

**Albert W. Burghardt**  
**Narrator**

**Mike Russet**  
**Wayne Clarke**  
**Interviewer**

**Interviewed on August 23, 2006**  
**Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society**  
**Buffalo, New York**

MR: Can you give me your full name date of birth and place of birth please.

AB: Albert W. Burghardt, 95 Roxley Place Tonawanda New York. I was born April 26, 1922. In other words I'm 84 years old.

MR: Where were you born?

AB: Buffalo, New York.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering the service?

AB: I think my last years were high school. Then eventually I went on to the University of Buffalo for about two and a half to three years.

MR: That was after you were in the service?

AB: Yes, on the GI Bill.

MR: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

AB: We just got back from my mother's old home. We had eight and a half acres and we farmed part of that. By the time we got home we heard about Pearl Harbor.

MR: Did you hear about it on the radio?

AB: Yeah.

MR: What was your reaction to that?

AB: Well I knew we were gonna be in a war with Japan that's for doggone sure.

MR: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

AB: I was drafted

MR: You were drafted into the army when?

AB: In December, I think it was November, 1941. I went to the induction center and they took me to Fort Niagara. The base was back there where the inductees went. From there we took a train, we went down to Camp Livingston, Louisiana. I was with the 28th division. I was carried out on a stretcher in the Hürtgen Forest.

MR: How long was your basic training?

AB: Well it started in Livingston, Louisiana. I don't remember how long it was because the 28th division at that time turned into an amphibious outfit and we went to Florida where we practiced amphibious training there.

Voice: Was it 1942?

AB: [Shakes head, yes]

MR: So you were assigned right away to the 28th division?

AB: Right. I stayed with them all the time I was in service.

MR: What kind of craft did you use when you were in Florida for assaults?

AB: We used a power boat which we run up on the beach. Then we used those landing crafts, like the picture in my book, where they drop the ramp and you run ashore. Then we practiced more in Camp Pickett in Virginia where we practice amphibious landings on the Chesapeake Bay. From there we went to Camp Myles Standish, where we were reequipped with new equipment for overseas.

MR: Now what kind of weapon did you carry?

AB: Well I had all kinds of weapons. I had a .45, a Carbine and an M1 and I was assigned to a mortar section. I was the last ammunition carrier in the mortar section.

MR: When did you head overseas?

AB: From camp Myles Standish whatever that date was. That would be in my book somewhere.

MR: Before D-Day then. You went before D-Day.

AB: Well let me get one thing straight. We knew we were going to do this kind of landing because of the amphibious training we had received. We also made more amphibious training in the Irish Sea off of Land's End over in Wales. We spent time in England also. From there we went to a security camp in England, I think a little bit north of Southampton where we received new equipment again. Of course we waited for D-Day because that's what we were trained for. And in my book, as much as Eisenhower said he didn't plan for a second front there if D-Day failed, I have the proof that the 28th division was planned for D-Day landing and then they substituted the 2nd or the 4th division in our place and we were set aside in the security camp. We didn't know, I didn't know about it until after the war when I was reading about it. But we were supposed to spear head Patton's Army of tanks about thirty seven miles up the coast from D-Day. In other words we were tearing them loose I think it's the Brest Peninsula and let them create a lot of havoc there so that D-Day could continue on.

But when D-Day was a success we were just set aside. We didn't go ashore until I think it was the 26th of August. Then we landed on D-Day Omaha Beach and went inside then our first engagements were after St. Lô where the 1000 or 1500 planes bombed them and we were supposed to take the 35th divisions place but there was a screw up there so we didn't but thank god because the bombs fell short of St. Lô. They were supposed to run parallel to the American lines because then they can see where their bombs were landing. Instead they went over the top of them and the dropped them and they were lost in the dust and stuff and they bombed the 35th division and they had a tremendous amount of casualties.

MR: Now when you went ashore in Normandy beaches was there still a lot of debris on the beaches?

AB: There was a fair amount of debris and we saw a bunch of white stuff over on our left up above a little bit. We put the binoculars on them and they turned out to be American White Crosses. There was a lot of them. In other words they didn't have time to bury the bodies.

MR: So St. Lô was your first offensive?

AB: We walked right through St. Lô. Right after St. Lô was where the hedgerows were and that's where we took off and it was a bitch of a time in there. Here again we spear headed a bit for Patton because one early morning when we woke up I was on guard duty with some fellow and we heard the tanks coming and we said oh hell we won't have anything to stop them, but they happened to be the vanguard of Patton and he went right

through us and into the, we broke out of the hedgerows and we broke out and he went and that where the offensive status.

MR: Now why do you find the hedgerows such a difficult area?

AB: Have you ever seen a hedgerow?

MR: Yes. I'm just asking you for...

