Transcription: Albert Giebelstein

Today is Wednesday, May 8th, 2013. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Al Giebelstein. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office Building in downtown Austin, Texas, and Mr. Giebelstein is at his home in Austin. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for our program. Sir, the first question I always like to start off with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you entered the military.

Albert Giebelstein: Well, I was born in Davenport, Iowa. My family moved to Texas when I was 18 months old. They moved to a little town called Nederland. It's between Beaumont and Port Arthur, and I lived there and went to school. I started school there and finished school there, and that's where I was living when I entered the Army.

What year was that that you went into the Army?

Albert Giebelstein: 1944.

So I guess you'd been in early years of high school when the war actually started then.

Albert Giebelstein: Yes, in '41 I was 16.

Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Albert Giebelstein: Yes, we had 8 in the family. It was two families melded together, so it was raining on Saturday. I was over at my sister's house. My sister and I did the laundry, and I was out in the yard hanging the clothes on the line. We didn't have dryers then. I heard about it.

What were your thoughts at that time, do you remember?

Albert Giebelstein: My thoughts were well, it won't take long, they'll whip those Japanese. But little did we know at that time.

So I imagine then all the time you were in school you had to have been following the events of the world and the war. Did you realize at some point that you'd probably be entering the service yourself?

Albert Giebelstein: Yes I did.

When was that?

Albert Giebelstein: When I finished junior college at the age of 18 and in January of '44, and I had been deferred from the time I was 18 the previous November up until January, but then I got my greetings.

Was it a telegram or a letter?

Albert Giebelstein: It was a letter, and I had applied for officer's candidate school and they told me I was too old. I was 11 days too old.

That's pretty crazy.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, so everything went off all right. I think I entered, well we went from Beaumont, Texas, to Houston for a physical.

How long was it between the time you got your letter until the time you had to report for ship out to boot camp?

Albert Giebelstein: Maybe three weeks.

So a pretty quick period of time.

Albert Giebelstein: Yes.

So you were saying, sir, they sent you to Houston?

Albert Giebelstein: They sent me to Houston for a physical. We went down there in great big old cars, semi, we called it the cattle car. It had metal seats in it and everything. And so we went to Houston, down there and back in the same thing.

What were your thoughts at that point, were you excited or fearful or anxious?

Albert Giebelstein: No, I wasn't fearful. I was ready to go if I had to.

So you go through your physical in Houston, and where did they send you for your first basic training?

Albert Giebelstein: To enter, they sent me to Fort Sam Houston.

OK, in San Antonio.

Albert Giebelstein: San Antonio. Then from there, they sent me to Camp Bedouin, Mississippi.

What are your memories of basic training? Any particular good memories or bad memories?

Albert Giebelstein: Well, no I could understand why a soldier made a good soldier because they take him out of the living home and everything like that and put him under a drill sergeant and they work him 18 hours a day, and so it's so hard on you you're ready to go overseas, that's how I put it.

What were most of the other guys like in your platoon? I imagine they were all pretty young and were they from Texas as well?

Albert Giebelstein: Well, there was some from Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Louisiana, and we had one in there from Kentucky that had been in the Aleutian Islands when the Japanese invaded up there, Alaska. But the age ran from 18 to 38.

That's quite a gap.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, some of the men in there called us babies and all that kind of stuff, but that's how it goes.

During your basic training did you have any idea of what your specialty was going to be after you finished?

Albert Giebelstein: Oh yes, I knew. I was a demolitions expert, and also they sent me to 50 caliber school for anti-aircraft. They sent us to Fort Bliss for that.

How did you get that specialty of dealing with explosives and ordinance, was that something you asked for or they just told you hey, this is what you're going to be doing?

Albert Giebelstein: No, they looked at my IQ and the mathematics that I had studied, and you have to figure things out, how much to put on there and everything, and I could figure it out in my head and they said well, you're a good one for that, so that was it. So I rode, overseas I rode a truck with a mounted 50 caliber machine gun on top and 500 pounds of TNT in the back, and not supposed to, but we had the blasting caps in the glove compartment. That was a no-no, but they were handy anyway.

So you did your basic there at Fort Sam and then you said you went to Mississippi?

