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## Albert J. Adams oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, July 18, 2008

Albert J. Adams (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project  
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[Transcriber's note: This interview begins in mid-sentence. The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

**Michael Hirsh:** —coming out of the blue that someone calls and asks you about World War II.

**Albert Adams:** Well, you know, it's kind of interesting now. Oh, golly. A month and a half, two months ago, they paid me to go back to Bradley University and tell them about my experiences at Mauthausen. And then they have like forty students over there right now.

MH: In Mauthausen?

AA: Yeah, yeah. Actually, I think they went to Vienna, but basically after, Mauthausen.

MH: Your full name is Albert J. Adams, A-d-a-m-s?

AA: Yup.

MH: And you're at ...

AA: Yup.

MH: Phone number is...When were you born?

AA: 9-1-23 [September 1, 1923].

MH: Which makes you how old today?

AA: Eighty-four.

MH: Eighty-four. And you were with the Headquarters Company 21<sup>st</sup> Armored Infantry Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Division at Gusen and Mauthausen. So, tell me a little bit about what you were doing before the Army.

AA: Before I went in the service? I was working at the shipyards, and—a little sidelight: I love to hunt deer, so I told my boss, “I’m gonna go deer hunting,” in 1942, and he said, “Okay.” Well, they postponed the season for, oh, a month or so to get the apples and stuff in, so I told him, “I can’t go when I wanted to go; I gotta go in November now,” and he said, “No, you go when you scheduled, and that’s it.” And I said, “Well, I’m still gonna go (laughs) and hunt deer.” And he said, “Well, if you do that, you’re going to lose your deferment; you’ll be drafted.” And I said, “Well, that’s the way it is; I love to hunt.” (laughs) I went hunting and got drafted.

MH: Did you get a deer?

AA: Oh, yeah, a nice deer.

MH: So, you got a nice deer, and then you got drafted. Okay. Where’d they send you?

AA: Started out in basic training at Camp White down in Medford, Oregon. (coughs) Excuse me. Partway through basic, they came around with a test, which I passed, and they sent me then to ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program], first at Stanford [University] and then Santa Clara [University] for a year. And the plan was that we would spend two years engineering stuff and come out of there as engineering officers. Well, at

the end of the year, they found that they needed foot soldiers worse, so they closed the program down and sent me down to Camp Cooke.

MH: Let me ask you, when did you go into the service?

AA: March forty-three [1943].

MH: March of forty-three [1943], okay. So, you go into ASTP, and a year later, they say, "Sorry, that plan is no longer working," and now they send you where?

AA: Camp Cooke, 11<sup>th</sup> Armored.

MH: Okay. And what happens there?

AA: We were there just a very short time. We had enough time to qualify on the various armaments and things. I was a sharpshooter with, I guess, three weapons, and a marksman with three others.

MH: What weapons were you a sharpshooter in?

AA: Well, the Garand, and the M1—that's the M1 carbine, and what the heck was the other one? Oh, a light machine gun.

MH: Okay. And you were not part of a tank crew, right?

AA: No.

MH: No, okay. Tell me, what is an armored infantry battalion?

AA: Well, like our outfit, the 21<sup>st</sup>, we had tanks, half-tracks, jeeps, machine guns, mortars, that type thing, and I was in what they call the recon [reconnaissance] as a lead scout. And we were the people that led the attack. (laughs) We were to find out where the Germans were and lead the first people in, et cetera.

MH: How long are you down at Camp Cooke?

AA: I think it was only two or three months.

MH: Then what happens?

AA: We went to—let's see. We went to New Jersey for about a week, and then we got on a big old boat and went to England.

MH: This is forty-four [1944] already?

AA: That would be—no, that's forty-three [1943], isn't it? Let's see. Yeah, you're right. I'm sorry, forty-four [1944].

MH: Okay, and it's toward the end of 1944?

AA: Yeah. What happened—we were supposed to go over to France, and they sent all our clothing and everything else into France and put us in England.

MH: Sounds like the Army I know and love.

