Transcription: Viggo Gruy

My name is Tom Cengle, and I am with the General Land Office. Today is Friday, December the 12th, 2008. It's approximately 9 o'clock a.m. I'm interviewing Viggo Gruy by telephone interview. I'm located at the General Land Office, and Mr. Gruy is at his home. The interview is in support of the Voice of Veterans Program of the State of Texas Veterans Land Board. The purpose is to create a permanent record of the military experiences of veterans. Mr. Gruy, as you know, I'm about to interview you relating to your military experiences. The interview is by telephone and I will be using a tape recorder to record this interview. The interview will be transcribed and made into a permanent record at the Veterans Land Board in Austin, Texas. Does the Veterans Land Board have your permission and consent to conduct this interview and to make it a part of the permanent record of the Veterans Land Board?

Viggo Gruy: Yes it does.

OK, now the purpose of the interview is to record your recollections of your military experience. We will follow somewhat a question and answer format. Please feel free to expand on your answers, and add anything that you think may be helpful in refreshing your recollections so that future generations will have the opportunity to know what it was like for you during your military life and how all these experiences shaped your life since then. We understand that some of your experiences may be difficult to discuss, and if so you are free to limit the interview to the extent you are comfortable in relating the experiences. Would you please give me your name and present address?

Viggo Gruy: My name is Viggo Gruy.

Would you spell your last name please?

Viggo Gruy: It's G-R-U-Y.

OK.

Viggo Gruy: I live in Beeville, Texas, Bee County, at 133 Fairway Ridge.

All right, and Mr. Gruy, if you don't mind telling us how old you are?

Viggo Gruy: I just turned 85.

OK. And could you give me some family history and information about your immediate family?

Viggo Gruy: Present family, or - ?

Beginning with your parents.

Viggo Gruy: Well my grandfather on my mother's side immigrated to the United States from Denmark in 1868, thereabouts. And he ended up in south Texas first at St. Mary's in Rockport and then in Beeville. My father came to the United States from Austria in the year 1900. He was, both of them were 20 years old I think, approximately, when they arrived in the United States, and my father became, he had apprenticed in Austria as a bricklayer, and when he got to

the United States, he pursued work as a bricklayer and eventually, he had been in St. Louis, Missouri, but after World War II, he came to Texas and he was building a house on a contract in Hebbernville, Texas was where my grandfather and my mother lived, and they had a small hotel there and he stayed at that hotel and met my mother and they got married.

OK, and so your mother, was she also from Texas originally?

Viggo Gruy: She was born in Texas, yes.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Viggo Gruy: I have an older sister and a younger brother.

OK, and a younger brother. Did either of them have any military experience?

Viggo Gruy: No they didn't. My sister though, she was in school in Vienna, Austria during the days when Adolph Hitler marched into Vienna. And my father had to go and get her because Hitler ordered all foreigners to leave this country when he took over in 1938, in May of 1938.

And she was in Vienna for what reason?

Viggo Gruy: Going to school. She was living with an aunt, the sister of my father's. She was in high school.

OK. Could you tell me something about your education before you entered the military?

Viggo Gruy: I started school in 1930 at a Catholic convent in Victoria. I was there staying with an uncle, brother and his wife of my father's because my grandfather who lived with our family was very ill and they sent my sister and I off to school, and then after that year, I went to school in Hebbernville, Hebbernville Grammar School through the 6th Grade. Then I started school in Beeville and stayed in Beeville through the 9th Grade, and then went to San Antonio to a Texas military institute for my junior and senior year, and graduated in 1940 and entered Texas A&M college in the fall of 1940.

How did you happen to get into a military school in high school?

Viggo Gruy: Well my father, my mother passed away when I was 8 years old, and my father had traveled, there were three children, the youngest, my brother at that time was only about 2 years old. So he was having trouble taking care of business. We had considerable agricultural real estate and city real estate in Beeville and Hebbernville, and he decided to put us all in school. By then, my sister was back from Austria and she went to in ____ San Antonio and graduated from high school, and my brother went to San Antonio Academy, also a military school for younger students. So that's the way we wound -

Was it your decision or your father's decision?

Viggo Gruy: It was his decision. He made all the decisions.

OK, that's the way it was in the old days.

Viggo Gruy: Yes it was.

And did you enjoy the military school aspect of young living?

Viggo Gruy: Some aspects of it, some I didn't. I was only 14 years old and due to circumstances, I was anywhere from a year to two years younger than most people in my classes. I skipped a grade early on, and so I didn't fit in too good with the ones in my class. I found myself with people two years behind me in school because they were my age. In a boarding school, that was easier to do than a public school.

OK, so you completed high school and then you went to Texas A&M.

Viggo Gruy: Right.

And did you choose Texas A&M or was that chosen for you?

Viggo Gruy: Well I think I had some choices. It came down to Texas University and Texas A&M, and I had two cousins who graduated from Texas A&M in 1937, and but through talking to them and everything, I just decided A&M might be a good place to go. Agricultural was what I was looking for anyway at the time.

OK. And what did you study while you were there?

Viggo Gruy: Animal husbandry.

OK, and did you spend the full four years there?

Viggo Gruy: I spent seven semesters there.

Do you recall what years that would have been?

Viggo Gruy: Well, I started in the fall of 1940 and so the 40-41 school year was my Freshman year. Then we had the summer vacation and my Sophomore year was 41-42, and during that year I turned 18, which at that time the draft had been installed and so everybody in my circumstance there was given the chance to enlist in what they called the enlisted reserve or to go back home and sign up for the draft board. So I think to a man, everybody in our class did sign up for the enlisted reserve. I turned 18 in the middle of the first semester of my Sophomore year, and that was 1941.

OK and what did the enlisted reserve mean?

Viggo Gruy: Well, it meant that you were signed up, you were in the military, but you were not on active duty. You were in the reserves, and they had the right to call you up at any time, but what they wanted were second lieutenants.

But they wanted you to continue your education.

Viggo Gruy: Right and they wanted especially for you to continue your ROTC training which at that time, A&M was fully military. There were no, no one going to school there with few exceptions that weren't in the military. At the end of second year in May of 1942, A&M college

started a three-semester year to speed up the education, and so we went the summer semester of 1942 and the fall semester of '42 were our junior, my class was our junior year, and we became seniors in the first semester in 1943.

So you were then in school when Pearl Harbor happened.

Viggo Gruy: I was, I had just about a month before Pearl Harbor, I had turned 18, so I had joined the enlisted reserve.

Do you recall that day?

Viggo Gruy: Yes I do.

What you were doing and what effect it had on you?

Viggo Gruy: My roommate and I were in the movie theater watching the movie *Gone With the Wind*, which was big in those days, and they stopped the movie and made the announcement, and that time the President hadn't made his speech yet and so then they continued the movie after maybe a 10-minute break.

Did you realize the significance when you heard the announcement of what it was and what it meant?

Viggo Gruy: Well certainly, yes, no question about that, but it wasn't like it was something unexpected. I mean certainly we didn't expect the United States to be attacked in that manner, but we thought it was just a question of time until the United States was in the war.

OK, so it was shocking in the event, but not necessarily the end result of being in war.

Viggo Gruy: No, I think that's aptly put.

And how did you feel with that transition, knowing that there was now going to be war? What did that do to your thinking while you were a student?

Viggo Gruy: Well, it pretty well, I mean it was obvious that we were going to war, and it, through talking to the military officers who were in charge of our training, they tried to push that idea that this is happening and that we're gonna be in the military, and the whole country started, well it had already begun, but after the Pearl Harbor, everything fast forwarded as far as the manufacturing and the training of troops and so forth. The draft had already been ongoing for a year or more.

Yes, and so you were a student during the early part of the war.

Viggo Gruy: I was as student, yes, I were.

And at a time when things were not going well for the United States on the war front. How did that affect you in terms of you continuing your education versus did you have a desire to get into the combat situation, or did you desire to stay and continue with your education?

Viggo Gruy: Well, I guess you could say that my feeling was that to do what more or less what they had in mind for people in my situation which was for us to graduate and get a commission because they wanted officers, and I'm sure you know that A&M, Texas A&M college furnished several thousand officers for that war.

Yes. I assume that was a point of pride in you that you were in fact being prepared by one of the foremost institutions in preparation of officers for the military at that time?

Viggo Gruy: Well, I don't know that, keep thinking, you keep asking me about myself, and I keep thinking in terms of us because we all talked about it and we all kind of did the same thing. Now there were a number of people who in my situation, but older by a year or two, who did go right in the military. They resigned their reserve status and just went right into active duty. Some of my friends did that, but the vast majority stayed there.

OK. And as you knew that you were getting closer and closer to completion of your education and the war was going on rather fervishly at the time, what were your thoughts?

Viggo Gruy: Well, we had no indication that we wouldn't just go through and under the circumstances they were that our class would, which was the A&M class of 1944, would finish at the end of the summer of 1943 we would be graduated. In that lieu, I took extra hours during the fall of 1942. I took 23 hours rather than the normal 17, and tried to get as many credits as I could, and then we were kind of surprised in March of 1943 after we had entered our senior year that we were all, two top classes of A&M, the class of 1944 and the class of 1945, were both gonna be taken to induction centers and put into the service as privates and return to Texas A&M to finish that semester, at the end of which in May we would go on active duty back to in our case, Fort Sam Houston, and just be privates, and the war department had determined that people in our situation of which we'd had by that time would have had seven semesters of military science and tactics training in the reserve officer training corps, would not have to go through basic training but would be assigned from Fort Sam Houston to various branches of service to the officer candidate schools. We'd already been qualified as far as the requirements for being accepted as an officer in candidate school. That had already taken place the beginning of our junior year.

So you had no doubt that when you went active that you would be doing it as an officer?

Viggo Gruy: Right.

OK.

Viggo Gruy: But they said they couldn't give us a commission right out of school in the normal procedure because we hadn't been through a couple of the main things. We hadn't completed the four years of MS&T and we hadn't been to the summer camp which they considered to be very important in those days, that summer camp for ROTC students.

OK. So what did they do to you then?

Viggo Gruy: What did they do?

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: Well we went back after we were inducted in March, we went back to A&M and we were just privates in the Army. We were no longer cadets at Texas A&M. We had on, we wore Army uniforms and private's uniforms, and we just completed that semester of studies and then we went on active duty.

So you were soldiers going to school.

Viggo Gruy: We were soldiers going to school, and then we went back to Fort Sam Houston in May when that semester ended and we waited for assignment to various officer candidate schools. At that time, A&M, the military, they didn't have an Air Corps. I think most of the Corps over there now is Air Corps, but in those days it was divided into Infantry, Cavalry, Field Artillery, Coast Artillery, in all the combat branches of the service.

Which one were you in?

Viggo Gruy: I was in the Cavalry.

OK, and so you finished, you got your degree?

Viggo Gruy: No, we did not get a degree. We lacked one semester.

Oh, OK.

Viggo Gruy: I think in my case, I lacked 9 hours because I had taken extra courses coming into this. But when we, a group of us, mostly all a group of friends at A&M, when they started the spring of – no, in the fall of 1942, they created the Tank Destroyer branch of the service, and there were a lot of A&M graduates in the military who were involved in that and were instructors, people that we knew from earlier classes while we were at A&M, instructors at what was then Camp Hood in Killeen and they came to the campus from Killen, from the Tank Destroyer people, and they asked for volunteers. They wanted volunteers from the Infantry and the Cavalry and the Field Artillery. And I think there were some 250 or 300 applied. They took 17 out of our class.

