

2-14-2008

Herbert A. Butt oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, February 14, 2008

Herbert A. Butt (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Butt, Herbert A. (Interviewee) and Hirsh, Michael (Interviewer), "Herbert A. Butt oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, February 14, 2008" (2008). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 36.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/36

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This Oral History is copyrighted by the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Florida.

**Copyright, 2011, University of South Florida.
All rights, reserved.**

This oral history may be used for research, instruction, and private study under the provisions of the Fair Use. Fair Use is a provision of the United States Copyright Law (United States Code, Title 17, section 107), which allows limited use of copyrighted materials under certain conditions. Fair Use limits the amount of material that may be used.

For all other permissions and requests, contact the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, FL 33620.

Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: C65-00015
Interviewee: Herbert A. Butt (HB)
Interviewer: Michael Hirsh (MH)
Interview dates: February 14, 2008
Interview location: Unknown
Transcribed by: Kathy Kirkland
Transcription date: September 8, 2008
Audit Edit by: Kimberly Nordon
Audit Edit date: February 9, 2010
Final Edit by: James E. Scholz
Final Edit date: February 10, 2010

[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

Michael Hirsh: Formalities first. If you could give me your name and spell it for me.

Herbert A. Butt: Herbert, H-e-r-b-e-r-t, middle initial A, last name Butt, B-u-t-t.

MH: ...And your date of birth?

HB: 3-28-23 [March 28, 1923].

MH: And what unit were you in?

HB: Company A, 222nd Infantry, 42nd "Rainbow" Division.

MH: When did you go into the service?

HB: April 15, 1943.

MH: That's two days after my birthday.

HB: No foolin'. It was about a week before Easter.

MH: Yeah, and you were living where at the time?

HB: ...Kansas City, Missouri.

MH: You had just gotten out of high school?

HB: Oh, heavens, no. I'd been working at North American.

MH: North American Aviation?

HB: Aviation.

MH: Doing what?

HB: Hydraulic lead man.

MH: So, you were drafted?

HB: Afraid so.

MH: That's how I felt.

HB: (laughs)

MH: And where'd they send you to basic training?

HB: Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri, Air Force.

MH: Air Force? So, how'd you end up in the 42nd?

HB: Well, that's a long story, but I started out Air Force basic, and if you really want to know the circumstance, you're asking, the government had seniorities established, and at the time I went through basic, they had Officers Candidate School, Army Specialized Training Program, or Glenn Miller Band, which would be Air Force Band. And I primarily struck out as item two and three, ASTP or the Air Force, and ASTP had more priority, so I went to ASTP.

MH: Which meant that once you finished basic, they sent you where?

HB: First to Grinnell, Iowa, to a staging area, then to Fargo, North Dakota, to North Dakota Agricultural College.

MH: One of the other guys was up there, too.

HB: Oh, yeah, there are several of us from here.

MH: Then they shut that program down.

HB: Shot it down.

MH: Shot it down. And then what?

HB: That's when I went to Gruber, to Rainbow Division Camp Gruber, Oklahoma.

MH: Then you shipped over with the 42nd? (coughs)

HB: Cheap cigarettes will do it every time.

MH: I know; it's the cigars. And you were infantryman?

HB: Mm-hm.

MH: Carrying what kind of weapon?

HB: Well, I was a BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] instructor at Gruber, and they had a funny way of processing me. Maybe I was a screw-up, rather than the proper term—and I had a 4055 MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], which is clerk typist. So, got down to Gruber and spent some time as a BAR instructor, and I had a chance to go into 222nd personnel office, and after there, three or four months and just about ready to go overseas, I went back to the rifle company. And they used me as a runner, whatever they hell they wanted, but they kept me in the platoon and in the company. And the two of us, a guy named Remsbecker from St. Louis and I were the two runners that we had, and we went overseas together. And come along with a little bullshit as we go along with it. Who's transcribing this?

MH: A woman who's used to hearing bad words.

HB: Okay. We had—

MH: Her name is Kathy. Say hello to Kathy.

HB: Hello, Kathy! Never dated a Katherine.

But we—I made the statement one time that Remsbecker, as runner, was as far down and as far forward in the hold of that ship, and I was a bunk above him, and he was the first man killed in the company, so consequently, I feel I led the division overseas, and I don't know if you ever caught up with Colonel [Carlyle] Woelfer, and he heard my statement, and he said, "Oh, no, that's not right." That's my feelings. So, we went overseas then, and went to that area—

MH: You landed in Marseilles?