AB: Because the Germans knew about them and they could defense them real easy. We had the same thing in Wales because it was just an over shadow of the hedgerows in France and we practiced in them all the time but nobody ever told us we'd be fighting in the damn things because the Germans had the advantage again because they could defense it real easy and we couldn't. We had to take each one and that's when this genius, some PFC or something, developed big teeth on the front of the tank to break through the hedgerows because they had to [undecipherable] and if they weren't too deep they could go right through them. If the didn't they were stopped cold then the Germans could use their panzerfaust to disable the tanks because their guns were much better than ours, sadly to say.

MR: These are the 88's that you're talking about?

AB: And the panzerfaust. They're anti-tank weapons were much superior to ours.

MR: Where did you go after you got out of the hedgerows?

AB: After we broke out of the hedgerows we went to Paris where we were first divisions through Paris and we marched a date I have in my book. I asked our people how long it took because I can't even stand fifteen minutes on my feet anymore and they said it took about nine hours to march through Paris. Then we were in the open and we chased the Germans right on through.

MR: Were you treated as liberators as you marched through?

AB: Oh yeah. The French people loved us. We'd walk in and as we went across France you can walk in sober and walk out pie-eyed because the French got out their best wine and they gave it to us and we drank it.

MR: Where did you go after Paris?

AB: After Paris we chased the Germans across the land there then we'd come into Elsenborn where we had a brief rest and we saw that place. Now that must have been a special training camp because the local inhabitants told us that the English mosquito

bombers would come over at about 500 and bomb them. They had huge bombs because they left craters anywhere some twenty to thirty feet in the ground and they were filled up with water and most of the barracks were destroyed. We found a lot of little red things. They looked like cartridges about an inch and a half maybe two inches long. We didn't know what those were for. We went from there into The Siegfried Line and we captured a bunch of pill boxes there but this is one of the reasons why I want to expose the irony and leave town so to speak because we went in there and we captured all those pill boxes and they just pulled us out. Why the devil did we have to leave those pill boxes we just captured, pull out we had to take them again.

MR: You never destroyed them you just left.

AB: At the time we didn't have any explosives to destroy them. There were no Germans in there, no armament in there at all. The next time we tried they were loaded with crouts. They had taken over those pill boxes we had to fight for them again. We lost a lot of men there. They pulled us out of there eventually. We had a bit of a rest we never had much of a rest. Most of them were to reequip and replace the losses that we had. Then we went after the Hürtgen forest.

MR: Were you with the weapons platoon at that time?

AB: All the time. Machine guns and mortars.

MR: Do you want to talk about the Hürtgen forest?

AB: Not really [laughing]. I have an article in there on the Hürtgen Forest. I wrote a bit of a digest on the forest. I gave a few of those copies away. It's about the shelling that went on. There's a German general in there, he was on the Russian front, he was also in WWI, as well as fighting on the eastern front, our front, and he said he never had shelling like there were in the Hürtgen Forest. He said it was a tremendous amount of shells that went down.

MR: What was daily life like there?

AB: Besides being shelled all the time? Very dull. We didn't get any food and everyone was wet because of winter or the fall rain would start and we were fortunate enough to take over positions by the 9<sup>th</sup> division and they had dug in pits. They weren't any deeper than these desks to the floor and we can crawl in there and sleep and also when a barrage come we could get up in there and we'd come out and fire our weapons.

MR: Did you have winter gear at all?

AB: No, no, all summer. Our feet were wet all the time, that's why I ended up with trench foot. Bradley, one of his books in there I quoted, said that they made a mistake because they sent instead of food and clothing, ammunition and I forget the other thing. Of course we needed the ammunition but we moved so fast they couldn't keep up with us, the divisions that were on the line.

WC: Were you wounded at the Hürtgen forest?

AB: I never was wounded in the whole time I was in service. I had a hell of a lot of close calls. I ended up with trench foot. After we escaped from the trap the Germans had us in, they phoned us up one night because all the electrical lighters were down. I think they radioed us. And they said that we were completely surrounded in there and they couldn't get through to rescue us because we had gone onto the attack that had saved the 112<sup>th</sup> division which was trapped also. They said we were completely surrounded and we can't get you out so you're going to break up in small groups and get back the best way you can. Good luck men. And that was the end of us. They wrote us off in other words. So after dark, early on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November we broke up into small groups and we left that area very quietly. We went across the tall bridge which my platoon sergeant and I discussed in the Beachwood general hospital in California, they must have been held by Germans. But we were bigger, our group was eighteen people and we walked across that bridge held by the Germans but we moved so fast and we looked like them anyways because we were dressed a lot like the Germans and we went right across and escaped after that we went up the hills which were a lot like the once in Letchworth state park which anyone in New York state who's been around there know how steep they are. We went up the hills there and when we got almost to the top or at least halfway somebody... we never wore our helmets buckled down because the Germans could come over and give it a pull and break your neck. So they were loose on our head. So somebody must have leaned over backwards or something and their helmet fell off and went crashing down the rocky slopes all the way to the bottom. Most of us thought that our position had been given away and that we certainly were going to get some shells. But thank god we didn't. We got to the top of this hill and we went across an open field. Somebody challenged us in English and whoever led us on that trap was one hell of a soldier. He talked to him in English and he let us pass and we went on to our company areas and we were so tired we didn't lay down at all we just fell down and went to sleep.

