

Q: How long did you serve as deputy corps commander with General Ridgway?

A: Oh, that wasn't long. That was when I went back to rejoin the division in early January.

Remagen Bridge

We moved east towards the Rhine. We crossed the Roer and we headed across those hills back there. Then we headed east towards the Rhine, generally east. Part of the time I had to go north to hit the proper roads. Well, we were together again—I am trying to remember—I rejoined the division at some point in there, I guess after we got straightened out. I had a very good infantry division alongside of me. I remember their code name was “Diploma.” I’ve forgotten its number [9th or 78th]. Anyway they were a good outfit, and they had good commanders. They stuck by me when we finally went across the Rhine.

But we moved up and then is when we were split again—we were in the division, but the main job then was to turn south and close that pocket because the Germans were trying to escape from the Saar Valley and cross the Rhine, get back towards the Rhine. Combat Command A was on my right and they were to clean out that back side, and my job primarily was to go up and get near the Rhine and close that. But it was primarily to grab those bridges over the Ahr River and stop any Germans coming in from that side and to open a way of getting on south. That was my prime mission. By that time I had another battalion of infantry with me. So, I had more strength, and I had a good battalion at that time with a good commander. But he was only attached. He was from the other combat command. But that's when I got up towards the Rhine. But the day we made the attack I was first supposed to capture Bonn up north of Remagen; but the night I'd issued my orders to start the next day towards Bonn—that direction, that was due east—it was changed that night. I had to change the orders during the night, get my battalion commanders in, and we were then headed south of Remagen primarily to capture these Ahr bridges and close up to the Rhine. We were then at Stadt Meckenheim. I was badly shelled, but we weren't getting any great damage at the time. That's when we started, and I had split my command—well, to keep contact on my left I had my reconnaissance troop over on that left. We could make contact with the 9th Infantry Division

which was on that flank. Then I had ordered my force, about half of it headed directly towards Remagen and to the Rhine over there.

There was Sinzig, another place down the Rhine, that I was supposed to capture; the other force was to go down and hook up with CCA which was on my right and capture these bridges over the Ahr. Well, that seemed to be the most important mission. So, I started out the next morning following this right column which was the one they had put most importance on, and I wanted to see how they were going. The other column went due east towards Remagen. Well, I got down south, kept radio contact in the command car along with this battalion commander who was in charge of the south task force. He reported to me about noon that he had captured the bridges over the Ahr River. "I have taken one and have positions on the other side." So, that was the main mission. Then is when I went back to see how my headquarters, which was with the middle column, was doing, and they had gone towards the Rhine.

When I got back to my headquarters, he sent me word that the Rhine bridge was still standing, and they could see it. So I immediately got in the car and went up to join that task force commander [Lieutenant Colonel Leonard E. Engeman, 14th Tank Battalion], who had the infantry battalion and a tank company and some other unit. As I went up, got to the Rhine, I passed through a lot of the troops on the way and some prisoners coming back. There were a few snipers in the woods, but no damage. I got up to the Rhine and stood there on the bank and looked down, and there it was. The bridge was there right above the town. I couldn't believe it was true. I issued an order right away to go down and grab that bridge, go down through the town and put tanks on both sides of the bridge, firing parallel to it. I had some support artillery. It wasn't any regular artillery, but it was made up of support guns from the reconnaissance troop. They had made up provisional batteries. They couldn't hit the side of a barn. They didn't know anything about it—but anyway I put them up there on the hill to smoke that big hill that stood on the other side and cover it so they couldn't see what we were doing. We moved on down into the valley and through the town, and got to the bridge.

