

Hahne, Edward

Aircraft Artillery, Combat Engineers, Infantry, Field Artillery: 1942-1945

This interview was held on April 22, 2006. The questions were asked by Bryce Goodwin and Shelly Goodwin. This interview is a two disk interview.

DISC 1

Q: If you'll begin by stating and spelling your full name.

A: Edward Henry Hahne.

Q: Where do you currently live.

A: I currently live at 450 Circleway Drive. Cedar City, UT.

Q: Is this where you lived when you were enlisted?

A: No. I lived at 483 North 300 West in Cedar City.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

A: I enlisted.

Q: What branch of the service did you serve in?

A: I served in the Aircraft Artillery, The Infantry, Combat Engineers, and The Field Artillery.

Q: Did you serve full time or in a guard or reserve unit?

A: I served right 3 years on active duty and I served 10 years in the National Guard and the Army Reserve.

Q: Where was your headquarters or where have you been stationed during your service?

A: I started out with my basic training in San Diego, California at a place called Camp-Cali. And this was an anti-aircraft training camp where we trained on the bofors 40 mm anti-aircraft carriers.

Q: What years was it when you served?

A: 1942 when I started.

Q: When did you end?

A: 1945 on active duty. It was about... let me see when that was. It was around 1945 or 1946.

Q: What was your highest rank that you achieved while in the service?

A: I was a Tech Sergeant.

Q: What does that mean?

A: That's a two striper. It's got three stripes over and two stripes under. It was something like a grade. If I can find it on here real quick. No, no by golly. My directorate here show I was a First Sergeant.

Q: So does that mean you're in charge of other men?

A: I was in charge of the whole company.

Q: How many is in a company?

A: 180.

Q: Were they all from here?

A: Oh no, no, no. They're from all over the country. Nebraska, Idaho, California,

everywhere. But the infantry company had 180 triangular divisions. And an infantry company got about 180.

Q: Were you decorated for your service?

A: No, I really wasn't. Good conduct ribbons. Two war areas in Europe, The Central Germany, and The Rhineland. Those combat badges. And also the combat infantry badge. But as far as gold stars and silver stars, I didn't get any.

Q: So did you see combat, then, where you were?

A: Oh yes. I did. And I might've... I think I was recommended for a gold star. One night outside of Lintz, Austria, another infantry in the night removed lines from the railroad bridge. And I think I was recommended for that because we never went through.

Q: So you were right on the ground in the war?

A: Oh yes.

Q: We're even more lucky to have you here then, huh?

A: [Laughs] I lucked out. I was wound up in the Reserve Company of the Reserve Battalion of the Reserve Regiment.

Q: So what does that mean?

A: That means that there's always your front-line troops, and in behind those troops you have reserve units in case something happens or there's a disaster on the front-lines. And the reserves are moved in to fill in the holes. So I usually wound up, it so happened that the infantry company that I was in and battalion was usually designated as the reserves for the division.

Q: You did something right, huh?

A: [Laughs] Lucked out.

Q: Were there any people that you met that were famous or kind of historical figures?

A: Well, I met General McNair at one time and other than that I would say no.

Q: Were there any particular moments of religious or spiritual experiences?

A: Well, every time before we launch an attack, we always attended services. The services were conducted by the chaplain. And we always did attend religious services before we started off on an attack.

Q: Were you all LDS?

A: No, I was the only LDS. No, no. There was another LDS boy in the unit next to me. I was in George Company and he was in F Company. His name was Davis and he was from Kanarraville.

Q: Did you know him before you went?

A: Oh yes... not before we went. But he was several years older than I was and he use to come over and check on me; make sure I was still okay. Leonard Davis was his name.

Q: So when you went on... what did you call them? Missions or attacks?

A: Attacks. When it was on offensive.

Q: So were you carrying guns or cannons?

A: Oh, absolutely. We were carrying loaded weapons, rifles, pistols, bazookas, machine guns.

Q: So you were trained with those?

A: Absolutely, yeah. My position during the war was that of a light machine gun section sergeant. And I had two light thirty caliber machine guns.

Q: You carried them?

A: Yeah, we carried them with us...plus the ammunition...plus the bazooka.

Q: What is a bazooka?

A: That's that rocket launcher; fired from the shoulder. It's a two man team. One individual puts a rocket in the back end of the bazooka, then the fellow that's holding it fires it.

Q: Do they still have those?

A: Oh, absolutely.

Q: How big is the rocket?

A: Oh, it's probably 3 inches in diameter.

Q: So you had non-denominational services before you went?

A: Yes. Always.

Q: I bet those were comforting, though.