Albert Giebelstein: No, I was inducted in Fort Sam and went to Mississippi for basic training.

OK, and what was the name of that place?

Albert Giebelstein: Let's see, Camp Van Dorn. It is now, I know a man here in our church from Mississippi and he said it is now a national forest. Everything there was temporary. The barracks and the whole bit.

So I imagine wooden barracks and that sort of thing.

Albert Giebelstein: Wooden barracks, no finish inside, sliding windows that leaked, and wooden floors that had to be cleaned every week. But that's the Army.

Sure, what time of year were you there?

Albert Giebelstein: In the summer.

So I imagine it was hot, too.

Albert Giebelstein: Oh yeah, it was hot, and we had mosquito bars, but we had screen doors, so it wasn't too bad.

How long did your training last?

Albert Giebelstein: I think it was 12 weeks.

That sounds about right. At that point when you graduated, where did they send you to next?

Albert Giebelstein: They sent us home for a two-week furlough and while we were gone, the cadre packed everything up and broke into your foot locker, gave you a dufflebag, stuck everything in a dufflebag, and then we went, there was a train rail there, and we entered the train rail and got on Pullman's and they pulled us up to New Jersey to Camp Dix.

When you went back home, I think you mentioned, sir, you had quite a few siblings, is that right?

Albert Giebelstein: No, two families. It was my mother and dad, and my sister and myself, that's four. Then it was my older sister and her husband with two children.

How did they, were you the only one in the family then that went off to war?

Albert Giebelstein: Yes.

How did they take that? Was it hard on them?

Albert Giebelstein: My mother had a brother named Albert, and she said the name is a jinx, she said. She said he had to go to World War I, and here you're an Albert, and you had to go to World War II. So when I left from furlough going back, I told her, I said whatever you do, don't cry when I leave. And she held it. But I know there was a lot of prayers sent up for me.

Yes sir, I'm sure. With your uncle, did you know your uncle?

Albert Giebelstein: Yes, I knew him.

And so he served in World War I and then obviously made it back OK.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, he made it back, and as far as the combat stuff, he didn't talk about it and I don't like to talk about that part either, but the bad part's all hidden somewhere. You know, that's the way the mind works.

Sure, well that's true in certain cases, absolutely. So then you had that little two-week time back home, and then you had to go up to Camp Dix, New Jersey. Was that kind of your final preparation before going overseas?

Albert Giebelstein: Yes, we went onto the boat from the 31st of October.

Of 1944?

Albert Giebelstein: 1944. And we went over on a convoy. I was on a liberty ship and the Atlantic was rough at that time. That little old boat would go from bow to stern and dip water, go from port to starboard, and it would dip water, and they said down in the engine room, they claim that they have a little model of it suspended over water with a degree counter, and they said if it had gone two more degrees well it would just capsize.

Boy, that would've been horrible.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, but as far as you could look in every direction, there was ships. You wouldn't believe there was that many ships, but there was.

That much need of transporting troops over the Atlantic. How long did you spend aboard that ship?

Albert Giebelstein: We landed in Southhampton on November the 11th.

So you left on Halloween day, the 31st, and got there on the 11th. So almost two weeks of being aboard a ship, and from everything I've ever heard and read, it probably wasn't that much fun was it?

Albert Giebelstein: Well I don't know, I stood fire watch duty and I went on at midnight, and every midnight you pushed the clock forward an hour, and so I didn't have to stand but three hours, so it wasn't bad. But they were baking bread on the ship at night and the cooks, when the guards got off duty and changed shifts, we'd go down to the kitchen and they'd give us hot bread and butter and strawberry jam.

Small comforts then.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, but they were nice.

When you arrived in Southhampton, describe for us sir what that was like.

Albert Giebelstein: Well, they call your name and you come off that ship, and there's a British official sitting there and he looks at you and checks your name off the list, and they tell me they had to pay a head tax on us, but I don't know. Might've just been rumor. But then we loaded into, we were supposed to have landed in France, but part of our equipment had been destroyed, so we had to go there and our trucks, most of them were there but some of it wasn't, and we got on trucks and then we went to a little old town called Nettlebed.

What type of town was that, was it a farming community?

