of January of 1944. And they sent me home, all of them that was going in the army, they sent home, because they had to wait until there was a slot for them. Because it was going to be about three weeks before some places opened up. But the guys going in the navy and the marines, they took them right straight in.

Meyer: And when did you get out?

Young: I was discharged the twenty-ninth of November, '45. At Camp Plauche, Louisiana.

Meyer: Okay. These are just the preliminary things that I always forget till I get to the end. Let's see. Where was your place of birth?

Young: I was born in Knox County, Illinois.

Meyer: And what's your birth date?

Young: March 8, 1925.

Meyer: And what's your branch of service?

Young, Willis; Corporal, Co. B/ 377th Inf./95th Div. WWII Interview date 07/30/2009

Young: I was in the infantry.

Meyer: Then infantry. And your highest rank?

Young: Corporal.

Meyer: And your unit? Your division?

Young: I was Company B, 377th Infantry; 95th Division.

Meyer: Okay. And I know the answer to some of these questions, but I've got them at the top. Were you ever a prisoner of war?

Young: Yes.

Meyer: Did you sustain any service-related injuries?

Young: Yes.

Meyer: Okay. And then right now, what's your current address?

Young: I live at 128 East Placedo Del Pova (PH), Green Valley, Arizona.

Meyer: Green Valley, Arizona. What's the zip there?

Young: 615 ... 815...614 – or something.

Meyer: I can always look that up. What's your phone number?

Young: 520 625 1421.

Meyer: Okay, they just like to get that information off at the top. Now just some early questions, what were your parents' names?

Young: My dad was George Edward Young, and my mother was Inez Taylor Young.

Meyer: And what did they do for a living?

Young: Farmed.

Meyer: They farmed. And that was in what state?

Young: Illinois.

Meyer: In Illinois. Is that central Illinois?

Young: Central Illinois.

Meyer: What sort of farming did they do?

Young: Well, just general farming. It was corn, and pigs, and cattle, and like that.

Meyer: So you grew up on the farm?

Young: Oh, yes.

Meyer: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Young: I had one older and one younger brother.

Meyer: What were their names?

Young: Ralph and Keith.

Meyer: When you were growing up, what was growing up like?

Young: That was the height of the Depression. Things was real tough. It wasn't so tough for us kids, but I think it was real tough for the folks. Because they had to worry about putting groceries on the table and three boys eat a lot of groceries [laughs].

Meyer: That's right. They eat a lot.

Young: But we raised a big garden, we had a big orchard, made our own cider and stuff like that.

[TIME 5:10]

Meyer: How did you look like when you grew up? What did you look as a kid?

Young: Well I looked like I was about fourteen when I went to the service [laughs].

Meyer: Where did you join up?

Young: At Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

Meyer: Is that close by?

Young: That was north of Chicago, right on the lake.

Meyer: And why did you decide to serve?

Young: Well, I had a brother in Europe. He was flying on bombers. And I didn't intend to try and stay home or anything else. I went up to the draft board to see why I hadn't been drafted yet. And they said, "Well you got a deferment."

I said, "No, I haven't."

"Yes, you have." They said, "Your uncle got you one."

I said, "You send that back to the uncle and tell him I don't work for him anymore. [laughs]. I just quit."

Meyer: What were you doing at that time, working for your uncle?

Young: Well, everything that ...

Meyer: Were you working on the farm?

Young: Oh yes, yeah.

Meyer: So your uncle behind your back got you a deferment because he wanted to keep you as a worker.

Young: But the bad thing was he was an alcoholic. He needed to do his work himself. That's what I figured.

Meyer: So you're born in 1925 and this is 1944?

Meyer: That's '44.

Young: So you're just eighteen?

Young: Eighteen.

Meyer: Before I forget, do you remember hearing about, do you remember what you were doing when you heard about the Pearl Harbor attack?

Young: Yes.

Meyer: What was going on?

Young: Standing in the kitchen with my mother. She was getting Sunday dinner. And we had a little plastic radio, you know, like most of them had in that time. And that come on and I mean everybody was just simply floored. They couldn't believe such a thing. In fact, one of the boys – I went to school at Yates City. we lived on the [unintelligible] mail route, but I went to school in Yates City. And one of the boys from Yates City went down on the Arizona. And he's still there. So... [momentary break as another chair is brought in.]

Meyer: Okay, so you were just saying when you heard about Pearl Harbor, heard about over the radio it just floored all of you.

Young: Yes. You just couldn't imagine such a thing happening.

Meyer: No. No. When you joined up, why did you pick the army?

Young: I was supposed to go in as ASTP, Army Specialized Training [Program]. So as soon as the word got out, it's what I said, as soon as the word got out to the right people, they just folded it up [laughs]. But that's what some of the guys in my outfit said, that they'd been in college for two years, and they folded it up and they said, "Blame Young for this, because he just got here, and they folded up [laughter]."

Meyer: So you joined ASTP. And they send you, where do you do basic training?

Young: Well I'd done basic training, but I had been assigned a job at Fort Sheridan. Yes, about the second day up there, or third, they called. We had to fall out for roll call, you know. And they started down the line and I'm the first guy they started with. And I thought, well he's got his paper upside down [laughs].

Meyer: That's because you're Y.

Young: And he said, "You go with Lt. Whatever-his-name-was." And then he called two more names, and he said, "You go with Young." And so as soon as they got there, the lieutenant, we went around the building. There was a big mess hall there, shaped like the letter "H." And on the back side was officers' mess. Three days in the army and I'm mess sergeant in the officers' mess [laughs].

Meyer: Other than being a farmer, you –

Young: I knew absolutely nothing. But I could polish the fire extinguisher. And scrub the floors. What the job entailed, it was three days on until you got your help trained. And then it was two days on and one day off.

[TIME 10:15]

Meyer: So a good job. A Great job.

Young: Yeah. And the guys, they put new sergeants in each one of the other cafeterias. It was like a cafeteria, you know. You come up, and filled your tray and kept on walking right on through until some officer jumped ahead of you. I mean, the officers, they'd jump anyplace they wanted to.

But the reason this came open, one of the sergeants came down with TB. And they loaded him on a train and sent him to Arizona. I don't know whereabouts, they probably went to a hospital there. And they were going to try to, one of them had TB and they all slept in the same room. So they just cleaned house.

So they brought me a set of papers two or three days later, and fill out that I was staying there. As officer staff sergeant. Go from private to staff sergeant in one jump. And so I signed

the papers, and they took them and I figured that's all there was going to be to it. And the next thing I knew, about three days later, this lieutenant comes running in there and he says, "Young, what the hell you doing in here?"

Well I said, "You gave me my papers, said I was staying here."

"Have you seen the shipping list today?"

I'm number one on the list, and these other two guys is two and three. And then they're all alphabetical from there [laughs]. And that's 9:30. And by 11:30 we're on the train going east [laughs].

Meyer: And you're on the train, and where did they take you to?

Young: Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania.

Meyer: So now you're nineteen, you're getting off in--

Young: Well, I was still eighteen.

Meyer: Eighteen. You're getting off at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, and I know you're with a group of soldiers who have been there for a while.

Young: Yeah, but this is the outfit that gave me my basic training even.

Meyer: So you got your basic training once you got there?

Young: Yeah.

Meyer: B377

Young: And it so happened that my platoon trained, I don't know, we had in excess of a hundred boys, I suppose. And I think they broke down into two or three platoons. And so my platoon sergeant, he picked I think three of us, and the rest of them were scattered out through the battalions, through the regiment.

Meyer: So your platoon sergeant picked three of you for what?

Young: To stay as, that's how I ended up in Company B.

Meyer: Oh, so they gave you basic, and then had the choice to keep a few of you for their company.

Young: Well, yeah. They kept some of them that graduated first. They graduated, it took about five weeks for some of them to get out of basic after we got out. And so the next thing after basic training they sent me out on camouflage school. And we was there for a week up on a mountaintop there. Those mountains, the long, flat, mountains in Pennsylvania.

And we're up on top of one to the west of Indiantown Gap. And they taught us different things about how to make camouflage nets and all kinds of things like that. Not that we ever had to do

it, because we didn't have anything to work with [laughs]. But anyway, then when it come to the end the old general called us up there and he made it very plain: "I want you to dig a foxhole and I want you to camouflage it."

And they counted them off alphabetical, in ones and twos, and here Young is by himself down on the end [laughs].

[TIME 15:04]

So I dug me a hole about knee deep, and I put a bunch of little sticks and stuff. There was all kinds of leaves and stuff up there – and I covered it up. Then they come around. Everybody else just dug a foxhole, you know, with a dirt around it, and sprinkled it with leaves. So the general, he's inspecting, and he's down here about two people away from me.