A: Well, they were because we never knew what we were getting into.

Q: And what countries did you say you were in? You say you were in several countries.

A: I was in Luxemburg, Germany, and we got right to the border of Austria.

Q: For a little Cedar boy, that's pretty...

A: [Laughs] Well, there were a lot of us.

Q: That's still a ways away!

A: Leonard Davis was right there with me.

Q: That's neat. Really neat. When you reflect back on your service, what was the most vivid memory of your service? It can be frightening, funny, whatever you want.

A: Well, most frightening was probably when we assaulted across the Rind River in Germany. But our Battalion was assigned to a section to the Rhine River. The Regiment had a section that was in the 353rd Regiment of the 89th Infantry division. And we didn't know really what was coming up. We knew that we were right there on the river and then before sunup; dawn in the morning, there come a bunch of engineers... a convoy of engineers. And they were dragging amphibian assault boats behind them. And they went down to the river and unloaded on the river and we were taking cover on higher ground... and then we got the order to go get in those assault boats. We started off across the Rhine River with tracers and Germans shooting over our heads. But the funny thing about it is that I don't think the Germans ever expected us to assault where we did.

Q: They weren't ready?

A: Well, they were ready but we were close to two German towns- Wessel and Oberwessel. One was on the East side of the Rhine and the other was on the West side. And the Regiments that assaulted down by Oberwessel really got hit hard. The Germans eliminated the Rhine River with tankers, oil tankers that were in the harbor. And then they just machine gunned and shot the troops coming across the river. But where we crossed... when we were dumped out of the amphibian assault boat, why, you couldn't have dug a fox hole... and we came, we jumped into the Rhine River up to our chests in water and waded ashore with all of our equipment.

Q: With people shooting?

A: Over our heads. But they were shooting at the troops that were downstream and upstream from us, not at us. And we got to dry land, but it was just cobblestone. There

was no way in the world you could dig a fox hole. And we headed up the beach and came right against a twenty foot rock wall that was there to control the flow of the Rhine River. And there was one stairway up through that rock wall, and if the Germans had put a set of machine guns there, there's no way we could've got off that beach, but there was no Germans. We made it up the whole Company made it up that stairway and across the road and into the vineyards. Then we started up through the vineyards up to the top of the bank of the Rhine River. And we ran into only one German who was dispatched by our scouts one German soldier. And before we had made the crossing, we did send a patrol across the river. And they were housed in a farm building up on top of the Rhine River. And so we established communication with them. And then we could see Germans running across the fields off to the East of us. We were not shooting at them; just shooting at them. They were so far away; there was no way of hitting them. But anyhow, it wasn't very long before somebody shouted there's Germans in the ravine just ahead of us, so 2 patrols were sent down into the ravine and they brought back 80 German soldiers who surrendered to us. And then, we cut off the Germans in Oberwessel behind them and cut them off and took the pressure off of the Regiments that were coming across in the smaller wooden assault boats in that area. And so we cut behind those Germans and cut them off, and then they surrendered.

Q: I don't understand what an amphibian... what was it?

A: And amphibious landing vehicle. I know you've seen pictures of them. They're the vehicles that look almost like a tank. They've got tracks on the side. The marines use them a lot in the Pacific.

Q: And what do they do?

A: They carry the troops.

Q: So they can float or go on land?

A: They can either float or go on land, right.

Q: And is the Rhine River big?

A: Oh yeah, they float ocean going frigates on it.

Q: So it's not a river as we would think of a river?

A: The Mississippi, it's like the Mississippi.

Q: I just think you'd feel like a sitting duck in those going across there.

A: Well, you were. The Regiments that were downstream from us illuminated by the burning oil tankers. They were just sitting out there like targets out on that water and they really got worked over. But I really don't think the Germans expected anybody to make an assault across where we did.

Q: And to make it up that stairway?

A: To make it up that stairway. I really think that the German command thought that the assaults would be made where you could establish yourself on the beach and then advance from there. I think we took them by surprise.

Q: How do you spell the name of that town, we better have that?

A: Oberwessel. O-b-e-r-w-e-s-s-e-l.

Q: That's not how we would've spelled it, I'm sure!

A: O-b-e-r-w-e-s-s-e-l. And the one on the West side of the bank down on the right was Wessel. W-e-s-s-e-l.

Q: So you're saying that a "V" like a "W," is that German pronunciation.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you speak German?

A: A little bit.

Q: Did you learn that when you were in the war?

A: No, I learned it in high school here in Cedar City. They use you quite a bit as trying to interpret over there. But I couldn't... when we could cut in on a telephone line, a communication line of the Germans, they were talking so fast that there was no way I could interpret

Q: And you couldn't really say slow down, huh?