Albert Giebelstein: No, they had one pub there called a Dog and a Duck. There was farming community around there and woods, beach trees all around, and they had Nissan huts, and the end of them, I can remember this real plain, were made out of 1 by 12's, with no batting, and so the lumber was green when they put it up and it dried and when the snow drifted, it would drift in through the cracks.

Yeah, that was a rough place to live I guess.

Albert Giebelstein: Oh well, we were tough.

Did you have much interaction with the British civilians, British population while you were there?

Albert Giebelstein: Yes, they were, the civilians were real nice to us, but the British soldiers, I can't tell you what they told us, but you might have to take it out of the interview.

Well we'll skip doing that then, but why do you think there was any acrimony between the British troops and you guys?

Albert Giebelstein: Well I'll tell you, but leave it out of the recording.

OK, well I don't want to do that either then. I guess I can probably guess.

Albert Giebelstein: I'll tell you when it's over.

OK sir, we'll do that then. We don't have to go back and delete anything. So how long did you end up spending there in Britain?

Albert Giebelstein: Until December I think.

So about a month or so?

Albert Giebelstein: The latter part of December, and while we were there, they took us down to what's the name of that town, it's close to Dover?

I'm not sure. Down by the coast though?

Albert Giebelstein: It was Deelding, and that's where the Marines, the British Marines were trained.

Did you get to do a lot of training there before?

Albert Giebelstein: No, we didn't do any raining. We had been sent there for, there was a ship in the English Channel that had been hit with the bow of another ship. Part of it was floating and the other part, the ballast and stuff was underwater, but you could still walk from one side to the other, and it had gasoline in five gallon cans all over the deck, and they had Army trucks and everything else on there, and we were sent there to unload that onto barges. I guess we were there maybe a week, eight days.

Pretty big task then.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, it was all right, but we used the cranes from the ship and they were able to pick everything up and put it off.

Did you know at some point that you'd probably then be sent over into mainland Europe?

Albert Giebelstein: Oh yes, I knew that, and then after we got back, they loaded us up and I think we went back to Southhampton. I'm not sure exactly where we were. And they put us out in a great big field with woods in pup tents, ice all over the ground, and we stayed there I think maybe two or three nights until they got everybody there that was leaving. Then they loaded us all on LST's, our equipment and everything, and we went over the Channel in LST's and up the Seine River, and then unloaded there.

What were your thoughts at that point? Do you remember?

Albert Giebelstein: Well I was thinking, this is it. I guess this is what we've been training for. And well a 19-year-old kid, he's not afraid of anything really. I guess that's the reason they made the best soldier.

What about some of the men that were with you? Any of them stand out, or memories of those guys that went over into Europe with you?

Albert Giebelstein: Yes, but that's farther down the line.

So you arrive in France, and this is close to the beginning of 1945.

Albert Giebelstein: Yes and it's just almost the end of the Bulge. So they sent us north of Okkin, and there were no street signs anywhere. We didn't know where we were. But they attached us to the British 2nd Army, because they were short of engineers. The hardest thing for me to do was to figure out who was an officer in the Army and what rank they were and all that, in the British. We finally figured that out. And the first action we saw, I was in one country and there was a man in from the same town. I was in Belgium and he was in Holland, and he'd write home somewhere in Holland, and of course I wrote home somewhere in Belgium, and then of course the families at home got together and they was wondering what was wrong. We couldn't tell 'em. But one side of the Moss River and he was on the other side of the Moss River.

And he was from Nederland?

Albert Giebelstein: He was from Nederland, yes. He had graduated a couple of years before I had. We were sitting there waiting to cross the Rhine, and the day we knew it was gonna happen was paratroops came over, and as soon as some of them crossed the Moss River, they jumped out early and they come down in the combat position and everything. We told them hold the phone now. We're in the same Army. And that was a tickled bunch of men. They were real happy. But you know they fly low. I never realized they flew that low when they jumped. You could see his figure up in the plane in the door getting ready to leave the plane, or get pushed out, one, I don't know which.

I guess it kept them from, reduced the likelihood of the plane being shot down by anti-aircraft fire by flying lower.

Albert Giebelstein: Oh yeah. We crossed there in Zaxton and the west side we were on, it was just like walking out onto a beach, but the other side was about I guess a 60-degree angle uphill.