AA: Yeah. (laughs) So, for about a week, we didn't have a darned thing. I got a pass to London. Well, I didn't have any dresses [dress uniforms] to wear. I had to wear fatigues, and I got picked up for being out of uniform. (laughs) We were up in what they call the Salisbury Plain, and there was a big kind of gully behind our camp that was just full of rabbits. So I made up some snares out of wire and snared some rabbits, and we cooked those up, and that was our food. (laughs)

Then we went over to France, a place called Brais-Saint-Nazaire on the west coast of France. The Germans had submarine pens, and we set up outside and were prepared to go in and see if we could capture the suckers, and the boats broke. Oh, you know [George S.] Patton—have you ever seen the *Patton* movie?

MH: Yes.

AA: Well, he told [Dwight D.] Eisenhower, “I can have four divisions attacking from the south in forty-eight hours.” And Eisenhower said, “That’s absolutely impossible.” He wasn’t aware that Patton had really worked on the plans ahead of time.

MH: But Eisenhower was also giving the gas to [Bernard Law] Montgomery, wasn’t he?

AA: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MH: And shortchanging Patton.

AA: Yup, exactly. That was earlier, though, when they were going across France and Germany and that area more. Anyway, we were one of the four divisions from the west coast of France to action the Bulge in two days.

MH: Which means you’re driving your jeeps, trucks, your tanks, and your half-tracks straight through.

AA: Right through, right through, day and night, yeah. I think we had a half-hour, hour’s stop now and then. But basically, it was around-the-clock hopping, getting in there. Then they told us—they said, “We’re going to attack in the morning. We want to know where the Germans are.” So the lieutenant in charge of our group got me and two other guys, he said, “We’re going to go out and find the Germans, and if we’re not back by two AM, report us missing in action. We’ll either all be killed or captured by then.” (laughs) Well, of course, bright, moonlit nights, snow, you could see us a mile away, but we found the Germans and didn’t get captured or anything.

So, the next morning, we attacked based on where they were. Well, the son of a guns cheated; they moved up during the night. And so, there was kind of high ground, railroad tracks on high ground, and then it went down, S-curved down into a little town. We were leading of course, so we got into that little town, and here the Germans were sitting out there with their 88s blasting at the people up on the high ground. And I’ll tell you something, it bothers me yet.

They went 300 yards away, and we were behind a big pile of dirt where they, I guess, put potatoes up for the winter. I got my M1, and I said, “I’m gonna nail that guy on that gun,” and the sergeant said, “No, no, don’t shoot at him.” I said, “Sarge, I can take him between

the eyes,” and he said, “Well, no.” And I said, “God, how about a mortar?” No. “How about the big machine gun, the .50?” No. “The little machine gun?” No. And I said, “Well, what?” and he said, “Nothing, nothing. They’re not shooting at us, they’re shooting at them.” Well, “them” is us, (laughs) you know? I don’t know how many people got killed because he wouldn’t let me shoot that guy. I couldn’t believe it.

Anyway, they cleared the road and told us to get the hell out of there. I was on the half-track, and we went up on the railroad track, and I knew we were safe, and I said, “It’s kind of funny they didn’t shoot at us.” And the guy said, “What’re you talking about? The shell hit right behind the half-track and got the jeep that was following.” (laughs)

MH: Was your hearing impaired at that point?

AA: No.

MH: And he took the leg right off the guy that was in the jeep, and everybody said, “Oh, you lucky so-and-so, that’s a million dollar wound. (laughs) You get to go home, you don’t have to fight anymore, and you’ll be on disability.” (laughs)

MH: Yeah.

AA: But anyway, we were getting ready to attack a little town a few days later. We were sitting out there watching it, and the Germans were walking in and out of this house 400 yards away, probably. I got some tracer bullets and sighted my M1 in for the distance, and they didn’t go in and out anymore after that, alone. When the attack started, they dropped a shell right behind my half-track, and a piece of shrapnel—I had my gun leaning up against the ring mount, and my canteen belt over the ring mount, so this shrapnel took the wood off of the rifle, bent the barrel, took the bottom out of the canteen cup, and it hit me in the elbow. Well, by that time, it didn’t have much power left, you know, so I said, “What’s that?” and I looked around and found a piece of shrapnel there and picked it up, and it burned me. That hurt worse than the elbow hit. (laughs)

Another one, a couple days later, we were getting ready to attack again, and I did artillery—I mean—yeah, artillery spotting. I had a scope, and they told me, “Go over there.” There was thirteen tanks; they had all had been shot and put on fire, like twelve in one spot and one by itself.