A: [Laughs] I couldn't say, no. [Speaks German]

Q: What was your family like while you were serving?

A: I was single.

Q: You hadn't married yet?

A: No.

Q: Did you know Sidney yet?

A: Nope.

Q: Were you writing anyone?

A: Well, I had a few girlfriends from North Carolina.

Q: From where? Is that where you're from?

A: No, no. I'm from Cedar City.

Q: And you met them over there?

A: I met them in North Carolina. Our Infantry division... the 89th division was at Hunter Lincoln Military Reservation and we were a mountain division. We carried everything on our backs. The battalion had two jeeps... everything else; our food, our ammunition, our guns, our weapons, everything.

Q: How much do you think that weighed with everything in the pack?

A: Close to 50 pounds.

Q: Wow. Every single day you did that?

A: Every single day. Going up the Coast Range in California.

Q: And in Germany too.

A: Well, now, after V day, then we were converted from a mountain division to a regular triangular division with artillery, truck transportation, all of the communications, all of the extra supplies, and the support troops that a regular 18,000 man division has. When we were a mountain division, we were only about nine or ten thousand strong.

Q: Only?

A: Only.

Q: So you left your parents obviously?

A: I did.

Q: And your family? What's your family?

A: I had two brothers, my younger brother was in the Navy. My older sister died from pneumonia and my older brother, he was working at the iron mines.

Q: So your poor mother sent two boys off?

A: That's correct.

Q: What were your experiences of joy; things that you might want to tell your grandchildren about and sadness; things that you might want to forget about during your service?

A: You mean things that I really remember about the whole thing?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, I remember the assault across the Rhine. And I remember one night in Eisenack, Germany we were lost and we were making an approach on Eisenack, Germany and the Company commander got lost. We didn't know where we were. We went around this one mountain called Burg. We went on the West side, the North side, and the East side. And we stopped for a break because they were trying to figure out where we were and there was shooting; rifle fire started right up on top of that hill. On top of the hill, we call it a "Burg," a mountain. And so a platoon was sent up there to find out what was happening and they brought back 190 German prisoners. But talking with the Commander of those prisoners, he told me that he'd never seen so many Americans and all it was was just us going around him in a circle. [Laughing] So they decided to surrender. So we had these 190 German prisoners.

Q: How many of there were you?

A: 190.

Q: There was 190 of you too?

A: Yeah. And so we entered Eisenack, we started into Eisennack and...

Q: You better spell that.

A: Eisenack. E-i-s-e-n-a-c-k. Eisenack, iron city. But in it, there was a place where locomotives, steam locomotives were built. It was a steel building city where they made steel.

But anyhow, we got into the city and we had those 190 Germans we came in through an alley. We had those 190 Germans behind us and I set up the machine gun section covering the road where the alley entered the main street. We set them up in window wells covering the road and the radio communication was out, so the battalion did not know where we were. We couldn't tell them. We were inside the city and a Patrol, myself, and a Lieutenant met up in a schoolyard with the mayor of Eisenack. And the group of Germans we were trying to negotiate surrendered with the city of Eisenack and I was trying to interpret what was going on with what little German I knew and we could receive. And a runner came across the street and he said, "We gotta get out. There's chilling ice now." so we dropped everything and headed back across the street, we had these 190 Germans behind us. And we no sooner got across the street when I don't know how many hundred, must've been close to a battalion of German troops with armor came marching down that street on their way out and so there we were between those 190 German captives and all those Germans with their halt built boots sparking on the cobblestones. One of our Infantrymen, one of our scouts, was out on the street and he was gunned down by an armored vehicle that came down the street. Now, we could've pulled the trigger on our machine guns, but with those Germans behind us, Germans in front of us armed with armor, we just stayed in the dark and holed up. We rescued the boy that was shot and he was wounded, got him back to safety. And then we retreated out of the alley, taking our 190 captives with us. The Germans headed off in another direction, we probably met them within the next two or three days further on. But anyhow, we retreated out and when we crossed this railroad bridge, when we went under this railroad bridge coming into Eisenack, we noticed some caves that had been cut out; out of the bank, out of the mountain. So the artillery shells were coming in, so we headed into those caves with the Germans and us and we got in there and one end of the cave was filled up with artillery shells; live artillery shells, the other end was filled up with German civilians. And we moved in there with our [chuckles] Infantry Company and our prisoners.

Q: And all those civilians?

