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Ted Simonson oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, March 19, 2008

Ted Simonson (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses. As the interview was conducted in a public place, there is a considerable amount of background noise.]

Michael Hirsh: Okay, so we'll start of with real easy questions. Give me your name and spell it, please.

Ted Simonson: Oh, you need my legal name?

MH: I need whatever name you want to use. Except—

TS: Okay, my legal name is Carlton, but nobody knows me by that.

MH: Don't cover that. Okay, so your name is.

TS: My name is Ted Simonson, S-i-m-o-n-s-o-n.

MH: And your address?

TS: ...

MH: And your phone number?

TS: Area code....

MH: And your date of birth?

TS: February 5, 1925.

MH: You got all those answers right.

TS: Those are all right.

MH: So, the rest of the questions are easy.

TS: Now it gets to the hard questions.

MH: You went into the army when?

TS: Nineteen forty-two [1942], when I turned eighteen.

MH: So, you had graduated from high school?

TS: Yeah—no, I'm sorry, I told you wrong. Nineteen forty-three [1943], when I turned eighteen. I actually graduated from high school in forty-two [1942] but I worked almost a year as a longshoreman, and then when I turned eighteen, I was automatically drafted on my eighteenth birthday.

MH: Where were you growing up?

TS: California, Southern California.

MH: Whereabouts?

TS: Ventura.

MH: In Ventura?

TS: Ventura.

MH: I lived in Calabasas.

TS: Did you? I know Calabasas and that part of California reasonably well, yeah.

MH: So, you go into the service—

TS: I go into the service. I report to Fort MacArthur. You want to hear dumb stuff about soldiers that have nothing to do with Dachau?

MH: Sure.

TS: Well—

MH: Anything that will lighten this up.

TS: Well, along with being a high school wrestler and a football player and a baseball player, I played trombone in swing bands and stuff. And I was a year younger than most of the guys I went to high school with, so when I graduated in forty-two [1942], most of those guys were turning eighteen were immediately drafted. But I didn't get drafted until I was eighteen in forty-three [1943]. I lied about my age and went to work as a longshoreman, 'cause I could work—prior to that, I worked for thirty-seven and a half cents an hour; longshoring paid sixty-seven and a half cents an hour, and I could work all the overtime I wanted because they didn't have any able-bodied men. Therefore, I worked twenty-four hours on and twenty-four off, and averaged time-and-a-half.

MH: You're not—I don't mean to be offensive, but you're not the biggest guy in the world to be a longshoreman.

TS: No, no, but my game was when I worked the oil fields, I could pick up 500 lbs. of weight material and keep my drilling crew in beer because I could beat every truck driver on the route.

MH: How tall are you?

TS: Five [feet and] four-and-a-half [inches]. But when I did that, I weighed about 154: that's what I wrestled at. So, anyway, I was just a working stiff's kid, you know, and I had real trouble in school because the teachers constantly told me, "You're smart, you ought to do this, you ought to do that." But I was much more interested in the fact that I bought my first car when I was thirteen and got my driver's license at fourteen so I could go to work, and worked hard ever since at something or other.

But anyway, I was drafted and the Army immediately said, "We're going to send you to bombsight maintenance school, but first you have to do Air Corps basic." So, I went to Camp Kearns, Utah, and I was about halfway through Air Corps basic when they called and said, "You know, you got really high IQ scores." Actually, they weren't IQ; they were whatever the selection tests were they used. "And you can go to OCS or you can go to college." And I'm eighteen years old and interested in girls—my first thought was, "Hell, I'll be an officer! The girls will like the uniform." Well, then I discovered you were probably going to come out infantry lieutenants, and I'd heard through the grapevine that infantry lieutenants, if they ended up in charge of rifle platoons, lasted about two minutes under fire.

MH: I was looking at my watch, yes.

TS: Yes, and I thought, well, I'm not too smart, but my mother didn't raise a complete idiot. I thought more deeply, and it suddenly dawned on me: all that was in college were girls. All the guys were drafted. I ended up in Kansas University with a college full of Kansas farm girls. Like heaven—right up until they shut down the program and told us one morning, "Pack your bags, gentlemen, you're all being sent to the 42nd Rainbow Division in Muskogee, Oklahoma." (both laugh) Now, by God, that was an awakening.