Pretty steep.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, we put mainly bridges and stuff, and anyway we maintained that field a little while, then we went on into central Germany. That wasn't much other than a truck ride, and when we got at a certain point, the British said well, they didn't need us anymore. So they got orders to turn around and go to Marseilles, France. Well, we loaded up and got to Nostrecollin, and the MP stopped us and asked us what outfit we were in and all that, where are you headed, and we told him, and they said well, you're not going there. You're 12 hours late. The ship will be gone by the time you get there. They were gonna send us to the south Pacific through the Suez Canal. I guess we lucked out there and they sent us down on the east side of the Rhine to a little old town called Kruznok, and actually what it was was a winemaking area,

region there. We stayed there, I don't remember what the date was or anything like that. Of course really didn't matter over there.

I'm sure every day became kind of like the next.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, at night, you wanted it to be day, and day, you wanted it night. All you could hear was the constant roar of the British artillery. We stayed there I don't know how long, but the war ended while we were there. They had blown a bridge on, I think that river was Nahi River. It was a bridge for automobiles and trucks to cross, and it was an arch bridge. Of course the Army, they're not gonna let you set around and do anything, so we went down there and put piling up, put timbers across, and then we put the heavy timber on the bridge for the runway, and some extra boards over that, like first boards went across-ways. The boards went parallel with the bridge and they lined up with the trucks and cars and stuff. We finished that and they sent us from there – oh by the way, they pumped the water out of the river and treated it right there, and had lister bags. One lister bag had water in it, and the other one had wine.

Where did they get the wine from?

Albert Giebelstein: Right there in that town. And then we went on south and we crossed the Rhine at Ramaggin. We went over the Bailey bridge that the engineers had built there, and that was all a ride. And when we crossed the Rhine, we ended up, well we just kept riding and ended up in Czechoslovakia.

That's a long haul.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, but it wasn't anything but a ride, didn't get out and stretch your legs and keep on going, but wasn't any combat or anything like that. When we got to Czechoslovakia, they asked us where we got their trucks, the Russians did. Well they had our trucks instead of us having theirs, but they had, I remember there was a prison camp there that they had a bunch of Russians in, and they had made a bunch of vodka while they were there. They invited us all over for vodka. Of course I didn't drink. But some of them had a ball. They got looped. Then they sent us back, and I think we ended up in Austria somewhere, and while we were in Austria, actually we didn't have anything to do. We weren't doing anything. But they hired a ski instructor and everybody was supposed to learn how to ski. So we did that, wasn't any broken legs or anything, and then eventually we ended up in a little town, it wasn't a town, it was a castle called Lucian. And we were going out and repairing roads with air compressors and stuff, cutting a hole square, filling it up with base and then filling it up with asphalt. And we had a thing we called a Bouncing Betty to pack it all down with. That was a British invention. Then one day a general drove by, and all of us soldiers out there working, and the man in charge – by then I think I was a Corporal – the man in charge went over and reported to the general and the general said, he used a few expletives, and what are you all doing out here working on these roads? This isn't our country. We helped tear it up. But there's plenty of German prisoners that can come out here and do that. So the next day we were ordered to go down to a PW camp and check out prisoners of war. We had to check out their food. If they worked, they got an extra meal a day. And I don't remember, it might've been a rumor, but they got three cents a day. This PW camp with bobwire around it and rolled wire on top and they had dogs and MP's walking around the border, and as far as you could see, there was pup tents. We'd check 'em out, and you had to sign for 'em and get their rations. So I just got some rations the first day. I asked one of the Germans, I could speak a little German -

I was going to ask you, sir, how you were able to communicate with them.

Albert Giebelstein: I could speak some of it, and the bad thing was, my daddy was from the north part of Germany, and they spoke low German, southern part of Germany spoke high German.

So kind of a difference in the dialects.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, just a little bit, yes.

Did that make it harder then for them to understand you and vice versa?