MH: American tanks or German tanks?

AA: American tank. So, they said, “Go over to that one tank with a bazooka.” Well, I knew what I was going to do with that bazooka if a Tiger tank came around. Anyway, I got in the tank and got out the sighting scope, looking around. All of a sudden, there was a snap right beside my ear. Well, if a rifle bullet goes near you, it snaps. So, I looked around to see what the heck, and on the down slope behind me, this 88 shell skipped down there like throwing a rock in water. It didn’t explode, it just skipped on the rocks, on the snow. And I thought, “Well, somebody doesn’t like me looking at him with that scope.” (laughs)

MH: They were trying to take you out with an 88?

AA: With an 88, uh-huh, and they just missed my head. If it’d gone a little lower, it’d got me or the tank or killed me or anything. So, I got out of the tank real quick and got down behind it—I figured it had a little bit more metal that way—and they only took the one shot. It was funny.

MH: Were you with the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored that found the guys who had been in the Berga slave labor camp?

AA: Well, we were the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored going down, I think through Poland and Czechoslovakia and on and on, but we saw a couple of camps.

MH: Do you ever recall seeing—you know, these guys were on—essentially, they were being death marched out of Berga. They were American prisoners, and it was people from the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored on April 23 that found them on the road. That doesn’t ring a bell?

AA: It doesn’t ring a bell. It was a little later than that. This camp—prisoners were coming out, and we gave them all the food we could possibly give them, and we killed them.

MH: Which camp was that?

AA: I don’t know.

MH: Okay. Tell me about that experience.

AA: They were walking up the road, and so we gave them all the food we had, you know.

MH: What did they look like?

AA: Oh, they were just skin and bones. “Death warmed over,” we called them. They were right beside my half-track. They had a bicycle, and they knocked the guy down and beat him on a bicycle until they killed him, and it turned out he’d been one of the guards in the camp.

MH: Did you see that?

AA: Yeah I saw it. It was right beside my half-track.

MH: That’s where they found the guy on the bike?

AA: I don’t know if the guard was on the bike. When I saw it, the prisoners had the bike and were beating him. Knocked him down and were beating on him with that bicycle.

MH: Did they tell you who it was?

AA: No.

MH: How was he dressed?

AA: He was dressed like the rest of them, pretty much. And I think what—somebody down at Mauthausen might tie in here, now.

MH: How far—where did that happen in relation to Mauthausen?

AA: I would say just a few days.

MH: A few days before.

AA: Probably late April—let's see.

MH: Because according to this, you guys got to Mauthausen on May 5.

AA: Yeah, May the 5<sup>th</sup>, exactly.

MH: You got to Gusen on May 5, and Mauthausen on May 6.

AA: Yup. I was there. I've got a picture of me standing outside the main gate at Mauthausen and everything.

MH: I would love to get a copy of that to use.

AA: First thing we did, [there were] several really good-looking young ladies, and they wanted to go out, and I said, "I don't see why not." So, I let them out, and then someone said, "No, no, don't let anybody out." Of course, they'd already gone out.

MH: Wait a second, though. You're coming down the road, and what was the first thing you saw that told you there was a camp there?

AA: At Mauthausen?

MH: Yeah. Was it Gusen first, and then Mauthausen?

AA: No, I think we went to Mauthausen first.

MH: Did anybody—

AA: The fellows from the—oh, God, what is their number?—54<sup>th</sup> something Battalion were the very first ones there, and then we come up and they informed us that, you know, it was a camp and everything.

MH: Did you know anything about these camps before that point?

AA: Nope.

