

## Clip 1 (first combat experiences)

Philip Minges: We left the camp, marched to the train, got on the train, got to Camp Cook and there again we went through an assignment process. I don't think they paid a bit of attention to your background at all--just, you know where you need to go. So I ended up in--the armored division has three battalions of tanks, three battalions of infantry and three battalions of artillery. Well, I ended up in one of the three infantry battalions. Actually, I was assigned to Company C, Fifty-Fifth Armored Infantry Battalion, in the Eleventh Armored Division. Now they have an Engineer Battalion and I thought, well you know, that makes sense if I go there. Well, it didn't. So I ended up as an infantryman and had no particular training as an infantryman other than combat engineers; there's a lot of infantry in that. I stayed in that company the rest of the war. We trained in California until September; we shipped out for New York as a division, went across country on troop trains. It takes forever to get across the United States on one of those. Then we left New York in September, 1944; we were headed for France--and I knew this after the fact--but while we were at sea, it was determined that they needed our equipment worse than they did people right then. So, the equipment all went to France and that was kind of the time in September when they were breaking out from D-Day and moving on up. So, we went to England and trained there and were re-equipped because the infantry squad has a halftrack; so we had a lot of halftracks, the artillery is mobile and, of course, the tanks, so we got re-supplied. Then we went to [France] in December, 1944 and landed at Cherbourg and picked up our equipment again. About the time we landed, the Bulge--the Battle of the Bulge--had progressed. There again, I found out later we were supposed to go to Southern France. They had a bunch of Germans bottled up down there and we were going to clean up that mess. Well, that fell apart and we went straight to The Bulge. We mounted up and we made a force march in the vehicles and set some sort of record. I went through Paris at night in the back of a halftrack, it could have been in Mount Pleasant, you know. But anyway, we went right straight to a camp where some of the troops had been pulled out who were already involved in The Bulge. We moved up--my first day in combat was the last day of December of 1944. It was at night. My foxhole buddy [Joe Hopko] and I were digging our first foxhole when the New Year came in. I stayed--the first day of combat we had twelve people in the squad and when we got ready to--my buddy and I were the scouts for our squad—we were the scouts for the platoon. We came across a hill and we were going to take this small village; it wasn't a town hardly. Of course, by then there was snow everywhere and I guess he and I saw the first Germans, at least in our squad and platoon and so we sent the word back. We got a--.

Jack Bass: When you sent the word back, how did you do that?

Minges: Just yelled back to the squad leader. Word of mouth. We didn't have any radios. Then we came back where we were going down to take the town which, at that point, you don't know squat, you know. The first time, whatever they tell you to do, you do; and we started down that--we were on a ridge and we started down--the whole company was going down. Well, we came under severe mortar fire; there were also some tanks in there that got us pretty good but most of it was mortar and some artillery fire got us pinned down;

and, I mean, you've got to dig in somehow--the ground is frozen and I was more stupid than anything else but, that morning, I had left my shovel in the halftrack--I was going to be a commando, I guess, filled up with hand-grenades. So here I am pinned down with nothing to dig with but a bayonet and I probably set some sort of record with that. But, what I'm coming around to--and I feel like that was a misjudgment--probably not the company commander but the battalion commander sending us down there--. We had tanks. Eventually, the only way we got into that town was, our tanks came up and we followed them in; but, by the time my squad got up to go in there was only three of us. There was eleven with us because the halftrack driver stays with the track, so there was only eleven men with the squad. Only three of us got up, two were, uh (pause)--two were killed and the others who didn't--all the others were wounded except the three of us--the squad leader and myself and Joe Hopko who was my foxhole buddy.

#### Clip 2 (On being wounded)

Bass: Tell me about March 6th.

Minges: Okay. I think the two days I remember most, in my mind, are the first day and the last day. The last day we were moving--we rarely moved forward in a halftrack—in fact, I don't remember any other time. They parked the halftracks and we were walking. We moved up pretty good, almost to this little town named Nieder Bettingen.