And you were one of them?

Viggo Gruy: And I was one of them. And we went to, we stayed at Fort Sam Houston until early July.

Of '43?

Viggo Gruy: Of '43.

Did you know when you volunteered what you were really getting into? Did you understand what it was?

Viggo Gruy: Well, we knew that it was armored force, and the Cavalry as we knew it at A&M, we still were training on horseback.

Is that right?

Viggo Gruy: That's right. And of course there were no horses. The artillery was the same way, but there were no horses in the military at that time. The Cavalry turned into the mechanized Cavalry, which was not the armored force, but this, the Tank Destroyers was the branch of the Army, it was their own branch, but there were tanks. Actually they didn't start out as tanks. The first weapon they had was a half-track with a 75mm gun on it, but by the time we got there, they had changed to, actually they were re-equipping the Tank Destroyer units with the M10, with the 3-inch, it was an old 3-inch Naval anti-aircraft gun.

And that was on the chassis of a Sherman tank, right?

Viggo Gruy: It was a Sherman tank chassis, but with a different turret. The turrets on the M10's and all of the tank destroyers were open, like a convertible automobile.

So it had no top.

Viggo Gruy: No top, and it had a lot less armor on the turret than the turret of a Sherman.

OK, so you had volunteered for this kind of service.

Viggo Gruy: Right.

And did you regret volunteering for that at any time?

Viggo Gruy: No, no.

OK. So you were assigned to, where was it? Fort Polk?

Viggo Gruy: Well, after we graduated from the school and were put into the officer's pool there, and then December, first week in December, I don't remember the day exactly, we graduated from OCS on November the 5th. I remember that, and we had 10 days leave and then we reported to the officer's pool there and we were there for about two weeks, and then they cleaned out the entire officer's pool. They just sent everybody, every officer that was there, to a Tank Destroyer battalion somewhere.

And where was this that you went to OCS?

Viggo Gruy: Camp Hood.

At Camp Hood.

Viggo Gruy: Fort Hood.

Oh, Fort Hood, OK.

Viggo Gruy: The OCS was right there at the outskirts of Killeen.

And how long, that was what, about four months?

Viggo Gruy: Well it was interesting. The OCS's up until that time had been 13 weeks, 90 day wonders if you've ever heard the term. But the Tank Destroyer people changed that. We were

the first class to go 17 weeks, and the interesting thing to me was that they hadn't changed the curriculum any. So the last 4 weeks we were there, we just spent on a firing range. They didn't really have anything else for us to do.

Is that right?

Viggo Gruy: So there was another aspect to it. Everybody in our class except for three members, and I think there were 85 of us in that class, were all from ROTC schools all the way from Maine to New Mexico. VMI, University of Maine, South Carolina, LSU, any military school, we were all, had all been seniors when we went into the service. But every other school with the exception of Texas A&M had a 6 weeks semester and graduated their seniors, and that's the ones of us from A&M, we just had to wait at Fort Sam Houston until the other ones got graduated. We didn't know that until we got to the OCS school.

I see. Now at OCS, that was your first opportunity to really start meeting people from the rest of the United States, wasn't it?

Viggo Gruy: Right.

Until that, you were pretty much a Texas boy living with other Texas –

Viggo Gruy: Fort Sam Houston, everybody, all the inductees were all from Texas.

And when you got to Fort Hood, that changed.

Viggo Gruy: Absolutely.

And how did you find that experience? What were your feelings about the new people?

Viggo Gruy: I liked it. I liked, there were a lot of people that had different stories from us, they had different experiences, and it was a good, we had a good relationship with everybody it seemed like. I don't recall any friction at all.

You fit in pretty well then.

Viggo Gruy: Yes.

OK. So you then graduated from OCS.

Viggo Gruy: Right, and when they cleaned out the officer's pool at Camp Hood, I was sent to the 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion at Camp Polk Louisiana.

OK. Tell me a little bit about officer's school in terms of your own experience. Did you enjoy it? Did you not like it? Did you find it worthwhile? Do you think they really trained you adequately?

Viggo Gruy: Well, first of all, I enjoyed it. It was good and it was, they had a very physical regime there. I mean you didn't walk anywhere. You ran everywhere. Everything was double time and they had several obstacle courses and they were very into getting everybody in good physical shape, which as I understand it from some of my friends from A&M, Fort Knox and

Fort Riley and places like that, it was a little different. But I enjoyed it, I enjoyed the whole thing . There was no hazing or anything like that. It wasn't that kind of a school. It was just you're in the military with military training.

Was there any part of it you didn't like?

Viggo Gruy: Not really. I was used to, remember, I had been 5-1/2 years in the military really.

Yes, you already had a good touch of it.

Viggo Gruy: Although it wasn't the Army, it was, we did the same type of things.

And did you think that they were adequately training you for what your responsibilities would be?

Viggo Gruy: Well at the time, yes. It's all we knew, and we were actually shooting the armament, we were shooting the big guns and the handheld guns, and we were riding around in those M10's and half-tracks and we didn't have anything to compare it to as far as knowing whether we were getting adequate training. In hindsight, I'd say that it really wasn't as good as it could have been.

OK, what was missing?

Viggo Gruy: Well, it depends on your experience in the military. The Tank Destroyers were separate battalions. You didn't have a division structure like an infantry division or a cavalry division, and when we got overseas, they split up the battalion and the companies. Are you familiar with the organization of the Armored Division?

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: Well, you know they had three combat commands in an Armored Division at that time during World War II, Combat Command A, B, and C. Well they would put in the division that we were attached to was the 7th Armored Division, and A Company went to Combat Command A, and B Company went to Combat Command B, and C went to C, and then they broke the, Patton in his charge across France, he broke those Armored Divisions, which he had three, down into Combat Commands, and each Combat Command had three task forces, OK? And it was much like the, as I could determine from television, like the Iraqi war was fought. They were lined up on each task force is lined up parallel to each other and they just went across the country and tried to keep one task force from getting too far ahead of the other one, or one from lagging back, and so you stopped and started a lot.

So your battalion was essentially separated.

Viggo Gruy: Yes.

It didn't fight as a unit.

Viggo Gruy: Combat Command A and B of the 7th Armored Division were the lead forces. Combat Command C was a reserve, and then the breakdown of the Combat Command, Task Force 1 and 2 were the lead and then the third one was in the reserve. I was in the 2nd Platoon, so

I went to the second Task Force that they created out of Combat Command A, and I had no superior there in that Task Force from the Tank Destroyer family. The Task Force commander, he had a company of tanks and a company of infantry, a platoon of tank destroyers, and a platoon of engineers, and a battery of self-propelled field artillery, 105 Hausers, and each one of the commanders of those broken down units were on their own as far as their troops went. So most of my time was spent, was not with the Tank Destroyers at all, but with some Task Force in the 7th Armored Division which I was looked to by the Task Force commander to properly deploy my troops in whatever job he gave us to do.

So your battalion was essentially nonfunctional as an operating unit.

Viggo Gruy: Our battalion had one instance where our battalion commander was given a Task Force head and that was during the Battle of the Bulge, and everybody needed everybody they could get, but other than that, our battalion headquarters and our company headquarters were never in the front lines you might say.

Just to go back to OCS for a minute, most officer trainees didn't have the opportunity to get training in the type of equipment and tactics that they were gonna be involved in.

Viggo Gruy: That was pretty much true with us, too.

Yeah, you did not, or you did?

Viggo Gruy: No, we did not. But one of the biggest things that I missed functioning as I did in the military was paperwork. I mean it was always the 1st sergeant in the headquarters that took care of the morning reports and all that. When I got over there with another Task Force, I didn't realize until they had to, that I was supposed to turn in a report every day as a platoon leader – how many rounds of ammunition we used, how many gallons of fuel we used, and what we'd done. It took about week before they finally pulled me up and said hey, where are all your reports? And I didn't know what they were talking about.

So you'd had no experience with preparation or any of that stuff relative to those.

Viggo Gruy: Well I had, but only at a company level. In my first job in an active unit was when I was a company executive officer, which meant that I was sort of in charge of all that. But the platoon leaders didn't have to do anything like that.

OK, let's go to the end of OCS, you've got your gold bars, and did you immediately deploy? Did you get any leave or did you - ?

Viggo Gruy: They gave us a 10-day what they called delay en route. They moved us from South Camp Hood to North Camp Hood and they gave us 10 days off to get there.

10 days off to get there…and how did you spend it?

Viggo Gruy: I went home. And again when they sent us out to these various units and made it Camp Polk to the 814th, we got another leave of absence, had 10 days to get there, too. And the interesting thing was when I got to this battalion, they were already packing up to go overseas. They were doing their arm and ground force firing tests and so forth, and under the rules of that time, a battalion like the 814th, they couldn't take but a 1% overage in their officers' contingent.

Well, in a battalion as I recall, there were like 36 officers. Well 1% of that isn't even one extra officer. And when I got there, they had 50 something officers, 57 or 58 officers. So they, we were told when we got there, you know, by the staff, that we would just be there until they could find a place to send us because they were going overseas immediately and they couldn't take us with them. So Christmas time came along and I asked the colonel if I could have a three-day pass to go home. He asked me where I lived, and I said in Texas. The question was could you get there and back in three days? And I said no problem. So he gave me the three-day pass, and told me that he hadn't cut an order on me to where I would go, but I would be gone, and maybe by the time I got back, they'd have an order for me to go somewhere. Well, I went home and told my parents and everybody that I had to, the battalion I was in was going overseas, but I wasn't going with 'em, so I'd be going somewhere else. When I got back to Camp Polk, they called me in and said that they had sent almost all the officers out and that they couldn't take, but that one of the original officers in their, in one of the companies had misbehaved at a Christmas party, and they'd shipped him out and going over the 201 files on the commanding officers, they'd selected me because I was listed as cavalry and the colonel had a mild shock when I told him my experience in the cavalry was with horses.

At Texas A&M.

Viggo Gruy: So he didn't put me in the recon company as I was supposed to. He put me in what they called a gun company, which was where the tanks were, and I went overseas with them. We left three days later.

Just three days later, wow. So you ended up staying in the 814th.

Viggo Gruy: 814th, right.

What were your feelings about that once you knew you got back and you knew you were gonna go overseas?

Viggo Gruy: Well, I had this instant recall of all the movies, all the war movies and everybody getting shot up.

You wished you were back in school.

Viggo Gruy: Well, I wasn't sure I was ready for that. But it didn't matter. I wasn't alone.

I'm sure that's the case. So you deployed down to, overseas.