MH: Nobody had ever told you about them.

AA: No.

MH: So, they tell you there's a camp.

AA: Yeah. So, I go in, and like I say, these ladies that I let out, I found out later they were—oh, what'd you call them?—"comfort ladies," for the German soldiers. They were young and well fed and well dressed, you know, and everything. They had the barracks right inside the gate, first gate. Anyway, this fellow came up to me; he spoke very good English. I still don't know who he was or what he was. He said, "Can I borrow your carbine for a little while?"

MH: Who is this asking for this?

AA: One of the prisoners. He spoke perfect English, that's all I can tell you. So, he said, "Can I borrow your carbine?" and I said, "Well, what the hell, why not?" So, I could hear some shots, and he came back and gave me the gun back. He said, "Well, now there's several of them that you won't have to take to court," and I said, "Several what?" and he said, "Kapos." And I said, "What's a kapo?" They were prisoners in charge of barracks. Like that one that got killed that day, probably, you know.

MH: Do you know the guy you lent the carbine to?

AA: I have no idea. He took me on a complete tour of the camp then.

MH: Okay. But you're stopped outside the camp, outside the main gate?

AA: This was inside the main gate.

MH: So, you'd gone inside the gate. The German soldiers had left already.

AA: Yup.

MH: You get off your half-track, and just—what kind of day was it? What kind of weather was it?

AA: Oh, boy. It was not raining, (laughs) because I didn't have any rain gear on. It was fairly nice weather.

MH: And that's when this guy comes up to you and in perfect English asks if he could use your carbine.

AA: Yeah.

MH: You didn't ask him what he was going to do with it.

AA: I did not.

MH: You're a very trusting soul.

AA: (laughs) I figured he had a good use for it.

MH: So, he brings the carbine back, and now what?

AA: He takes me on a complete tour of everything.

MH: Tell me as much about it as you can.

AA: Okay, the very first thing he showed me was buses that—apparently they were signed in at Gusen and transferred to Mauthausen for final—to get rid of them, okay. All

these buses had an enclosed thing for the driver, airtight. The exhaust gases were back into the bus, and they killed the majority of the people getting from Gusen to Mauthausen.

MH: What did the buses look like?

AA: I don't know.

MH: I mean, did they look like buses or did they look like trucks?

AA: Yeah, buses.

MH: Buses.

AA: They were buses.

MH: Seats inside, or you couldn't see?

AA: Like a bus, (laughs) just a bus. Probably hold forty, fifty people.

MH: With windows?

AA: Yeah, windows. They probably had the windows sealed, though, because they were gassing them. And then the next thing he showed me was the gas shower. It was a shower room that held several hundred people, and the showerheads didn't put out water; they put out gas. So, they would eliminate that group of people that way.

MH: Were there bodies lying around?

AA: There was thousands of them, thousands of them. Yeah.

MH: Seriously.

AA: Really. And what they did later—I was still there. They came in with bulldozers and dug some huge ditches—trenches, whatever—and they got the people out of Mauthausen, made them dress in their Sunday best clothing, and come over and throw the bodies in the hole.

MH: The German civilians?

AA: Uh-huh. And, of course, they all tried to claim they didn't know anything about it, which was an absolute lie, because a lot of them worked at the camp, even.

MH: It had to smell terrible, too.

AA: Oh, you had to, you had to. Yeah. Of course, the ovens where they cremated them were still smoking hot when I went in. They'd probably used them the day before, at least.

MH: Were there still bodies in them? You could see bones in them?

AA: There were bones, not bodies. Yeah.

MH: How do you react to all this?

AA: Well, I don't know what to say. You know, I couldn't believe that anybody could do that to somebody else. I just couldn't believe it.

MH: And the Army had not prepared you for this in any way.

AA: No. Oh, some funny little sidelights, like these bodies that were just huge piles of them there. Some of the ladies had starved to death, and they probably were down to forty, fifty pounds, or whatever. They still had fairly good-sized breasts, though. And I would think that'd be one of the first things that would go.

MH: I would think so.