It's in Germany very close to Luxembourg. We were on the track that day and things had been going pretty good. We had a little bit of fighting then they'd pull back. We came into this town and I think everybody had relaxed, I know I had a little bit. They stopped the tracks and told us to get out. There was a small dirt road that went into this town which, I guess, may have been five hundred people. Our squad got out and we were moving into town up this road and as we did we came under--we thought we were going to just walk into the town, I think, no more than we thought--but we came under sniper fire. There were several, not several but at least one church in there. I personally think that the guy must have been somewhere like that because the town wasn't that high. But, when we did, there was a ditch on either side of the road; and the first part of the squad fell off in the cover in the ditch on the right side but the last half on the left side. I was the last man; I was on the left side with probably about three or four guys with me. We kind of stayed there to figure out what we were going to do to get on up the road. In the left side of the ditch we were more exposed than the fellas who were in the right side and they followed the ditch on into town. It took us a while to get in there so we were separated. I had about half the squad and Kling had the rest of them. So when we got into town, the first thing I wanted to do was to find my squad. I thought they had moved on into town and out towards a field that had trees at the end of it. I didn't realize there was a river behind those trees--at the time--I didn't realize that until about two or three years ago. But, I had these four or five guys with me and I ran into a Lieutenant who I didn't know; he wasn't--if he was in our company, I didn't know him. I asked him, "Lieutenant, I'm looking for C Company, my squad." I don't remember verbatim but, in so many words, he told me [he didn't know] where--where they

were. [Later found out they were] in the house eating food and drinking wine (Laughter), I believe. They had stopped off. So I had leapfrogged; so he said, "Take those guys you've got and his three or four guys that separated from their unit and you take them and go on across that field." By that time the tracks had gotten up to us and we got in the track again. Here I was with, really not many fellas, people from another squad and replacements; but anyway "we'll make it out." And we moved about halfway into that field and it turned out there were trees on our left and to our front and, really, way over on our right. We used the track as much as we could. They told us all to get out of the track and walk. There again, we hadn't come under any particular fire while we were in the track. And for whatever reason, I had left my rifle in the track right behind the driver on what amounts to a gasoline tank, I guess. Anyway, when I got out I reached up there to get my rifle, he could get the guys organized; and I heard something hit on the side of the track, about waist high. I knew what it was. [If the shot] had been over about a foot [it would have gotten] me in the back. I grabbed my rifle and trying to get cover I went towards the front of the track on the driver's side and turned and I heard another pop and dirt flew up around my feet. As I turned on the passenger side, my foot went out and I got shot in the foot. It wasn't all that bad but, I couldn't go on. So, I got back in the track and by that time two or three other guys had gotten it. We were kind of using our track as a collecting place. I'm sure the fella who--I think it was more than one person shooting at me because the German rifle is a bolt action and you can't just fire it off like we could with an M-1--. I don't think one guy could have been shooting that fast. We got back in the track and then these guys started getting in--we probably had about six or eight of us wounded in the track and the medic came up. By then, I had taken my boot off--it could have been a heck of lot worse--evidently the fella was using, the sniper was using the armor piercing ammunition because the hole where it came out was no bigger than the hole where it went in which was about the size of a pencil. It didn't hurt all that bad and I put some sulfur and a bandage on it. The medic wanted to give me some morphine and I said, "No. This thing's not hurting and I don't know whether this is going to be it and we're still in this halftrack and we've still got rifles and I don't need to be under sedation." We needed though, to get out with that halftrack with the wounded, but we couldn't. [Mortar fire was coming in.] One other thing I didn't tell you. The halftrack driver was not our halftrack driver; it was a guy I knew but when I got shot at the first time--I grabbed a--I was right by the door. He was sitting right behind the door. I opened the door because that's where I was--that was my shortest route into that halftrack--. Well, he'd never been--track drivers never get in combat; at least not many of them. Well, he slammed that door on me so then I had to run around the track. By the time I got in that track--you've got to understand your mentality when you're in combat is kind of screwed up anyway--. I kind of recall that I was ready to put him out there where I was and I was going to take his place; but we got over that.

Bass: Did you have words with him?

Minges: A lot of words.