MH: What was the goodbye party like?

TS: We didn't even get a shot at a goodbye party.

MH: Didn't get a chance to tell the girls you're off to war?

TS: No, they announced it one morning, and the next morning we were gone.

MH: Oh, man. What an opportunity lost.

TS: (laughs) Yeah, so that's how I got in the Rainbow. Otherwise, I was going to go to Denver, Colorado, and study how to maintain Norden bombsights. Oh, I didn't tell you the worst part of it. When I was at Fort MacArthur, because my buddies graduated—

MH: Fort MacArthur is where?

TS: In San Pedro, California. I was there, that was my induction center, and they ran through 5,000 men at a time at the time. Well, my buddy was out a year ahead of me. He's playing in a band, an Air Force band down in Texas. And I'm standing in front of 5,000 men. When they called my name out loud and asked if I want to go play in a band in Texas, and I'm standing before 4,999 guys I don't even know, and I'm embarrassed to suggest I'm going to go play in a band—and I said no. I said no! Talk about not smart.

MH: So, you swapped the slide trombone for an M1.

TS: Well, in no time at all, I swapped it for a damn BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle], again, because I wasn't smart.

MH: So, I've heard from your compatriot, the adventures going all the way around—I assumed—

TS: I followed exactly the same path dear old Dee did.¹ His memory is 900 percent better than mine.

MH: Let's—

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

TS: Just segue right around

MH: Let's segue right around, and you're approaching Munich. Let me ask you, what did you know about concentration camps, slave labor camps, that sort of stuff?

TS: Absolutely nothing. I had no idea of their existence; it never occurred to me that there was anything like Dachau. And all I knew when they loaded us on the trucks and said, "There's a German prison camp up there, we need to get there in a hurry to try to save the prisoners," the implication that I drew, at least, was they were afraid the Germans were going to kill them all, and we had to hurry and get there. It never occurred to me that it was any primary bunch of Jews or this or that; or it never occurred to me the concept of a death camp itself and really starving people and incinerating them, you know, by the thousands. Never occurred to me.

MH: Tell me about the orders you got.

TS: As far as I know, the orders I knew about simply said, "We've got to make this run; you guys get on these trucks." And getting on trucks—my God, we'd hardly ridden a step all the time we'd been in Europe. So, when we first got on those trucks, it was like a picnic for me. Hell, we're actually driving past those other poor bastards that are walking, and here we are riding.

MH: These were deuce-and-a-halves or 6x6s?

TS: Yeah, two and a halves, regular two and a halves. Part of the way in, we had one place where the Germans made a pass at us like we were getting strafed. I jumped out of the truck—

MH: From a plane?

TS: Yeah, yeah. Well, I jumped out of the truck, I hung my BAR belt over a stake on the side of the truck. Everybody else ran and got in the ditch, and I'm eyeing him up in the air trying to unbuckle my belt so I can (laughs) get out. I hit on my knees on the pavement; didn't slow me down a bit. When I got in the ditch with the rest of the guys, all they said was, "Hey, what kept you, Shorty?"

MH: That was your military nickname? Shorty?

TS: Yeah, Shorty all the way.

MH: All the way. So you get back in the trucks—

TS: Got back in the trucks, so we continued. And you know, the run into Dachau was not like most of the combat we'd been in. We didn't get a lot of resistance, you know. The Germans—by that time, there was sporadic resistance and so forth, and here and there, there was a little bit of fire. And then we got in close to the camp and we were offloaded, you know, and proceeding on foot: we hit some small resistance, but it wasn't like combat per se had been. It isn't that hell; you can't get shot by somebody, a fifteen-year-old or somebody else with a stray round. But it wasn't anything like that, and we hit very little artillery. One place we hit some. Sporadic.

MH: How long was the run in—hours, days?

TS: Oh, no. No, for us it was like one afternoon, you know. We got in there in the afternoon, mid-afternoon-ish

MH: Of the twenty-ninth of April?

TS: Twenty-ninth of April, yeah. And there was some resistance and fire that came out of the guard towers initially—

MH: When you got there?

TS: When we got there, yeah. It was a small amount of fire there, but that was shot out in nothing flat.

MH: Did you engage that?

TS: Yeah, we did, slightly.

MH: Tell me about that.