AA: But it wasn't. They still had breasts.

Then he took me over to the quarry. They had—I think it was around 180 steps to the top of it. And I've seen pictures—when was it, [Omar] Bradley. People were—they'd get them on a forty-pound rock, carry it up to the top, and then throw it over. Go walk back down, pick that rock up, and go up and throw it over. All day long. But the people were solid going up those steps, just one mass of humanity carrying rocks up that thing. And then partway up, there was a—what the hell did they call that damn thing? It was a cliff, and if the Germans didn't like the look of someone, they'd shove them over the side.

MH: This is what this guy who's taking you around is telling you.

AA: Yeah.

MH: Do you remember his name?

AA: No. I never asked his name, I never asked his nationality.

MH: Did he speak English with an accent?

AA: No, he spoke perfect English.

MH: Really?

AA: He might've been an American or an Englishman, you know, or something.

MH: What else—then what's next? He shows you the quarry.

AA: Well, he showed me where they tortured them, where they would hang them, hang them up and beat them. Oh, they had a place where—what the heck would you call that? Medical experiments. They had a room in there where they'd—he showed me the table where they'd lay them on and cut them apart and stuff, you know. And what else?

MH: What was it like walking through a place like that?

AA: Well, I'd seen so darn much, things during the war, that it didn't bother me that much, frankly. We kept the prisoners in there for probably two weeks [that] I was there, I think, and if they tried to climb out, I'd beat on their hands with a rifle butt and knock them back down inside, because we were—it was for their own benefit. We were trying to bring them back to life gradually.

MH: So, you were there when the Army brought in doctors and medical people and they brought in food and that sort of thing for them?

AA: Oh, sure. Yeah, that was right off—probably the second day or something, even.

MH: Did they warn you not to try and feed them because you could kill them?

AA: Well, we were told to make sure they stayed in the camp. They were not allowed to go out or climb the fence, like they tried to.

MH: So, you actually stayed at that one camp for a couple weeks.

AA: Yeah, we lived in the town of Mauthausen.

MH: Where did you live?

AA: In a house.

MH: Would you throw the Germans out?

AA: No, all I remember was it was a house, a two-story home. That's all I can remember about that. We had—well, a funny thing. Over at a place called Gemünden, wasn't that far away, there was a camp over there also. But they had—they were trying to breed a race of super Germans, okay. They'd take the best-looking blonde girls and the best-looking husky brawn soldiers, whatever, and breed them, and they had a love camp over in (inaudible). I saw that. They had all these girls over there; once they got pregnant they

had to go over there. And they also had a brewery over there, and we'd go over about every third day and get a truckful of beer.

MH: So, the brewery was continuing to operate during the war.

AA: Uh-huh. It was operating when we got there.

MH: Did you go into this love camp?

AA: I'm sorry?

MH: Did you go into this love camp?

AA: Yes, I did.

MH: What'd you see there?

AA: We saw a bunch of good-looking girls that were pregnant. (laughs) I understand there was a concentration camp over there also, but I didn't see it.

MH: You didn't see it. Tell me more about Gusen or Mauthausen.

AA: What about, now?

MH: Just tell anything else you can tell me about it. Did they bring in an evac [evacuation] hospital with nurses, American nurses?

AA: I don't know. I don't know that.

MH: I'm surprised that they let you—well, actually, that's right near the end of the war, so I'm not surprised they would let you stay there for two weeks, 'cause the war ended a couple days later. Were you in the camp when the war ended?

AA: Yup.

MH: Do you remember that moment?

AA: Yup.

MH: How'd you get the news?

AA: (laughs) Somebody come around and says—well, we were told at least a day ahead it was going to end, so we knew that. I had a funny thing, not quite concerning Mauthausen, but almost. We were heading towards Vienna, went to a town called Linz, Austria. And the Russians were not that far down below us, so the Germans were all heading out to try and get away from the Russians. Another fellow and I—I think it was about three days before the war ended—we took 36,000 prisoners in one day.

MH: How do you even count that high?