And here's some major, he come a running up there he starts chewing my butt out real good. "What the hell's the matter with you? Why didn't you dig a hole?" He's standing right beside it.

So the old general walks up beside him and falls in it [laughs]. And there was a full colonel with him. And he just rode this major like he was a donkey. I mean, he really gave him a bad time. He said, "Apologize to him, dammit [laughs]!"

So, boy I mean – name, rank, and serial number, and all of that. "Well who's your company commander?" So I told him the name.

And, so okay, we had to fill up the holes. And trucks came to pick us up, and we went back to camp. And they come along the company front. The mess hall would be on one side of your area, and the orderly room on the other. Like A, B, C, and D all in a row. And they pull up about B, and let A, B, and C off, so they didn't have to stop at every place. And I'm going to the barracks with my duffel bag on my shoulder, and somebody sticks their head out of the room and said, "Young, the company commander wants to see you immediately." And I said, Oh my God, I'm probably going to have to buy that poor old general a pair of pants.

So I hurry up putting my bag in the barracks, and I head back to see what's bothering the company commander [laughs]. And he says, "What went on up there on that hill?" He just looked real sober, you know.

I said, "I don't know."

"The hell you don't," he said. "What went on up there?" He said, "I got a call from a brigadier general." And he says, "When a captain gets a call from a brigadier general, all he says is 'Yes sir, yes, sir.'" [laughter] So he says, "Is he [the brigadier general] your relation?"

I said, "No. Why?"

"Well," he said, "He told me, you said, 'You be damn sure you get Young a furlough home tonight.'" So he said, "Do you have money enough to go?" And I said yes. "Alright," he said, "you've got twenty minutes to get in there and clean up, and get over to the bus stop." And I made it with time to spare [laughs]. But I thought sure when he wanted to know about the money, that I was going to have to buy him some new clothes [laughs].

So anyway, that pretty well ended things until we went down to West Virginia mountain maneuvers. And that was a little hairy business stepping off that cliff the first time, backwards.

Meyer: I've heard that that was hairy. Now you were attached with ropes, or how did that work?

Young: Well, let's see. The rope runs between your legs and up around and you controlled it this way.

Meyer: Ah, you controlled it with your hand.

Young: Pulling it across the chest for leverage. Of course, the guys that trained us, they had nice leather gloves. We had bare fingers [laughs].

Meyer: Oh, no! So that rope's burning your hand.

Young: Sergeant Spenceton got upside down on the rope about two-thirds of the way down. And one of those mountain boys out of Colorado, some school out there was what it was, and he went down that rope like a squirrel. And he wrapped his legs around the sergeant and took him the rest of the way that way. Headfirst [laughs].

Meyer: When you're at Indiantown Gap, do you keep the rank of sergeant or do they drop you?

[Time 20:02]

Young: Oh, I never got my stripes [laughs].

Meyer: You never got your stripes. So you're just a buck private.

Young: I was a buck private.

Meyer: Before I forget, how did the old-timers who'd been at Indiantown Gap for a long time, some of them said they treated you ASTPers as wiz-kids. Did you feel like you blended in?

Young: No. I really wasn't an ASTPer by the time I got there, you see. These boys had had maybe a year-and-a-half, two years of college, some of them was going to Penn State – I mean, they was going to good colleges, it wasn't any junior college or anything.

Meyer: How were you treated once you came in as a sort of replacement?

Young: Fine.

Meyer: Because they gave you basic training there. Okay. After Indiantown Gap, do you go to Camp Myles Standish?

Young: Yes. Well, we was up on Indiantown Gap D-Day, the sixth of June. Before the sun went down we had orders to get back to camp. Because you're on your way over here now. [laughs]
We got empty barracks for you

So when we went acrost [on] the USS America, it's known as West Point during the war. Now we had all rifle outfits on it. And we took off of Boston Harbor unescorted, and we're going southeast. And I kept wondering why are we going southeast? So we got almost to Gibraltar and somebody said, "Well, we got to go to England now." We was backup troops for the invasion of Southern France and we didn't know it. Because if they got their bottom kicked off we was going to be the next ones in [laughs].

Meyer: That's interesting. Okay.

Young: But we didn't have the artillery or anything like that with us. We had almost 9,000 infantrymen.

Meyer: And how was the trip across?

Young: Oh, it was a beautiful ride.

Meyer: I know some of the men had trouble with getting seasick. Did you have any problems, since you're a farmer and you're used to the land?

Young: No. The thing was, we was unescorted. We didn't have any other ships in sight. We had whales that followed us for a day or two and like that. Spouting water and they was putting on a regular show. And they was big rascals. They are.

Meyer: [laughs] Yeah, they are. They are. Did you sleep in bunks?

Young: They had a bunk for everybody. I never slept in mine but at night we went around Northern Ireland. Hey, that old green water is cold.

Meyer: Because you usually slept on deck?

Young: Yeah. Hey, it's a lot better to be on deck in case you took a torpedo than down there where it exploded.

Meyer: Someone just told me today that he was on the America and he was on the fourth down. And they told him, "Well, if we take a torpedo, we're going to close your deck, so you're going down with the ship." So you landed in Liverpool?

Young: Yes. We went around Northern Ireland, and came into Liverpool, and they was waiting for us. We pulled right into the dock. We didn't wait five minutes [laughs], I mean. And there's trains backed up there, waiting for us.

Meyer: And then from Liverpool, where did you go?

Young: Well we went through London and then we went down to Barton Stacey, which is north of Winchester. And oh, it was interesting there. Those buzz bombs came over, sounded like a Briggs & Stratton engine running. And when that thing quit, it came down pretty shortly.

Meyer: Can you make the sound that a buzz bomb sounds like?

Young: It makes one helluva big bang when it hits the ground.

Meyer: No, I meant when you hear it in the air.

Young: It just sounds like a Briggs & Stratton engine running.

Meyer: What's that sound like?

Young: One cylinder engine running, like a lawn mower.

[TIME 25:03]

Meyer: Like a lawnmower.

Young: Yeah.

Meyer: And you'd just hear that, and when it stopped you thought, I hope it –

Young: Well, in fact one quit just about over us, and it just went outside the camp a little bit and killed some poor farmer's cow [laughs].

Meyer: And Barton Stacey, what sort of things were you doing?

Young: Well we was just waiting boats to take us across is what it amounted to. We was only there three weeks or less.

Meyer: And then you get on the boats to –

Young: We took the Llangibby Castle. And it was anything but a castle. It had never been in for any repairs or anything, to drydock, since the English entered the war in '39.

Meyer: That's five years.

Young: And that's first September of '44.

Meyer: So that's a long time.

Young: Their meat is running loose on the deck. Goats and sheep.

Meyer: And where are you, below deck? Or you're on deck?

Young: Yeah, we was below deck.

Meyer: So there's goats, and sheep, and you.

Young: Yeah, that's what it amounted to. So we pulled up – there wasn't any dock built at that time. Well, they had built some temporary docks, and those ships that they, some of them was concrete, and some of them was old ships that wasn't worth anything, and made water breaks out of them. And they had an awful storm in June, and it tore those all up, and it set the Americans back quite a little bit.

Meyer: Are you talking about hitting Normandy?

Young: Yes, Normandy Beach. I went in Omaha Beach.

Meyer: Omaha Beach. And so out in the water are these ships that have been torn up.

Young: So we got out there, there's landing craft come out to get us.

Meyer: The LSTs [Landing Ship, Tank].

Young: And –

Meyer: Was it easy to get on an LST?

Young: Well they had a great big canvas chute. I don't know, it was three or four feet across, maybe three and a half feet. And the guy ahead of you, they're down here pulling on the thing. And you hand your rifle to the guy behind you. And you go down that thing, and then he lets your rifle come. And it's up to you to save your own gun [laughs] instead of having one with a bent barrel [laughs].

Meyer: Oh, that's interesting.

Young: So they only got thirty-nine guys loaded on that day. And we went up by the ship and it hit the cargo door on the side, and that son of a gun shot in the air like it was jet propelled.

Meyer: The LST?

Young: The LST hit it. And oh, the old captain – nobody else got off that day – it got too rough. So thirty-nine of us got off that day out of B Company. I don't know how come B Company was always the first one to do anything, to experiment [laughs]. I guess they thought if we could do it all the rest could [laughs]. That's what it seemed like. I mean, we was the first ones into combat, we was the first ones to do everything.

Meyer: Okay. Yeah, I heard that. So you're on the beach –

Young: And here's that great big long hill. And we got our duffel bag on our shoulder, and you had to climb that dang sand hill with that duffel bag on your shoulder. You didn't need anybody shooting at you – it was hard enough as it was [laughs]. So we got on up top the hill and a couple of trucks picked us up and took us down to the apple orchard area, and that's where we was for two or three weeks.