TS: Well, I can't tell you much, except to say there was a small amount of firing and that was over. And in no time—I say “no time,” but slowly advancing and being careful and so forth. The lead elements—a kid, Jack Perry, who was with us, was up to the wire before we were done.

MH: Did you park the trucks how far away from the wire?

TS: I have no idea. But a good distance, you know, because we closed in on the camp on foot.

MH: When did you first smell the camp?

TS: Oh, you know, I don't know. But by the time we got close to it, well, then obviously we knew that thing wasn't right, and so forth. And we were—at least the section I was in, we were—I think they call it the Jourhaus Gate, whatever it is, you know. Now there are plaques that are hung inside there and so forth. We were slightly to the right of that, and back and not right up—we never got—all of us didn't get right up to the wire.

MH: You weren't with Dee at this point.

TS: Yeah, Dee was around somewhere where I was.

MH: But not with you.

TS: Not side by side, no. No.

MH: So, you heard the guards in the towers start shooting?

TS: Yeah, initially we got some light fire out of those and that kind of stuff.

MH: And you're sure they were shooting at you guys?

TS: Yeah, we think—I think so. But that didn't last long, because hell, their firepower compared to the number of people we were closing in with was like nothing. And those guard towers weren't made like defensive positions; they were there to guard prisoners, really. So, although they had weapons, they didn't really have protection up there.

MH: I talked to somebody who came in with the 45th, and he said they'd sent people up and actually threw the guards out of the towers and then—(inaudible).

TS: Well, I never saw any of that happen. I question whether—I know that the 45th came in off to the left of us through what I would call the administrative area, and all that sort of thing. And I don't know when they did that. But they didn't do that while I was looking at it, for sure. And we were laying in an open field: there was nothing—once we were up close, there was nothing to impede our view other than just the men ahead of us, and the wire.

MH: So, tell me what you're seeing.

TS: We saw the wire, you know, and initially I think—I believe there were dogs that were between the two wire fences, and before we were done, we saw a few prisoners that electrocuted themselves. The fences were—the fence was alive for a while after we got there.

MH: Did you see that?

TS: Yeah. Saw some of it, a few guys who ran to the fence and got stuck.

MH: Were they pressed by the crowd into the fence?

TS: No, no, they just ran up there, you know. And there were not very many. Most of those guys—when we got there, most of those guys did not come out until after we had people actually enter the camp and they suddenly realized, “Hey, we're free.” And the thing that, if you ask me, of all the things there that impress you the most, the thing that I really remember? I remember when those prisoners realized that they were free. It was like howling animals or something like you'd hear in a modern, oh, science fiction scare movie sort of thing. It was just like animals howling; and the guys that were closest to

the fence told us that those people literally tore the guards that they got their hands on and stuff, limb for limb.

MH: The kapos.

TS: Yeah. The kapos, yeah. They literally just ripped them apart. And I remember that, above all else.

MH: The sound.

TS: The sound, yeah.

MH: How many people do you think you saw inside?

TS: Well, you know, we never—I know there were about 30,000 people there. But we, in the very front elements, we didn't see much of that. Then, when after that they began to churn around and so forth, in no time at all they took us and moved us out into the city, and then on to Munich. And it was the elements that followed us that really got to go inside and really look around and that kind of stuff.

MH: You didn't go inside.

TS: Did not go inside.

MH: So you had no one-on-one contact with these people.

TS: No, we had—I had no one-on-one contact with those prisoners at that time. The next day we saw some prisoners wandering and that kind of stuff, that I presume came out of there. But no, the actual liberating troops, at least the elements we were with—and Dee and I were 242 [Regiment], remember. We were I Company 242, and as far as we know, we were the only platoon of the 242 attached to the 222nd [Regiment], and we don't know why that happens. We know that our morning reports don't even show that we were there.

MH: Did you pass the train?

TS: Yes, and we saw—

MH: Tell me about the train.

TS: Well, we saw the train, and we saw the bodies spilling out, and we knew it was full and it was stinking, you know.

MH: Were you walking past it, or driving?

TS: No, we were walking, you know. We went off toward the city of Dachau, which is not that far away.

MH: What's that sight do to you?