In the morning when I woke up I was covered with the first snow of the season, November the 9<sup>th</sup>. I'll never forget that. I was like a blanket of snow on us. The medics come around and they asked all these fellas questions. They asked me if my feet hurt and I said no. I stood up and they dropped my M1 which weighs about 9 pounds on my foot.

They said did you feel that and I said hell no I didn't feel that. They said well take off your shoes. My feet were as white as the snow. So they had me lie down and put a tag on me and when they took my rifle about 8 inches from the top of it, it was completely destroyed. A piece of shrapnel had to come through sometime and I never heard it because I always had my rifle right next to me when I slept it was between my legs so I could keep it warm so when I had to fire it I could. So that was the end of my career with the 28<sup>th</sup> they put me on a stretcher and carried me out. I went to nine hospitals including the one I got out of at camp Upton New York in '45 I think it was.

MR: And what did they do to treat your trench foot?

AB: Nothing! We got a shot of liquor when we got out they kept us under sedation because when the blood started to come back to your feet you couldn't stand. So they gave us some kind of morphine. But they really hurt. The only thing they did when we got to California was give us elastic bands and hot and cold water I don't know which one was first. Then they said they had a new thing they were gonna try. They pumped alcohol into your spinal column to try to get the blood to flow. They said that if they didn't take it they'd court martial us. We thought we were all going to japan anyway so we said were not taking it. Not all the fellas except about four of them said were not taking it so if you want to court martial us, court martial us. So they had about four guinea pigs that they gave the alcohol to and were going to get out of a good drunk in about three days. They didn't do anything else but leave us alone.

MR: How many guys in your group ended up with trench foot?

AB: I don't know because myself and my platoon sergeant and another fella from 110<sup>th</sup> division ended up in that hospital together. They split us up because there were eighteen guys that came out of the battle with me and there were other ones. There weren't many left of close to 200 guys. Besides being killed or injured or taken prisoner that was it. There's a picture of the call trail time to heal in the book there which shows the American and German medics giving first aid to the troops. I had to be on station but the fellas that got around to the first aid station said that they had the bodies piled up there about four high about sixty feet long of our dead comrades. They had two rows and they said there could have been more. There started to salvage the guys for burial but they couldn't take them out of the Hürtgen the Germans wouldn't let us. Some of the fellas that did come out did get checked by the Germans to make sure they weren't fit to fight then they'd let those guys go out and walk to the wounded and the medics.

MR: Have you read much about the Hürtgen forest?

AB: Yes I'm a collector. I bought all the books I could on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Some of the authors wrote me and wanted my book here. I said we can exchange information. They didn't want to exchange information. They just wanted everything I had and the hell with me so I said kiss it. I didn't give them a damn thing. Except the fellas who gave me a book. *Bloody Forest* from Gerald Astor. From Dorothy Chernitsky whose husband was in the 110<sup>th</sup> *Voices from the Fox Hole*. Which I had quoted from fellas like myself in the book. I forgot who else I gave it to but we didn't just give this thing away. We spent thirteen years on it and give it to some guy so he can make some money, forget it.

MR: How long were you in the hospital total?

AB: The first time seven months. I didn't walk until very late in the season because my feet were so tender. [Looking through documents] Here are some of my awards that I got. My daughter-in-law is making me a big picture. With those I got all the documentation. I didn't just go out and buy medals.

MR: I see you have the bronze star. What were you awarded that for?

AB: I'll read it to you. The bronze star, for meritorious achievement to ground combat against the enemy during World War II. I mean I maybe should of got about six of them but they gave me that one and they gave me the documentation with it.

MR: After you were discharged were you hospitalized again? You said you were in seven months at one time.

AB: They turned me loose and I came home, started dating Ella, and went to the University of Buffalo for two and a half, three years. Then I just got a job so we can get married and have something to live on.

MR: You said you made use of the GI bill. Did you use it for anything else besides the college? For your home or anything?

AB: No, I started sales and marketing because that's what I went into.

MR: Did you ever use the 52-20 club?

AB: What was that again?

MR: It was the \$20 a week for fifty two weeks. It was like unemployment.

AB: Oh, probably did.

MR: Did you join any veteran organizations?

AB: I joined the VFW and then I quit because at that time, you couldn't join unless you were overseas and I disagreed with that. I thought that if you were in service you should. So I joined the American legion and I was with them for quite a while. Then I joined the disabled American veterans and I've become a lifelong member there.

MR: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?

AB: Wrote them up all the time until they passed away. I'm still in contact with my platoon sergeant who is in California now. He's blind and he's got other infirmities.

MR: How do you think your time in the service had an effect on your life?

AB: Made me more sure of myself. I don't back off from anything. I always go back to my service and how the things I had to go through and the hardships. Nothing is going to be as hard as that would be.

MR: Alright well thank you very much for the interview.

AB: My pleasure.