Meyer: Did you drive on the Red Ball [Red Ball Express] at all?

Young: No, you had to have a government driver's license. They had guys driving on there. One of these guys that was on the trip here this morning, he said that they wanted to make him a driver. He said, "I don't know how to drive a truck." He said, "I don't even drive a car. I ain't got

a driver's license." At least I had a driver's license. I could drive a car or truck, either one. But you had to have a government driver's license.

Meyer: What's your job now, at this point? You're there, you're in the apple orchards.

Young: I'm first scout. That means you're indispensable [laughs]. You can go any time.

[TIME 30:00]

It means you're dispensable. I guess that's the way I'd better put it [laughs].

Meyer: Sure. Indispensable and dispensable. They need you, but you can be replaced. So then, do you get on the Forty-and-eights [box cars]? What's next?

Young: No. Well, these other guys that I was with, see, they're on this ship eating goat meat and hard biscuits. And those English said, "Of course, you Yanks knew those are left over from World War I." [laughter] And I wouldn't argue with him. I tell you, they was the hardest things you've ever seen. They was biscuits, alright.

Meyer: When you eat a biscuit that's that hard, do you just let it soak in your mouth? How do you eat it? Or do you break it with a hammer? What do you do?

Young: We didn't have any hammers. [laughs]

Meyer: How do you eat something that hard?

Young: I don't know. I wouldn't put it down on the deck floor and pound it with a rifle butt because those damn sheep would get it [laughs].

Meyer: That's interesting. Because I heard about the hard—

Young: We soaked it in coffee, and like that. But they soaked real slow. They soaked real slow.

Meyer: Speaking of food right now, just to digress, was there any food after you were done that you hated, or you could never eat again?

Young: Well yeah, some of that stuff I got in German prison camp, like rutabaga soup, blue grass soup, I haven't had a craving for either one of them [laughs].

Meyer: No. No. So back to the apple orchard. You're in the apple orchard. Did they load you up? What happens?

Young: Well, no. They finally got the rest of the guys in. This is just part of the 1st Battalion. This wasn't too big of a ship. Some of them came over the next day in more ships and like that. And then we had to wait until the rest of the division got over. And then they started, I was in the 1st Battalion of the outfit. So, they loaded us on a train, and next thing we knew, we was in Belgium.

And when we stopped we was supposed to be in the 9th Army. Well here comes some officer hollering and screaming, “Get the hell back on that train! General Patton just raising the devil down there. His 5th Division got heck kicked out of them yesterday, and he needs troops.”

So we went down. They put us back on the train, and it went like the dickens, and we ended up over near Nancy, which was south of Metz. And we went up and bivouacked one night; the next afternoon we headed for the front lines. About, close to dusk. And as far as, I never saw anybody else but Company B. And the next morning, my platoon sergeant came to me and said, here I’m clear on the north end, and he started down on the other end, and he needed somebody to take a man to the first aid station. And he said, “Would you take him to first aid station?”

Well that means get your butt out of the foxhole, because you’re going. He’s got five stripes and I got one. So who do you think outranks who? [laughs]

So I asked him about that after the war, when I seen him down at one of our conventions in Lexington, Kentucky. And he said, “Just think about it for a little bit.” He said, “I was looking for a farm boy.” He said, “Do you want one of them guys from Brooklyn or Chicago trying to figure out where the first aid station is out here?” He said, “There’s no street signs.” [laughs]

Meyer: You’re right. Now was being around Nancy, was that the first time you saw combat? You saw some signs of it?

Young: Yeah. Yeah.

Meyer: Were you hearing artillery all this time?

[TIME 34:58]

Young: Well, off and on. Anytime you get, oh twenty miles of the front or so, you could hear outgoing artillery, and there would be some answering shells come back.

Meyer: Okay. So now you take this guy to the first aid station –

Young: So the sergeant said, “It’s a mile straight west of here.” He said, “You can’t miss it.”

I said, “You’ve got to be kidding.” [laughs]

“No,” he said, “you won’t have any trouble.” But he said, “Don’t go right over this hill. You’ve got to go around and go on that little narrow path, on the side of the Vosges Mountains here, where they haul their grapes out.” We was in the grapevines.

So everything went all good for, we got about halfway back there. And all of a sudden, all hell breaks loose, bullets just a-flying. And I said, “Hey, this is supposed to be a friendly country.” Well, it wasn’t.

So I told this guy – he couldn’t hardly walk – to keep going, I’d take care of the situation. And so he kept agoing. I finally realized, hey they’re coming from down in that valley up. And a few holes in my jacket, I realized that [laughs]. But anyway, I looked down there and here’s four guys lined up like a firing squad. So I just dropped his rifle butt-first on the ground and grabbed my bayonet and stuck on it and grabbed that and put my rifle on there, bang, bang, bang, bang.

Meyer: You held it like a stand.

Young: Yeah. And, they was tired, they all laid down. So I looked around. And Patton had left orders: You don't just put one bullet in them. Put at least two. Because if you don't, he may raise up and put one in your back as you walk away.

So, I couldn't find anybody else down there. So I gave them each one another one. And that German had been counting my rounds. And as soon as I done that, he threw a camouflaged net back and he started to crawl out of the hole. Boy, he had a big old gun of some kind. It looked like, about like one of our Browning automatic rifles, or bigger. So I waited until he turned around and I gave him one in the chest. And he went down, so I kept going.

So when I got back, I caught up with this other guy and got him on to the first aid station. And the captain, he was a doctor, said, "I'll take him in and check him over."

And so a couple of the guys there wanted to know if I'd had anything to eat yet. No, I said, I hadn't. "Well come on," they said, "we got some" – I think they had some scrambled eggs and some bacon back there in the kitchen. So I was eating some of that, and had some coffee.

And about that time the captain come back there. And he says to me, "Now I want you to promise me that you won't shoot that son of a gun until you get him back to the company area. Shoot him in the company area, but don't shoot him in my area," he says.

"Well," I said [laughing], "I try just to shoot Germans."

Meyer: Let me ask you this, just for a second. When you ran into the Germans right then, do you think it's because you're from the farm that your reflexes were, I mean, you had to--

Young: Well that and the fact that they made me mad shooting at me.

Meyer: Ah, they made you mad, sure.

Young: They had fired at least three shells apiece at me. Because see, we were on these Vosges mountains and I suspect we were 700 feet up above those guys. That's just a guess. Maybe it was eight, maybe it was six. But anyway, it was, I figured at that time, about 700 feet, something like that. And anyway, well that doctor, he said to me, "You know what was the matter with that stupid hillbilly?"

"No," I said, "I don't." If I had of, I might have shot him in the company area.

[TIME 40:00]

"Well," he said, "You probably would have." He said he had his leggings so damn tight that he had circulation shut off. [laughter]

So from then on, when something came up, the company commander, his first thought was where's Young? Where's Young? He didn't send a damn staff sergeant or tech sergeant out to do a dirty job. There's a couple times they had machine guns that was giving them a bad time. Where's Young?

And then when they pulled us back off the line, 5th Division come back and took their positions. And we was back there, and first, I guess it was the first morning back off the line, here's the company commander hollering, "Where's Young? Where's Young?"

And the first sergeant said, "You just about go now, he'll keep at it until he finds you." [laughs]

So I go see what he wants. And he says, "See that jeep over there?" He said, "You go get in it. You're going to go with that guy."

I said, "What am I going to do?"

He said, "You're going to be in charge."

I said, "In charge of what?"

"You'll find out when you get there."

So, who do I get? This idiot that –

Meyer: You get the hillbilly?

Young: I get that hillbilly [laughs].

Meyer: So now you're in the jeep with him.

Young: Going north like – I don't know, you'd have thought Adolf was right behind him, because he took us one ride in that jeep, I'm telling you.

Meyer: So he drove?

Young: No, the sergeant that was in the jeep. Sergeants belong to the jeep. Come to find out it was the 28th Division. And I don't know if the 28th Division was still in Patton's or if they was in the edge of the next army up. But anyway, it was in the Maginot Line.

So, when it got dark I had to go with these guys. They took ten guys. And went out and we made a beeline for—they had one of these French pillboxes, at the Maginot Line, the Americans had, as an observation post. The Germans had the rest of them [laughs]. So I for about, I don't know, it was a week or, I think I made nine or ten trips out there. And when this guy from the 28th Division, that captain, came back, I was down there in the – because they wouldn't let me out there on the front lines.

Meyer: So you're in this pillbox. What are you doing? What sort of work?

Young: I'd taken ten guys out there and I'm picking the ten guys up and bringing them back that's already there. Because I was the only guy who could find the place out there and they didn't want me getting shot in the daylight [laughs]. So I had to stay in the basement.