TS: That changed my perspective considerably over what, you know, that was the first real realization that hey, this is different than what we typically—I never thought a prison camp was any, you know, what—paradise or anything. But I never thought of a prison camp where people died by the hundreds or thousands, stark naked, nothing left on 'em, stripped, sort of thing. Just, you know, living skeletons, that sort of thing. That part really dismayed me and said to me, “Hey, there's more reason for this damn war than I had realized at first.” Well, to this day, it reminds me how capable people are of being led astray by the governments; you can be led to believe a whole lot of things are okay if necessity dictates it.

MH: What did it do to your thinking about the German people?

TS: You know, initially, initially it made me pretty negative. Because even in the very short time we were in Dachau, you know, we'd start asking, “Hey, how come? What about that?” and nobody knew anything. And—

MH: This is when you were in the city of Dachau.

TS: Yeah, as we'd go through. And nobody knew anything, you know. “Well, we don't work out there. We don't know what's out there.” And, you know, you don't have to be

very bright to understand that's a crock. There's no way you can live that close and the rumors not get around and the talk get around of what was going on.

MH: And wonder what the smoke is.

TS: Yeah, and wonder what the smell is, the smoke is, and all the rest of that. And so that made us—made me at least—pretty doubtful of the whole, I guess, what I would call the Nazi point of view and so forth. Interestingly, subsequently, I changed my view to this extent—not that I think that anything they did was okay, but it's very clear to me that if people are raised from a young age to believe a certain way and are indoctrinated in it, they accept it. And you know, if a German kid was raised to believe the SS was the highest order of things and aspired to get there, he wasn't a lot different than our guys who aspired to be paratroopers or something else that was elitist comparatively, and so forth, and they're true believers. And they went down, true believers, just the same as we did. Our government said we were right, and if anything the Dachau experience confirmed for me: hey, we're right.

MH: There were no doubts in your mind.

TS: No, no real doubts. But you know, it's pretty hard to run into people, and particularly as we began to advance into Germany and Austria, as we started moving that way, we'd see people who looked pretty much like Mom and Dad back home, and stuff, you know. Slates all falling off the roof, this shell, that shell, this animal's dead, and that kind of stuff. And it's pretty hard not to look at those people and see your own people, too, and wonder jeez, what happened here. So Dachau was a sort of confirmation that hey, well something is really wrong here.

MH: I've been told something at this meeting that I've never heard before, and that was that some of your guys ran into American soldiers who never came anywhere near the camps who didn't believe the Holocaust happened.

TS: Yeah, well, I think that's true.

MH: How could that be?

TS: Well, if you don't want to believe it. You know, for one thing, people forget that, starting about World War II, the predominant European group of people in this country were German. You know, we had a huge German population, particularly in the

Midwest. And some people don't realize that the original formation in World War I of the 42nd Rainbow Division was because there were people who believed that a lot of our men might not go to war if they were ordered in World War I, because divisions at that time, much like today, were regional in character. And there was some concern that if we order up a division, say, out of the Midwest—out of Iowa or something like that; Wisconsin, something like that—and the people say, “Hell no, our kids won't go.” Then what would they do? So, the original 42nd, you know, was composed of—was National Guard. You'd think we were doing a (inaudible). They were National Guardsmen from twenty-six states and Washington, D.C., all gathered at Camp Mills on Long Island and turned into the Rainbow 42nd Division.

MH: For World War I.

TS: For World War I. You know. And so, there was resistance to the idea of going to fight Germany then. And I think, you know, there were German people who had relatives in Germany and a lot of them in this country. It wasn't as if, you know, those people in Germany were total strangers to our total population. Now, out in California, where I lived, and was born, well, nobody even thought about the fact that a large part of our population was German. But in reality, we were.

MH: When you came back, did you have to convince people that what we know happened really happened?

TS: You know, when I told people about Dachau and stuff like that, there was that kind of wide-eyed “Really?” sort of reaction, you know.

MH: Did you talk about it?

TS: Yes.

MH: Right when you came back.

TS: Yes. Well people would say, “Where did you serve? What did you do?” and that kind of stuff.

MH: Some of the other guys said, “Nobody asked.” I mean, it's like when we came back from Vietnam: nobody asked.

TS: No, no. Well, it wasn't a major topic of conversation or anything, you know. By the time I came back in forty-six [1946], we'd already returned a lot of young men home with the point system. And being younger and that sort of thing, we didn't come home with the initial surge. When I came home, I was looking at going to college and getting a job first, and then going to college. But some people would ask what you had done and where were you and why were you there, and what did you do. And I would mention it, and they would find that hard to believe. And it wasn't until later that we published a division book and that kind of stuff that had some pictures you could actually show people, and that sort of thing.