HB: I was trying to think. The hills outside of Marseilles, the staging area, and then we went up towards north of Strasbourg, and we were stuck out on an OP [outpost] at Ingersheim [France]. And at that time, I think we ran from those bastards about ten days, two weeks, and I know we were pulled back at least twenty miles and went back in the line. And these guys that showed up in pictures of the 182nd Airborne, we relieved elements of that at one time, so they weren't all what they were cracked up to be. We were pulled out in January, the last of January, early February, and picked up

replacements and went back in the line, early March, and then they moved us into Wingen and Waldhambach [France].

MH: This is 1944.

HB: Yeah. And we jumped off in the attack, and stayed with all the way through until May 29th, I think, is the date that we went into Dachau.

MH: Now you're into 1945. April 29.

HB: Yes.

MH: Before we get to Dachau, did you know about the concentration camps?

HB: Didn't really recognize it. Not knowledgeable. I think this guy Remsbecker we talked about, he seemed to know about it, but I didn't recognize it.

MH: In the division's march through France and Germany, did you ever run into any of the smaller camps or—

HB: Uh-uh, we never did.

MH: So the first time you ever faced—go ahead.

HB: I know at the time that we had—there was an article, we had a Norwegian people, elements of one of the officers liberated—if I had a book, I could show you in the book what it was talking about, but it turned out to be a woman's prison camp or some such thing, and they liberated them. And they came here for a reunion. So, somewhere in the records, if it meant much to you, why, you could get [Dee] Eberhart; has probably as good a memory as any.¹ He could probably dig it up. And I know in the book, there's pictures of the camp or the hotel or whatever the place is. That, to me, was about the only knowledgeable information relative to PW—prison camps as such.

¹Dee Eberhart was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is C65-00035.

MH: So what led up in the days or the week before Dachau, what led up to that for you?

HB: Trying to keep myself alive and dry and warm. There in December and all, we were running, didn't always have—hell, after the town of Ingersheim, I didn't even have an overcoat. We just lived on what we had. So, as far as shoepacks, I had shoepacks and changed my socks regularly. Had a professional fighter in the company, and as soon as we got into snow and all, he took his shoes and sock off every night and waded in the snow. Don't know what we did, but he lasted about three days and he went out with trench foot, and he never did come back in the company that I'm aware of. But I would've thought a professional fighter had some guts about him, more than I had as a—what I was, PFC [private first class], poor civilian.

MH: (laughs) PFC, poor—civilian. Yes. So tell me about as you're coming to Dachau. What were the orders you had?

HB: Well, really, as far as I was concerned, the first—the 222nd was in regimental, or Italian reserve, I think, at the time, and we got the word somewhere along about 1:30, two o'clock to load up, and we got the instructions that we were going into Dachau. Well, what the hell and who is—what is Dachau?

MH: This is in the afternoon of April 29.

HB: So, we moved in then, and I think F or G, whoever was there early, was gone. And they told us to—I don't know about the other platoons, but there was a guy from Cedar Rapids [Iowa] that I knew, we came down for meetings in Kansas City, and I've got a picture of Dachau. If I'd known this was coming up, I could've brought you a picture of the camp of Dachau, and it was on April 29th.

MH: That you took?

HB: No, Air Force took, and I took it to my handy-dandy copy company. I've got a big sheet like this, cut and spliced.

MH: Oh, the aerial? Yeah, I've seen that.

HB: And one of it is—

MH: But take me—you get orders to go up there. You're in a Jeep?

HB: No, hell no.

MH: You're in trucks?

HB: Truck.

MH: It's a convoy?

HB: Yeah, I think there was a couple, three trucks, our company. We were down by that time. We were—you might even get two platoons on a truck. And hell, might've been twenty guys in a platoon by that time, and they moved us up. And we got there about three, four o'clock. Time was incidental, didn't really know what the hell the score was.

MH: When did the smell first hit you?

HB: About the time—see, now, you're going to have to transcribe this and add to it. The area where that railroad track was, let's say, this way. (indicates location) And there was a parking area, and the front gates were over here.

MH: Is the railroad track inside the gates or outside?

HB: We never did go down by truck into the gates. This is on top; the area up on top was the—where that railroad train was with all the dead bodies in it. And then at us, we were told we could do whatever we wanted. But we were to be back by 4:30, 5:00, and to make ourselves known to where we were around the camp but stay out of the camp and the area of up here. The camp was down here, and the main gate was down here.

We got in, and wandered down this way to the gate and visited. We could see the camp this way, and since we were told—we were all buck-ass privates, we didn't violate anything. And we didn't go into the camp, because they told us to stay out. So, we could walk down this way. There was—the moat was over here, and the moat was over here,

and the crematory was here. And I'm not so sure. I don't think there was a moat down this way.

