

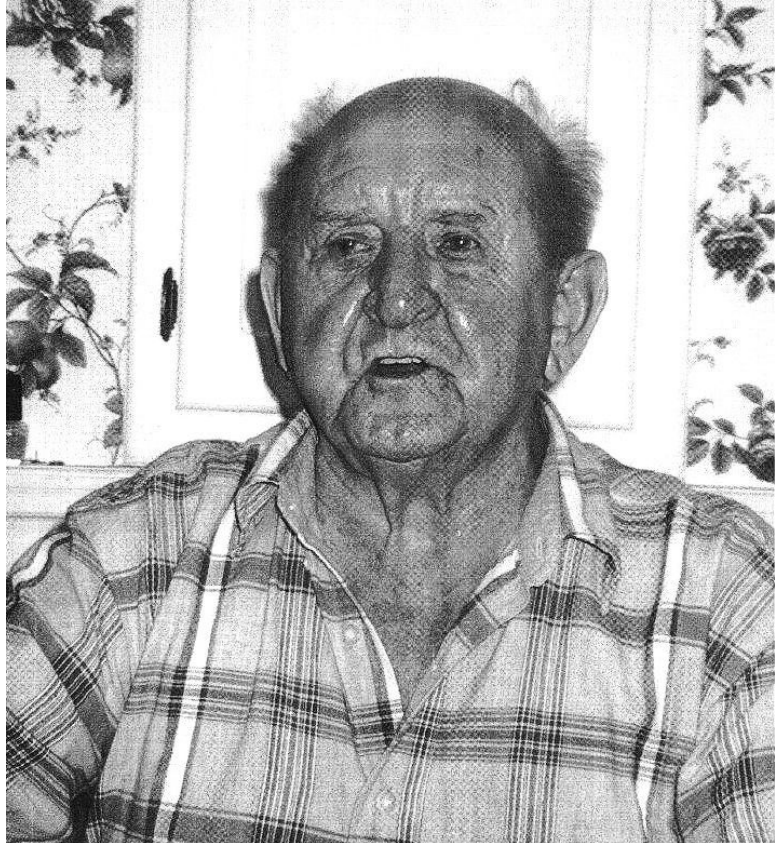
Murry Arbuckle

Veterans History Project WWII

This is (Tom) Zerfoss' recording, Monday, May 19, 2003, of Murry Arbuckle.

This recording is being made in Mr. Arbuckle's home on Littell Rd. in Tracy City, TN.

Arbuckle: I was drafted in April of 1943. And then I was inducted in the first of May, sworn in, the first of May in 1943. And I went to, uh, Tullahoma for an examination. And then from Tullahoma I went to Fort Oglethorpe, GA, and stayed there two days. Then left Fort Oglethorpe by train and went to Abilene, TX, Camp Barkeley.



Zerfoss: And how old were you?

Arbuckle: 18. There was a MRTTC Base, Medical Replacement Training. I took a test there. -----They asked me if I wanted to go to school, and I said yes. I'd like to go to any school, any kind of school. So I had worked in the bakery before I went to the army after I finished high school, and they asked me if I wanted to go to Cooks & Bakers School. And I said I'd be glad to.

Zerfoss: Now that's the famous bakery out here?