Albert Giebelstein: Yes it was, but we could talk with our hands and motion and stuff like that. So I asked them, I said well what would ya'll really like to eat? And they said can you get some ketchup? And white bread, and onions. I said that's all you want to eat? Said yes. So the next day I checked out, I don't know how many gallons of ketchup and an onion for each one, a big onion, and a loaf of bread for two men. They opened the ketchup, they'd break off the bread and dip it in there in the ketchup, eat it just like cake, and then bite off of the onion. So they were working real hard for me. The other guy says well how can you get 'em to work that hard? I said I give them what they want to eat. So they all changed to that and everybody was happy then.

Yeah, that's interesting. So I guess most of the German prisoners then were pretty docile, you didn't have any problems with any of them in terms of attitudes or that sort of thing?

Albert Giebelstein: One sergeant did, and then I was a corporal then, but he was regular Army, and he had no sympathy for 'em at all, and so I told him, I said, his name was Russell, I said Russell, I said they're humans. I said they're just like I was. I had no control. I had to go to the Army. You selected to be regular Army. I said so don't treat 'em so rough and they'll work better for you. And there's a young kid trying to give some psychology information to an older man, but it worked.

So he listened to you.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, he listened. And then we were shipped to, it wasn't actually a town with a name, but at Ettal – that's where they had all the passion plays, they were up on top of the mountain, and three miles down, that's how long the road was, winding road, and we were staying in the resort hotels there. It was about 6 kilometers from Garmisch. We could go to Garmisch in the evening. Then they said Giebelstein, you're a sergeant now. Of course I got a raise in pay. I was making more then than a second lieutenant. And he said you and your squad and the Jeep driver for your lieutenant, your platoon lieutenant, take a truck, can go to Landsburg. When we got to Landsburg, the boy said apartments, and I had an apartment all to myself. They really treated us nice. And I was living across the hall from the chief of police of Landsburg. So cigarettes, I didn't smoke, cigarettes were like gold. So they were selling them for $50 a carton. It cost us 50 cents. So what they sent us to Landsburg for was to take 1/4th of the Landsburg penitentiary and suicide-proof it. I don't know if you are familiar with it, but it's built like a cross, and the guard tower is in the center with machine guns pointed in the four directions, and it was on an elevator. Of course they got walks and cross-walks, cat walks up there. So everything on the first, second, and third floor of that one wing, everything was nice. It was one-person cell, it had a lavatory and a commode, and a bed, so the lavatories, commodes

came out, the beds came out, and the drains of the different commode and lavatory had to be closed off because of sewer gas. And they had windows. The grass had to come out and they put reinforced mesh in there. I guess you'd call isinglass on each side. The glass came out and that went in in its place. Then it was a light installed at every door. The doors were I guess 3 to 4 feet wide, and they were about 2-3/4" thick in solid oak. The opening that was there wasn't very big, but the light shown in there for later use. Anyway when we finished that, then all the cat walks upstairs we had to get chain link fence and it was fastened to the railings so no one could jump overboard and try to commit suicide. So they had to have some acetylene gas and they sent us back, the truck driver and I went to Munich. I had a stamp thing in my pocket, I could get anything I wanted from any engineer depot or any civilian place that had it, because it had to go to the Army for that use there in Landsburg. Then we picked up the acetylene, and it started snowing and the roads got slick and we stopped on the side of the road to put the chains on. It was freezing. Then Meldy, that was the truck driver, put chains on one side and I was putting the chains on the other side and he was on the driver side and I was on the passenger side doing that, and I looked up and here comes a Jeep, and I told Meldy, I said get out of the way! And another vehicle coming from the other direction and that guy couldn't stop in that Jeep and he ran into the back of that, under that truck, and he broke the rear housing. So we had to get a wrecker. The lieutenant was in the Jeep. He said well I'm sorry it happened. I said well, it's worse than that, lieutenant. I said this load of acetylene has to be into Landsburg by morning. He said well I'll go down and get a wrecker sent up here. They took us down to the motor pool there in Munich. Of course you know, the sergeant has to go report to the day officer. I told him what the score was. He said to go talk to the motor pool man. I think it was the captain to the motor pool, and I went down there and I reported to the captain. And I told him, I said I have to have that truck fixed overnight. He looked at me and laughed. I said sir, it's important. I have to be back in Landsburg tomorrow no later than noon. He said why? I said I have a load of acetylene on there. He said acetylene? Where did you get it? I said from the acetylene plant down the road over there across the railroad track. How many bottles do you have? I said 15. Can you lose some of them? I said sir, what do you mean? He said I don't have any and I need it to fix some of these trucks and vehicles. I said I imagine I could lose some of it, just you and I know about it. And I said OK, take three or four bottles off of there. I said maybe you better stop at there. He said well do you have a wrench to open it? I said yes. A different wrench from American tanks. He said OK sarge, he said glad to have met you. He said in the morning after breakfast this truck will be ready. And sure enough, after breakfast the truck was ready. Three containers of acetylene gone. And we made it back to Landsburg. So I had called the captain that was still over there in those resort hotels and told him what had happened. So then when I got to Landsburg, I called him again and I said I'm in Landsburg. He said you get the truck fixed? I said yes sir. Same captain I had all the way through, training all the way through. He said sergeant, how'd you do that? I said well, I'll tell you when I get back there. So he says, well I'm waiting. I said well, we'll finish up. So I had a radio. You know they got AC and DC current over there, and if you don't plug the radio in to the proper current, well it blows up. And I had the radio there and it wasn't working. The chief of police asked me what was wrong and I told him, and he says let me have it. I said I'll take you down. I'll let the Jeep driver take you down there. He said no, I'll carry it. So he carried it down there and he brought it back and had it fixed. I said how much the man want for fixing the radio? He said a pack of cigarettes. I said well, I tell you what, I said chief, I said you just take this carton and you all have a ball with it. And he thanked me for that. And while we were there, we would go on the weekend, we would go deer hunting, and we shot a deer. We field dressed it and bring it back and his wife would cook the hind quarter, I'd go to the mess hall and get all the onions, carrots, and potatoes to go around it, and we'd give them the rest of it, just one hind quarter, and we'd give them the rest of the meat. He was appreciative of that. And I'd get 'em Crisco and potatoes and stuff to eat, too,