Meyer: So in the pillbox, you'd go out from the pillbox out to the front line –

Young: No, no, no, no. We had a big old castle, up on the hill here. And we went to this pillbox. And I don't know, I still say I had a couple of guiding angels, because I'd just go out and make a big old circle, and just keep walking. When I thought I was about there, I'd pull in [laughs]. And I never lost a man.

So coming back once we pretty near got in trouble. We're coming down along a little ditch. Well I stayed away from that ditch from then on. And the lieutenant was right behind me. And he reached up and grabbed my shoulder and he said, "Did you hear something?"

Well then, stopped walking. "Yeah, it sounds like they're digging over here, and they're digging over there."

“Well,” he said, “you’re in charge – what do we do?”

So I said, “Well, let’s four guys take hand grenades. Pull the pin and hold the lever down. Two of you throw right, two of us throw left.” And we done that, and they all went off at the same time.

[TIME 45:06]

The Germans [laughing] really went to work on one another, just shooting the heck out of themselves with their machine guns, and we walked right out from under them. We – I never went back near that area.

Meyer: You were smart. You’re lucky, too.

Young: So when that captain come down the stairway down in to there to take over, he got right in the doorway and he just froze. And he said, “My God, Young, you still alive?”

And I said, “Yeah. Ain’t I supposed to be?”

“Well,” he said, “How many days you went?”

I said, “Every day.” I said, “That’s what I was supposed to do, wasn’t it?”

He said, “Don’t get smart with me, I’ll take your stripe you got.”

And I said, “I don’t think you will.” I said, “My company commander’s sitting right here.” [laughs]

So he said to the company commander, “You mean to tell me he went every damn night and he never lost a man?” He said, “I never had a man make it three days.” But I think they went the same route, every day. I never went the same direction even the same day.

Meyer: Oh, so you kept swooping around different ways, so they never knew where you were coming from. What was your company commander’s name, do you remember?

Young: Kovac. Vladimir Kovac.

Meyer: And the captain who seems like a bastard, what was his name?

Young: The one from 28th Division?

Meyer: Yes.

Young: I don’t know what his name was. But he was bound he was going to transfer me into his outfit. He kept telling my captain, he said, “My outfit has turned over three times since we come in Omaha Beach.”

And I done a little quick math and I thought, well how in the hell do you still stay alive and everybody in your company has been wiped out three times? He’s down here in the hole.

Meyer: He’s there protecting himself.

Young: Two days after I was captured, General Patton put out the order of the day: All officers and noncoms will lead from the front, and not the back. I got the orders for the day at home, and that’s what they say. And he found out, I guess when he found out that his 95th Division was doing that, I guess he really rared.

Meyer: What were the circumstances around when you got captured?

Young: Well, they took nine of us. See we –

Meyer: What had you been doing before?

Young: Well, we had been, well, we done that and then we was across the Moselle River on the west side, see.

Meyer: How did you cross the river?

Young: Well, C Company went over on the eighth of October. And we went over either late – it was dark when we went over – either late in the night or early the next morning that B went over.

Meyer: What sort of boats did you go over in?

Young: It was paddle boats. The Corps of Engineers was manning them. But it was a mean place that we crossed, because the far bank was straight up and down, because the Vosges Canal and the Moselle River run together right there. So they had a straight bank up and down along that Vosges Canal.

Meyer: So how did you climb it?

Young: Well, as long as you went out the front of the boat it was alright. But somebody started spraying us with machine gun, and I swung out on the far side of the boat, but I hung on to the boat, because I had to -- I was carrying more on my back than I weighed [laughs].

So we got ashore. We didn't lose any men. But they had lost several Corps of Engineers with those boats. But the Corps of Engineers had put up cables acrost. And they was going to build a pontoon bridge. And the Germans cut those cables with 88s [German anti-aircraft, anti-tank artillery gun]. So that went by the wayside.

[TIME 50:01]

And then some time before noon, the darn river started raising. The Germans had blowed up a big reservoir down south of us. I don't know how far south it was – there was a big lake they blowed up somewhere. And that Moselle River got three-quarters of a mile wide.

And the whole battalion was supposed to come acrost, the 9th and 10th. And there was very few got acrost because it gave too much time for the Germans to shoot at them on that water, and the Corps of Engineers went to building their bridge, and they only had about half enough bridge, because they had bridge enough to go acrost the original river – well here's all this other. So they had to go back and take down some more bridges somewhere.

Meyer: To be able to –

Young: To be able to have enough supplies.

Meyer: When I was in France five years ago there was a French woman who was sixteen at the time, and she talked about being on the hills and watching them trying to cross the Moselle. And she said, “All your boys, all your boys were shot. It was all so sad, it was all so sad.” She looked at you guys like you were magic. She said, “But they kept trying.”

Young: You know the reason why? The Germans was treating them very mean. The Free French and the Germans would get into a skirmish during the night, and if they killed a German soldier, there'd be thirteen knocks on doors. Whoever opened the door, bang, you're dead. Thirteen of them. That's what one of those ladies told me.

Meyer: That's what one of the people who was with us, Mr. Swan, and his wife was Odette, who was in the south of France. She said sometimes they didn't want the Free French to – she said, They would come and they would kill a Nazi, and we'd say, “Why did you do that, because now they will kill us.” And the Germans would be rough.

So now you've crossed the Moselle and you're on the other side. And this is mid-October of '44.

Young: Yeah. The 9th, and then daylight. So Company B went ahead and took the hill. And there wasn't any Germans on the hill anyway. But our stupid company commander left orders with the artillery, if you don't hear from me by a certain time, you lay in on top of that hill. Well he didn't count on his radio man and the radio getting shot going up the hill. So here we are up on top of the hill and digging in, and all the sudden here comes our own artillery. And they had to send a guy down to C Company with a message to get a hold of that artillery and tell him to shut the damn thing down, that that's us they're shooting. We had eight guys wounded by the artillery.

Meyer: Is your whole company on top of the hill?

Young: Yeah.

Meyer: So now you're on top of the hill. Are you outside of Metz, like one of the fort hills? Or where are you?

Young: Let's see. We crossed at – I need my map.

Meyer: Oh, let's see. Keep talking. I have [Joe Janescowitz?] book.

Young: Well, there's three or four little towns right there together. The one on the west side, Uckange, Bertrange, was two of them. And Bertrange is where I was captured, the first aid station.

Meyer: And what day were you captured?

[TIME 54:27]

Young: I was captured, well, fourteenth of November. But I had been up – see, they took nine of us up behind a railroad track, so the Germans couldn't come down on the backside of that and

get behind Company B and C, because C had to come up off that river bottom because it was flooding, they couldn't stay down there. So they're up with the rest of B. And my squad leader came up long enough to position nine of us, telling us where to dig in. And he disappears, him and his buck sergeant both. And we never saw them again. Went and dug themselves a big hole and put logs over the top is what we heard.

Meyer: Geographically, where are you in relation to Metz now? Are you north or south of it, do you think?

Young: We're...north of Metz.

Meyer: You're north of Metz. There's Woippy, Maizieres-les-Metz.

Young: Well, Woippy is a little further north. You got--

Meyer: [Names other nearby towns from map.]

Young: Your map is upside I think, there on the book, the way you're looking at it. North would be to the top.

Meyer: North is at the top, where you have Maizieres-les-Metz.

Young: But we was further north than Bertrange.

Meyer: Okay. [Names more towns from map.] They call something Operation Casanova....

[TIME 56:20]

Young: Well, I think that was the guys coming in from the...

Meyer: That's November eighth through fourteenth—

Young: Well I guess that's what it was.

Meyer: First Battalion, 377th?

Young: Yep.

Meyer: They talk about something called Operation Casanova.

Young: Yeah, that was us.

Meyer: An attack by the First Battalion 377th from November 8th through November 14th [reading] was meant only to be a feint attack across the Moselle at Uckange and for a full week the division —

Young: All that's there now is B Company, C Company, and the machine guns out of D. That's all that's over there. They can say that the battalion was there, but it was a pretty short battalion. A Company and the rest of D hadn't got over.

Meyer: So you're over there and –

Young: And it's raining cats and dogs.

Meyer: Is it cold, too?

Young: Oh, yes, it's cold. All I had was a field jacket, one of those green ones with the big pockets. And so after they put us up there and we dug in behind this railroad bed. Because if the Germans come up the front side of it, these other guys could see them. So we was blocking them on the back side. Well after three nights, I'm the only guy left. None of them died, they just picked up themselves and went to safe territory [laughs]. But anyway, they brought me a fresh supply of hand grenades every night, and some K-rations [laughs].

Meyer: What were you supposed to do? I mean if you saw the Germans?