MH: Did people argue with you that this couldn't happen?

TS: No, I never experienced that at that time. I think people were pretty willing believers that—hey, we pretty well had people—what's the right word? I want to say "Satanized;" that isn't exactly the right word, but we pretty well had people believe the Germans really, really were wrong and had done things that were really bad. But—and at that time, you know, people even like yourself, probably, we were still saying Uncle Joe Stalin was our buddy. You know, at that time when we came home. Hey, the Russians had not yet begun to try to gobble up stuff and turned Uncle Joe into something bad rather than good.

MH: Did you run into anti-Semites when you came home?

TS: No, but strangely enough—I need to be just a little bit careful here. I mentioned a woman I helped come to this country. And I was shocked that one time in Vienna I was talking with a young woman and an older woman, and they were asking, you know, what was I going to do when I went home. By that time, my father had been really successful, and he died—with a sixth grade education—and he died a multi-millionaire at a time when being a millionaire really meant something. And he had bought an automobile finance company, and he wanted me to run it. And I mentioned it: when I mentioned finance, both women looked at each other and said, "*Jude?*" Just like that. They immediately assumed if my father was dealing with money, finance, he was Jewish. Therefore, I must be Jewish. And I explained to them, "No, no, no, no—I'm not Jewish, my father's not Jewish." But there was, even among—and that young woman, who was a displaced person herself, and had done everything possible to avoid getting into relocation camps for DPs and sent back to her own country under Russian domination. But there was an anti-Jewish flavor there in that woman that I helped bring to this country.

MH: I want to thank you.

TS: (laughs) Yeah, you know, but that existed in that damn culture. There's no question about it. And therefore, my concept of how could Hitler and his cohorts do something like that and get away with it is because the population condoned it. That's what I truly believe. It was like, "Okay, we'll look the other way, because after all, we don't really approve of those people either."

MH: But as you were re-integrating yourself into civilian life here, even years later, did you ever run into it?

TS: Yeah, years later I ran into a few people who said, "Well, we don't really think that was there," and I'd say, "Well, I can sure as hell vouch for one camp." You know. And the thing that happened to me later in life, really, was that I was impressed when we returned in—I think it was ninety-five [1995]—

MH: Fifty years.

TS: Yeah, fifty years. The Bavarian government asked us to go and speak to their—what would be their equivalent of our high school seniors here in this country and testify to what we had seen and make sure we told them what we'd seen. Because they had people who were trying to suggest it never occurred, and they wanted to be certain that those high school kids had heard from men who were really there that this really happened and could see it. Because we want to be sure that historically we don't forget what happened when we weren't a democracy.

MH: And now you've got [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad and Iran.

TS: And now we've got whatever his name is and Iran, saying it never happened. You know. I can't explain that, I'm not a wise enough man. But, you know, we who were there know that it happened. You know, and—

MH: Do you have children?

TS: Yes. I have two daughters.

MH: At what point did you tell them about—?

TS: Oh, when they were about high school age. For one thing, I worked in the same high school for forty-seven years.

MH: Doing what?

TS: Well, I started as a wrestling coach and a football coach, and I taught business subjects because my father had expected me to go in business with him, and therefore an accounting and marketing major combined. And—

MH: You went to college.

TS: Yeah, and as I was finishing college—by that time, I was married. I was finishing—

MH: What college, I'm sorry?

TS: I went to San Jose State University. And you ask why I went there? At that time, 1948-49, the two best undergraduate business schools on the coast were San Jose State College—at the time before it became a university—and UCLA. And my wife and I could live and go to San Jose State University for half for what I could go to UCLA. And since I was going to work for my father, I didn't need any big resume or anything; I just needed to get the training. But while I was there, I made up my mind I wanted to teach. I thought it was going to be a more worthwhile profession, and I might have more influence on the thinking of young people, and I purposely picked high school. I had several opportunities to go to the college level, and I knew I wasn't fitted for the elementary level. And high school just happened to fit me—from my view, at least—perfectly. And when I decided I wanted to teach, well, now I'm all the way through. If I'd made up my mind earlier, I would have majored in science. But I'd already completed a major in business, and I needed to start supporting my wife rather than having her support me. And I went to work teaching purely out of choice for one-tenth of what I started—I made \$3,200 a year, and my father would have started me at \$30,000.