I had gotten a prisoner—I don't know whether he was any good or not—but a German prisoner who reported to me that the bridge was to be blown up at 4:00. It was then about 3:00 in the afternoon, 3:00 or 3:30. And I said, "You got to get that thing quick 'cause it's going up at 4:00. It's going to be blown." The battalion commander, tank battalion, said,

“ We’re all right down here waiting to go. ” While we were waiting there, they blew a big crater in the approaches, which we could get around. We could use bulldozers and fill that so we could get over it. Then we started to go across the bridge and an explosion went off on the bridge at this panel point about midstream and blew out one big panel point. It was about 20 or 30 feet in diameter. Just one whole side of the bridge out, but all the charges had failed to go off for some reason. Whether it had been cut by artillery fire or something else, I don’t know. But they failed to go. I think, it seems to me I read someplace, that the Germans had to go out and put a hand fuse on the charge that did go off because that had been damaged too—the wiring back to it.

I issued my orders. First we sent the infantry across. Right with them I sent a squad of Engineers to remove any demolitions that were on the bridge, and we found maybe 1,000 pounds or something like that underneath. They cut those loose and dropped them into the river.

We still had foot passage across and the bridge was still standing. That was when I didn’t know what was going to happen. I was waiting for the thing to fall and luckily it didn’t do it. We got across and then we put a company of tanks across. We put more than that, I guess, in the attack. We had more than that. But one of the heavier things I started across with was a tank destroyer company, and they were bigger and they were not as good drivers as the tankers. Anyway they ran into a hole they’d blown in the middle of the roadway and the damned thing got stuck and fell down into this hole. But it didn’t go through to the river. It just stuck there and blocked the bridge. So, we had a hell of a fix there and you couldn’t move the damned thing. It couldn’t move under its own power, and I told them to cut it loose and let it drop into the river. It didn’t make any difference. I had to get rid of it because it was blocking all the traffic of reinforcements and everything. Well, they couldn’t do that. So, they finally sent a tank back from the far side, the east side of the Rhine, and hooked a cable on the front end of this tank destroyer and pulled it out; and that opened up the bridge. Then the traffic began to flow. We took the infantry across.

In the meantime I got some pontoon bridges there. They had diverted everything to me after I reported I had captured this bridge. Anyway while I was looking at it and we were started across the bridge, I got orders to abandon my previous mission and head southward to Koblenz on the west bank of the Rhine. Well, I was already half across the river

and I decided I'll wait and see whether the bridge stands up. Then I'll go back and tell them what's happening. I disobeyed the order, but I think I was right.

Q: It proved to be right and I think that decision had to go all the way to Eisenhower before you were proved right. Didn't it?

A: No, my division commander, I met him back there, and he approved it right away and sent word back to the corps and the corps sent it to the Army and they went back to Eisenhower.

Q: Corps did not approve it, as I recall. They did not make the decision, the corps commander.

A: I don't remember. The corps commander [Major General John Millikin] was later relieved, and we got [Major General James] Van Fleet in as corps commander afterwards. But that was the sequence of the thing, and I turned over my mission down along the Ahr River to CCA, which took that over. I got that outfit over and reinforced my combat command on the other side of the Rhine. Then I got this infantry regiment from—four hundred and something—division. I've forgotten. The four hundred and something regiment. I can't remember who they were. They were a National Guard regiment and they were good. [310th Infantry Regiment, 78th Infantry Division.] We got them across and then everybody began coming, the 9th Infantry Division—but I used the bridge there until we got the pontoons across and I didn't have any traffic coming back. They later criticized me for not sending over bedding rolls for the men who were first over there. Hell, we didn't have a chance to send them. It was warm enough then. You could sleep in your overcoat or something like that. We couldn't stop. The only traffic I allowed back was ambulances coming back until we got these bridges, pontoon bridges, over. We got two of those across. They were knocked out a couple of times when building, but they later got them up.

Well, I moved over myself. I had my operations officer with me and my communications man. That was all I had on my side of the river. The rest of them were on the other side. The artillery was on the west bank. They were the supporting—they could see better from the west bank than they could from the other side, and the Rhine at that point was only

maybe 500 or 600 yards wide. So, the observation was better from the west bank than it would have been down on the east bank till we got some ground. Then I immediately began to expand my bridgehead, as I got these troops in. I had it plotted. There were ones I wanted to cover, to protect, the bridge. I used the first infantry battalion, my own battalion, just on the north side of the river and took the high ground in there. Then I sent the recon outfit up on the hill to get rid of the antiaircraft battery which was on top; then I sent the next battalion on the right side of the bridge to expand the bridgehead. But they began to come, and then I had to draw goose eggs all over the map, where I wanted the next battalion to go. But there was a period in there when I was commanding damned near a corps and I only had this one operations officer and the rest of the division was on the west side. But we expanded. I had the 78th Division. And I had the 9th Infantry Division for a while, and I had my own outfit. I had about three divisions under me and commanded it all.