Arbuckle: um huh, Baggenstoss Bakery, Dutch Maid Bakery. So I went to Cooks & Bakers School, and when I finished my basics, thirteen weeks of basic training I was shipped to, uh, as a replacement to a general hospital in Fort Jackson, SC, as a replacement. And it was a – out there, ready to go overseas. So we stayed in Columbia there, Fort Jackson, for just a short time, and then we went to Camp Shanks, NY. We were supposed to ship out from New York to North Africa, but they were having such a good time over in Africa making headway, you know, they changed our orders and we went from New York up to Boston and shipped out to, I was at Camp Atterbury ? , MA. And we shipped out from Boston Harbor. Only --moratamia-- (on the Moratania?) from Boston to Liverpool. It took nine days. And we didn't go in a convoy ----and we ran a zig-zag course, you know, 'cause we went alone. It was a large ship. It was 44 thousand tons of ---- 28 knots, still took 9 days. And we landed in Liverpool on 18th of October 1943 and from Liverpool we went to a little town called Worcester and set up a hospital there. It was, we called it a nut hospital, but it was for, we called it shell shock back then, battle fatigue. They was coming out of North Africa and ?. Been at that hospital for quite some time and when they got that one going pretty good, they moved us down to --Worcester??? and set up another hospital there. And that's what we did until the invasion of France in '44. We set up a hospital, get it running,--- set up another one. And then just before the invasion, we all went on D.S. to the different outfits that were going to be--an invasion ???

Zerfoss: That's detached service?

Arbuckle: Detached service. ----As a cook...cooking for an infantry outfit out there. And I can't remember the name of the division, but I think it was the 19th ??Regiment, can't remember the division. They would take them and put them on an LST, and they would go out and stay maybe overnight, and come back, and a few days, they'd go out, and come back. And one day they went out and they didn't come back. They knew then. They had started the invasion. They all knew it was coming...They all knew it was coming, but they didn't know when. A certain thing happened there. You know. We weren't supposed to tell it. They were out one night on the LSTs (Landing Ship Tank) out there in the channel. They didn't have no protection. And a German E-boat got in there--2 German E-boats. And they stopped?? 2 or 3 of the LST's and we lost around 750 people. It was an E-boat? you see. And they told us that if we told they would -- But it's coming out now. You may have heard about it. It's coming out.--They can't touch us now.

So after the invasion, we went in, over to---and got on an LCI. That's a Landing Craft Infantry. It's a flat bottom. ---And we went across the channel the longer way. And we hit Utah Beach. Omaha was the bad one. That's where we lost so many people. ---We couldn't get so close to the beach. I say 200 yards, maybe 300 yards. Sand bar.....And that was a -- invasion. And we had a ... was laid out in a grid. We had a certain field that was

assigned to us to set our hospital up in. ---Well when we got to the...We walked 8 miles off the beach. ---There hadn't been any mines. ---And we would sit there on the side of the rode ---

General Hospital is a pretty good size.---- It took 5 acres, at least 5 acres to set up. We had 2 operating rooms in tents. We had I forget how many nurses we had...we had I guess 30 nurses.

Zerfoss: You brought them in?

Arbuckle: Yeah, they came I with us. We had about 10 doctors. We had 44 cooks. There was 500 people in my outfit, in our general hospital. ---The reason why we had so many cooks is because we had – mess and officer's mess. And the patient's would have to eat??. So it took that many cooks for a general hospital.

Zerfoss: Do you remember what was going on around you when the ship hit that sandbar and you had to get off?

Arbuckle: Well I was not very tall, 5 foot 6. --I might lose my head. We had packs on you see. If you pack that pack light, it would make you float. So sometimes --and you would go under. --I could swim...I could swim since I was 5 years old. And I didn't have any problems getting to the beach, but some of the boys did. Some of the went --- The beach was secured. They had a just put a road in, just wide enough—vehicle and people ----so 20 feet. Ribbons on each side that didn't have any mines. --If you stayed inside those ribbons you would be alright.--- and all the time we were walking in there. These trucks were coming in loaded...

Zerfoss: Did you have any??