Young: You were supposed to do them in. Germans set up a machine gun. I don't know how many different times they shot at me with that machine gun, and I cleaned them out I think three times in the nine days. And then toward the end of the nine days, or six days, my platoon sergeant had brought a fellow up and put him in the foxhole with me. And he was a complete nervous wreck. He had been a sergeant in the air force ground crew. Well, they didn't need so many of them. So this is army air corps. And so army said, "Pull your stripes off, you're a buck private in Company B now." And oh, talk about a letdown. Some of those boys had led a pretty jeweled life. But it wasn't so good from then on.

And then he just shivered and shook all night long. And I said to him, "Somebody's watching us." And I looked across the railroad bed, and here was the meanest looking German officer you ever saw. With the lightning bars on his collars. And so, a little fast with my grenade, the first one.

[TIME 1:00:02]

And it got pretty near back to us before it said bang. So the next one I pulled the pin down here. And then when I got up top the circle I stopped and just flipped it on to him, like that. And a big old grin, he was going to stick that right down my neck. Only thing when he got right back side his head it said bang. And you know, he just kind of froze there in position a little bit. But he wasn't near so tough looking as he was looking before [laughs]. So I just filled the other side full of hand grenades, because there was a bunch of them over there with him, and they was all coming to his help. So I thinned out a few of them. But three of them got away.

And this goddang guy, he jumped out of the foxhole and he kicked my gun and knocked it about ten feet away. I could have, if I'd have had the gun, I probably would have shot him. And so evidently these guys come with another machine gun, and they set it up in the same dang place. Well, they shot and hit me. Knocked me down flat.

Meyer: Where'd they hit you?

Young: Right on the ammunition belt. Ruined pretty near every shell on my right side. But I mean, made me mad for some reason or other. So I put a grenade up there where I figured the – and it either hit one of them on the helmet or it hit the machine gun just as it exploded. So I followed up with another one. Well then, no more action.

And so I suppose after that guy showed up down there where the others, if he ever showed up there – I don't know where he went to, because the last I knew he was screaming and hollering, "Young, you son of a bitch, you're going to get us all killed." I was the only one that kept him alive all night! [laughs]

But anyway, he was a going south. And he's listed as missing in action. I don't know whether he thought he could get to the Moselle River and run across it, or what. But anyway, he's still listed as missing in action, as far as I know. Because I got the 377th book they put out. It's the only regiment that put out a book. And they got the name of everybody that was in the battalion, early, late or any time. And like that, they was way off on the medals and things like that that different people had done. Because there was no way they could keep that kind of stuff all up. Because I didn't get hardly any of my medals until about 1953. They started coming in the mail, one, two at a time. The last medal I got was a Legion of Honour from France, and the 2nd of October in '06, the president of France signed a paper, issuing it to me.

Meyer: Issuing it to you. While we're just talking about it, just quickly, what other medals do you have?

Young: Well, I got two Bronze Stars, two Purple Hearts, and of course this whole assortment of ATO (CK), with three stars. Then you got, oh don't forget the Good Conduct medals. The officers didn't get that.

Meyer: Oh, they didn't?

Young: No, no.

Meyer: I didn't know that.

Young: No. Officer wearing a good conduct medal you're going to call him down on it, because he ain't supposed to have it.

Meyer: Tell me the circumstances around the time of your capture. What was going on then?

Young: Well, the afternoon after I'd got in this fight with that – come to find out, he was a full colonel. In the SS. Because the platoon sergeant thought I'd been out there long enough without any help. So he sent two guys after me.

[TIME 1:05:00]

And this one nut left his rifle out there. And after he got me to the first aid station, because they had to carry me in, my feet was-- it was unbelievable how big my feet was swelled up. I don't know if you ever saw any of these galoshes, they call them. They're low, like rubbers, only they're kind of a felt? A fellow had a pair of number 11s, and he said, "I don't need these, see if you can put them on." I couldn't get my feet in them.

Meyer: What size are your feet regularly?

Young: Oh, they're about a 10. But I mean, the difference between 11 and that – no comparison. See, I'd been in the foxhole full of water for six days. And I was downstairs there a while ago and one of these French girls said, "What's the difference between trench foot and frozen feet?" And here's four or five guys at the table, and they couldn't tell her. I said, "I can tell you real quick. I said, "Trench foot is you've been in the water too long. And the water replaces the blood in the skin, the circulation."

Meyer: Your feet swell up?

Young: And they stink, just like you're dead. So the Germans brought a big ambulance in there after they come to get us. And they put thirteen of us that couldn't walk in that ambulance.

Meyer: First, what happened? Your commander sends people up to get you.

Young: Yeah.

Meyer: And that two people come up and get you, and so your feet are swollen up. Then do the Germans come and get you?

Young: No. They carried me down to Bertrange. In the barn that they was using for the first aid station.

Meyer: So you're in the barn in Bertrange.

Young: No officers or no noncoms there. They was all in the house.

Meyer: So you're in the barn, and you can hardly walk.

Young: I'm laying right in the doorway.

Meyer: Right in the doorway of the barn.

Young: No couldn't hardly. I couldn't.

Meyer: You couldn't walk. So you're laying in the doorway of the barn. Is it afternoon or is it night time?

Young: Oh, it's getting pretty well towards evening. I was the last one they carried in that night.

Meyer: So it's getting dark. And it's mid-November, so it's cold.

Young: Oh, yes. And it's been a raining.

Meyer: Your feet are wet, you can't walk.

Young: And we'd been living on rations that they dropped from Piper Cub airplanes. And they dropped ammunition. They didn't know whether they could drop mortar shells or not, so they flew over a German occupied town and they dropped a case on the main street to see if it would explode or not [laughs]. They didn't explode. But they knocked eight- or ten-inch limbs off some of them oak trees when one of those big old... A guy wouldn't be four inches high, I don't think, if it hit him right on the head [laughs]. I mean, you'd have been real short.

Meyer: Real short. So now you're in the doorway of the barn, and it's dark and it's cold and all this. And is that when the Germans come up?

Young: No. I passed out about that time, I think. Because I hadn't had any sleep to speak of for at least five days. And I think the first night I was up there I got a little sleep. But after that, I was it. And as usual the last thing the noncoms said before they left, "You're in charge." I didn't have any damn more stripes than anybody else! They was either privates or PFCs. The only difference is, I got four dollars more than some of the privates did in a month. So that's what it amounted to. And then they put the ones that couldn't walk in this ambulance. And they took off, and we went right up to the southeast corner of Luxembourg, across the river there.

[TIME 1:10:01]

Meyer: Now these are our guys, still?

Young: The Germans.

Meyer: When did the Germans get you?

Young: The next morning.

Meyer: So you fall asleep, you pass out, and do you wake up –

Young: I woke up. It was just starting to break daylight. And I could see an outline of something. And I thought it was a jeep. I thought, boy the Americans got here finally. And I got news: It wasn't the Americans [laughs]. It was a German machine gun sandbagged, and he was looking right over that sandbag [laughs].

Meyer: So now you're captured.

Young: First German up to the door, he says, "Are you Young?"
And I said, "Yeah, why?"
He said, "You're the bastard we're after." [laughs]

Meyer: Where did they take you?

Young: Well we went up there, right across the river from the southeast corner of Luxembourg. I don't know – I thought the town, they called it Melzig, but I don't know. But anyway, it was a German Army hospital. So about the second day there I'm interviewed by another German

colonel. And he said, "You mean you got the best of old," what you call him, I don't know. He called him a name. He said, "Good." He said, "I didn't like that bastard anyway." [laughs] He said, "He was so overbearing, he thought he was the only colonel and everybody else was below him." [laughs]

Meyer: So he's happy that you got him.

Young: Yeah, he proceeded to tell me, he said, "You know, if Patton, if the American Army would give us Patton and give us 250,000 eighteen- and nineteen-year-old boys, we'll furnish two and a half million Germans, and we can come up with a couple of thousand of the best Panzer tanks". And he said, "We'd be in Berlin in two weeks."

Meyer: The German said that.

Young: Yeah. But he said, "We'd have to have the Americans promise us food, clothing, and gasoline."

Meyer: So he was willing to turn?

Young: And he said, "I can get two and a half million Germans to go with me."

Meyer: To turn on them. Huh.

Young: But see now Patton, that was Patton's idea. Patton kept saying that we're going to have to fight those damn Russians. I said all along, Patton's accident was not an accident. Because that truck simply came down the road and turned right into their vehicle. They was in a, I think, a Plymouth car.

Meyer: Yeah, there was sort of shaky stuff. Where did they keep you as a prisoner?

Young: Well, I was there just a few days. And the artillery was getting quite loud. So one morning they had a whole bunch of these here Red Cross trains back there. And they loaded everybody up. They aimed to put one American in each car. They didn't want all the Americans in one place because they might not get bombed, you know. So the car I was in was, me and one other American was in it.