AA: (laughs) That's what I was told, how many we had. They'd come up there and we said, "Put your guns over there in this pile," and somebody'd come by and haul them away. I brought two of their guns home and I've still got a beautiful .22 that I got there, a Mauser .22 sniping rifle. But anyway, the weird story: This lady that retired from the same company I did, I got talking to her, and she was German. She said, "Well, I was in the German army. I was coming toward Linz and there was a roadblock there. Everyone was surrendering, so I swam across the Danube River and went around the roadblock." (laughs) I almost her took prisoner. Isn't that funny?

MH: Go back to Mauthausen for a minute. Were you involved in having to get the German citizens to come out and help bury people?

AA: No, no, I just saw it happen.

MH: What are you seeing? I mean, are they protesting? What's going on?

AA: Well, they acted like it was just a shock to them, you know, but they didn't try to fight it or anything. They just grabbed them and threw them in the ditch.

MH: How long did that take? It must've been what, days?

AA: Yeah. Well, let's see, how long was it? Oh, golly. I think it was only one day.

MH: One day, to get all those bodies buried?

AA: Yeah. There was 3,000 or 4,000 bodies, but there were an awful lot of people throwing them in, too.

MH: Was there anybody protesting the fact that they were just tossing them and not being more respectful?

AA: Not that I'm aware of.

MH: How did being at that camp and seeing death on that scale affect you?

AA: Like I say, I was pretty inured to that kind of stuff, frankly. I don't know if you—oh, boy, let's see. What's the name of that place in Belgium where they massacred 200 Americans?

MH: Malmédy.

AA: Malmédy Massacre. Okay. Well, one of the fellows that got massacred had a brother in my outfit. So, after that massacre, word came around: "Absolutely no prisoners. None." These Germans would come up waving a white flag, their arms in the air, and we'd shoot them. (laughs) We wouldn't take them prisoner.

MH: You said the word came out—that was, I'm sure, unofficial.

AA: It was unofficial, but it went around. And then, after a while, we discovered we were better off to take prisoners. One day, we had a truck completely full of German prisoners, probably forty or fifty in the back of that truck, a big truckload. This one guy said, "I am so glad that you took me prisoner. Now I won't have to be shot at, I won't get out and lay

in the snow. I'll be fed good food. I'll be sent to the United States of America and go to school and become a doctor." (laughs) So, that was the thing—

MH: He said that to you in English?

AA: Yeah, very good English. So, the thing was that they had that kind of thing to look forward to, they were happier to surrender than they were to fight. So, that's why we said, "Hey, this 'take no prisoners' stuff ain't no good." (laughs)

MH: Nobody said it really violates all the rules of warfare to be shooting people who are holding white flags.

AA: We captured an SS officer; I think it was a major. So, this fellow that—his brother'd been killed, you know. He put the guy on the front of our half-track, and then he took like a bat or whatever and beat the guy's shoes, just beat them. Well, that really hurts, because the feet swell up inside the boots. And so, he'd sit there all day; in case we got shot at, he was going to get shot first.

MH: You mean he tied him to the front of the half-track?

AA: Pardon me?

MH: He tied him to the front of the half-track?

AA: He just sat him up on the motor. Then when we stopped for the night, he'd take him off there and beat him unconscious, every night. He finally killed him, but it took him about a week. But every time he'd hit him with something, he'd say, "That's for my brother!" (laughs) That was something else.

MH: War is an ugly thing.

AA: Yup, exactly.

MH: When did you finally come home?

AA: I came home in December of forty-five [1945].

MH: So, you had some occupation duty, then.

AA: I got out of the service in early January forty-six [1946].

MH: And did what?

AA: Went to college.

MH: Whereabouts?

AA: Ended up at the University of Washington.

MH: Majoring in?

AA: Engineering. I could transfer all the stuff I had at Santa Clara, so I got out in three years that way.

MH: Then what'd you do?

AA: Well, I spent a few years going up and down the West Coast building wood fire boilers, then I went to work for the power company running a steam plant, and then later on, I became the manager of the hydroplants. That's when I retired. I was the manager of all the hydroplants.