Arbuckle: But the first night, after walking in there, the first night we had an air raid. But that was overnight?? business. They'd call him--Charlie? He came over exactly at 11 o'clock. The Germans do everything by the book. Every night at 11 o'clock he would come over. What he was trying to find was ?? I was in the first army??-- One night there, there was an army division going up to the front –

Rimbo highway?? I guess you've heard of that. It's a long way to the front. And you come back another way. It's a narrow road. And it's just a steady stream of vehicles to the front. And this army division was going up to the front. Of course every one of those vehicles had a least a 50 caliber machine gun on them---. And this airplane was cloudy?-- and this German airplane he got down too low. And he was running right through the road there. --that thing was a mile long--. Everything in that division opened up on him and shot him down. Well he came right in, the airplane came right in our field – of course, we all ran

over to get a souvenir you know. Well, they stripped that pilot and the co-pilot. They took their boots off. Getting souvenirs. I got a souvenir off the airplane; I got, off the machine gun. An electrical? plate off the machine gun. I don't know what I did with that. I kept that for years. But the Air Force... you're not supposed to go and fool with anything. The Air Force is supposed to come and inspect that wreck. By the time they got there they didn't have anything else--- But every night we would have an air raid. None during the day. One of our guys, he was looking for a souvenir, and he found a German hand grenade. They call them Potato mashers you know. They got a handle on them. They were easy to throw and more accurate too than ours.. fragmentation...Concussion??. He wanted to defuse it, so he pulled the fuse out of the handle and it went off. And that was our first casualty. It didn't kill him, but he was ruined from his toes to his head. So that was the first casualty we had. And we stayed there, and ran that hospital and got it running. And then as soon as they took Belgium, we moved up into Belgium, Liege, Belgium. ---We set up in an old cavalry? barn. --It was a pretty good sized town. I'd say about like Chattanooga. We had the engineer come in there and put concrete floors in that barn, we called it a barn, and set up a hospital there, a general hospital. And we started taking patients. --If they were too bad, first they went, at the front, you have the advance? hospital, behind the front, that's the first place you go to. Then maybe to the field hospital, then come back to the general hospital. And if they weren't too bad, we would patch them up and send them right back out. If they were too bad, we'd patch them up, and they'd take them to England, then send them home.

Zerfoss: Where did they get all the ?? Have any idea?

Arbuckle: No, don't have any idea. But I know they used mostly ordinance with the blacks. Black soldiers. ---Segregate. All the blacks were in the ordinance and -- engineering. ---

The Germans began to throw that V1 rocket in on us. But they started that in June --. It was before the V2. And just before the Battle of the Bulge, they began to throw the V1 on us. And we would get one every 15 minutes. --- German... And they were a funny thing. Did you ever see one?

Zerfoss: No.

Arbuckle: We called them buzz bombs because they made a funny sound when they land. They only make about 450 mile an hour... They get to a certain spot that engine will quit, and when that engine quit, they do 2 or 3 different ...some of them come right straight down, some of them go into a glide. And one went into a glide and come right over our hospital. And just missed us. And we had one near, real close hit. That thing had a ton of high explosives in the warhead. And if it hit within a mile of you, it took every window

right out and would take a roof off. See, they had these terra cotta roofs on the buildings there...

Zerfoss: How accurate do you think those things were?

Arbuckle: Not very.

What they were trying to do...See, Liège was the hub of the wheel, they called it. That was one of the biggest depots. Everything was coming from... They had hundreds of thousands of gallons of gasoline and ammunitions ...They were trying to hit that place because it was a general depot. You might call it a general depot, a division for the front, so they were trying to hit that. And they hit it. ...We were trying to prepare food there, and it just blew it off the table. All that dust and dirt and everything came down, you know. We... to get something to eat there... So our colonel in charge of the hospital, he was real strict about, you will have a hot meal ready.

Zerfoss: Do you remember his name?

Arbuckle: No, I don't. Can't remember his name. Daniel/Dennis? was his first name. We called him ... He was very strict about that.

We drove through every day... We sent a food truck every day. And we ... infantry, Air Force had the best rations...For breakfast, we would have fried eggs, scrambled fried eggs, hotcakes, bacon, coffee, and maybe oatmeal...a good breakfast. I never went hungry a day in my life down there, and I don't think anyone in my outfit did either. A lot of times,...we'd cook one hot meal a day, but then we'd get two rations after. You know what a K-ration is?

Zerfoss: Yes.