because the mess sergeant and I were pretty good buddies there. Different outfit, but we seemed to hee and haw together. Then my captain was a collector of antique guns, and I knew that. I asked the chief of police, I said you have any guns down there? He said yes. They confiscated all the firearms. And I guess the room must've been 12 feet wide and maybe 16 feet long, and that thing was stacked from floor to ceiling. They had rifles and guns there, and musket loaders, and they had hatchet gun barrels, some of them were laid in gold in silver, real fancy guns. He said there you go, go ahead and take some of them. I said I don't know which ones are which. I said I'm not a gun enthusiast. He said I tell you what, how many you want? I said five. I don't want to be a hog. He said there's thousands of them there, you can have all of 'em if you want 'em. I'm tired of guarding them. So I said I tell you what, you pick out five of some of the best ones and I'll take 'em back to my captain. He said good. And I gave him some more cigarettes. I said I'll send a Jeep driver down there to pick them up. He said oh no, no, I come home for lunch I'll bring two, I'll go back and when I come home at night I'll bring two more. The next day I'll just come home right quick and give you the other one. So when we got back, we finished that job. The first day we finished it, they filled up the first floor. They had been tried in Nuremberg, sentenced to death, and the torture master from Bukinwall was in the bunch, and he looked like a whip. So we had to put a bar over the middle of this opening in the door so he couldn't crawl out. And so they filled the first floor up, and earlier we had been in Eder Oberstein. I forgot about that. That's where they cut most of the precious jewels in Europe. And we had built, there was a stable there that had been cavalry to the German army, and they had mirrors all around this wall and they had a wooden floor in there, and the cavalry officers could watch theirself, their posture and everything while they were riding around. We built solitary confinement cells there, and they were 4x4x4, they were built out of 8x16 concrete blocks, and they had a wooden top on them, and a little wooden door, and when you opened the door the man had to crawl out of there and holler achtung! And the old doctor over there that used all those Jewish people for guinea pigs, he was there. So he was one of the first ones there that they filled up the first floor with, and I went down there and I talked to him, and he had a pencil and paper and his notes. I asked him, I said why do you have and no one else has anything? All they have is a box to relieve themselves in and a straw mattress, and here you have all this paper and stuff from your notes. He said well I'm transposing these notes in long hand because I'm the only one that understands the notes. I said well how long do you think that'll take? He says well I'm hoping until I die naturally. I said I'm sorry, but I don't think that'll happen. But then we went back to the company area and enjoyed the place down there, and they had a dance hall and mess hall and everything, and I think if I'm not mistaken that's where we left from when they discharged us.