MH: Which hydroplants?

AA: White River, Electrons, Snoqualmie, (inaudible) River, and Nooksack.

MH: These are dams on those rivers?

AA: Yeah, dams on each one. Then I was also a contact to some of the dams on the Columbia River. We had part interest in some of those dams.

MH: I see. When did you get married?

AA: I got married in December of forty-six [1946].

MH: Children?

AA: Five.

MH: Grandchildren?

AA: Thirteen.

MH: Thirteen. At what point did you tell your wife or children about what you'd seen in the war?

AA: (laughs) I don't think I have.

MH: Seriously? You've never told your wife about Mauthausen?

AA: No. I told her about a few of those other incidents I mentioned. I got a Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, American Theatre of Operations medal, a European Theatre with three battle stars.

MH: I've read the citation for your Silver Star. That had to be an interesting evening.

AA: Yeah, I guess I can talk about it a little bit. We were approaching the Siegfried Line. Being a recon, we had to go first again, so they said, "Well, we want a patrol. Go over in the valley with those Americans over there and make contact." Okay. So, we started out. The littlest guy in the outfit had a radio, and those suckers weighed about sixty pounds.

MH: Those are the big square things you carry on your back?

AA: Yeah. So I told this guy, "You're too damned little; let me have that," so I ended up with the radio. And the major said, "You got enough weight. You can leave your rifle. There's no Germans." Well, he was wrong. We were going up this road, and there's a pillbox, and it looked like a German was standing outside the pillbox. So, we hollered at him to surrender. He went back inside the box. We dropped over the hill where he couldn't see us and called back, and the guy said, "Well, that's probably the only bunch; keep going."

So, now, we're going along and approach a spot where there was barbed wire and woods and everything, and a German came up with a machine gun, probably thirty, forty feet away. Well, my other lead scout fell down and laid his rifle on the barbed wire and just reached up and pulled the trigger. The guy never shot us. Like I say, I never could figure out if my friend hit him or scared him or what, but he didn't shoot. Meanwhile, there's another pillbox up on a hill to our left; they started shooting at us. So, I got down in a little hole; I could get part of me in it, and the (inaudible) would straddle my body. It'd be on either side of me and go up a ways and come back and straddle my body again. They killed my friend about five feet above me.

So, I got on the radio and called artillery. First shell hit about fifteen yards to the left, the second shot about five yards right. I said, "Five yards left. Fire for effect," and they dropped five guns right on that machine gun. (laughs) You could see it go up in the air. I couldn't believe it. So, then they said, "Come on back."

We forgot about that first guy, though, and we walked up toward the road like and he started shooting with a machine gun. There were some little piles where they had threshed wheat in the fall; they weren't that big, but I went down behind them, anyway. Oh, and one of them picked up my friend's rifle, because I didn't have one. So, I tried to shoot this guy that was shooting at me, and the gun wouldn't work. It had a broken firing pin in it. (laughs) I could've probably got him. Anyway, I turned around and put my butt to him, and he would go down either side of my body. That little piece of pile of stuff or whatever it was distracted him enough. He went on either side of me. So I called artillery again and got smoke shells in, and then we all got out.

About ten years ago, we had a reunion. This little guy said, "Do you remember me?" I said, "Nope." He said, "I'm the guy you took the radio away from." (laughs) I couldn't believe it. And he said, "I was the only guy in the outfit that didn't get wounded." I visited him down in Texas this year, matter of fact. He lives up near Dallas, and I have

two brothers in San Antonio, so I go down and borrow one of their cars and go visit this guy for a while. (laughs) Kind of interesting.

MH: The citation says you actually went back to get somebody who was missing?

AA: Yeah. What happened was, the first—well, the second guy. I was walking along, I had the radio and was talking on it, and he shot and just grazed my neck and went through my left arm, left bicep or tricep, whatever. So, yeah, the captain said, “Are you sure your friend is dead?” and I said, “Yes, I’m sure he’s dead.” He said, “Well, would you volunteer to wait until dark, go in there and recover the body?” and I said, “What the hell, why not?”