MH: Where's the train?

HB: Whereabouts are you?

MH: If the moat's here—

HB: On the east side or the west side—okay, coming into the camp and into this area—Back off over in this area was where all of the—That's why that map would've helped. This way, coming along—put your railroad in here. And there'll be a moat down here and a moat down this way. Now, this is high ground. And you come down around this way, and that train didn't go much beyond here. It was about so far and then stopped.

MH: The train came in this way.

HB: Yes, and the camp was in this area, here. And Olson and whatever the boy was and I went walking—

MH: Did you walk past it?

HB: Oh, sure, we walked in—

MH: Tell me about walking past the train.

HB: Well, it's just a batch of bodies, and by that time, it wasn't like you'd never seen a dead person before. You didn't have your body that you'd slept with the night before killed and you'd just seen him, and that's the last thing. It's done. There's nothing you can do about it now. At least in my way—of course, I'm awfully tenderhearted right now. I can cry at the drop of a hat. But at that time, that was it. You didn't get excited anymore. It was dead, and it was those lousy bastards, didn't deserve any better than that.

See, they had been loaded on—this was another batch of political prisoners, like Dachau prisoners were. They weren't combat people, and as a result, they were there, and you

came and went. And in our case, we came in, and then we went walking. They told us to reconnoiter the area, blah, blah, you know, Army term, and find out where you are, and see what's going on. So, Olson and I came down this way, and it was down in here would be the main gate, in that area right there.

MH: The main gate's here?

HB: Yeah, down there, and here, in this area—this, all down here, was starting of the billets that were in there. And there were probably two rows of them as far as I can tell.

MH: Did you go through the main gate?

HB: No, hell no—oh, we went through the main gate into the camp area, and we've got—National has got pictures of this main gate and the prisoners hanging around. You've possibly have seen those.

MH: I've seen pictures. But you walked in through the main gate. You have American Army guys guarding the main gate?

HB: Uh-huh. They were there. Yeah, because we were—then we came down this way, on the outside of—you were no longer inside the camp area itself, here. And we were—I guess you'd say we were on the outside of the barbed wire in this area, when I stop to think about it, because we walked all the way down this way, and we got to this area. This was the crematory, in this area, and flowers, beautiful flowers, and they were fertilized real well. And how would you say it? As I can remember, and it's only been a week or two, you understand, but in finding out later that we went into this area, and the crematory, and we looked in and saw the bodies stacked up and all that jazz.

MH: But you're in your early twenties. You have to be reacting to this when you see it. You've never seen anything like this.

HB: Yeah.

MH: I mean, war is one thing; this has to be something else.

HB: Oh, yes. You just couldn't understand how people could do this sort of thing. And, like we were doing in this area, here, find out later on, here was a mound in here, maybe as far as from here to the wall, and it was higher than the rest of the area. I found out since then that that's where prisoners, they weren't dying fast enough, so they made them kneel on that, and they'd shoot them, and that was that area. Then they'd drag them off and bury them or throw them in. They couldn't get them in because they were burning them as fast as they could.

But I got the smell. In Kansas City, there was a stockyards area between Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas, and it was a stink that you noticed as you drove by. And I was—my dentist was in ASTP; he was a medic at the time I was in. I said something to him about the smell, and that's when he came up with the name of it. I've had it written down for years of what that smell was, and that was—it just plain stunk, just like the stockyards did, in those old days, and made the statement that, or we made. I made the statement later that I couldn't see how people could live in that area.

And I understand—here again, hearsay—while we were there, we moved out the next morning, but that night or the next morning, they brought people in from the city of Dachau itself, and took them through. And they didn't know that anything like that was going on.

MH: They never smelled a thing.

HB: Well, they said that they didn't. Well, Christ, I know what's happened. It's just like you get something of your own that you get to where—well, in your own house. Let's say—I don't keep a cat, but I've spent some time with Rainbow at some guy's visiting, and the house stunk. Well, since then, I've found out it was their kitty litter and the cats that they had and all. And you just get accustomed to stuff like that, and that's what we were getting accustomed to when we were there. But it still stunk, and it still upset the stomach and all.

MH: When you were going in the camp, there was no more shooting.

HB: No.

MH: Was there any shooting at all when you came up to the camp?

HB: No, no. See, we came in as a reserve company and F and G, I think, were the two troops that moved in. Where we were in this area here, I think, they came in over here in this area. Now, this was a shop area over here. They pushed us to go into this thing of people saying that there was no Dachau and there was no—

MH: Holocaust.