Meyer: How many other people are in it?

Young: I think there was either twelve on each side in a car, either twelve or twenty-four. And anyway we got down to St. Wendel, about ten miles down the track. And an air raid's going on. So what do they do? They pull us right in next to the depot. There's a big old antiaircraft gun, just firing like the dickens. And he's really putting up a lot of ammunition. But somebody forgot to tell that little son of a gun coming this way. And there was one of them B-51s, and he laid a big old egg right in that hole. And when the smoke settled, there was no gun barrel even showing [laughs].

[TIME 1:15:03]

I don't know where it went to, but it was gone [laughs]. I had two hunks of it in my leg, but I didn't know about anybody else. But there's every German in that car is in this here alleyway, and that alleyway was just about, not more than eighteen inches wide. And those poor bastards on the bottom, they're just a-screaming bloody murder. These are all fresh amputees. And they're just a-screaming bloody murder. And I'll bet it was forty minutes before they got them all back into a bunk somewhere.

Meyer: Now but you're pulled on, and you're on the train nearest where the gun gets hit.

Young: Yeah. I'm looking out the glass window right there watching it.

Meyer: When it explodes, did you say some remnants of the gun got in your leg?

Young: I got two pieces of shrapnel, let's put it that way.

Meyer: You got two pieces of shrapnel from whatever there. So now you're wounded, you have the shrapnel in your leg and see all this other carnage going on. Was that your first Purple Heart?

Young: No, I was entitled to one for my feet as far as that went. But then we got on down the railroad track, about three miles, maybe four. And they stopped, and they picked up a pilot. I wondered if he, if it was that – because I never saw that son of a gun. I was watching him and I don't know where he went to. Anyway, this guy, his leg down here, it went down about halfway below the knee then it had a right-hand turn to it. It was a double compound fracture there.

Meyer: The pilot?

Young: Yeah. Well, he had to bail out. His plane was hit. And the tail hit his leg when he bailed out. They didn't have those ejection seats like the jets have now.

Meyer: No. No, sure, because you bail out and it's coming this way, so if it hits you.

Young: So then they took us down to Ludwigsburg, which was a little further south, not too close to Stuttgart. And they had a big old German artillery piece mounted on a naval gun, mounted on railroad cars, and they pulled that darn thing out at night. In the daytime they kept it in a tunnel somewhere where it was hid. But man, talk about shaking the ground. I think somebody said it was a 270 millimeter, or something like that. It was a big gun. And the Americans finally got it.

Meyer: So in Stuttgart, where did they take you in Stuttgart? Do they take you to a camp?

Young: Yes, that Stalag 5A. And that's where I met this doctor that done his training in Illinois. Because about the second day I was in there, he comes in with some papers and he says, "Where's Maquon, Illinois?"

And I said, "What do you know about Maquon, Illinois?"

"Hell, you know where it's at," he said, "that was your address!"

They knew all about us. They didn't have computers, but they knew about us.

Meyer: They knew about you. That's what I heard sometimes. They would know a lot. They knew where the 95th were, they knew—

Young: One guy said that he told them, my uncle taught school with your father at some place there on the east coast, one of the guys.

Meyer: So when you're in the camp, how did you take care of the wounds on your leg, the shrapnel?

Young: Oh, an English artillery officer had a sharpened screwdriver, and he-- [laughs]

Meyer: You mean when you were still on the train?

Young: No, no, after they left me there. He had a sharpened screwdriver and so-- [laughs]

Meyer: So now you're in a prison camp, what do they have you do?

Young: We wasn't doing anything. Couldn't walk very much. So they was going to amputate, and brought me the papers to sign. I said, "No, I'm not going to sign that."

He said, "You've got to. Gangrene will kill you."

I said, "I came with them feet, and I'm going to leave with them."

1:19:54

End Track 1

Begin Track 2

Meyer: So you're in the prison camp for six months, and you're in a special –

Young: Well, they – after the Battle of the Bulge started, they took us out. Because this Stalag 5A, it was a small camp. Well, it was a horse cavalry barn out here, and about a three-story brick building is what they had for the hospital. And one day I looked down the road and I said, "Hey, boys! We're going to be liberated! Here comes the Americans!" And I took a second look and I said, "Hell, they're ain't none of them got a gun." Fourteen hundred [1,400] Americans are walking in a group coming down the road with their colonel walking in front.

Meyer: Prisoners?

Young: Yeah.

Meyer: From the Bulge.

Young: They had put the 106th Division on the front line, and they thought they was back in reserve. They pitched tents! And during the night they heard tanks a-running, and they said, oh, Patton's moving some tanks around. When it come daylight, it wasn't Patton. They was

surrounded with a whole bunch of Tiger tanks. And the first look these guys had got of them, they was looking right up the barrel of an .88 cannon. And so the old colonel was standing up on top of one of them and he said, "Surrender or die, boys. You got five minutes." Well, they really didn't need five minutes [laughs]. There wasn't a damn one of them had a gun that was loaded.

Meyer: So they just surrendered?

Young: What else could they do? Their colonel was with them, he surrendered them.

Meyer: So he surrendered them.

Young: Yes, 1,400 of them. The whole battalion.

Meyer: So that's in the Bulge in December.

Young: Well, it really wasn't the Bulge yet, but the Bulge is happening in about two days.

Meyer: Okay, just on the way. Okay.

Young: But these idiots, they – I don't know, they thought it was going to be a picnic, I guess. And they pitched their tents. Never had a foxhole dug or anything.

So they took us out the back door and put us in a boxcar. There was just a few Americans there. And next thing we knew we ended up in Moosburg.

Meyer: So they take you from Stalag 5A to Moosburg.

Young: Yeah. And then a week or so after we got there they put me in with a bunch of English and Canadians and Royal Dutch Marines that was captured at Dunkirk. I'm the only American.

Meyer: They must look, they'd been there for years.

Young: They was spick and polished.

Meyer: Really?

Young: The old sergeant major run that place like he owned it. When he said, "Boys, we scrub the barracks floor," they scrubbed the floor. And one day when I come back from – well, yeah, I hated to see them go. Because there was food left from noon when I got there. And if they had ate in the evening, food was there for me. Old sergeant major says, "That belongs to the Yank, you keep your hands off it."

Meyer: This is at Moosburg?

Young: Yeah, at Moosburg. That's 7A.

Meyer: That's Stalag 7A.

Young: At Moosburg. And then they started putting me on work detail with a bunch of these other guys that they couldn't trust.

Meyer: What sort of work would they have you do?

Young: Oh, putting tile roof on four- or five-story buildings. Filling the bomb craters in the railroad bed. And we'd get them filled, then you'd carry railroad ties and put them down. And then we'd carry railroad rails and put 'em down.

[TIME 5:10]

And that turned into a bad deal one day. All the guys but me and two others fell down. And boy, when that old rail hit the ground, it really wrecked our backs. Well, we held it up long enough to get everybody out from under it. Or there would have been a number of broken legs. It must have been an hour before either one of the three of us – there was one guy from Kansas and one from North Carolina, and me.

I was at the prisoner of war convention one time, and the wife and I was walking along and this guy from Kansas was telling about this. He said, "I don't know who the guy was on the end." He said, "I think the guy was from one of the Carolinas." And he was. Because how I knew it, I saw in the American Legion magazine that he needed help getting a VA disability because they didn't believe the story. So I wrote a letter to him, and he sent me back a nice letter about a month or so later, and he got his disability. But I've had spinal fusion because of it.

Meyer: Because of the rail?

Young: Yeah, my back was broken.

Meyer: Oh, God. So you're having this back injury, and this is in Moosburg, Stalag 7A.

Young: Yeah, it's probably in February.

Meyer: Probably in February. And you don't get rescued until when?

Young: Ah, about – they said I was liberated the twenty-ninth of April, but that's when Moosburg was liberated. And they had kind of a peace treaty between the Americans and the Germans when they got to Munich, and they said if the soldiers will evacuate the town we won't blow it all to hell. Otherwise, it's going down. So they evacuated. Even the SS went.

And so the 42nd Infantry Division, it was in the 3rd Army. And they came through Munich. And I don't know what the tank outfit was, but there was one American tank with them. Well, what they'd done, they'd take maybe a battalion and tanks, and scatter them out amongst the regiment of infantry, see. And sometimes the Americans rode them until they got into combat, if they was traveling quite a little ways before the next fight, and things like that. But if an artillery shell hit that tank with a whole bunch of guys on it, sometimes it was pretty hard on the count.

Meyer: When you were liberated, can you talk about what was going on? Who liberated you? Did the Germans just disappear or what happened?

Young: We was locked in these dang boxcars. We couldn't get out.

Meyer: You mean they took you out of the camp and they put you in boxcars?