Viggo Gruy: Yeah, we went to actually nothing seemed to happen as it was supposed to in my case. We went to Camp Miles Standish in Massachusetts and got there about the 1st or 2nd of January, and they had us penciled in as they called it on a liberty ship or victor ship to go and the next convoy was leaving in about a week. Well, the boat they had us penciled in on got sunk coming back from the previous trip, so they didn't have any place to put us, and we sat around for another three weeks, and they finally put us on, our battalion and another tank destroyer battalion, they sent us to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and we got on a British troop ship which had been a French ocean liner before the war. They had taken it over when the French had capitulated. It was called the Il' de France. So we were on that Il' de France with an awful lot of Canadians and I think there were 3,000 RAF pilots who had been sent from England to Canada

to train and gotten their wings and they were going back on this boat. And we went from Halifax to Scotland in four days by ourselves. I mean it was no convoy.

There was no convoy?

Viggo Gruy: No, we had air support for about the first 12 hours off of Nova Scotia, and then the RAF picked us up about six or eight hours off the coast of Scotland, and we had several, as I recall they told us they had three submarine sightings and we were doing, this was a very fast ship. It was the fastest ocean liner they had in those days, faster than the Queen Mary and some of those. It wasn't quite that big. But they had 14,000 troops on the ship, and it was kind of tough. They told us that the first thing they told us when we got on the boat, they said the lifeboats were for the crew if they got sunk, but they had lashed these already inflated rubber rafts to the decks and that if they had to give an abandon ship order, they would cut the lashes on those rafts and it'd be catch as catch can, and there were only enough rafts for about 4,000 people.

And there were 14,000.

Viggo Gruy: Right, the numbers didn't add up.

And you sailed alone.

Viggo Gruy: And we went alone.

No convoy.

Viggo Gruy: Very fast though. And of course it was the North Atlantic. You couldn't hardly get out of the inside of the infrastructure of the boat because it was a storm the whole way.

Did you get sea sick?

Viggo Gruy: I was one of about 5% that didn't.

Is that right? Good for you.

Viggo Gruy: Well they let, the officers stayed up above deck. Our particular people in our battalion were on the 5th deck below the level of the water, right up against the bow plates. And of course as officers, we had to spend time down there. They had to have one officer with our company at all times, so I spent my time down there and everybody there was sick. You can't imagine how bad it was.

Oh I can imagine. I was in the Marine Corps and I spent time on tack transport, so –

Viggo Gruy: They had those fold down bunks, and I guess you had maybe what, 14 inches from the bunk above you.

Yes, yes. So you went over at least in relative comfort.

Viggo Gruy: Right, we had the officers had a big ballroom and they had an entertainer on there named Danny Kay.

Danny Kay, oh boy.

Viggo Gruy: The only thing I noticed was when I went to breakfast, I was the only one at my table where there was supposed to be 12 people, because I didn't get sea sick and I don't understand that, because I've been sea sick since I've been in the service.

But not then.

Viggo Gruy: Not then.

So you had the table all to yourself in the morning.

Viggo Gruy: Well, I guess I was just lucky. I didn't know what I was doing. I'd never been on a boat before.

First experience, and I assume your first experience in being with people from other countries.

Viggo Gruy: Well that's true. There was a contingent of Polish WACs. They were all from Poland and been trained as WACs, whatever the WACs did in the British Army in Canada.

Ladies you mean?

Viggo Gruy: Ladies, yes.

The ladies auxiliary, OK.

Viggo Gruy: Then there were all these RAF pilots, and there wasn't a whole lot of comingling because the weather was so bad that there wasn't much, you couldn't really circulate around the boat very much.

So your first chance at being an international was kind of limited.

Viggo Gruy: Right, right.

So you ended up getting ashore in Scotland?

Viggo Gruy: Grimack, Scotland. And they took us to a Scottish Army base and we spent the night.

Do you remember approximately what date this was when you landed in Scotland?

Viggo Gruy: I want to say it was around the 1st of February.

OK, of '44.

Viggo Gruy: '44. We'd had all that delay time there in Massachusetts waiting for a ride.

OK, so you got to Scotland.

Viggo Gruy: Then they put us on a train and we went down to a place called Packington Park, which was a large nobleman's estate or something, and he had taken, there were two battalions quartered there, our battalion and another battalion. They were on the other end of the estate. We never really saw them. But they had constructed quansit huts. Are you familiar with those?

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: They were quansit huts for the, for all the barracks and the headquarters and everything was a quansit hut. And that park, Packington Park, was on the main road between Coventry and Birmingham. Actually when we went on leave, there wasn't much in Coventry. Everybody went to town, they went to Birmingham which was only about 12 miles.

And you were there until you deployed to France I assume.

Viggo Gruy: Well no, not hardly. They issued us our equipment. We got our tanks.

By tanks you mean your tank destroyers?

Viggo Gruy: M10 tank destroyer. And jeeps and trucks and we had to, they were all, I don't know what the word would be, but they were all covered in cosmoline, so we had to clean 'em up and that's quite a chore, and it took a couple of weeks to clean those, get the cosmoline off the tanks, from the vehicles before we could even use 'em. And then we just sort of did, actually started up classes for the enlisted men and put people like me to teaching classes. I had to do an algebra class, and then on the, I believe it was like the 10th of March after we'd been there about a month and got all our equipment, they called a meeting of all the officers of our battalion at 10 o'clock at night, and they told us that the SHAFE headquarters had decided that the 1st Army was gonna make the invasion, the 3rd Army was gonna be the follow up, and all the armor was gonna be in the 3rd Army, so we would be 3rd Army troops, and that our job from that time to the invasion would be to move to the south coast of France and run marshaling area camps. So we put the cosmoline back on the tanks and just left 'em there and went down to the headquarters for the marshaling area was in Dorchester, and our company was assigned to operate KMD-10. D for Dorchester, Dorchester 10, and this was a facility that had six mess halls and we had perimetal tents that would house 3,000 troops, and it was located in a ravine maybe 200 yards wide and a little over a mile long with all these big trees, poplar trees and very well camouflaged. It was so well camouflaged that the Germans who flew over that area every night never did drop a bomb on our camp.

Wow, that's pretty good camouflage.

Viggo Gruy: It was, it was a perfect setting and we were lucky to get it because some of 'em were more exposed. And we had almost every night you had an air raid, a warning.

And so what did you do while you were there?

Viggo Gruy: We were mostly hotel keepers. We had to operate the mess halls. We had concertina wire strung out all the way around the camp, and we had to see that we did the guard, our troops did the guard duty, nobody got out and nobody got in. And they ran while we were there from the 12th of March through the invasion, they ran three operations. The first two were practice. They didn't tell you that though. They put these 3,000 troops and they would be, come in by truck to the camp and assigned their quarters, and we had attached to us, our company, we

had a quartermaster officer who checked all their equipment to make sure they had every piece of equipment they were supposed to get, and if they were short, he had to procure it for 'em. We had an ordinance officer and he had the same job with their armament. We had a transportation officer who was responsible for getting them from our camp to the port where they embarked, which was Waymouth.

So during your time, pre-invasion while you were in England, your time was mostly spent in non-preparation for combat.

Viggo Gruy: Absolutely none. Like I say, we were hotel keepers. As executive officer of the company, I was the camp adjutant and I was the mess officer, and under those circumstances, if anybody got dysentery, the mess officer went to jail. They didn't want any of those troops to be sick when they put 'em on those boats.

I guess not.

Viggo Gruy: We also had a CIC man there who did the briefing. He's the one that had their maps and the information of where they were going and so forth, and of course he knew I'm sure whether it was the real thing or not when they came in, but what they would do is they'd bring 'em in there and they'd give 'em their briefing and check their equipment and get 'em all ready and then they'd put 'e on the transportation corps trucks and then take and put 'em on the boats. In the first two operations, the boats would just go around the back side of the island and let 'em off on the beaches there, and supposedly the troops did not know that they weren't going to France. But then the third one which was called Overlord, and was the invasion, it wasn't difficult at all in our position to know that this was going to be the invasion. ___ differently. More pains were taken. But the interesting thing was, we started loading troops on the assault ships on May 25th, and at that time, the invasion was supposed to happen on June 5th. Because of the weather, it was delayed. Now you know what I'm talking about a hectic day, June the 5th was one hectic day.

I would imagine.

Viggo Gruy: The orders came down to go. Then the orders came down not to go, and that happened three times that day. And they finally decided they were gonna go the next morning. They were gonna delay it until the 6th and that's when they went.

What were your thoughts? Were you wishing that you were one of those going first? Were you more than happy to stay behind and get the others loaded?

Viggo Gruy: Well, my personal thoughts were that I was glad I wasn't in the infantry.

You were glad you were not in the infantry.

Viggo Gruy: Right.

And not going first.

Viggo Gruy: Well, that was not a very good thing. A friend of mine and I went to Waymouth the morning of the invasion about 11 o'clock and at 11 o'clock the hospital ships were, the first

ones were just getting back. And they were talking about 80% casualties in the 1st Infantry Division, which is the people that had gone through our camp. It wasn't a pretty picture.

Were you concerned while you were there in England that you were not getting any combat training?

Viggo Gruy: Well, once the invasion happened, they gave us 30 days' training. We went and got our tanks and brought 'em back down to the area on the south coast. I can't remember exactly where it was. It was not in a town. And we did 30-day training, and at that point, they changed my job from executive officer to platoon leader.

And what did that encompass?

Viggo Gruy: Oh that involved getting familiar with the tanks which I had never had any experience with at all, really, and of course getting to know the men and I was very fortunate that I had a platoon sergeant in that platoon who had actually been 11 weeks in a field artillery at OCS and was very competent, but he told me he'd been kicked out of OCS for insubordination, and he admitted that he had been insubordinate and he deserved it, but he thought he was justified at the time. But anyway he was a very good man and fortunately we both made it through the thing together. I was lucky to have him because you got to remember I was just a teenager then.

How old were you at the time of the invasion?

Viggo Gruy: 20 years old.

20 years old. And you were in command of how many people?

Viggo Gruy: There were 33 people.

33 you were responsible for. And how many vehicles?

Viggo Gruy: We had four M10's, a jeep, and a ¾ ton weapons carrier.

OK, and you were responsible for them.

Viggo Gruy: Right.

OK, so the invasion was occurring. You were training to do your part and be involved.

Viggo Gruy: Right.

And I assume you knew you were going at some time, but not knowing when.

Viggo Gruy: That's essentially true. They told us, we didn't start training until maybe the 15th of June. They told us that it would be six weeks, but what actually happened when I 'm gonna say the, probably around the 23rd, 24th of July, when Patton's people were getting ready to break out from the beach head and go across France, they had received intelligence that there was gonna be a German counterattack, and they needed some anti-tank support, so our battalion was called upon to supply some, and what they did was is they put A Company, which I was in A

Company, and one platoon of B Company on an LST. That's all the tanks, that was 16 tanks, and that's all they could get on one LST. So we went over across the channel on about the 24th or 25th of July. I don't remember exactly when. The rest of our battalion didn't go over until about the 8th of August. We went over the 24th of July, and what we did is we were thrown into the defensive line to stop some counterattacks which never happened, and so we did some what they called indirect fire or artillery firing where you don't really see what you're shooting at but you got a forward observer.

OK, now you went over in late July.

Viggo Gruy: Right. There's something funny about that though because there was a member of the 814th that wrote a book, and he called me and I went over the thing and I told him we'd gone over and he didn't believe it. He still doesn't believe it because the records don't show anything about us having gone.

Is that right?

Viggo Gruy: That's right.

You knew you were there, but the records don't.