HB: I'm glad, because I hope you don't get like this at my age.

MH: I'm already there.

HB: (laughs)

MH: You saw me speak at lunchtime.

HB: No, I didn't. (laughs)

MH: Oh, that's right, you were—

HB: That wasn't—I know what happened that far back.

MH: Oh, I see.

HB: But we had things that went on. I know the thing that has, and early on, I could break down just bigger than shit. Outside the crematory, and was what they called shoes that they had. Some of them was blocks with some stuff on it, and they made 'em take their shoes off before they went in to take their shower, and I can remember—and the thing that stuck with me the longest was all of those shoes that laid there from these prisoners outside, and they were all killed, gassed, whatever you want to call it. And that vision, I can see that almost to this day. The smell I could probably identify, but that just was something that jarred my whole preserves. Here I was, a swinging teenager, no, that—

MH: Just seeing this pile of shoes.

HB: It would be about table-high, that sort of thing. All discarded shoes or what they called “shoes.” They weren’t shoes like we would have. It would be whatever they—clogs or whatever they had. We crawled on TDs the next morning and headed for Munich.

MH: TDs?

HB: You’re as bad as a damn reporter from one of the radio that time we went into—tank destroyer!

MH: Tank destroyer, right.

HB: Gee, whiz, you must’ve been a long time back.

MH: We didn’t have those things.

HB: You probably didn’t know there was a difference between tanks and TDs. TDs didn’t have tops on their turrets.

MH: Okay. Did they have a big gun?

HB: Later on. When we first went into combat, we got in the early ones, and I think they only had 70mm on those tank destroyers. In fact, I had a guy who turned out to be my barber, and he was National Guard, I guess, and when everything started, he went in right away. In fact, he was having to clean the horses up before they could eat their chow, because they had horses, still, that early. And 70s was what they had, and later on, just like the 20th Armored came in, they had 90mm, which was pretty good. We went into a little town, the tank sergeant says, “Well, don’t shoot this one up. We’re supposed to stay here the night,” so come along and put that 90mm, “You ever see this?” Put that 90mm on a house and just fired right through it. That 90mm is a killer.

MH: Back to Dachau, were the ovens still going when you were there?

HB: No, they’d run out of gas the day or two before, so there were not. There were people still in the ovens.

MH: They were coal fired, right?

HB: No, they were—

MH: I thought they were coal fired.

HB: It was a fuel oil of some sort. Gas or something, because they had run out of gas the day or two before we got there.

MH: But there were people still in the ovens?

HB: No, I think they were—they'd burned them up as much as—and drug 'em out. We didn't stay around. We knew what was there. You're trying to get real nosy and, hell, I didn't have sense enough to be that nosy.

MH: Did you ever have physical contact with the prisoners?

HB: Uh-uh, no way.

MH: The wire was between you and the prisoners?

HB: Now, our company, our A Company didn't do it, but early on, there were those that were in that—in fact, there was a guy that turned out to have joined my MO-KAN [Missouri-Kansas] Chapter in Kansas City that had been in, the lieutenant who was involved in the early-on occupation of Dachau. Now, they went in—in my files, I've got letters from [Walter] Fellenz, who was regimental commander, and [Donald] Downard and somebody else, one of the other officers, that had actually went in, had to make their reports to National, to headquarters. So, I've got copies of their reports.

MH: I think their reports are in the book, the Dachau report.

HB: Don't be too sure. I don't think that's the real reports.

MH: What impact did this have on you?

HB: Well, I've been quoted as saying that, "The thing to see is man's inhumanity to man." That's about the way I could look at it, as not being a writer. I damned near flunked English. So, picturesque speaking, I can't do, or writing.

MH: Was there an immediate impact on you? Let me tell you something about—

HB: I'm trying to think here.

MH: Kathy can stop transcribing for a moment. In Vietnam, I had done a story on a medic that was a conscious objector; it was the first time anybody had ever done a story like that. I came three weeks later to show him the story and he was dead. He had gone out on a squad and the entire squadron had been executed. And I went into what I call reporter mode, where you just turn off all the emotion and it's just the facts. Now you can turn the transcribing back on. Is that the kind of thing that happened to you when you're seeing all this?

HB: Oh, sure.

MH: You turn off the emotions?

HB: It's just like in combat. Didn't ever actually go into this hand-to-hand bayonet and that sort of thing, but to be honest, I had a little prayer. I said, "Lord, is this my day to get a mattress cover or clean sheets?" And come along at night and get settling down, "Thanks, Lord, I didn't make it today. Maybe you'll have a chance tomorrow." Something like that was the way I got through.