Arbuckle: Well, ...then for breakfast and supper we'd give them a K-ration. And I used to like to hand K-rations out for breakfast. I'd ask how they wanted their eggs: over or sunny side up. That would make them mad. It's not good to get mad at a cook. A cook could ruin you. A cook could absolutely ruin you.

Zerfoss: What would a cook do to ruin somebody?

Arbuckle: Well, I'll tell you what I did 'cause I don't mind telling you. After the war, we had set up an officer's mess...and I started cooking in the officer's mess. This little first lieutenant came in there and got nasty with me about something. I don't know what I did, but he got nasty with me. And he said, "Do you know who I am?" and I said, "I don't know who you are, but I'll remember you." And so we kept the plates on a warmer to keep the plates warm...He'd tell us what he wanted and we would put it in there. Well, I took his

plate and I took a bar of soap and I rimmed? it. I took the plate over the side, and when I seen him coming I'd get the plate and lay it down and give it to him. And it gave him diarrhea. And they couldn't figure out what. He kept diarrhea. They came and inspected the kitchen, they couldn't find anything wrong. Everything was as clean as it could be. And washing the dishes in hot water, and rinsing them off in cool water, rinsed the pots and pans, and couldn't find a thing wrong. He got dysentery. Ha ha. Diarrhea, for a long time. So that's why I said a cook has got a way of getting back at you. See, we didn't stand guard, or we didn't...We didn't do any of that. We worked 24 on and 24 off. Like I'd go to work today after lunch, we would take over. We'd cook supper, breakfast, and lunch the next day. Then we'd be off. It was, uh. We'd get up at 3 o'clock, 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, and start breakfast. When you cook for that many people, you know...we had 500 personnel I'd cook for.

Zerfoss: Did the cooks all stay in one place?

Arbuckle: Well, they hid us. So, when the 2nd? General came around, he wouldn't see us. We would be tied up during the day, tied up in the bed. And they didn't want him to see that.

Zerfoss: Did they give you a gun?

Arbuckle: No. We weren't allowed to carry guns. Let me show you something. See that was my protection there.

Zerfoss: So you were covered by the Geneva Convention, and this says War Department, The Adjutant General's office. Murry Arbuckle was a T/5. Certificate of Identity to be Issued to Military and Civilian Protected Personnel. So this puts you in a different class.

Arbuckle: Yes, see this right here?

Zerfoss: Yeah, this card has a red cross on it. You were 5'6", weighed 140 pounds, had brown hair, blue eyes, and born 5 July 1924. And this other number here is 34713952. And you were a very young man at this time.

Arbuckle: Yeah.

Zerfoss: This was issued on the 11 March 1945.

Arbuckle: That was my second one. I wore? my first one out.

Zerfoss: You look a little bit here like uh, what is that movie star, that actor, that played with uh...Gibson, Mel Gibson.

Arbuckle: Oh. Mel Gibson? I like him.

Zerfoss: Yeah, you look a little like Mel Gibson there.

Arbuckle: He's something else. Isn't he?

Zerfoss: Yeah.

Arbuckle: You see they made a mistake on there. It's got 33, and actually its 34713952. And I carried that card in case we were captured. All I had to do was show that card to them.

Zerfoss: Yeah.

Arbuckle: We wouldn't carry guns. The medics and the ..did. Of course, the Japanese they didn't recognize the Geneva Convention.

Zerfoss: After you were in Liege, what did you all do?

Arbuckle: We went up into Aachen, Germany, and set up a hospital up there.

Zerfoss: What river did you cross to get up there?

Arbuckle: We were right there on the Liege? River. Aachen is just across the border from there. That's the first city in Germany. That's as far as I got in Germany. And then after the war, I went to Cologne...I went looking around. I had a friend that got killed over there during the Battle of the Bulge. No, that was before the Battle of the Bulge. And he was buried in Maastricht, Holland. Not very far up. Just across the Holland border. So I went up into Holland, Maastricht, Holland and I found this cemetery. Great big. It think it had 10,000 people in that cemetery. And I found his grave, and I made a deal with the keeper that lived there close to the graveyard to put flowers on his grave. Give him candy, you know, chocolates, cigarettes, and stuff like that. As soon as the war was over, his mother got him and brought him back home. So, they brought him back. ...high school. I was a pall bearer at his funeral.