So, three of us went in to return the body. It was another bright moonlit night, and we got up probably fifty yards from the body, and this machine gun opened up on us. And it’s kind of a thrill, looking down the barrel of a machine gun that close at night, I’ll tell you. (laughs) Well, they got one of the two guys, they got him, but they missed me again. So, the next day, they went back in with the tanks and everything, and the Germans just all surrendered, didn’t even try to fight. And they got the body then.

So, then they wrote me up—funny, they wrote me up for a Bronze Star. That was returned and said, “No, that’s more than a Bronze,” so they wrote it up for a Distinguished Service Cross, and they wrote back and said, “It’s not quite that good.” (both laugh) So, I wound up with a Silver Star.

MH: Yeah. I’m curious, are you a religious person?

AA: Nope.

MH: So, what you saw during the war, especially at the camps, wouldn’t have affected the way you felt about faith and God and that sort of thing?

AA: No, not really.

MH: Have you talked to your kids about what you saw?

AA: Nope.

MH: Nope? Okay. What happened when you went to Bradley University?

AA: You know, that was fun. We had a noon get-together with the faculty, and then we had an open session for everybody in town and so forth to come.

MH: You said “we;” is there more than you?

AA: No, just me. And then after that, I met with the students that were going to Mauthausen.

MH: How did Bradley University—that’s in Iowa, right?

AA: Yeah.

MH: How did they happen to find you?

AA: I think through the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored. We have a fellow in (inaudible) who’s kind of the backbone of the Northwest Chapter of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored. They got a hold of him, and he told them, “You really want to talk to Al Adams,” so that’s how I ended up getting contacted, finally.

MH: Tell me about your conversations with the people there.

AA: They asked questions kind of like you’re asking. One of the townspeople said, “How did you feel? How did that affect you?” and so forth. I don’t know. It was war. (laughs) I couldn’t imagine that one man could do that to another. I just couldn’t believe it, but it didn’t affect me personally that bad.

MH: Did you enjoy your time with the students?

AA: Oh, yeah. You know, it’s funny. (laughs) I’ll show you how I react to things. We were down through Germany, after I got out of the hospital, and I was a corporal. And I told the guys, “Well, it’s a busy day today; why don’t you go ahead and cook dinner, and

then we'll clean up the vehicles." And so, they're in there cooking dinner, and the officers come by and say, "You haven't cleaned up the vehicles," and I said, "After dinner. They'll get cleaned; don't worry about it." They said, "Well, the standing order is that you clean the vehicles and then eat." So, I said, "Sir, they're almost done cooking. Get realistic," you know? He said, "Private Adams, start cleaning the vehicles." (laughs) And he turned to Private Jones and he said, "Corporal Jones, get them guys out here." Okay. So, he got them out, and then he said, "Load up that bunch of Panzerfausts." You know what they are?

MH: Yes, I do.

AA: Okay, there was a bunch of Panzerfausts, and he said, "Load them up, take them out and throw them in the river." Well, they went out to the river and drove right into a bunch of Germans and were both killed. So, I figured, two stripes, I'd rather be alive.

MH: So, he actually took your stripes from you.

AA: Yup. Yeah, we have a little fun.

MH: You mentioned you have a picture of yourself in front of the camp at Mauthausen?

AA: Yes, I do.

MH: Is it possible to ask you to send me a good copy of that, and I'll scan it on the computer and then return it to you?

AA: Sure.

MH: The other thing I'd like is a picture of you as you are today.

AA: Okay.

MH: Do you have an e-mail address?

AA: Yes.

MH: 'Cause I could send you my address by email; that's probably the—

AA: ...

MH: ...

AA: ...

MH: Okay. Okay. I'll send you an e-mail with my address and everything.

AA: Okay.

MH: Is the picture in good shape?

AA: Sure.

MH: Great. Okay. And I'll take good care of it and return it to you.

AA: All righty.

MH: I thank you very much for your time. I sure appreciate it.

AA: Good to talk to you.

MH: Okay. Bye-bye.

***End of interview***