MH: The mattress cover was the body bag.

HB: Yes, that's what we had then.

MH: Did you each carry your own? Somebody told me—

HB: Hell, no.

MH: Somebody told me you each carried a mattress cover.

HB: I got news for you, and let's—I'll just tell you what—We went out on an OP at Christmastime, and that's when Remsbecker got hit, and I was at headquarters, because I was the runner and he was the one assigned to the unit, the platoon. He was there, and I was at headquarters. So, they came in and said, "Remsbecker's dead. Get your ass in gear; you're going down to the platoon." Okay, fine. And I never saw Remsbecker after that, but they tell me he had two or three slugs in his chest. So, that was Remsbecker.

Well, we went on that OP; so, in other words, the main line of resistance was here. We were in a railroad station here, and our guys were out here, dug in, that far out, so we were an OP to the OP.

MH: What is that, like 200 yards, more than that?

HB: Somewhere like that. And they had an 88. Those son of a bitches were good. The road went out this way and around here, and they'd bring in a tank or TD or 88, and they'd lay in there and fire on us. We lost a second platoon sergeant, first company platoon sergeant; was a direct hit from an 88. They could put that in your back pocket. So, you—I'm losing it from where I'm thinking, but we were there, and got run off, and they pulled us back, where the lieutenant says, "Let's pull back," so we pulled back. Cowboy that he was, he started shooting and carrying on, and we're supposed to have been pulled back without any noise.

So, at that time, we had a field jacket and a field jacket liner and a knit cap and an ammunition belt and a shelter half, and in our case, a shelter half was wrapped around—you folded it up and put it over your belt, and it slapped you on the ass as you ran. And I think we had two first aid packs, by that time. I think they had those on our belly, because so many guys were getting killed and landed on their back, and that's where the first aid pack was, so they had it doing that way, and they could get to them quicker if they needed it. And I think we had shoepacks and gloves. When we had gone out on our OP, I never understand, we had our full bag—come on, come on, what you carried all your stuff in.

MH: Rucksack?

HB: Well, I think for us it was a bag.

MH: Duffel bag?

HB: Something like that. I'm running out of words.

MH: It's okay, I'll make them up.

HB: I'm sorry. Barracks bag, thank you; you're a lot of help. (laughs) But we had everything I owned in there; family pictures, stationery, my extra uniform and all was in that barracks bag. And we left them in the railroad station, which was the OP, and I think we hadn't been shot up that bad yet. I guess it was twenty, twenty-five off, still scattered up and down. Three or four, couple machine gunners and a couple of mortar people. Powers decided to pull back, and that's when we shot up the things like a bunch of cowboys, and we pulled back.

Well, there was our barracks bags and everything, so the company commander was smart. He says, "Get your ass in gear and go down in the morning and get them." So, that's what we did. But I got looking, and some of the others looked, and there was little things under the barracks bags that I didn't put under mine. So, we never bothered with a thing; we just left 'em.

MH: They had booby traps?

HB: I think that's—we never found out. I never did hear anymore, but I felt that that was a booby trap that they had done to those. So, we pulled back, went back inside the main line of resistance, and I'm—time gets fuzzy for me right in that. I don't know if we ran combat patrols, but I was working out of headquarters by that time, and I had to know where all the platoons were, and I can remember taking a second John to pay the troops. Shelling and all that sort of crap.

MH: You recited that prayer for me before.

HB: That's my own personal—

MH: And you began to tear up when you said that. It brings back—

HB: Yes.

MH: Sixty-five years later, it still hurts.

HB: When I think about Remsbecker.

MH: Were you a religious person?

HB: I was confirmed, and I was married in church. I wasn't what I would call—I had to go to church.

MH: Which church?

HB: St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod.

MH: And when you came back from the war, how were you about religion?

HB: I went. I think Sunday's meant for church, however you want to term it that way. I am not a good church worker as one of the guys who's gung-ho and works real good. My wife told me one time, when I was dissatisfied with the way things were going, she said, "Well, you know what you can do? You can join the voters meeting and go to the voters meeting and change things. If not, sit there and keep your mouth shut."

MH: But had what you seen in the war, especially in a place like Dachau, didn't change your view of God at all?

HB: No, no. Hell, no.

MH: Why not?

HB: Ah, it's there. And He's there. Sure, in my case, I probably have a better feeling because I got through it. I lived. I know—always ended up with, at night you'd always say, "Thanks, God," or, "Thanks, Lord, for looking after me today."