When was that, sir, that they finally sent you home?

Albert Giebelstein: Then sent us from there, that resort place, to Augsburg.

Do you remember what year that was? Was it '46?

Albert Giebelstein: It was '46, yes. We finished that place up there in Landsberg in February. Then they sent us to Augsburg. It was an old German army camp. And they were nice barracks and everything, terrazzo floors, showers and commodes, steam heat, and walls 18 inches thick, dual windows. The platoon sergeant and I had a room together, and just like here in the States, and the rest of the soldiers were out in a great big squad bay. And so they were discharging a bunch of people and they sent a bunch of men in there from the anti-aircraft. They figured they didn't need them anymore, so they were gonna give them some basic training. Now who do you think was chosen to train these men?

I imagine you.

Albert Giebelstein: I sure was. We had training, had to train them in demolition, everything to do with combat engineers. And in between time in the same place we were building a dance hall, ice cream parlor, and a short order place so if people got hungry in the dance hall, they could go over there and eat ice cream. It was also a beer hall. When I left there, I was in the process of supervising the building of a swimming pool, but I didn't get to finish that.

Sir, what was the name of the unit that you were with during the war?

Albert Giebelstein: 381st Engineer Combat Battalion.

Were you with them throughout the entire time?

Albert Giebelstein: Yes, but they changed our name at times. We also, I forgot about this, we were also in Kassel where we were converting a building from offices to a hospital, and I was put in a drafting department. At that time my job was to, there was a window at the end of the hall, and I had to convert it, draw the print to convert it from the window to a door for a fire escape. And all this stuff comes back to me sometimes later on, so we did that. Before I got that at Kassel, I had been on furlough to England for a couple of weeks. We got back and the company had moved, so I called the company commander and he sent a truck to pick us up, and that's when they put us there. We were all over the place. They even put us into a forestry outfit one time, and the reason for that, we had all the lowboy trailers with the cables and winches on it, and when they cut a log over there, they trim all the branches off, and then it lays there and it's got a number burned into it. When that log goes through a saw mill, the size is taken before it goes to the saw mill and every piece of lumber that comes out of that log has to be accounted for. That's how strict they are. And the woods over there, it's just like a park, all their forest, because they clean all the shrubs and everything else out of it, and it's real clean, and very nice.

And sir, I think you mentioned, too, that you saw some combat action but it's too difficult to talk about, is that correct?

Albert Giebelstein: No, it's not all that bad, but I don't even remember where it was. None of the towns where you could get lost and I don't know if you had a map, we had maps that covered three square miles, and all you had on there was places to recognize like a water tank or something like that. But it wasn't too bad. But what tickled me, the British would go down the road 3 o'clock in the afternoon and everybody stopped and they had their tea. And all the munitions and bombs and artillery shells and all that stacked right against, right along the road, all stacked there, and some people gardening, and that's about it.

You finally got to come home in '46, and what was that like finally getting back to the States?

Albert Giebelstein: Well, when I got to New York, we hadn't seen a movie in a long time, and we went to a movie, and they always had a news reel. And the news reel showed them taking these convicted people that had filled the first floor up in Landsberg, they were taking them to the gallows. And see, that was February until May when they finally, well that's what they did, you know what they did to 'em. So it felt good. I went to call home there in New York and oh gosh, what a long list, and I got tired of waiting, so about 1 o'clock in the morning they said,

they called my name, but I wasn't there. I went back and went to bed. But they called my sister and at least she knew that there was a call from her brother.

Well that's good. How much longer then at that point was it before you were able to get back to Texas?

Albert Giebelstein: I was discharged on June the 13th, 1946. I spent about 26 months in the Army. 21 of that was overseas.

I bet it was a pretty good homecoming when you got back.