Viggo Gruy: The records don't reflect that. Which is interesting from this standpoint because when the war ended, they had a method by which they sent you home -

Yeah, point system.

Viggo Gruy: A point system. The points to come home immediately were 84. I had 79. Now if they had recognized that I'd been in Normandy for three weeks, I would've had more points.

So the records didn't help you.

Viggo Gruy: The records were important. I stayed there actually where I would've come home in June or July, I stayed there until January.

Wow.

Viggo Gruy: They just didn't have the transportation for everybody.

So the records –

Viggo Gruy: I had too many points to come home and be trained and sent to the Pacific, but I didn't have enough to be discharged.

So the records did you in.

Viggo Gruy: The records did me in.

Wow. OK, let's talk about getting ready to go over. You now know you're gonna go across the channel and you're gonna be in combat. I assume before you went as you had mentioned, you were getting reports about what was happening and what was going on over there.

Viggo Gruy: Oh yes.

And I assume – what was the general thoughts of the guys still in England getting ready to go, about what was happening over there?

Viggo Gruy: Oh, it was our turn in the barrel.

Was the general consensus that we were making progress, that this was working, or that it was still questionable whether it was gonna be successful?

Viggo Gruy: It was questionable in some ways because the British weren't making any progress around Caen. And the American forces had established a solid bridgehead, and the fact that they were getting ready for the breakthrough at least said to me that everything is going according to plan.

OK, so you at least didn't feel like you were gonna go over and get pushed out.

Viggo Gruy: Well, we didn't know that of course, because we hadn't been there. We didn't know what to expect really, but I think we felt like that we were gonna go over there and we were gonna be involved in some battles and we were gonna win this thing.

What were your personal feelings? What was going through your mind as you were getting ready to go over there, knowing the time had come where all the preparation, all of the movement, all of the training and everything else was now done and the real thing was about to start?

Viggo Gruy: My personal feelings was hoping that I was up to the task. I mean I was in a position of some responsibility for a person my age and inexperience, and I was just hoping I could handle it.

OK, so your main concern was were you adequate to the task?

Viggo Gruy: That's sort of it, yeah.

OK. Fears? Any other fears?

Viggo Gruy: Always. I don't think you lived without the fear of being wounded more so than I guess being killed. I think people dreaded losing limbs and things like that more than they did -

So that fear was with you from the time that you -

Viggo Gruy: Always, yeah. You lived with it.

OK. All right, so your outfit at least part of your outfit went across early and you went across as a platoon leader in command of men and you went over on an LST, and you got -

Viggo Gruy: Right. USS Florida.

USS Florida, still remember, huh?

Viggo Gruy: Yup.

And when you, what beach did you land on?

Viggo Gruy: Utah.

On Utah?

Viggo Gruy: Utah. We were, we got off the LST and we went south towards the rim. That's where they were expecting the Germans to counterattack.

That must have been quite a sight when you hit the beach at Utah after all of the combat that had taken place there and all of the equipment and all of the things coming in.

Viggo Gruy: Well actually all of that happened at Omaha.

OK.

Viggo Gruy: Utah was a different situation. I think the troops there got pretty well off the beach before they ran into opposition. There were no, not a lot of signs of, not a lot of burned out vehicles and things were out on the beach where we landed.

How about equipment and ships and things like that?

Viggo Gruy: No, actually we didn't go across in convoy. Once again, this LST took us over there sort of on our own. They all, see, they'd already been there for 45 days, something like that, and the only thing bad that happened was whoever was driving our ship ran it up too far on the beach and when they dropped the lid that you drove out on, we were still 10 feet up in the air. They had to get some bulldozers to come and push the sand up so we could drive off. Fortunately there was no shooting going on.

That must have been embarrassing for that ship commander.

Viggo Gruy: I don't know. It would've been for me.

OK, so you come ashore.

Viggo Gruy: We're ashore, and we had, immediately had orders about where to go, so we went down almost to the Bress peninsula at somewhere close to Rennes, and stayed in line for a couple of days and we didn't have the expected counterattack, so they pulled us back a little ways and we went into some little town and had some combat. It didn't amount to very much, and the Germans left. We set up as an artillery unit and fired for a few days. And then we returned, left and went back north and waited for the 7th Armored Division to land which didn't happen until the 9th, and on the 9th of August, they deployed us to our various, as I was saying earlier on, we went to and I was assigned to Task Force.

OK, now it should be obvious what a Tank Destroyer outfit is, but maybe in your own words could you describe what's the function of a Tank Destroyer outfit?

Viggo Gruy: You know, that's interesting. I have to explain that. When I got to this Task Force, the Colonel Chapwee from New Orleans, he asked, he was familiar with the tanks and he talked to the tank commander and he talked to the infantry commander and the engineers and he got to me, and he said now, lieutenant, he said what is it that you do? I said well I'm with, we're a Tank Destroyer unit. And he said I know that, but what do you do? Well, I told him that all our training had been to fight tanks. That's what we were supposed to do. That's what they told us we were gonna do. We were gonna be the people that fought the tanks. And he said well, the colonel told me, he said well, I don't, I'm gonna have to think about this and how we can deploy you because I'm not familiar with your organization. He said I'm gonna give you the job. You're gonna be the rear guard for our Task Force. So I lined up at the back of the column, and first day out, we do anything but hear some small arms fire off in the front there. But the second day was when we ran into the trouble. They attacked the rear of the column, and that was the day that I got my medal. Hello?

Yes sir. OK, now we're back. All right. We were interrupted there a bit by mechanical problems, but we're back on. The colonel of the outfit you were attached to didn't know what to do with you, so he stuck you at the rear end of the column.

Viggo Gruy: Right. He called me the rear guard.

And you were at the rear guard and something happened.

Viggo Gruy: Well, the second day about mid-afternoon I guess it was, the column was moving and we were coming along in our position at the rear, and we got into a very small town, really more like a big farm headquarters or something with a road. We went in from the east and as we got into the buildings, there was a big wall on the right, a big stucco agricultural barn, probably for livestock, and the road turned right and went like a city block and turned left, and then went about four blocks and turned right and went out of town, and we were the last vehicles in the column and right in front of our lead tank was the ambulances. We had two ambulances attached to this Task Force in case of casualties, and as we were just sitting there and after we'd been there maybe 5 or 10 minutes, there was an explosion and a hole appeared in the Red Cross on the side of this one ambulance. Obviously it had been shot. So I had already deployed, which I did whenever we stopped, I deployed the four tank destroyers so that we could see the terrain in every direction, and there was a large hill on our left, and the road, it was like a junction of a road. A road came from the left and joined the road we were on to go right out of the town. And then we saw this tank out in the field, a German tank had fired at this ambulance. And we, after the panic set in, we got bead on him and knocked him out, and then I heard another shot from back behind us, and I jumped down off the back of that tank and ran around the corner, and they were shooting at another tank which they had knocked out. So then after that, we actually knocked out three tanks and then we could see two more disappearing into the woods a couple thousand yards away. So we felt like they had left. We fought 'em off. But I then checked all my tanks and nobody, I had one person wounded, a shell from one of the enemy tanks had hit the plastered wall and had knocked some rocks off and wounded one of the tank crew in the throat. I don't think, I'm not sure because he was evacuated, but I don't think the metal had hit him. I think it was just the rocks off the wall because I looked at the wound and I couldn't see that it had been… Anyway, after that was over and the column had already moved off ahead of us, and we caught up with 'em and kept moving and when dark came, they stopped and we set up our defense at the rear of the column, and about 10 o'clock that night, four Germans on a motorcycle ran right into our road block and they were an advance party for a small column and insisting there were some guns, supply trucks, and when they showed up, we shot the lead vehicle and it

was dark, and all the people behind us in the rest of the battalion started shooting. We were afraid they were gonna hit us because we were between them and the enemy. But fortunately, none of that happened and all the Germans gave up. It was about 130 or something like that. And that was that, and the next morning the colonel sent for me and asked me why I hadn't reported to him. I said well, we tried to raise anybody we could on the radio. We had all the call signs for everybody, the infantry and the tanks and his headquarters of course, and we couldn't raise anybody. So he got his radio operator checking radio, and it turns out that they had a 500 series radio and we had a 600 series radio and there was no way we could communicate.

Wow.

Viggo Gruy: And nobody knew that. It hadn't been checked out. So anyway, he got his radio people to get, take one of the radios and put it in my jeep and that way he could talk to me. But unbeknownst to me, somebody, the motor officer for this Task Force had witnessed the whole thing, the tank fight. And rode up I guess for the count. As far as any listener, we were just doing our job. We didn't know we were being heroic.

But you did, and what did you receive?

Viggo Gruy: Silver Star.

A Silver Star?

Viggo Gruy: Yeah.

So were you the one who received it?

Viggo Gruy: Yes.

OK, because you were the commander.

Viggo Gruy: Well, yeah, I guess things were happening that I wasn't noticing. They said the guy that wrote up the report talked about I was standing on the back of the tank and the machine gun bullets were ricocheting. I never knew that, I mean if it was true or he made it up, I don't know. But there were some machine gun there in haystacks and after tanks had quit, we realized that and we fired on the haystacks and knocked out the machine gun there. At about that time, all these French freedom fighters showed up, and we rounded up, they insisted on being in on the thing and right up on the Germans, they all gave up, and they took charge of 'em, said they would take 'em to prison. Whether they ever got 'em there or not, I don't know.

I imagine you had some suspicions whether they did or not.

Viggo Gruy: No, they didn't like 'em.

No. Now your first experience in combat turns out to be very successful.

Viggo Gruy: Right.

Your outfit destroys three tanks.

Viggo Gruy: Right.

That had to be pretty good shooting.

Viggo Gruy: Well, I did not train these people. I can't take credit for that, but I want to say that they, that platoon, the tank drivers were outstanding, the gunners, everybody was well trained.

I would assume it's not easy to hit a tank.

Viggo Gruy: Well, no, you're wrong. It's not hard to hit a tank.

No?

Viggo Gruy: They're big.

But how far away are they?

Viggo Gruy: Well, in this instance, we were very close. I'm gonna say 300-400 yards. Our guys could shoot their, they're a very flat trajectory gun, and we did a lot of damage from 3,000 yards, 3,500 yards.

So at that time you were facing tanks that your guns were sufficient to take care of.

Viggo Gruy: Right. They weren't tiger tanks, they were Mark 4's which had been the, in the beginning of the German war, the Mark 4 was kind of their Sherman. It had a defect which played into our hands pretty well. They did not have a 300-degree traverse. Their turrets would only traverse 170 degrees. So if they traversed toward you and you were out of that arc, they had to back up and turn, which gave us a little more time.

Yeah.

Viggo Gruy: We didn't know that until that day, but we learned it.

So until that day, you had not been informed that the Mark 4 had a limitation on its ability to rotate.

Viggo Gruy: Well if I had been informed, I'd forgotten it.

OK. I would imagine at that moment, a lot of your training went to the way side and instinct took over.

Viggo Gruy: Well, it's kind of funny. You know, the gun commander has a set of orders he gives, like enemy right front, 2 o'clock, or something like that; load and then your fire orders an so forth, and the motion of those tanks started stammering, so I had to give the fire orders. The one we saw first was right in front of us.