Young: Well, we had been living in these boxcars on the railroad track in Munich because the Americans kept bombing the railroad track so much that it was more trouble trying to get us back and forth, so they just quit. And of course, they damn near quit feeding us too.

Meyer: Just so that I'm clear. In Moosburg, you mean they would move you back and forth in railroad cars to take you to work.

Young: Yeah. We'd leave about 5 o'clock in the morning, and maybe it'd be 10 o'clock at night before we'd get back.

Meyer: And so now the Americans are going to take Munich, and so now you're in these boxcars, you're not moving, and they've locked you in?

Young: Yeah.

Meyer: So you're locked in boxcars. What happens next?

Young: Well, it was pretty late in the morning, probably getting close to nine o'clock. Hell, we couldn't get out. Because those boxcar doors had a loop out there and a thing come around and dropped in that. And there was no way you could force the door to open it.

[TIME 10:03]

And anyway, we got about quite a while after we should have been out of there, we heard somebody flipping those things. And one guard we had looked like Charles Atlas. He wore a motorcycle outfit, great big broad shoulders that just tapered down to his shoes. [laughs] And him, and that leather suit he wore was just in shreds. He had put up a heck of a fight somewhere. And there was a fellow, I suspect the other guard was probably eighty years old, and he was pretty well beat up, but they got away. And the SS got the rest of the guards and took them with them. And they was running along, flipping them out, and they said, "Run, the SS is coming to shoot you!" Hitler had put out the orders that all prisoners of war was to be shot.

And so we took off for Munich and first building we come to said, American Apartments. And we said how appropriate that is. [laughs] So we took over the American Apartments. And it was a triangular building. Went down into the basement there, looking for something to eat. Did you ever see one of these one-pound coffee cans?

Meyer: Sure.

Young: That's what they used to put powdered milk in for those Red Cross parcels. That building was probably 200 feet by 200 feet by 200 feet. It was a triangle. And it's probably at least a four-foot, maybe a five-foot, ledge all around it. And that is every dang powdered milk can you could put on there. The SS had been eating our Red Cross parcels; that's why we wasn't

getting them. I don't know. Me and one guy we tried to figure one time. The god dang figures were so big we just finally just gave up and quit. [laughs] But it was just unbelievable.

So then the Americans they stopped and gave us a little food, some K-rations and stuff like that. And they said, "Somebody will be along to check on you." So they kept going. And me and two other guys are standing on the street and along came one of those jeeps from the 42nd Division with the colonel in it. And he pulled up to the curb and, I mean, we was a devil-looking mess. And he wanted to know if we could speak German. And I said, "Just enough to get in trouble." [laughs] So the other guys, no they couldn't speak any German. "Well come on, I want you to go with me," he said, "I need an interpreter."

I said, "You're better off without me than with me." So I finally told him, I said, "Hell I'm a prisoner of war. I haven't had hardly anything to eat for a long time and I sure as hell ain't taking off for Austria and having to—" I said, "My feet aren't in any shape to walk."

He said, "You go with me, you won't have to walk."

I said, "Don't make a difference. I'm not a-going."

Why, the clothes we had on was terrible, the shape of them. In fact, they come with, these here airplanes they'd been parachuting out of, and they left on the Autobahn over by that big old prison camp, Dachau, where they burned so many Jews? We got the distinction of getting a shower in those same showers that they smoked the Jews in. The big old pipe come down about every twenty feet. With a hook shape on the bottom, and one of the guards told me, he said, "You know how they do that?"

I said, "I'm really not interested, just hope to hell we get out of here before that."

"No," he said, "There ain't nothing that's gonna happen." He said, "They know the damn war's over." He said, they go up in the floor above, and they drop about a half-pound of cyanide pills down one of them, then they pour about a quart of water down there. And that makes all that gas, and just in minutes 500 of them are dead. Or more.

[TIME 15:12]

Meyer: But the showers are actually were working showers.

Young: Oh yes, the was working showers. But the Jews thought they was going to get a shower and all they got was gassed.

Meyer: So one of the first places you happened to get a shower is Dachau.

Young: Yeah. That was just about two days before the Americans coming ...

Meyer: Were there any signs of – did it smell?

Young: Oh yes. There were dead bodies laying everywhere. They were stacked like cordwood. I mean, a lot of them didn't weigh sixty pounds, I don't suppose. They had just withered away to nothing.

But anyway, they flew us back to Camp Lucky Strike. And first thing they done was lined us all up in front of this here one great big long tent. And they said, "Everybody strip to the bare hide. Nothing left. Just throw your shoes and everything else in the pile." By the time we got a shower and came out the other end, they burned our clothes! [laughs] Holy hell it was full

of wood ticks and fleas, and everything else. I mean, they didn't even want them near anything else. We got clean clothes on the other end. [laughs]

Meyer: How much did you weigh now, after being in there?

Young: I don't know. I was weighed about ten days or two weeks after I was liberated, with all my clothes on, filth and all, and I weighed 108 pounds then. But I imagine I weighed not any more than a hundred.

Meyer: And when you went in the service, how much did you weigh?

Young: Oh, 145 or 50, somewhere in there.

Meyer: So now you're at Camp Lucky Strike, and you're in clean clothes – are they getting ready to send you home?

Young: Yeah. They locked up all the candy because the day before we got there two nineteen-year-old boys, each one ate a candy bar. And dropped dead just like that. They dropped dead just like that.

Meyer: Because their systems couldn't process it, because they'd been starved for so long. So, did they give you soup? What did they start feeding you? Do you remember?

Young: I don't have any idea what it was. [laughs] But I know they had a mess hall there and we ate three meals a day, so it was better than what we were getting in Germany, when there was days we went without anything. When they moved you in those boxcars you didn't get a drink of water or anything until you got where you was going. And we wasn't a high priority outfit. The ammunition and soldiers going to the front took precedence.

But some of the places you got into – there was a place up north of Munich that had about eight or ten sets of railroad tracks, but only one coming in and one going out on each end. The Americans caught that plum full of trains. And the fighter planes closed both ends. And they called the bombers. There was holes there that was thirty feet deep. We covered boxcars in those holes. And they'd start out here at the end, and we'd lay track. ... They'd come in there with the cars that could dump sideways, of rock, and we got to scoop that rock around. But they had had the Jews up there working for two days, they told me, that they picked up just pieces of bodies. It was a terrible mess. I was glad I wasn't in on that.

Meyer: You're the third person I've talked to who went to Dachau and talked about the bodies.

Young: Well, you know Patton went to town and he rounded up everybody they could get. And they took them out there and they made them walk clear through that whole place. And they'd say, "Oh, we didn't know what was going on."

Patton said, "I bet every damn one of you got a lamp shade made out of somebody else's tattoos." That's what they done. They'd skin them for that tattoo, and make a lamp shade.

[TIME 20:18]

So old Patton went to town and made 'em – They brought them out there just like this, a herd of dogs or cats, driving them out there.

Meyer: When you were in the camp, did the Germans tell you when Roosevelt died? Did you know that he had died?

Young: Yeah. We was walking to work up Main St. in Munich, and –so. But there was nothing we could do about it. I knew about the Battle of the Bulge probably four or five days before it happened. The German guards had been bragging about there going to be eleven hundred tanks and eleven hundred fighter planes, and all this and that. My God, they didn't miss it very far. It was quite a deal.

Meyer: The only other person I knew that talked about knowing about it before was also a prisoner, who had been captured just before. And he saw, while they were bringing him back, he saw all the tanks and everything toward the Ardennes.

Young: But I don't know how in the devil they could keep making them tanks. At one time they only had eleven tanks in France. The Americans – see, the best thing that the Americans had to work with these German tanks was their fighter planes. And some of them they put rockets on, and some of them they put hundred-pound bombs on. And some of them had, I think it was either 20- or 40-mm. cannons mounted on them. Because they done a lot of experimenting seeing what really worked. And you hit those tanks from above and from behind, it don't take much to knock them out. But from the front side, now that armor was probably four inches thick. It was over a thousand or – a thousand millimeters?

Meyer: Yeah, maybe.

Young: I think they said that that would be about four inches. Something like that. It was a pretty tough thing to knock out. That's why when the Americans finally put 90-mm. guns on their tanks, and then they brought in those tank destroyers with 100-mm. in it – because when they was in North Africa, what they done to the American soldiers was terrible. They sent them into combat with absolutely slingshots to work with.

Meyer: Let me ask you a question. When you look back, and then before I talk to you about leaving the service, up to this time, who do you think was the most important to you in your time in the service?

Young: George Patton. He was the only general we had that was a fighting general. He said, "Boys, throw that damn spade away." He said, "That will just get you killed." He said, "You stop and dig a foxhole, you're in, just stop and remember you're in their territory. They know how far it is to every tree, every crossroads, and everything else. They know when you dig that foxhole just exactly where they're at, and they can drop a mortar in it." And I think he's right.