Albert Giebelstein: Well we went from San Antonio and all the trains and buses and everything had already been run, and we went down to a travel agency and a man put five of us in a great big old Buick and we told him this is pretty nice. But he stopped on the way and picked up his girlfriend, and put four of us in the back seat. And it was big enough to hold all our duffle bags. So we were coming down old Highway 90, and we got to Weimer, the hill on the west side of Weimer, kind of high, so he hit that hill and he took the power out of it and he blew a rod, and there we were, hot summertime, and there was a water tank there, and five of us soldiers setting there trying to hitchhike. So pretty soon here comes a man by there and he says can any of ya'll drive? Yeah. So there was a man there, his name was Bill Jones. That was his real name. He had no middle name except none. I said yeah, I'll drive. So he said well I'll pick all of you all up. All I want you to do is buy me a bottle in the next town. Well the next town was Flatonia. We stopped there at that liquor place. He sat over there in the passenger side and Bill was driving. We got to Houston. Well he was passed out. So we went to the bus station and we parked him in there on the street. He had a parking place. And we thanked him. Of course he didn't know it. I went into the bus station and I called my brother. He lived in Houston. And he said where are you going? I said I'm going home. He said, no, you stay right there. I said well the next bus doesn't leave here until about after the last one in the evening, it was at midnight. He said that's all right, I'll take you back there. And so I went and visited with he and his wife and he took me back and I got back to Nederland about 3 o'clock in the morning. There was a taxicab there and I had drug that duffle bag all over town and I had about three blocks to walk and I said well, I'm tired. And I just got the cab to haul me home. Then I had to go knock on the window to wake my parents up. Anyway my younger sister was there with a three-month old baby, her husband still in the Navy, and my older sister had had a baby in December, she was six months old. So they told my younger sister run, go in there and call Caroline, that was my older sister's name. She went in there and called her. And her oldest son was 5 years younger than I was and we were raised like brothers, and he was 15 at the time, and so he was staying there with my mom and dad. He'd rather stay there than stay at his house. And so when I got in the house, well first of all, my sister came to open the door, and she says who is it? I says it's your brother, open the door. Doesn't sound like my brother. I said well it is. And I was 5 foot 7 when I went in the service. When I got out, I was 5'11-1/2".

Wow, you grew quite a bit then.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah, and she opened the door and she looked at my feet and she looked up and she slammed the door. She says you're not my brother. I said oh yes I am. And so she finally opened the door and she said you grew a little bit, didn't you? I said yup. But then my other sister came over and she brought her six-month old baby, and she said this is your uncle Albert. And the little thing just came to me just like she knew me forever.

Oh, that's great.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah.

That was a great homecoming, and I'm sure your parents were excited that you were there, too.

Albert Giebelstein: Yeah.

That's excellent.

Albert Giebelstein: Of course mama started crying. But they treated me like the son that had left in the Bible, squandered his money and all his inheritance, and I like coconut cream pie, and that's what she made the next day.

Oh that's great. I'm sure they were definitely proud of you and I'm sure they were thankful you were back home.

Albert Giebelstein: Oh yeah, they were glad of that.

Yes sir. Well sir, I tell you, I really appreciate you sharing these memories with us. Our goal is to save these stories for generations and it's one thing to read history in the books or see it in an old film, but to actually hear the story come directly from someone like yourself, it means a lot, and we have archives here at the Land Office that go back to the 1700s. We have the original Land Grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at The Alamo, and we have the Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of all the settlers that came to Texas. So our goal is to take this interview along with all the others we've done and save those for posterity. With that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview years and decades from now?

Albert Giebelstein: Serving for your country is one of the best things you can do, if you love your country, because liberty is not cheap.

Yes sir, we all definitely agree with that.

Albert Giebelstein: And at my age, if I were back young again, I'd go in there again.

That's good to know. Well sir, my time here today is up, but -

Albert Giebelstein: I want to tell you one more thing. One of my best friends I've known since '88, young enough to be my son, worked there at the Land Office. His name was Bruce Smith. He worked for David Dewhurst. And I want to tell you one more thing. The recorder's off.

Oh no, I'm still recording. Let me go ahead and turn the recorder off here real quick. I want to just conclude the interview, and thank you for your service on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone at the General Land Office, and I'll go ahead and turn the recorder off now, sir.

[End of recording]