Zerfoss: Do you remember something about __ that were coming into the hospital?

Arbuckle: Oh lord. I couldn't count them, especially during the Battle of the Bulge. We had so many; we had them laying in the hallways and everywhere. See, they were bombing us. ... And those boys said, "I'd rather be in the front instead of here in this bed", you know, with no protection whatsoever. Up there you'd get in a hole..., but right there in the hospital...and things hitting all around us there... I know one hit there close. And this dietitian, she was a first lieutenant, a lady, she was from New Zealand. Beautiful woman.

Well I was hunting cover, and she was too. And I beat her to the... and I got under the __, you hang it on the wall, I got under it, and she tried to get under too. And I wouldn't let her under. Haha. That was the first time...So we laughed about that.

Zerfoss: What kind of wounds did these guys have? Were they leg wounds?

Arbuckle: Most of them were from artillery shells. Very few rifle, machine guns. Grenades, very few grenades. Most of them were artillery shells. Most of them, well they were just all over.

Zerfoss: ...person dealing with all that stuff?

Arbuckle: Well, you just have to...I know, lots of time I'd get up in the morning and go to work in the kitchen I'd go by the operating room, and they'd have 2 or 3 big _GI?_cans out there, they'd be full of legs and arms. ...Germans... in there it didn't matter...When the Germans' legs and arm were pretty bad...but that didn't bother me too much to see all the arms and legs...

(END OF SIDE A)

Zerfoss: This is side 2 now with Murry Arbuckle. At this point, we just finished talking about the Germans, and they were treated in the same hospital.

Arbuckle: They were treated in the same hospital. Yeah.

Zerfoss: So as far as you got then was ...

Arbuckle: To Aachen and back, and come back to Liege, Belgium. Then when the war was over...I'll tell you a little incident that happened there during the Battle of the Bulge... We had what you call __. They were people who didn't make a good grade on their IT? test, and they couldn't do nothing. But they would wash dishes, and wash pots and pans, stuff like that...

So this boy, I didn't know, he wasn't too bright, but he wasn't too dumb either. I didn't know him very well either. That day, three times we tried to put the meal on the table and it got blowed off every time.

He fell down on his knees and he said, "God, you gotta come down here and help us. 'Cause we're in a hell of a shape. But now don't send Jesus." Haha ____

There's always a little prayer going on all the time. You know, a lot of people say they are not religious, and they don't believe in this and don't believe in that. But you get them in a fight?, and the first thing they call on is, "God, help me." That's the first thing you hear.

Zerfoss: How long were you from the time you got into France, well I guess you went into Belgium?

Arbuckle: I was in France first; then went up to Belgium.

Zerfoss: How long were you in France? to Achen? How long was that period of time?

Arbuckle: Well, I went into France in June of '43 and left in, I left Liege, Belgium in '45. The war was over in May, and we thought we were going to have to ... Well we stayed around there until. They had a way of discharging you, after you had been overseas so many months, you got a point for every month you had been overseas. And you got a point ...The Battle of Normandy, Northern France and __, you got so many points for each one of the battles. I got a point for every month I was in the service. And that's the way they decided how you go back home. The ones with the highest number of points got to go first. But it was December before I got to go. ..Been in the army longer that I had or been overseas longer than I had. But they got to go home first. They transferred me out of the General hospital in to a field hospital because my outfit was a ...and they had been in the army for years, and they all had high points. See I went in as a replacement and I hadn't been in the service as long as they had. They transferred me out and put me in another outfit. Put me in a field hospital. And we all had about the same amount of points. So I was actually sent home with the 15th (?) Field hospital. We left Liege, Belgium in December, early December, moved down to La Havre, France. There was a camp down there. The Camps, they'd named them Cigarettes. Lucky Strikes, Camel. I was at a camp named Lucky Strike. And we'd sit there and waited for a boat to come home. And at that time there was a lot of people...the local war. And they were reenlisting. If you'd reenlist, they would ship you back home for a furlough.