MH: When you came back, did you have nightmares?

HB: Sure.

MH: When did they start?

HB: They started overseas!

MH: How long did they continue?

HB: I don't know. I can't remember, but I know that the shoe pile bothered me for a long time.

MH: When do you think they stopped?

HB: Maybe when I quit worrying and thinking about things. I don't know. It just—it's just the way it goes. I just never gave it a thought. Never figured I'd have to talk to somebody like you about that.

MH: For which I apologize but not sincerely.

HB: I know that. (laughs) I did the same thing with the Holocaust people at one of the reunions, had one of the gals from the Holocaust says—I still get periodic, from the Holocaust—

MH: The museum, you mean?

HB: Yeah.

MH: In Washington?

HB: Yes. See, I've been there and such, but I was oh, I guess you could say Remsbecker and Mel and Glenn and I—

MH: What was the second name? Remsbecker ?

HB: Remsbecker.

MH: And it's R-e-m-s-b-e-c-k-e-r?

HB: He's from St. Louis. He was my sleeping buddy, and Olson, Glenn A. Olson, I can remember that.

MH: O-l-s-o-n or e-n?

HB: O-n. I think he was Norwegian. And there was a couple other guys around, but the three of us—Well, there was Craft, that brings up a good subject. Craft and, come on come on—Michelle was in for awhile, but—

MH: Kraft with a "K"?

HB: No, C. I'm trying to think. You got me off on what I was thinking about. It was Craft, Remsbecker, and Olson—come on, come on, Miesenheimer.

MH: Miesenheimer.

HB: Now you spell that one.

MH: M-e-i-s-e-n—

HB: M-i-e—

MH: M-i-e—

HB: You're trying to get your own religion into this, and it's not gonna work.

MH: Sorry. M-i-e-

HB: S-e-n-h-e-i-m-e-r. He was a barber from Alabama, I think. He lasted—he made staff sergeant. I didn't—I wasn't good enough. I never ever got above PFC because I wasn't a good soldier.

MH: What does that mean?

HB: In my estimation, I wasn't one of these guys that'd jump up and say, "Let's go!" I'd wait until somebody'd say, "Butt, get your ass in gear, let's go."

MH: Did you take a lot of crap because of your name?

HB: No, no.

MH: Your name is Butt, B-u-t-t.

HB: Yes.

MH: And you took no crap because of the name.

HB: No, no.

MH: How big were you in the war?

HB: I probably weighed, when I went into the service, about 135 pounds, and after the war was over and I came home, living as personnel office, not doing a hell of a lot, I probably weighted 140, [1]45, [1]50. What do I weigh now?

MH: I don't know, 140.

HB: Hell, no, I'm probably up to 180 now, [1]75.

MH: But nobody gave you grief with your name.

HB: No.

MH: What was your nickname over there? Or they'd just call you "Butt"?

HB: Yeah, or some of them—somewhere, I was working at North American, and I had a squad leader that I was "Cotton" or "Whitey", because I was awfully blond-headed.

MH: So, you were blond over there?

HB: What hair I had. Miesenheimer and I got drunk and along with some of the others, and before we shipped overseas, he took the clippers and went (makes noise), so I went all the time overseas. I guess about two or three months before we were ready to go home, decided to let my hair grow, and that's when it came out. I used to be curly, but it didn't when I was overseas.

MH: So, you had—the nightmares over there, they continued back here.

HB: For a while.

MH: When did they stop, in the 1950s?

HB: I don't know. I never paid any attention. It's just something you had or you didn't have.

MH: And you had no other symptoms. You didn't come down with what we know as post-traumatic stress disorder?

HB: Oh, hell, no, but I did have battle fatigue.

MH: Excuse me, sir, same-same. Tell me about battle fatigue.

HB: Oh, we got pinned down; we were in a jump-off in the Harz Mountains the 15th of March, and we took off and—

MH: This is 1940 —?

HB: Forty-four [1944].

MH: Forty-four {1944} if you are in the Harz Mountains.

HB: I had—by that time we'd picked up another BAR man, and he was a big boy, about like you were before you got too good to eatin', and he was married and had a youngster at home. And I liked him; he was a nice fella. And we jumped off in the attack on the 15th. How well have you gotten into Germany? Would you know a firebreak if I talked a firebreak, what it was?

MH: No, go ahead.