Wow. That must have been quite an awakening.

Viggo Gruy: Well it was, it was.

I mean that was your first –

Viggo Gruy: I think we were blessed though in it happening the way it did. We didn't have time to think.

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: So we just reacted, and I think everybody did a good job of that.

Well trained.

Viggo Gruy: That's what I said. They were very well trained, as I say, before we came across the channel, I had nothing to do with the platoon.

So that's not bad though for first combat experience, never having been involved with it before, never been in command before, and you win a Silver Star.

Viggo Gruy: Well, I call it luck.

But it's still, I'm sure the report is a little more heroic than you're willing to admit and that you did a job that your –

Viggo Gruy: I don't know, I'm not bashful.

OK, but I'm sure you still have it and you're still proud of it.

Viggo Gruy: Oh yeah, very much so.

Absolutely. OK. Are you doing OK? Do you need a little break or do you want to continue on?

Viggo Gruy: No, I'm fine if you are.

Yes sir. OK, let's move on because we're almost an hour and a half into this.

Viggo Gruy: Oh really. Time flies when you're having a good time.

Absolutely. OK, and we've only been in France for a short period of time and we've been in combat, we've done some damage to the enemy, you've won yourself a Silver Star. Is it all downhill from now? Or what else do we have to talk about?

Viggo Gruy: Well, I think it was sort of uphill from there. The attack, the movement of the troops and attacking the enemy and that, that was something I was surprisingly able to handle. When we developed into static situations and had to sit still under a lot of artillery fire and strafing and stuff like that, it wasn't much fun.

So you liked to be moving and shooting.

Viggo Gruy: I guess that's it. Yeah, when you're in a situation where you don't, you can't shoot back, it was just different.

Yes. And did you encounter many of those situations?

Viggo Gruy: Well, after we were in France, most of the situations were like that until right at the end of the war when the planes were more fluid through the fall and on into the Battle of the Bulge, it was a different kind of fighting all together.

OK, so until that time, until the Battle of the Bulge, from the time that you had your Silver Star encounter until you got involved in the Battle of the Bulge, what kind of actions were you involved in?

Viggo Gruy: Well, we went to, after, at the end of all this, we were moving rapidly. For instance, we went through France and on up into the outskirts of Paris and then had to step aside and wait and let the French go through us to capture Paris, and then we backed off and went around Paris to the south and the east, across the Moulon River and got up to Chateau Thierry and it was quite a battle at Chateau Thierry. The Germans descended vehemently. Their Air Force there, they didn't want the Allies to have an air base that far advanced. And that was a pretty big battle, but when that ended, it was late, late August, and the stars and stripes came out, one morning I remember I saw an issue Patton, the headlines were "Patton says he'll be in Berlin in a week." The next day, we took off through the Oregon forest from Marines going towards Verdun, about an 80-kilometer move. When we got to the Nous River at St. Bahill, none of the Germans were with us. They'd all ran out of gas. Our vehicles and our tanks had run on diesel. We had plenty of diesel. So we got to St. Bahill and that was interesting experience. My commander, commanding officer left me at St. Bahill and we could see the road coming out of Verdun back towards the east, and the Germans were piling out of Verdun going, moving, retreating, and he told me that he was gonna find a place to ford the Nous River and for me to shoot any of those vehicles we could. So we estimated the yards. The yardage was about 3,000 yards, and started firing at 'em and weren't doing too good. So I decided to try a different tactic, and we just made our gun barrels stationery and allowed the vehicle to come onto the proper lead of what we figured we should lead them. We had the lines in those sights, and when the vehicle would get to a certain line, you'd shoot. And we piled up 70 something vehicles I think, and some guy saw that. Some officer saw that. And he came over there and asked me how we did it, and I explained that we weren't shooting on the wing. We were letting them run into the bullet. And I didn't know this until the war ended, but he had written me up for another Silver Star, which was turned down by our battalion commander because I had just gotten one two weeks before or something. And so I don't know why it happened, but the Task Force commander recommended me for battlefield promotion. So I was promoted to a 1st lieutenant.

Wow.

Viggo Gruy: Whether he did it because they didn't honor his report about the Silver Star, I don't know. But anyway it happened.

So you were doing pretty good for a young man from Texas.

Viggo Gruy: We had good guns and those guys could shoot 'em.

So your four anti-tank, tank destroyers, your M10's, you still had your M10's at that time?

Viggo Gruy: Mm-hmm.

So your four destroyed some 70 some vehicles.

Viggo Gruy: Yeah.

Was that in one day's work?

Viggo Gruy: Over about a three-hour period.

About a three-hour period.

Viggo Gruy: Right.

That's pretty good. That's like shooting ducks in a pond they say?

Viggo Gruy: That's what it was, really. They didn't have anything to shoot back. They were retreating. They were leaving.

Wow, that's some pretty terrific work.

Viggo Gruy: When we go to, and I'm sure you know about this in your work you're doing is that we didn't get any gasoline for 8 days.

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: We did get into Verdun. We sat there and reorganized and waited. In the meantime, while we were sitting there with no gasoline, the 7th Bomber Division Reconnaissance was already up into the, they crossed the Moselle River and going into the town of Metz and had no opposition. But when we got the gasoline and we moved out again, we were supposed to take the City of Metz, we got across the Moselle River one time and were pushed back, and never got across it again until after I was gone. They shipped the 7th Armored Division up to northern Holland because of an operation by the British, the market thing.

Market Garden?

Viggo Gruy: Market Garden. And anyway, they wanted some air and tank support, so we went to Holland and formed a line to try to keep the German tanks from getting to that operation. I don't think we were successful, but we were spread pretty thin, and we had, we did, stopped follow 'em, but I think they had a, we never did, I never did know exactly what happened there until some of the excerpts I'd seen on television.

Is that right?

Viggo Gruy: Yeah.

So you didn't know the results of Market Garden until years and years and years later.

Viggo Gruy: No, actually I found out a lot about it in March. I got a three-day pass to Paris over St. Patrick's Day, and I ran into a friend of mine that I'd gone to A&M with and it turned out he'd been a glider pilot with the 82nd Airborne on that deal up there, and he told me about it how it completely failed. But we didn't, we weren't that close to 'em. We were back off down to the south and east of 'em trying to keep the Germans away. I think from what I've pieced together, they didn't know that the Germans were already, the tanks were already up there.

That's right, the tanks were in the town.

Viggo Gruy: Right.

One bridge too far as they called it.

Viggo Gruy: After I saw that movie.

Yes. OK, we're probably getting close now to the Battle of the Bulge. Is that your next - ?

Viggo Gruy: Battle of the Bulge. Well we in a town of Honesbruck, Holland, and we were attached to the, this happened often, the 7th Armored Division would loan the tank destroyers out if somebody else needed tank support, and we were attached to I believe it was the 117th Cavalry Regiment who were getting ready to cross the Rous River.

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: North of Acken, and we were gonna be their anti-tank support and we had 2,500 rounds, our company did. Our company was the one that were gonna do this, not the whole battalion. And we had 2,500 rounds of ammunition which we transported up to the banks of that river, preparing to go across it, and I say we were in Honesbruck, and actually we were billeted in three of us in the company officers were billeted in the home of a city policeman, and he was big, short wave radio fan. And one night he told us that he'd been getting all these reports on short wave radio that the Germans were massing an Army south of us in the, oh I guess they call it the Ardennes Forest, getting ready, they thought toward the end they were talking about it being a big attack. Well, we didn't know whether to believe it or not. But the next day, I believe it was the 16th – that was the 15th he told us that, of December – the 16th, at night we had an officer's meeting, and I guess it was well after dark, probably 9:00, 10:00 at night, and we were leaving at 4:00 in the morning to go to Vealsomb, which was in Belgium, in the Ardennes Forest. And we did, we went down there and the column we were in was cut in Malmony by the Germans who did the master, and it was cut right in our headquarters company, and our headquarters company commander, Captain Sanderson and several of his enlisted men were part of that massacre.

Is that right?

Viggo Gruy: We were out, we were well ahead of them because we were headed, you know, the guns were, out of the headquarters. We got to Vealsomb a little after daylight. Bitter cold, raining, foggy, and we set there until about noon while the generals and everybody had their meetings and decided what we're gonna do, and we left Vealsomb a little after 12 o'clock to relieve the 106th Infantry Division in the City of St. Vith. And that division had on the previous day had, they had had one regiment completely wiped out. One regiment had surrendered and packed and what was left of 'em were trying to get out of the same ___ as we were trying to get

in, and it was a real traffic jam, them leaving and us going in. We got there and this was the 17th of December, and we managed to stay in St. Vith for, until the night of the 21st, and we were overrun by the Germans, but they said we did a good job standing, and bought a lot of time. That was the Combat B, Combat Command B of the 7th Armored Division under General Bruce Clark, and that Combat Command we were part of, got a presidential unit citation.

And what were your experiences during that period of time?

Viggo Gruy: During the Battle of the Bulge?

Yes, what was going on in your little outfit?

Viggo Gruy: Well, first night we were there, I was out on the perimeter and we were attacked a couple of times, and repulsed the attacks, and the next morning, company commander was told to send some tank destroyers east of the town to what they called Helsunbowen Ridge, a little town called Huntington, Hunange on the Belgian lap, and I went up there and reported to the commanding officer there, was part of the 87th Recon of the 7th Armored Division. We were looking right down on the town of Boerne, which was held by the Germans probably a kilometer and a half away, except for there was a road went down there. On the left side of the road was like an old ____ vineyard of some kind, very overgrown though. And he told me to deploy my tanks, said they were gonna probably attack from that direction, which they did that night, but we'd prepared a target area down there where we had our guns trained on a break in the brush, and when we heard the tanks coming, we just shot from around down through there and they stopped. And we stayed on that ridge until the 21st. My experience was that they attacked constantly. They were under constant mortar fire. We had an incident on the 20th, I guess it was the 20th, the 19th, the night of the 19th where we were heavily bombarded and had some casualties and the next morning, I was looking over the area and I found some fuses from, they were 105's and I took 'em back to the Colonel Seequore and said we were shot by our own bullets last night. Our artillery was put in that ____. So he had to call and get that straightened out. They were actually trying to fire within 100 yards of our position, in front of us, and they sent an Air Force, 9th Air Force sent a pilot down there as a forward observer, and they actually were strafing 100 yards in front of us at night during the attacks, and I guess we were lucky we repulsed every attack. They finally sent us three more tanks towards the second day we were there, and they were deployed where we had done the shooting the first night, and we moved over to extend the larger area to the south of them, over this open country, and they knocked out two tiger tanks that night. They used a different tactic. They backed away from the ridge and shot 'em as they came over the ridge where we tried to defer 'em before they got to us. But they did, they knocked out two of 'em. And we stayed there and were very successful and the Germans never got through there while we were there.

Were you still using the M10's at that time?

Viggo Gruy: No, we had M36's then. We had 90 mm.

So you now had the same basic carriage but a bigger gun.

Viggo Gruy: Right. We had, well it was actually, it was a gasoline powered vehicle, and maybe a little faster, about the same construction though. It was still a Sherman chassis with a different turret. The turret had to be a lot bigger and heavier. It had what they called a counterbalance on the back of it because those shells for that 90 mm gun were about 3 feet long, so in order to get

'em into the gun, you had to have a place in the back of the turret to put your elbow in the shell, lower it in the battery, if you know what I'm talking about.