MH: You started telling me about telling your daughters.

TS: Well, when they got up to high school age, for one thing, the teachers who taught history and social studies used to ask me to come in: when they'd do World War II, used

to ask me to come in and speak to the kids. Because if you take a look at how many people in the army really get shot at, most of the guys in the army—a lot of the guys in the army had better lives than they had before they were drafted. Because, you know, we were coming out of the Depression and so forth. And so, about 5 percent of the troops actually got shot at. Although we had veterans teaching, I was one of the few guys who'd actually ever been shot at and actually looked at warfare, right in the nitty-gritty of the face, as you understand it. And I understand it. So my daughters naturally heard, "Your old man come in and talked to us today." Then they started asking questions.

MH: I didn't ask you: were you wounded?

TS: You know, once, so slightly that I thought, "Oh God, I got a million-dollar wound." But we were in a place where we couldn't do anything. And remember the house I showed you the picture of? I got wounded the night before we went in and got trapped in that house. And Dee, who you talked with, he saved my life. We were spread out along the Moder River at that time, and I had three men with me and Dee was responsible for three men a hundred yards up the way. And during the night, a man named Herb Grassman—now deceased, neat guy—we were doing two hours outside of a dugout. We had a dugout that we'd cut trees and put over the top of the dugout in case the Germans started shelling us to hold the shrapnel off. But we had two foxholes dug outside that, and there was a road that ran between where we were and overlooking the river and that house I showed you, which was our platoon CP [command post]. And we had orders to keep civilians off the road. Well, that night, there was soft snow on the ground, it was a full moonlight night, and we were in these thick little trees. They didn't go any higher than this ceiling, if that high, but thick. And Herb woke me up and said "Shorty, Shorty, wake up." [Ted:] "What is it?" [Herb:] "There are civilians on the road behind us, and we had orders to keep 'em out." I said "Okay." I picked up my BAR and he picked up his M1 and we left the rest of our spare ammo laying right in the foxhole.

We walked out in the snow, and there were about twenty of these, what looked like German civilians. And we stepped out in the snow—we were to the right of them, they were over to our left. We stepped out in the snow right out into the road. When they saw us it was like an explosion, and they all made a dive for a big clothes basket a couple of them were carrying in the middle and came up with weapons. Grassman and I dived back into the woods. Fortunately, that road had a berm. Now, the Germans didn't know; they knew there were two Americans around, and they were Germans that were all in civilian clothes but were actually German soldiers. They started blazing away and firing at us like mad. I didn't know where Grassman hid; I knew where I was. I turned around and was facing him. The night before, we had been in the basement of the house and had a fire going. Everything got warm and we'd been out in the cold for a month. When I pulled the trigger on the BAR, it wouldn't fire. You know what a BAR is like? Heavy bolt—thunk—no fire. I thought, "Oh, my God, what now?" I pulled it back again—

another thunk. I tried it about four times, the last two times only when the Germans were firing because I was afraid they'd hear that bolt thunk if it was quiet.

And then while I'm laying there, about three feet from my head—I've got my head turned to one side—they throw a concussion grenade. Damn thing, I was looking right at it when it went off. And I'm thinking, "Man, this is not healthy," and I don't know where Grassman is. And then I feel a burn, just down the outside of the calf of my right leg. I said, "Wow, what was that?" Had no idea. Well, something went through there. So, I start crawling backwards, always looking toward the Germans. Now if you ask me why I didn't turn around and make real speed, I don't know. I guess I wanted to see who was going to kill me. But subsequently I felt something grab my leg, and it was Grassman. He's in one of the holes, and he's just got his rifle laying up there. And I said, "Get a hold of the goddamn rifle, you know, my BAR won't fire." He said, "I've only got one clip and there's more than that out there." (laughs)

Well, in the meantime, Dee had heard all this blazing away at us. He went out with one man—I think it was Pete Klomton; I'm not sure. But the two of them looked, they went back and got the other two of their guys, and the Germans are laying out there in the full moonlight, and they just leveled off and slaughtered them. If you think I thought that was a welcome sound, you're right. The funny part about that was, the night before we had K Company stragglers had come through and told us that the Germans had broken through up to when we were facing the motor, what was our right. And we went over and told our lieutenant, who was kind of green, "Hey, the Germans have broken through." He said, "Get back out there and get in them foxholes and watch that river. We haven't heard anything from headquarters." Probably never did.