Meyer: On a more personal level, was there anyone like a commanding officer or any buddy that you'd like to remember?

Young: Well I had an awful poor bunch of officers, because they never wanted to go where I was. Now when I was taking those guys out to that pillbox and back, I usually had a lieutenant. I'd take one lieutenant out, and leave him and bring another one back for those ten guys. But when we crossed the American lines, I outranked anybody there. That was the understanding when I took the job. Those guys didn't know where in the hell we was going, and it was silly of them to try and tell me how to get there.

Meyer: So you had a lot of experience with commanding officers who were bad leaders.

[TIME 25:05]

Young: Yes. I never saw anything above a lieutenant on the front lines. These captains, they was too proud of them bars to— But until General George Patton put out that order, and that was the sixteenth of November. I've got the papers at home to prove it.

Meyer: General Archer was telling a story today that a couple months ago he was at a special commemoration. And in the front row of this place, maybe it was at Fort Sills, there were five generals. And one of the people talking, the first person to come up to talk was a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge. And General Archer said, "Looky here." The guy said, "Looky here at this front row." He said five, I'm not sure what he called, he said, "Look at all these stars. I never seen that many stars in a row. I'll tell you, I never saw any of you in the Battle of the Bulge. You guys were nowhere to be found."

And everybody laughed. And General Archer said that up to that point they'd felt big. And then they started to feel small.

Well, you've been talking for some time, so let me ask you some questions because I know you're getting tired. Would you recommend military service to people now? Young people now?

Young: Well the military isn't what it was then at all now. I mean, I didn't ask anybody if I could pull the trigger. Now they've got to check with some officer: Can I shoot that sucker that's a-shooting at me? Of course, I didn't know where to find an officer to ask in the first place [laughs].

Meyer: The new 95th gave me a set of questions I'll just ask you quickly. What advice would you give the soldier of today based on your experience in World War II?

Young: Don't linger. If somebody's shooting at you, you better put an end to him quick. Because he's going to get lucky and get you pretty soon.

Meyer: Do you feel a difference between the support you got in the U.S. in WWII than you think that they're getting now in their war?

Young: Well, as far as I was concerned, when it come to top generals there was nobody to beat old George Patton. Because he was trying to save lives. He said you can't go out there and hit the ground and lay there because they're going to drop a mortar on you. I think he was right. We didn't throw our trenching equipment away, but he would have liked to had us.

Meyer: That's great. Now this will sound strange, but I talked to a twelve-year-old boy about ten months ago in Los Angeles. He came in, and I said, "Do you know who Hitler was?"

And he said, "Oh, he's a baseball player, isn't he?"

And I said, "No, the other Hitler."

He said, "No, I've never heard of him." So I have my own answer. But this is a question [unclear] just in your own words, people say, "Oh, it's not important to remember history." Why do you think it's important to remember what happened in World War II?

Young: Well, it's what I've always heard was if you don't remember your mistakes, you're going to make them again. Now the Japs forgot all about Pearl Harbor. Never told their people about Pearl Harbor. We caused the war, not them.

Meyer: Yeah, people rewrite history. Did you maintain contact with any of your friends from the time when you were a prisoner? Do you ever keep in contact with any of those, or the guys in the 95th?

Young: Well the guys in the 95th, I'd go to the conventions and like that. But I, I was a, go to the prisoner of war conventions once in a while. And I seen people there that I knew. In fact, down in Florida, when I lived down there, about twenty miles from me was one of the guys that used to be in Company B.

[TIME 30:23]

But he was a replacement. [laughs] I told him, "You and how many more replace me?" [laughs]

Meyer: Are there any other stories, because you've been talking, I don't want you to get tired. Are there any other stories that come to mind now that you want to tell? You could always tap me on the shoulder in the next couple of days, too.

Young: Well, I had a temperature of almost 104 when I got on the boat to go home. They tried to leave me in the hospital there. I'd probably had been better off. Because I found out after I was in Florida in the hospital at Gainesville, I had diphtheria. I said, "I never had diphtheria."

The doctor said, "Don't tell me my damn business." He said, "I know what I'm talking about. You got the scars on your lungs."

Meyer: So you got diphtheria somewhere—

Young: Well, I imagine I had it when I got on the boat. But some lieutenant, he was trying to get me to go to England to hospital. I thought, Christ I don't want to spend the next two years in your hospital or something. [laughs] So anyway I got on the boat and we got started for home.

Then we went across over to Winchester, and picked up a bunch of guys that had been turned loose out of a hospital there in England. And we joined up with a convoy of something over 100 ships. ... I got to the States the third of June. There was still subs out there at that time. And we stayed real far north – too darn far, really. So we got about halfway across and they called for icebergs. And they called the ships to all make a left turn. Well, some of them didn't hear it. And three different ships with ex-prisoners of war on it sat out there for about two days

waiting for big tugs to come and get them. Because they said, “We won’t stop for anybody. You fall overboard just wave at us.”

Meyer: So you get back to the States about when?

Young: June the third, ’45.

Meyer: And when do you get out of the service? What happens then?

Young: Well they sent me home the sixth of June, they sent me home from Fort Sheridan. For a 66-day recuperation furlough. For Mama to fatten me up is what it meant. And then I had to go back, report down to Miami Beach. Bad duty. [laughs] Picking up cigarette butts every morning. But anyway then they sent 800 of us, ex-prisoners of war, to Camp Crowder, Missouri. And it really isn’t the end of the world, but if you look real close you can see it. There ain’t much down there. Sand fleas, and sand burrs. And stuff like that. And they had the idea that they was going to use us to discharge these counterfeits that hadn’t even seen combat.

So I was about the fourth or fifth one in for an interview. And guy come out, he said, “That lieutenant’s getting hot under the collar.” And so I thought, Well good, I’ll help him along [laughs].

And he said, “You guys are going to meet cadre.”

I said, “Hell I can’t read or write, how can I do that?” [laughs]

Then, “What’s that there good conduct ribbon doing on your chest?”

[TIME 35:02]

I said, “You ain’t got any damn business with that.” I said, “You’re an officer and a gentleman.” I said, “You’re just supposed to be understood.” Boy I’ll tell you, he didn’t like that a little bit. I said, “By the way, what was your military service?”

“I was a cargo check officer. I made one round-trip to Hawaii.” [laughter]

So about two more guys, and he was mad enough he just cancelled the whole damn works. Next morning we’re on a train headed for Camp Plauche, Louisiana, which happens to be right part of the hospital part, right under the Huey P. Long Bridge down there at New Orleans. Right on the riverbank, you might say. And we had wooden seats to sit on all the way down there. I don’t know where they found that train. [laughs] But we travelled all night and got down there anyway.

Meyer: Is that where you were discharged?

Young: Yeah. I was working as a platoon sergeant down there, training Puerto Ricans. And those Puerto Ricans was getting combat pay for being in the United States. Because they was overseas. I just about had a stroke when I found that out. They would steal anything. I was the only guy that had ninety of these here Puerto Ricans. And had to count all their tent pegs and everything else. They’re ending their basic training, see. Gosh, they couldn’t – they was something. And part of them took off at the end of basic training. They wasn’t really discharged yet from basic training. And they decided they was going to go to Chicago or somewhere. They started up the Mississippi River and they got caught up there. They brought ’em back, and the captain called me in and said, “I want you to give them good duty,” he said. “I want them to

work like the devil.” So we got ’em toothbrushes and they cleaned the latrines, with toothbrushes. [laughs]

Meyer: How do you feel about the way you lived your life, and what’s important to you?

Young: Well I tried to live an honest, Christian life. Tried not to steal, and I didn’t want anybody stealing off me.

Meyer: That’s good. That’s good. Well, let me see. I’ll close up now, because we’ve been talking for a long time.

Young: Well, shorten it up to what you want to.

Meyer: No, no, no, I don’t want to, you know, you come back and talk some more, but I know after a while, I don’t want to tire you out.

Young: No, I’m all right.

Meyer: I don’t want you to say, oh, that guy. Okay, and this is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379th. It is now 9:10 in the evening and it’s been my great pleasure to talk to, Mr. Young, could you say your name again?

Young: Willis E. Young.

Meyer: And what was your company?

Young: Company B, 377th Infantry.

Meyer: And do you remember your service number?

Young: Yeah, 36903022.

Meyer: There you go. And your final rank was again?

Young: Corporal.

Meyer: Well, thank you very much, sir, for talking. And I’ll talk to you later because I’m sure you have a number of other stories.

Young: No, that story’s enough. [laughs] Any more than that, they’d know I was a liar. [laughter]

39:45

End Track 2
End Interview