HB: In those days, the government had forest and right here, probably, it was little stuff, and the trees got bigger. And as those people went in, they were supposed to go out and get a small tree. They'd cut one down and put it in the ground, for the one. Well, the firebreak, naturally, would be trees here, and then it would just thin out. You'd come into it, and this guy Miesenheimer—no, I guess it was Foss. I was working as assistant squad leader at that time, playing at it, not really enjoying it. And he says, "Check my shell as you come by." I had been working with him, BAR, trying to train him a little bit, what little I knew, and I got to him, and he was in a good BAR position. Have you ever fired a BAR, an old one?

MH: No.

HB: You were supposed to have your weapon on your shoulder in a line with your hips and your feet spread out, and your weapon firing that way. Division commander came in one day when I was a BAR instructor, and he says, "Your man in the right firing position?" I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "Arm and shoulder and hips don't line up," and I

said, “No, sir.” He said, “Why not?” I said, “There’s a rock right down there, and he can’t dig it up. It’s too big, we can’t dig it, so we shifted his position to move around it.” “Oh.” He walked off and left. But my commander ate my ass out the next day for not talking back but just giving it to him the way it was.

But I tried to, what little I knew. I didn’t want to pack the damn thing, but I lifted the helmet on Mitchel, and they were waiting for him, because his round was right in the middle of his forehead. Sniper was waiting for him. Waiting until we went across that open—that was Mitchel, that was my boy. Since then, I’ve heard from his daughter.

MH: M-i-c-h—

HB: I think it’s M-i-t-c-h-e-l, as I remember.

MH: When you came back, in your adult life, have you ever run into anti-Semites?

HB: Sure. It’s common.

MH: How do you deal with it, considering what you saw over there?

HB: You didn’t like it, but I was never a fighter. And if you’re going to resent something and stand, you’re going to have to back it up, and I quit backing it up. Just slough it off and go to something else. Give it up. See, I grew up with a father that was from South Carolina, so you get used to how you feel about the blacks and that sort of thing, so that falls in the same category. You shouldn’t, but it does.

MH: What about the people who deny that the whole Holocaust happened?

HB: That’s a batch of shit, and I’ve stood up for that.

MH: Can I quote you?

HB: Sure!

MH: Where have you stood up for that? Tell me about it.

HB: It's around, and some of the schools—because I've been invited and they were getting in conversation with the kids in school—that it didn't happen. Well, that was part of the reason I was working with that. As I say, I've conducted, oh, maybe four or five, six, discussions, took my map of Dachau and a book and talked about it.

MH: Do the kids believe it?

HB: Well, I never had anybody tell me I was a batch of shit to my face.

MH: Do you worry that after your generation is gone, the people who say, "It didn't happen," are going to win?

MH: No, I just think we're gonna have to do something to get some more of these strong feelings in the kids: patriotism and that sort of thing. It's just like—I could cry when I hear "Taps," and the young people aren't like that yet.

MH: They don't know it. In a way, I hope they don't have to find out.

HB: Well, it's just like Dachau or even standing in a damn hole in the ground, trying to keep your feet warm. You hope they don't ever have to do that, either. But some of us have got to do it, and I sure as hell was one them that did. (laughs)

MH: Do you have kids?

HB: Yes. My wife and I adopted a boy and a girl.

MH: At what point, if ever, did you tell them about what you'd seen?

HB: Oh, any time we—something went on, we talked about it, and they were aware that I was there. And they knew that I went to Legion meetings. And after my wife got involved with Rainbow, about the time the kids were old enough that we thought we could leave them alone, we went in—in fact, my wife was auxiliary president when she died. That was about—I guess it's just about that time. Oh, I know I went into being secretary at that

time because it helped pay—now I have to pay for my own hotel room here, but the transportation, traffic, I've got a budget allowance for that. So, they knew that I was in. My daughter is fifty, now, I guess, and she knows I'm fairly patriotic. Got a flagpole at the house.

MH: Are you one of the people who went back to Dachau?

HB: Yeah.

MH: When did you go? For the fiftieth [anniversary]?

HB: Yes.

MH: What caused you to go back?

HB: Well, partly to—let's see, was Laura alive at that time? We had gone to Oberammergau [Germany], she and I, with a tour, three or four years earlier, and then this trip to Dachau, and it was going into Munich area, and I ended up the war at, as the German called it at that time, was—we were in a little town called—don't go away.

MH: I'm waiting; it's okay.

HB: Can you work out to make a hamburger or something?

MH: No, but I can go, bam, bam, bam, bump, bump, bump, bump.

HB: We were in a little town called Anif [Austria], just outside of Salzburg, and we were going in there. We didn't get to see too much of Dachau when we were there, but Laura was there, and somewhere down the line, we've got pictures of her being at Dachau. We went to Munich, and I rented a car at Munich. We were staying overnight, and we went out to Anif to see what's going on, and didn't get in.