A: And all the civilians. And one of the civilians came to Captain Thomas and he said Eisenack, Eiseback, or Eisen something or the railroad. Combinden. And so Thomas came to me and he said what's he saying? And I said he's saying this overpass just outside the door right here is loaded with mines; explosives ready to be touched off. So he said Hahne, take Lundley here and you go out there and this civilian went with us. And we went out there and crawled over the overpass and cut all the wires, cut all the lead wires to the explosives.

Q: So your troops wouldn't go up.

A: Yeah, so that they wouldn't go off. Well if they would've gone off, and those artillery shells in one end and all those Germans in there and all those civilians, it would've been a real mess. So we cut every wire we could find.

Q: When you say civilians, do you mean...

A: German civilians.

Q: Men?

A: Men, women, and children.

Q: Hiding in there?

A: Hiding in there, taking shelter in there. That's the only cover they apparently had, so they were in there, we were in there, the German soldiers were in there, and the artillery shells were in there.

Q: Big cave?

A: Yeah, big cave. Well, we holed up in there until our division got through shelling up the city and then the next morning, communications was re-established with our battalion and we went into the city of Eisenack. We didn't get credit for taking the city, another Regiment got credit for it, but we were in there first. In the 89th history, why it's the other Regiment that got credit for being in there first, but we were lost, we didn't know where we were. And so I think that when the reports were turned in, why, it just wasn't mentioned where we were.

Q: That's very neat stories.

A: Anyway, that's what happened.

END TAPE 1

START OF TAPE 2. TAPE 2 REPEATS SOME OF THE
INFORMATION SAID
IN TAPE 1. THE NEW INFORMATION STARTS ABOUT 59 SECONDS
INTO
TAPE 2.

A: Then another time, just voting after we crossed the Rhine, about two or three days after that, we noticed this German with a horse cart that kept... every morning he'd come through our lines and the reunion. He'd go home... a civilian. We didn't know what he was doing, so one day one of us decided we better see what's in that cart, so we stopped him and looked in the cart and he was hauling food to a detachment of German soldiers who were behind us, behind our lines and he was hauling food to them.

Q: So what did you do to him?

A: [Laughs] Well, we took him into custody. I don't know... sent Patrols out to find those Germans.

Q: I guess I didn't realize that you're not fighting the people, only soldiers fighting soldiers, right? Are you fighting the whole city?

A: You had to be on the alert because of snipers. Many times you were fighting civilians just like you guys, but they would be hiding and sniping at you as you went by.

Q: So they were trained?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you have any regrets about your service?

A: No, I really don't. In fact, when my boys graduated from high school, a recruiter contacted Sidney, my wife talked to him, he wanted to talk to my boys about enlisting. And my wife told him, she says that I was a serviceman and he said what branch. And she told him that I really didn't mind it, I got along good in the service. And he asked her what branch I was in and she told him the Infantry and he hung up on her.

Q: How has your service impacted your current political, social, or religious views?

A: I don't think it's affected my religious ideals any. I think they were the same before and maybe stronger afterwards. And as far as my political, I think that freedom has got to be bought with people who are willing to risk their lives to maintain it. I believe that to this day. You do not just have freedom like we have enjoyed in this country handed to you on a silver platter. You've got to fight for it, you've got to defend it, and you've got to try and convert other people to it.

Q: If you could give advice to the service men and women of today, what would it be?

A: Keep your head down for a serviceman. That was the first thing I did over there was find cover. And it made me sick to watch the television from Vietnam and see our troops standing out in a street shooting up in the trees and what not. Because we were trained in the Infantry that the minute you stopped, you sought cover. You hid behind a rock, a tree, a fence. But you took cover. And then as you advanced, why you'd cover one person who was advancing and he'd cover you as you'd advance. And you never left cover until you had picked the spot that you were going to advance to and then you ran to that spot. Took cover and let the other person come up. Keep your head down.

Q: How do you feel about the current conflict in Iraq?

A: I think it's very important that we see this thing... this war through. I think it's very important because Islam is dedicated to destroying Christianity and maybe it reflects back to the crusades with King Richard but I think it reflects back to their original, their basic religious beliefs. They do not believe in Christ, they believe in Muhammad and their goal in order to reach salvation is to eliminate Christianity. I think that from now on out, we are going to be at war with Islam and right now, this fighting, this stand we have taken in Iraq, we have got Islam rocked off center. And if we weren't in Iraq making our stand, then we would have more 9/11's, we would have more terrorism here in this country and throughout the world. I think it is... from now on out, and until we are able to spread democracy throughout the world or we are able to smash Islam, which is an almost an impossible task because there are three times as many of them as there are of us. We're a minority on the face of the Earth. But right now we are able to hold them at bay with our

stand in Iraq... and Afghanistan, let's not leave out Afghanistan. But thank heavens we have got a volunteered group of men and women who are able to risk their lives to make this stand. In fact, if the Army would've taken me, I would've re-enlisted.