Yes, I do.

Viggo Gruy: So the gun was bigger and the turret was bigger.

And you were happy to have the bigger gun.

Viggo Gruy: Very much so, however, they still were not unequal to the 88 because the mother velocity was not as fast, so they didn't have the penetrating ability. They couldn't penetrate as much armor as the German 88 could because their mother velocity on an 88 was like 3,800 feet per second. Ours was 2,900 feet per second.

That's a substantial difference.

Viggo Gruy: The last day we were there, they called for some tank destroyers back in the City of St. Vith and they sent my platoon, and I reported to the colonel, and it was real hectic. They were really under duress and he said well I don't know where I want to put you now, but he says, they're having some problems back up where you came from. He said I want you to go halfway there, which was probably 8 kilometers, and just sit there. I said well I don't have any communication with you. So he sent a vehicle with a radio and we went back there and they absolutely forgot about us. I mean they abandoned the City of St. Vith and never told us. His vehicle might've just said we're gonna go. Ya'll can come or go, but we're gonna go. We can't contact anybody and we don't know what's going on. Well, actually they were evacuating the town and we didn't know this because we were 4 kilometers out in front of us, coming from the direction of where we met the previous three days. You couldn't see 'em because it was just overcast, foggy, dark, and you couldn't see anything, but you could hear the German tanks going across in front of us, across that open ground, and we knew they were getting behind us. So we finally just left, too.

And it was just your platoon.

Viggo Gruy: Just my platoon, and we went through the town of St. Vith, and there were Germans all over the place. They couldn't tell that we weren't Germans and we had a hard time distinguishing them as Germans, but it was obvious that they were, and we got out the other side of town going back to the north, and there was a colonel about a kilometer out of town, trying to set up a defensive line, and he told us to get in the edge of these trees and form a defensive line. I said well, I asked him who else was gonna be there? He said, well I sent a lot of units up there. There's a lot of people there. And I didn't want to do it, but I finally did. I went up there and the sun came up the next morning and it was just us and one tank put there, and that's all and nobody else. We didn't know where anybody was. Well fortunately, the tanker could get hold of his company commander, and they were in the town of Krombach, which was a good 20 kilometers away, and we were there by ourselves and ready to looking down into the town of St. Vith and it was all Germans. We didn't know what to do. So they sent a company of tanks from Krombach down the road, and said now, they told us that we're not gonna stop. We're gonna get there and we're gonna turn around and come right back and you got to fall in behind us. He said if you don't, there's nothing we can do about it. So we got ready and we got behind 'em and we went back, and I lost a tank, the tank right behind me. The Germans sent an 88 off the side of a hill and they got over one of us, short of one of us, and then hit the next one, and we went back and

got the people out of it. Took off and they never did shoot at us again. We don't know why. When we got back to Krombach and spent the 22nd of December in Krombach and were attack on Ike. We lost the company commander. Our company commander had been wounded in St. Vith and the 1st Platoon Leader was wounded that night in Krombach, and when we got out of there on the 23rd, went back to Vealsomb where a company headquarters unit was. There was just two officers left out of five, and we had 7 tanks out of 12 left.

Wow.

Viggo Gruy: And we were out of the Bulge then. That was our last participation in the Bulge until we went back in in January. They left the 7th Armored Division there, go back and recapture St. Vith. We did it in January there in 25 degree below zero weather.

So your platoon lost one tank?

Viggo Gruy: One tank.

One tank destroyer? But out of the whole combined outfit at that time, you lost 5 out of 12?

Viggo Gruy: 5 out of 12. The ___ platoon lost 3.

What were your personal recollections of all of that as it was going on? What were the emotions, what were the things that were going through your mind and emotions at that time?

Viggo Gruy: Well, we didn't know a whole lot, OK? And it was frustrating to not understand what's happening, and it affects your efficiency to not be able to, the fear is heightened, constantly thinking about what you should be doing and why is somebody else doing this, and you know, I don't really know how to describe it, but it's tension, tension of the unknown. We were in a static position fighting off the attackers.

And that's the part you didn't -

Viggo Gruy: The initiative was theirs and not ours.

Instead of acting, you were reacting.

Viggo Gruy: Absolutely and in the end, we had to run, and that didn't happen often. That was the only time it ever happened when I was around.

So eventually though, that part ended.

Viggo Gruy: That part ended on the 23rd of December for us. They had by that time, they had amassed, we were replaced and what we had done there by another line of troops with 82nd Airborne Division, the 84th Infantry Division had set up a line behind us, across the Somm River, and we crossed the Somm River and got out and they were then the last line of defense. They never did breach that line, the Germans didn't.

And then you had some little rest?

Viggo Gruy: Well yes and no. At the time on Christmas Day, I had to fill out all the reports of survey and about all the lost equipment and all that because I was a company commander then. Our company commander was gone. Just me and a couple of other guys there who were juniors to me. So I did that and then the company commander came back and the 508 Parachute Battalion called the 7th Armored Division for some tanks in forward and guess who got to go? My platoon.

No rest for the wicked as they say.

Viggo Gruy: __ in the hills with the ___ parachute stayin' for a couple of nights, and then came back and still in the company, and by that time we were getting our new equipment and stuff. On the 10th of January we formed up and were sent out to go in the elements of the 7th Armored Division to attack St. Vith, and the disturbing thing to me was the way they had chosen to attack St. Vith was to attack up that ridge where we had been so successful in keeping the Germans off. But that's the way we had to go in. But at least my action there was to the infantry, attack the town or my platoon was, we were back behind shooting at the targets that I thought, where the Germans might have their guns set up, which I knew where to shoot because we'd been there for three days in those same positions on the other side. So it really turned out to not have been much of an exercise to get up that ridge which really surprised me, because the Germans were never able to do it against us.

So then the town fell?

Viggo Gruy: Well, this was just outside of town and we did not participate in the actual assault on the town. The Sherman's and the infantry did that, but this was a period where we spent five days there on that same ridge, and the temperature never got above 25 below zero, and we couldn't start engines on the tanks because we'd get this fire if we did. We couldn't light a fire. And you couldn't sleep, it was so cold. That's the thing I remember probably most about the whole war was how cold that was for that five days, how uncomfortable it was.

So kind of hard for us, weren't there to visualize how nasty that must've been.

Viggo Gruy: Well, you're outside and you can't go anywhere, and that tank was like an icebox, you know, like a refrigerator. It was all metal and it held that cold. It was kind of interesting because we had an officer come to us who had been in South Africa, and he was there at the time during that cold weather and he told me, he said this is something, 25 below zero. In Africa, it was 180 degrees inside those tanks.

From 180 to 30 below.

Viggo Gruy: Right. I don't know which is worse. He said he didn't know either.

That would be a tough one. I don't think either one's really a good thing to have. OK, I think we should take just a couple minutes of break if that's all right with you.

Viggo Gruy: Sure.

I'm gonna put it on hold. I have to check a couple of things and then we're gonna come back and we'll finish it off.

Viggo Gruy: OK, I'm gonna take a couple minutes break, too. I'm just gonna put the phone down, right? I won't hang up?

No, that's fine.

Viggo Gruy: All right.

OK, now there's one part of your experience during that time of the Battle of the Bulge that we missed and that was you wanted to convey and it related to something that occurred around Thanksgiving time.

Viggo Gruy: Well, this was before the Battle of the Bulge, but you had asked me when we first talked, you had mentioned Will Rogers Jr. being in our battalion?

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: When we got to Holland and got through with the connection we had, when we were in the British 2nd Army up at the Market Garden deal, we came back to Holland to this town of Honesbruck, and we were actually on a big canal out there, and on that Will Rogers Jr., and he had been in contact with some people in Holland that were very good friends of his father's, and when his father had been in the Wild West show they sent to Europe, and he got to know these people very well, and Will Rogers said I've been invited over to these people's castle or whatever it was for dinner tonight, and he said for me to bring some friends, and there were three or four of us there, and he said would ya'll like to go with me? So we went with him over there and we met these rich people and they were very nice and they broke out some vintage wine they'd been saving and to celebrate Will Rogers Jr. being there because they were friends of his father. It was kind of an interesting evening. That was really my only contact with Will Rogers Jr. was on that one day.

Is that right? Notwithstanding that fact that you were in, and this goes to the fact that your battalion was always split up –

Viggo Gruy: Right. He was in a different, he was in a recon company.

Even though a battalion is not that big –

Viggo Gruy: We was gutted out.

Because you were split out to other units, somebody who was in your battalion is somebody you might not ever have seen, or seen rarely, so your experience with Will Rogers Jr. was just –

Viggo Gruy: It was a unique situation anyway. He was a Congressman from California, and he had applied for a commission and wanted to be in the service, and he resigned his seat in the Congress, and took a second, commission second lieutenant commission and was put in our battalion. He came after we'd been in Europe a while when he got there. And of course then when the war ended, he was on the first plane home. I mean there wasn't any actual time to get to know him. But Thanksgiving was a different deal. Thanksgiving as you know, the United States Army is very definitely, it was their opinion that every soldier should have Thanksgiving turkey and dressing, so the night before Thanksgiving we were knocked in the line and we were gonna have this hot Thanksgiving meal the next day which was a treat for us to get a hot meal.

And we were called together, once again, all the good news came at night, and told us that the 2nd Armored Division had been heavily in a bad battle that day and had lost 75 tanks, and that we were gonna relieve them in the town of Garenswaller, Germany, in the morning. We were gonna leave at 4 o'clock in the morning. So we got to have our Thanksgiving dinner at 2 o'clock in the morning. And we went up there and you can't imagine, it was the worst thing that ever happened. It was the worst day in actually my platoon's life. We actually had during the entire war 33 coincidentally with there being 33 people, we had 33 casualties, 6 dead. 4 of them were killed that day in Garenswaller.

And this was when?

Viggo Gruy: Thanksgiving Day 1944.

OK, so this was '44, this was then before –

Viggo Gruy: Before the Battle of the Bulge.

Before the Battle of the Bulge. OK, so there was a battle which was just as horrendous for your outfit as the Bulge and everything else.

Viggo Gruy: Well even worse from a casualty standpoint.

Can you convey some of what transpired?

Viggo Gruy: Well, it was, it's something that didn't have to happen. When we were entering the town and we were going as a company in this instance, one of the few times we did, and we got to the crossroads were, we were coming one direction and there was a road going into the town, turn left, but our road continued on and there was a crossroad there. It's something that you don't ever want to do is ever stop in the middle of a crossroad because those are pinpointed on everybody's map. And there were troops coming from the other direction leaving, and we couldn't go and we were stymied right on that crossroad, and the company commander said I'm gonna go afoot down this road and reconnoiter into the town to see where we can go when we get there, and it was raining, cold, and he said you come with me. So I went with him and while I was gone, they dropped a mortar shell right in the top of one of my tanks, and there were five people in it and only one of 'em got out. And that whole town was just a mess. The streets of the town were a river of mud, I mean mud up above your knees if you tried to walk in it, and it was not heavy mud. It was like you could walk in it, you could drive in it, but it was still mud. It was mostly water, but mud was just running down the streets like a river. And the thing was, they had, there was a tank ditch between Garrenswaller and the next town, and the Germans were on the other side of that ditch, and we were on the opposite side, and they had some big pillboxes over there and there were a couple of German Panther tanks over there, and they were behind those pillboxes and they would come out one side and shoot at you, and then go back and then come out the other side and shoot at you, and we already had the 90 mm guns which were much better than the French guys, but we were like, we figured it was 2,700 yards, and I think we were right because we were hitting the tanks, but our rounds were just bouncing off of 'em like tennis balls. You can't imagine. They hit one of us, it would knock us out, but if we hit them, it was like we didn't hit 'em. And we stayed there two days. It was a mess.