But anyway, after Dee shot those guys off of us and everything, the next morning, as soon as it was light enough to move around without the guys shooting at us and so forth, we went over and got in a hell of an argument in the basement of whether we should get out of there or we shouldn't, because obviously the Germans were in and around us. And while we were down in the basement, the Germans started firing in the windows, which brought us out of the basement and the ultimate firefight that I've told you about and we abandoned it. But anyway, Dee could have laid down and done nothing, say, "That fight's not ours, it's down there; let them take care of themselves." And I owe him my life, I'm sure, simply because he took the initiative to get out there and get organized and do the job right. So, if knocking off twenty people is doing their job right—(laughs) It felt right to me.

MH: You do what you've got to do. What else do you want to tell me?

TS: You know, nothing else. Dachau was part of the picture that made me understand life was more complicated than it seems, and my experience in school made me think that I could do a better job than my own teachers had. And I subsequently learned the problem wasn't with the teachers, when I was in school. The problem was my problem. But I was a pretty successful educator, and I think part of the reason was because I could relate to kids who didn't really feel comfortable in a school situation. I could talk to them about why you need and what you need, and they could think that, well, this guy understands us.

MH: Did the war ever come back to you?

TS: I had for maybe four, a maximum of five, years after I was out—I was married and that sort of thing. Occasionally I would have a nightmare. And the only one that really comes to mind came to me again when we first put our guys in Iraq. And when the war settled down, you know, victory was announced and all that kind of stuff. And now they're getting shot at out of the windows, and they're getting resistance like that. When we first started getting into Germany and we were moving through villages and small towns and so forth, and white flags would come out, well, some places we'd hit resistance. And you hit resistance and every window is a potential threat, every door you go in is a potential threat and that sort of thing. And you don't know about the civilian population. While we were in France, we were pretty comfortable. Once we got into Alsace, I wasn't as comfortable, because a lot of those people spoke German as well as they spoke French. And I was not comfortable with that.

One day—smile, or just talk?

MH: Just talk.

TS: One day when we were clearing a medium-sized town, we had a new lieutenant; and although by the end of the war I was a platoon sergeant, I always carried a BAR. Shorty, the tough guy with the BAR. You know what I mean. I had an image and a reputation—undeserved—for being really tough. And it was important to me at the time. And we were clearing, and we come to this house and it's got a cellar door. And you know, an external cellar door? And we got the door open, we hear noise in there, we think, and I say to this new platoon leader—I don't even remember his name—"What do you want me to do?" Now, one of the things you can do is throw a grenade in. He says, "Fire a blast in there with the BAR." So I let her roll—rrrrrup! You know? I hear a woman scream. Oh, goddamn. So now, in our rough German, we're trying to say "*Kommen Sie hier*," you know, "Come out," all that. Out comes a woman, twenty-three, twenty-four years old. I can see her as plain as day. She was dressed in a pair of German winter gray wool pants. And she's got two little kids hanging on her legs screaming, and she's pissed

herself totally. She's all wet in the crotch and I'm thinking, "Shit, I could have killed them, for Christ's sake." You know? And after the war, periodically, I'd have a nightmare over that.

Then after five years, I had no nightmares. I was well adjusted as any man I know. But when our guys got in Iraq and they started that goddamn kind of door-to-door stuff, initially and stuff, I had that nightmare again twice. Haven't had it since, but those, for me, the worst part of the war was being in a place where it's definite—he's shooting you, I'm shooting you, you're dropping artillery, we're dropping artillery, but you get in among that civilian population and that kind of stuff, that is a tough place. And I've heard the bellyaching and bitching, the Marine that shot a guy who looked like he was dead or could have been dead and all that kind of stuff. The people bitching about that never had to go in a door, and never had to make up their mind, "Do I throw a grenade in there first, or do I just walk in and let the guy—see who can quick-draw-McGraw," that sort of thing. That's a terrible position to put people in, and for me, that was the worst, of the combat situations, that was the worst—because it was psychologically, you're pulled two ways. Do I just kill every damn thing that moves and make sure I'm safe, or what do I do? I don't know how else to put it. That was really, really hard for me.