Q: That says a lot about you, Ed. It says a lot about you.

A: Well, I would've done it.

Q: Is there anything else you want to add?

A: Well, I can't think of anything right off the top of my head. But I really appreciate the men and women who are serving and I was battery commander of the National Guard Headquarters here in Cedar City for a number of years, I resigned my commission so that I could be with my family.

Q: Is that the 222nd?

A: No, it was the 215th.

Q: Was it then?

A: Yeah. Headquarters and battery 215th. General Dailey was the commander.

Q: And you were the battery sergeant?

A: I was the battery commander. And then I was the Battalion intelligence Officer ES3.

Q: So is that what you did for a living?

A: No, no, I worked for the USD with your dad and your grandpa.

Q: Well, thanks for your time.

A: Well, I hope I was a help to you.

Q: Oh you helped a lot. Thanks.

A: But our division opened the gates at a concentration camp. And it was a small camp, it was nothing like Auschwitz or Ordoff. It was a small camp. And it was a camp where Polish laborers were imprisoned and we shot the lock off that gate to that camp.

Q: So it's really; it's really locked?

A: Oh yeah. And inside were pictures of... well the rail yard was just stacked with corpses of Poles. They were stacked up like card wood to be loaded into the railroad cars to be taken to the soap factories.

Q: To be made into soap?

A: To be made into soap.

Q: Really?

A: Really. Well, that's what you do with dead animals. And they had a big pit. I don't know how many thousands; I think our history tells us of Polish workers. The Germans took bull dozers and gouged out the Earth and dumped the dead from this concentration camp in this pit that they would dig. They'd cover them with lime. They'd cover them with Earth, then they'd put in another layer of corpses. And they had a cremation rack built up and when they knew we were coming, they tried to cremate as many of those poles as they could. And so they took rail; steel rail and they made big cremation racks and stacked these corpses on the cremation racks, built fires and tried to cremate them. And the Poles, some of these Poles that were still alive in this camp, when we got there, a group of them found the individual who was in charge of the camp... and he tried to escape by putting on a prisoner's outfit; clothing and go out through the gate. But these Poles recognized him and they caught him. They took an engine crank; you know what a crank on an engine is. They killed him, beat him to death with that crank. But that was a horrible thing to see. And we still have people who say that those camps did not exist, but

they did exist. They did exist. And we saw it. In fact, I got some pictures here.

Q: Were the prisoners just skin and bones?

A: Skin and bones you can't believe how skinny.

Q: Was it men, women, and children?

A: Men; mostly men and some women.

Q: And did they just kill them and then...

A: No, they... I guess some were killed, but most of them were just died... malnutrition sickness.

Q: What book are you looking at? What book is that?

A: This is The History of the 89th Infantry.

Q: And that's what you were in?

A: Yeah, I was trying to look there and see if I could find it and show you some pictures, but I can't... here.

Q: How many survivors were there?

A: [Shows book to camera]

Q: Can you see all these dead people? Maybe we could copy those pages, Ed. Could we do that, and put it with your history.

A: Okay. You can do that.

Q: Is that all you want to say?

A: Oh... yeah that's the extra thing that I wanted to say. You can see this person right here is just filled with bullet holes.

Q: And they just stack bodies upon bodies. You saw this Ed?

A: Yes.

Q: April 1945 it says. 10th of April, 1945.

A: Now that, the...

Q: So how many years is that? It's April 2006, and that was 1945, so 51 years? A: Yeah. General Patton, see we were...

Q: Did you meet him?

A: What? I never met Patton. But General Patton, we were following his armor, we were mopping up Germans behind him as he would pass with his armor. When we ran onto this Ordoff camp, General Patton had all of the army six by six's; those big army trucks, brought into Ordoff and he took the older civilians, the mature civilians, not children. But the mature civilians and the mayor and his wife and took them on a tour through Ordoff. And the people were screaming at us saying you're torturing us, your causing us all this pain to see this and what not, you know?

Q: Did you say, it's your side?!

A: And, it was the Germans that were doing it. And that night the mayor and his wife committed suicide because they claimed that they did not know what was going on even though the one side of Ordoff where this big, burial pit was located was right on one of the main streets of Ordoff that's separated by a big fence.

Q: It's hard to believe, but...

A: The German mayor and wife committed suicide that night after seeing Ordoff.

Q: Thanks for your time, it was an honor.

A: Okay.