Is that your worst experience that you can recall?

Viggo Gruy: I hate Thanksgiving.

Is that right? To this day, I assume.

Viggo Gruy: Well, I always think about it. And then after that of course we got tied up with, to the Cavalry and preparing for something that never happened because of the Battle of the Bulge, and then we went down to the Battle of the Bulge. You want me to just keep - ?

Let's continue on now after the Battle of the Bulge, to St. Vith.

Viggo Gruy: After the Battle of the Bulge and after we recaptured St. Vith, everything went stagnant. In February, early February, there was a big thaw. Everything in this was, it had all thawed out, and those tanks chewed up the road so that they were impassable. So our battalion and a lot of other battalions, Infantry and so forth, we were put to work building roads out of timber. We cut trees down, 4 to 6-inch diameter, and lashed 'em together crossways across the road and just literally made a road out of tree trunks. We did that for three weeks.

Wow. And that consumed most of February.

Viggo Gruy: Most of February. And the bad thing about it was we had never gotten any winter clothing. There was some glitch in our, you know, the tankers had a special uniform, which was like a bib coverall, you remember those?

Right, yes.

Viggo Gruy: They were brown colored and lined with like an OD wool blanket, and then we had a jacket which has been copied in civilian life ever since. It's a knit cuffs and the knit waistband, and they were really warm. But we didn't get 'em until February when we were building those roads, and that created a situation that was really bad. You ever heard of trench foot?

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: Well we didn't get the shoe packs either and when we got 'em, what you did was you turned in your other uniform and put the winter uniforms on. And then we had the thaw, and everybody of course cutting those trees down and stacking them and all that, everybody's feet got wet and everybody developed what they call trench foot. People lost their feet. It was pretty bad. We'd just gotten through with the frosted feet. It's a sad story. Things, unintended consequences.

Yes. What creates that?

Viggo Gruy: What creates that? I guess just things that are planned out that I'm sure that some people got those uniforms and just so happened the people, we didn't. We were supposed to have but we didn't, and we did get 'em, but we got 'em in February after we'd been through the cold weather and it was starting to thaw out.

Then you didn't need 'em anymore.

Viggo Gruy: No, we didn't need 'em, it was a disaster as it turned out. Nobody knew that when we got 'em. We were tickled to get 'em.

OK. How about the rest of the time?

Viggo Gruy: Well after we built the roads and it started to get, then it was March. In March, we were organized into these Task Forces again to advance to the Rhein, and we joined, we were right next to the 9th Armored Division. The Task Force I was with was the liaison between the 9th Armored Division and the 7th Armored Division. When we got to the Rhine, the 9th Armored Division captured the Remallien Bridge, but they didn't have any tanks available to cross the bridge for a bridge hit. So they called our headquarters and they sent the tanks in our Task Force. So we wound up, my platoon and the Sherman tanks with this Task Force, we wound up being the first tanks to cross the Remallien Bridge.

Wow, that's quite historic.

Viggo Gruy: Yeah, although we didn't capture, the British, they called for tanks and we went and we went across at night across there. See, they wanted a bridgehead immediately because they knew that these many counterattacks by the Germans on account of that bridge. And sure enough, there were. But we only spent one night over there and they brought us back and put their own tanks over there. But then I was assigned the job of sitting there by the bridge with a, there was a coast artillery flashlight battery there, and they shone these flashlights on the water on both sides of that bridge all night long and we were watching for submarines. They thought they were gonna, and they did catch some frogmen that came down the river and tried to -

To blow it?

Viggo Gruy: To blow the bridge. Well, they never did get it blown but in about a week, it fell down of its own.

Right, I remember.

Viggo Gruy: But by that time, we'd been pulled off of there and we were doing indirect fire shooting over an autobahn about, our guns could shoot the second longest distance of any the Americans had. They had the 155 rifle which would shoot about 15 miles and we could shoot about 12 by digging the back ends of the tank in and elevating it as far as we could, and we were just shooting three rounds every 15 minutes all night long. They had an autobahn over there, without any, in other words it was all mapped out or uncorrected. We didn't have an observer or anything. We were just trying to shoot in that direction to disrupt traffic on that autobahn on the east side of the Rhein. At that point, the colonel saw fit to give me a three-day pass and I went to Paris for three days.

Wow, I bet you were happy to have that.

Viggo Gruy: It was nice. I enjoyed it. Actually there were, at that point the story was and I can't document, but the colonel supposedly me and two leaders from C Company I guess, or C and B Company, was the only two platoon leaders still platoon leaders who crossed the channel as platoon leaders in the whole battalion. A couple of them had been promoted to captain company commanders, but the rest of them had been wounded and evacuated. So he let us both

go to Paris for three days since we weren't doing anything but that indirect fire and they could handle that without us. And we got to see Paris.

How did you get there in the midst of a war?

Viggo Gruy: On a train.

So they were able to get you to a spot where you could get on a train and get there and then get a train back to your outfit.

Viggo Gruy: Yeah. I think maybe we, I think we went through Luxembourg, but it was box cars. They used to call 'em the 40 and 8's, 40 by 8's, and it took about, I don't know, 7-8 hours to get there I guess.

So it wasn't the most comfortable ride in the world.

Viggo Gruy: No, it was pretty comfortable.

It felt pretty good, right?

Viggo Gruy: And we had a good time in Paris. It was kind of interesting though that when we were going through France, you could buy a bottle of champagne for 70 franks, but when I got to Paris on St. Patrick's Day, it was 1,000 franks.

Wow, American inflation.

Viggo Gruy: Well, absolutely right, and I think that experience of that two years I'd been in Europe, I learned a lot about inflation. I learned a lot about the money because it was all over, especially after the war ended.

That's right, because you spent about what, six months?

Viggo Gruy: That's right.

Still there. OK, let's finish the war. You were -

Viggo Gruy: Well after I got back from Paris, then we got orders to cross the Rhein and we went back to the Remoggan area and they had by that time, they put up two pontoon bridges across the Rhein. We crossed one of those pontoon bridges over there and went south down the east side of the Rhein to a town called Badgotesburg, and we stayed there a couple of days and then we were divided up into Task Forces again and we did an encircle on what they call the rural industrial valley, and I think all the troops involved in that, I think they captured maybe 600,000 or 700,000 German soldiers in that trap in that valley. And we just made an encirclement, didn't do a whole lot of fighting. I think they were trying to stay wide enough away from the Germans so that they would be trapped inside. They didn't want to let 'em break out. And after that ended, our battalion was attached to a group called the British Airborne, Airborne group, and we were, went from that rural valley to the Baltic Sea with our mission was to go to Lubec on the Baltic Sea. Actually when we crossed the arrow but when we got part of the way towards Lubec and I think it all ended, they stopped us. We didn't know the war was over, but apparently it had been over for a couple of days before we found out about it. The 5th

of May, the Germans were all marching. They were coming down the road, you know, as captured units, and just all day they went by us and we just set there and watched them. They still hadn't told us that the war was over. We didn't know what was happening yet.

So you thought it was just units surrendering –

Viggo Gruy: No, we heard rumors but actually I guess maybe as it turned out, Hitler was already dead that day. What was the Admiral Donits or somebody was supposed to be in charge, and they were trying to, what we heard was they were trying to get some sort of an armistice agreement or some sort of a capitulation agreement. But that was the end of it. That was the last shooting we did.

And that was it.

Viggo Gruy: That was it.

And so it didn't come, you didn't get the big news, like it's over, they surrendered, what have you - ?

Viggo Gruy: No, actually we didn't. But then on the 8th, I think the 8th of May was what they determined to be VE Day, but before that and the thing that has always stuck in my mind about the end of that war was the lights. The lights came on. We had been, ever since we'd gotten to England, we hadn't seen any lights. I mean you didn't drive with lights, you didn't use flashlights, a lot of infrared coming on. It was quite a sight to see people turn their lights on.

And it was over. And you didn't get a chance to get home because they didn't know you were in Europe -

Viggo Gruy: But I had an interesting time. I went to some, May 14th they sent me to the 893rd and we decommissioned the 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. They sent me to the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the company they sent me to was running a war crimes ___.

A war crimes, I'm sorry?

Viggo Gruy: War crimes ___. Yeah, and shortly after I got there, they sent the company commander home. Well, I became the company commander in charge of this prison which had a large number of inmates, but they were sort of minor Nazi officials, von Ribbentrof. Valet was one of 'em. We kind of used him for a gopher. He could get anything. But after I'd been there about two weeks, they sent orders down there that they were moving all of the Germans connected with the Malmenimask into this prison. So we had to take all of the prisoners we had there and we moved them all into the mess area and set up cots for 'em and we had to put these Malmeny prisoners in the cells, and we had the Colonel Devitch or whatever his name was, that was head of the thing and giving orders. So ___ his name. Anyway we had him and they put him and the war crimes people were there. They sent an ____ board down there immediately. They put him in a, what's the term I'm looking for? Solitary confinement?

Solitary confinement, yeah.

Viggo Gruy: And it had a wooden bed in it, a wooden platform about a foot off the ground, off the floor with a bed and a toilet and lavatory, and they only gave him one blanket, and this was in

November. It was pretty cold. And they sent the, somehow or another they got a complaint out and the Geneva Convention people showed up and I was there when these interrogators went to his cell and they forced them to give him more blankets.

Wow.

Viggo Gruy: And this interrogation team was interrogating him. Of course we had no part in that. We were once again like we'd been in the marshal hearing camps and we were the hotel keepers. We did the guard duty and we did all that. The interesting thing about that facility though was, I didn't stay there very long, I left there in December, and went to Bermerhaben and waited on a boat, but after I left there, they had to try all these people of course. In 1948, I got a letter from a Colonel Ellis who had been the commanding officer of that interrogation team for all those Malmeny prisoners, and he told me in the letter, he said we're being investigated by the House on American Activities Committee. Would you come to Washington and testify? And I wrote him a letter back and he told me, and I told him I didn't want to go, I didn't have anything to say. I didn't see anything. I wasn't involved in the interrogation. He said well, I know that, but they want your testimony and he said let me see if you can just go before a federal judge and give a deposition, and that's the way it turned out. That's what I did. But he sent me a copy later of the proceedings, and they turned most of those guys loose.

Yeah, I know.

Viggo Gruy: Colonel Ellis was very, very upset about that. It affected him badly.

Is that right?

Viggo Gruy: Yeah.

That was a sad state of affairs when they did that, but you know –

Viggo Gruy: Well I've seen it on the History channel and supposedly that commanding officer died in bed sometime in France in 1980 or something.