We'd sit there for I don't know how long and waited for a ship to take us home. Finally, we left Le Havre on the 14th day of December '45. And I was on a ship called Athos II. It was a __ ship. 26 years old. The English? had taken it over. Then we left Le Havre, headed for New York. We got out in the middle North Atlantic, and the North Atlantic in December is pretty rough. Pretty rough. Then we hit this storm and we lost everything on the top deck: the hand rails, the guard rails, the lab coats?, the masks, everything. And we lost power. And we were sitting there, just white as a ghost. ?

And it blew us into the Azore Islands. Do you know where they're at? Ok. Beautiful place! __And you can see this big mountain there. It had snow on top. And the clouds up were so high, and above the clouds you can see the snow-capped mountains. We couldn't go to shore there because they belonged to Portugal. And Portugal didn't have anything to do with World War II. We had an air force base there. __ We laid there __ on that ship, and we didn't have anything to eat but eggs. And they had enough steam that they could boil

our eggs. And we'd eat boiled eggs twice a day. And __ our ship __ aircraft carrier, they were going to strip down to Enterprise. Strip down and make a __ out of it. So the Enterprise came there and picked us up. But we couldn't get close to there. They had to get a __ Athos, what they call a __, and __ the aircraft carrier. And it was still pretty rough and they had a ladder coming down the side of that aircraft carrier and a platform __ on the side of the ship. Well _____ and as you come down you jump and they catch you. ____down 15 feet, and up 15 feet...

They had two big sailors there, and they'd grab you. You'd jump and they'd grab you. And we transferred, I think, we had five thousand people on that ship. And we transferred every one of them. I don't know how long it took. Took two days, I think. There was a lot of crew(?). Women and all. ____ There were blacks on there, and they transferred the same way we did. Never lost a person. And then, __ on the hangar there__ Five ? It's still there. I'm not going up on that__. I might throw up.___ That was a mistake. Because a guy__ get sick, or if he wet in the bed, we'd catch him.

We landed in...It didn't take long to get to New York. I believe we landed in New York on the 14th of January. I left Le Havre on the 14th of December and landed in New York on the 14th of January. ____a month. We went from New York to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, where we were discharged. And they said __ if you want to get out of here in a hurry you can go all through the night, the day or it will take you three days. Everybody said, "We'll go right on through the night. We don't care 'cause we've been through enough." So I guess it took them about 24 hours. ____ And, then they gave us so much money. I had a lot of money coming. ____ But they only gave you eighteen dollars to get home. ____Hit the liquor store first thing. __ We came to Nashville on the train, and I had a boy with me who had been in my outfit. ____ He lived in Waverly, Humphreys County. I knew it was Humphreys County and Waverly was the name of the little town. When we got to Nashville, he said, "I don't know how to get home." (long pause) Terrible, isn't it?

Zerfoss: Yeah. Take your time. Every time I hear this, I get choked up.

Arbuckle: I found the right bus to put him on. I reckon he got home. I hadn't heard from him since. Never saw him. Never heard from him.

Zerfoss: Let's go back...Did you guys ever get, ever come out of the field, and go for some kind of R&R somewhere or did you just say over there?

Arbuckle: I never got an R&R. Never did.

Zerfoss: What about your rank?

Arbuckle: I never did get any place in rank. T5 is as high as I got. Because that was an old outfit and all the rank had been given out. --- Most of us were T4's. 3 stripes.

Zerfoss: (unintelligible)

Arbuckle: I got a bus to Monteagle. When I got off the bus in Monteagle, there was a guy there knew me. He had a taxi there, and he knew me. He said, "Hey boy, get in. I'm going to take you home." So he brought me home.

End