Then, when we went back for this last one, the last time, I went over by myself—no, I took Mona with me, a cousin, and we went back. I even got into the house I stayed in after the war was over. See, after hostilities were over, about two days, they pulled me

back in the office after the damned shootin' war was over. They pulled me back into the office so I could work in the office. So, I was there until I came home—

MH: When did you come home?

HB: In April of forty-three [1943].

MH: No, April of forty-six [1946].

HB: Six [1946].

MH: So, you've been to Dachau—back more than once?

HB: Twice. Went over one time as part of Oberammergau, it wasn't—but when the actual tour was, of Dachau, we didn't see anything much at that time.

MH: When you went back as a tourist, did it recall what you'd seen?

HB: Oh, yeah, you'd see it but—

MH: Or is it so cleaned up that it doesn't do anything?

HB: Yeah, it doesn't matter at that time. It wasn't like it was when we went in. Well, hell, we didn't ever go in. We went around it when we were fiddle-fooling around, looking.

MH: You clean that up nicely.

HB: Well, you want it the other way? (both laugh)

MH: I've never heard the expression fiddle-fooling, but that's okay.

HB: Okay. Well, I'm not gonna come up with a four-letter word just for your benefit, but just for—what is this, Kitty? Kathy. Just for Kathy's benefit; she's heard the word, probably.

MH: Yes, she has. Anything else you want to tell me?

HB: Well, it depends. What do you want to talk about?

MH: What was your career, what'd you finally work on?

HB: I worked in fabricating, manufacturing. I worked for years with Pittman Manufacturing, which is a truck, crane, and aerial platform manufacturing.

MH: What is that?

HB: Truck, crane and aerial platform manufacturing. You have somebody that digs your holes to put your poles on. I was with Pittman when they first came up with what they called a digger derrick, and stayed in that industry until they ran me off. They went down the tubes. I didn't have any retirement income, so I was one of those that didn't come out smelling like a rose.

MH: Were you wounded at all?

HB: No, just that two or three days on battle fatigue.

MH: Decorations?

HB: Got a Bronze Star for heroic survival—

MH: Valor?

HB: Yeah something like that, and because I got the combat badge in our war. If you rated a combat badge, you also rated a Bronze Star.

MH: Such a deal!

HB: Yeah, after you already got a star, then you get a cluster. So, I've got a Bronze Star and cluster as a result. Wasn't smart enough to get it when I could take advantage of it and come home early.

MH: Anything else you think of?

HB: Yeah, I just wish to hell I'd been a good soldier instead of a screw-up. I am, in my estimation, because—

MH: You did your job.

HB: Well, that's what we were sent over there for. You're supposed to protect your ass so you didn't get it shot off. That was second.

MH: The advice I got when I went to Vietnam was, "Don't be a hero."

HB: Oh hell that was—that's just plain old knowledge; you should know that.

MH: But what I didn't say at lunch is that toward the end of my tour, I started doing dumb things because I didn't think I'd done enough.

HB: Oh, no, I never was that way. No way. I didn't take any chances. I watched what I did. If you're just looking to bullshit, had an NCO [noncommissioned officer] club (inaudible) just outside of Anif and going up there, and had a three-quarter ton. Had his lady friend with him, and it was a batch of us. In my day, the bed was probably about as far as from here to the other side of the table, and maybe three or four guys down each side. Everybody was pretty well drunk up enough, so I squatted down between the legs of the guy from the office I'd known a long time.

That truck driver was going along, and he was impressing his lady friend. It's one of those cases where you could feel, he'd flip the wheel this way and rocked it a little bit, flipped it this way a little bit. About that time, he went this way, and I was sitting there, and we were going that way, and I told my boy, I said, "We're going over." And sure as

shit, we went over. Because I was squatting down between his legs, he ended up with a broken pelvis, and I got nothin'!

MH: It's bizarre to survive the war and get screwed up in something like that.

HB: Oh, heavens yes. No, you wonder about it. Getting pinned down and—
(announcement in the background) We've already been in the kitty. Hell, the trouble is we drink like we—there was 100 of us here, and you're only paying for about ten. What else you want to know?

MH: That's about it. You pretty much done it.

HB: I had fun in service, especially until I got overseas and got the shit scared out of me.

MH: Thank you for what you did.

HB: Well, that's part of the fun of being able to look back on it. I told myself I'd look up Remsbecker's family, and I never have done it. Still got this damn thing going?

MH: Yes I do.

HB: Turn it off.

End of interview