Yes, very sad.

Viggo Gruy: Well, it was particularly interesting to me to have been involved in it after some of our battalion were killed in the thing.

That's right. Did you know any of them that were killed?

Viggo Gruy: No, I didn't.

They were from different companies?

Viggo Gruy: The reason I didn't know the company commander because he was with the advanced party that went from Camp Polk to England before I got to the battalion.

OK. So you eventually got a boat?

Viggo Gruy: I eventually got a boat.

And came home?

Viggo Gruy: That was an interesting trip, too. Nothing happened to me that wasn't interesting.

Tell me about the boat home.

Viggo Gruy: We were on the steamship Akin Victory. It took the Akin Victory 22 days to get from Bermahaben to New York.

Wow.

Viggo Gruy: This was in January. We came down the North Sea, one continuous ___, through the English Channel, continual ___. Days we went backwards they told us. We finally got down to the Azores and then turned and went to New York. When we get to New York, this is still in January, the tugboats were on strike. So we had to sit off shore for 24 hours before they'd haul us in.

Finally coming back to the United States and the tugboats are on strike.

Viggo Gruy: Everybody in the United States by then, they'd seen the ticket day parade and they'd forgotten the war.

Yes, they were back trying to get extra bucks.

Viggo Gruy: It was an experience.

So once you got back in New York, where did you go to be deactivated?

Viggo Gruy: When we got to New York, we went to Camp Gilmer, and they kept us overnight in Camp Gilmer, and then went to Kilgore, Texas, Camp, can't remember the name of the camp, discharged us and I had to stand up on a bus all the way from that base to San Antonio all one night. It was so crowded that there were no seats for everybody on the bus.

From Kilgore to San Antonio standing up?

Viggo Gruy: That was an interesting story though you might be interested in at Camp Gilmer. When we came home on this Akin Victory, it was all the enlisted men on that boat were, had been stationed in Berlin. They were either military government or MP's. And there wasn't one of 'em that didn't have $200,000 to $300,000 in German Marks on 'em, OK? When we got to, I'd made friends with one of the sergeants. He was from Big Springs, Texas. And he came to my barracks at Gilmer and told me, he said I've got all this money. He said my family are sharecroppers. Said we'd never make this much money in our lives and I've got to do something with it because you see, they had started in June of '44, everybody had to have a currency control book. Are you familiar with this?

No.

Viggo Gruy: Everybody, every soldier in the APO had to have a currency, because the black market had gotten so bad, OK, and everybody was selling everything, and the big thing that had

happened and if you don't know this, this is very interesting. The Russian soldiers had not been paid any salary during World War II, and they were paid all at one time at the end of the war at the end of May. The money that they were paid was printed by the American bank note company, and it was identical to the bills that we were paid in. You know, they paid everybody in cash those days. And the only difference in those bills was the Russian currency, the serial number on it started with a dash, but the serial number on our bills started with a zero, and before anybody caught onto the thing, these Russians were buying everything the Americans would sell. I mean it was just one big flea market. And the Americans were getting all that Russian money and sending it home to the APO. And before they could catch it, everybody had the Russian money. It cost the American government $11 billion because they had to make it all good because the Americans wound up with all that. So they started the currency control books and when you were paid, like I was the payoffs in our company, and we'd pay 'em, we'd have to mark in their books how much money we paid 'em. If they went on leave and they changed some money from one currency to another, that would be deducted. So when you got to Bremerhaben to come home, they paid you, they exchanged your German Marks with the script that they paid us in, to American money, but they wouldn't change anything over what that book showed you had.

I see.

Viggo Gruy: So these military government guys and MP's that had been involved in the black market, they had all this money and they couldn't change it. So I told the guy, I said look, I don't have any idea what to do about this, but my experience is that the bartenders in the officer's clubs know everything. Well sure enough, I went over to the officer's club and I asked the bartender if he knew where I could change some German Marks. No, I didn't ask him that. I asked him if he knew where the hole in the wire was to get out of the camp. He told me it was behind latrine number 9, so I told the sergeant that and he got his buddies together and next morning he came by to see me and he said they found the hole in the wire, they got out on the New Jersey turnpike, and in five minutes a cab came by and picked 'em up and the first thing the cab driver asked was if they had any money. And they got 75 cents on the dollar.

Wow.

Viggo Gruy: We were all happy.

I bet.

Viggo Gruy: That's an interesting story. That's why I say you learned a lot about money in that war.

Yes sir.

Viggo Gruy: There wasn't anything or anytime I don't think in our history where the U.S. dollar was as strong as it was during that war. If you had a dollar bill in your pocket after that war ended, you could buy a whole ___.

Yes sir.

Viggo Gruy: I went on a leave in Switzerland in October of '45, and the Swiss, they were very, they didn't like inflation. In order to go on a 7-day leave in Switzerland, they only let you take

$150. They took $75 of that before you got in the country to pay for your room and board. And you only could spend $75. They didn't want the American dollar inflating their country, and literally in 1945.

Wow. That is amazing.

Viggo Gruy: It was very, very educational.

OK, so you came back, you got out of the Army, were you single at the time you were in the Army?

Viggo Gruy: Oh yeah.

So you got married later.

Viggo Gruy: I got married later.

OK. And did you have children?

Viggo Gruy: I have two children, and five grandchildren.

That's terrific.

Viggo Gruy: Three great grandchildren.

Wow. That is really terrific. Well I wish we could spend some more time kind of going after, yours was an amazing story, a lot of wonderful things to know about.

Viggo Gruy: Never a dull moment.

It seems not. I would like to in conclusion, ask you just a couple more question of a general nature, a reflection nature, and I'll start with looking back, if you could look back now, how do you think your military service affected your life?

Viggo Gruy: I think it had a profound effect in just about everything.

Would you call it a positive effect?

Viggo Gruy: Mostly.

Mostly positive, OK.

Viggo Gruy: I think you as a soldier will because of the experiences you have become a little bit callous about some things, and I think that's unavoidable. I think that's probably the biggest negative that can probably come from a war, as far as the after war.

Do you think of the war years often?

Viggo Gruy: Oh yeah, yeah. You think about it all the time, especially on particular dates like Thanksgiving. December and January in the cold weather. We had a spell here three years ago,

Christmas, and looking out, I live on a golf course now, and to look out the window of our house and the trees were all covered with snow and I told my wife, that looks just like Belgium in 1944. And it did. Of course it did to me because I hadn't been in snow since then.

Since then. So you came back I assume you came back, where did you come back to?

Viggo Gruy: Texas. Might could be there on heaven, though.

And then you've been there ever since.

Viggo Gruy: Been here ever since.

And what did you do when you came back?

Viggo Gruy: Punching cows.

Really? You made a rancher.

Viggo Gruy: Yes, well my grandfather bought some ranch land in 1900, and so I went into that. That's why I went to A&M to get an agricultural education. Like a lot of other things you learn, I learned more in a year at the ranch than I did in three years at A&M about that part of it.

Yes, so you became a rancher, stayed a rancher until you retired?

Viggo Gruy: Stayed a rancher.

Great. What about the war years do you think you'd most like to forget?

Viggo Gruy: I guess it qualifies as an answer to your question, I'd like to forget why we did it. It didn't accomplish anything. My idea of the German Army was so different from what it was. I mean all the stories I heard growing up in the 30s and high school and college and what an efficient deal it was? Well those guys, half their equipment was horse ___.

Really?

Viggo Gruy: Yeah.

So we heard so much about the German 88's, the Mauser rifle –

Viggo Gruy: The German 88 was the best gun in the war, I'm convinced of that, as anybody had.

OK.

Viggo Gruy: And they were good soldiers and they had a lot of good equipment, but they weren't near the awesome military power that they were made out to be.

They weren't the super soldiers as they were proclaimed to be.

Viggo Gruy: Well, their equipment, equipment won the war. We just, the American Army had not only as good of equipment as anybody had, but more of it, and we were completely self sufficient. We didn't live off the land like the German soldiers did. Our rations were brought to us on a truck.

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: Ammunition. My reflections about that war is how in the world did everybody get the idea that Germany was gonna conquer the world?

You didn't think it would.

Viggo Gruy: They didn't have a Navy.

That's right.

Viggo Gruy: Now how you gonna conquer the world without a Navy? I think we were sold a bill of goods in some respects. I don't know why.

So to some extent you would agree with the old isolationist that said what the hell did we do that for in the first place?

Viggo Gruy: I think there's a lot of isolationist in me.

Is that right?

Viggo Gruy: ____ the Monroe Doctrine?

Yes.

Viggo Gruy: I remember in school ____ sounded like a good idea to me. I know that that's not gonna be a popular thing for me to say.

I understand. So part of your reflections on the war is maybe we never should've been there.

Viggo Gruy: Well, the things I thought we were fighting for haven't turned out like that.

OK.

Viggo Gruy: I'm not knowledgeable enough to know whether it was necessary. I'm not trying to make that argument. I just don't see that, and I know that whatever war you're in, in order to incite the population, you have to say it's gonna be a lot, if you don't do something, it's gonna be a lot worse.

Right.

Viggo Gruy: But I don't know what to make out of it.

But you don't think the result is what it should've been.

Viggo Gruy: I don't. I think some of the most interesting things on television, you watch some of those warlords? You know what I'm talking about? They have 'em on the History channel, about Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt?

Oh yes.

Viggo Gruy: Apparently those people didn't get along very good.

No they didn't.

Viggo Gruy: I don't know what they were doing, I don't know what their goals were.

Well, they certainly didn't have common goals, let's put it that way.

Viggo Gruy: No, they didn't, and we were ending the war where we did, we spent a couple of months it seems like, at least a lot of time in what was to be the Russian zone, and it was amazing to me that the people, the German peoples who lived there were terrified of the Russians. When we pulled out, they wanted to go with us. They didn't want to stay there. They didn't want to stay in their homes.

For good reason.

Viggo Gruy: I guess so. I didn't realize before we were in the war that there were I believe two Russian divisions fought with the Germans.

Yes. There were – I read quite a bit about the fighting on the Eastern Front and what have you, and that was the most bizarre war you'd ever want to read about.

Viggo Gruy: I don't doubt that. I don't doubt that at all.

Yeah, it was totally bizarre. OK, I think we've got to wrap this up. So I'm gonna ask you one last question and think about it before you answer, and that's this, if there's anything else that you'd like to add so that the future generations will have a full understanding of what your generation went through, tell me now.

Viggo Gruy: I don't know if there's anything I could add. I don't know how you would, because each generation grows up doing what they do, and they are, they listen to the, they're just like I did and my children did, they listen to what's said on the TV and the radio and they form their opinions by what they know. So what happened in World War II is gonna have a hard time ever convincing anybody of anything.

OK. I respect that opinion. I do want to say Mr. Gruy, I've certainly appreciated talking to you. I really do consider it to be a privilege to talk to you guys who did so much back then, and on behalf of the Commissioner of the General Land Office and the Veterans Land Board, I want to thank you for your time, and some day you'll want to listen to what you had to say.

Viggo Gruy: All right, I appreciate your part in this and thank you.

OK sir, you have a good day.

Viggo Gruy: All right, you too.

OK, bye bye.

[End of recording]