MH: What brought you to this reunion?

TS: Oh, you'd have to know how I grew up. I grew up with the toughest father you would ever meet. He was a good father, and he really put me and three brothers on the right track about how to treat women, you know? My father thought any man—and I swear rather freely, and my father swore even more, and so forth—but he thought that any man who abused a woman verbally or ever thought of touching her was the poorest specimen on earth. On the other hand, no man ever crossed him and pissed him off that didn't get hit. He was known for it. Ventura was a small town in those days; nobody screwed around with old man Simonson. They also knew he was working fool, and they knew his kids would work or he'd kill 'em. So, me and my brothers always had work.

MH: (referring to background noise) You're making so much noise with this I've gotta take it away from you. Go ahead.

TS: Well, me and my brothers always had work. Because it was a small town and growing up in the Depression and so forth; everybody knew old man Simonson would kick the crap out of his kids if they weren't known as workers. So, we benefited by our father's raising. But I admire toughness. I admire toughness, because I admired my father.

And I can't give you the man's name, but we had a man in our company and in our platoon who was a BAR man in the 3rd Platoon. He was the toughest man in a bar fight I ever saw. He and I used to go into Muskogee every once in a while and clean out a bar, him 95 percent and me 5 percent. You know what I mean? We got in combat, and as soon as we got in combat, the son-of-a-bitch ran. He was a coward. And I'd always admired, you know, physical strength and courage.

Suddenly, I learned Herb Grassman who was—his father was a sign painter in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Herb, we could never get him cleaned up so we passed inspection without getting KPd [given kitchen patrol]. But he was as tough a combat soldier as ever lived. My father didn't like Jews because they had all the money. Well, Herb Grassman and his father sure as hell didn't have the money. Mexicans, in Ventura when I grew up, they had to live on one side of the railroad tracks. They weren't allowed to live where we lived. But we had a little guy named Size, who was a runner for us, who'd get up and move when all hell was breaking loose to carry messages.

And it was in the army I learned that you judge people by what they do, not what they say, not what they look like, nothing else. You judge a man strictly by what you can see what they do. And the men I hang with here have all proved to me when the chips were down, they'd hang in there. And I like being around them. It's that simple. A lot of guys, you never really get to test them. You never see them. You want to hear a war story after the war about this really tough guy that I knew?

MH: Sure.

TS: That beat everybody? After the war, because I told him one time, "You get down, you son-of-a-bitch or I'll kill you" because he was firing backwards into our troops as he ran away. We put him off and he went with the Rangers. When the war was over, damned if they didn't send him back to our company. We were billeted in some old SS barracks guarding war crime prisoners at a place called Gmunden, Austria. But anyway, the only person they could billet this clown with was with Jack Perry, who was a full-bore Christian Mormon. No smoking, no drinking, no coffee, no tea, no nothing. And Jack Perry is a round-muscled, smooth-muscled, good-sized guy, pretty close to this other guy's size. And we were billeted in the SS barracks and they had little narrow rooms, just room for two cots, a couple of foot lockers, a door and a window out the other end.

And one day, we hear this crash, bang, boom, and damned if our loser clown somehow actually got under Jack Perry's skin enough so they got in a fight. It was like a movie—we're crowded around the door looking in, and we're cheering for Jack. We know he can't win. This guy's never lost a fight, we know that. We know he can't win. But they're fightin' and fightin' and fightin', and by God, old Jack Perry wore him down and

he squeezed him so hard he broke a bunch of ribs; the guy squalled and hollered, and we all cheered. The next day he was gone from our company. To this day, Jack Perry's ashamed.

MH: Because he did that.

TS: Because he lost temper and shouldn't have done that. Should have understood. Which puts tears in my eye, because to this day, we think he's a hero. You know. Isn't that funny? But the army changed my outlook for life about people. And I judge people—rank means nothing to me. Position means nothing to me. I want to know, is your heart right? You can be rather stupid and have a good heart. You can be really bright and have a lousy heart. And I know with the guys I tend to associate with, like Dee Eberhart in particular, their hearts are right.

MH: Thank you. I appreciate it.

TS: You're welcome.

End of interview