Q: Everything on the east bank was yours?

A: Everything on the east bank was mine. Well, I stood there—I didn't have any communications or anything else with these other people. But finally this deputy corps commander sent over a division commander [Major General Louis A. Craig], 9th Infantry Division. Well, his division was mostly over there anyway by that time. They sent him over, and he took over from me and then I was in reserve, became a reserve of that force on that side. I stayed there for about—well, the bridge stood I know—it was about ten days, but we spread out up and down the river; and then I got word to move south towards Koblenz on that side of the river and capture—what was that—I've forgotten. It was really a nice town. Anyway we got down there and that's when I got orders relieving me and assigning me to command of 4th Armored [Division]. But I stayed with them until that afternoon to see that that mission was at least under control, and then I went back and got my stuff together and moved down south on the Moselle River and joined the 4th Armored. Reported in to the corps commander.

Q: Based on your experience at Remagen, do you think that it's better to seek all the information you can get and have participation by other individuals involved who might be involved with the results of that decision or to move quickly with the information you have?

A: I think it's fine to get as much help as you can, advice of other people, but that doesn't mean that you're going to follow that blindly. You've got to make your own decisions. But they must be made on the basis of knowledge and sometimes you've got a feeling of what is right and what is wrong. It's like that thing at Remagen. My orders actually were not to cross. Well, somebody remarked that if there's a bridge there, grab it, or do something, but nobody paid any attention to that; and actually my orders, later on while I was attacking the bridge, were to give up all previous missions and head south and join up with the Third Army at Koblenz. I was to abandon all those missions that I had before. And up until that time, my main mission in heading towards the Rhine had been to get those crossings over the Roer River so that we could make that connection to the south. But while I was there, I'd given the orders to cross. I'd sent the tanks down to get flanked on each side of the bridge and to bring fire parallel to keep my resistance down, and I'd gotten this battalion of infantry ready to push across. That's when I decided to change that mission, make the attempt. But that was more intuition than it was—I knew it was right. I felt inside me that I could never live with the knowledge that I had given up that opportunity without making a try for it. I couldn't have spent the rest of my life—and I knew it was, well, a dangerous thing, unheard of; but I just had the feeling that here was the opportunity of a lifetime and it must be grasped immediately. It couldn't wait. If you had waited, the opportunity [would be] gone. That was probably the greatest turning point in my whole career as a soldier—to capture Remagen.

Q: Yes, that was one of my following questions.

A: I'd have been retired as a colonel, I think, if it hadn't been for Remagen. I was sort of a nondescript. I had a good reputation, but there were hundreds and hundreds of officers who had been promoted over my head. They were commanding divisions—men I'd served with and I was senior to. That staff at Army Ground Forces or whoever it was, McNair's staff [in] Washington, picked all these division commanders when they were organizing during the Second World War. They were picked out of people in the States and people that he knew, and many of them were on his staff there at the ground forces headquarters.

Q: So, General Leonard supported you completely at Remagen; when he heard about Remagen he is quoted as saying, ‘That’s a hell of a note. Now we’ve got a bull by the tail and caused a lot of trouble. But let’s push it and then put it up to corps.’ ”

A: That’s what he said and he sent me help right then. I remember a remark he made. I said, “John, I have disregarded my mission. My mission was changed while I was up there and it was to go south toward Koblenz, but I decided on my own that opportunity should not be dropped and I took the bull by the horns and made the crossing. And now I’m responsible.” And John said, “Well, I remember as a young officer, a general officer once told me that you may not like the mission you’re getting, but I’ve decided on the mission and I have many more facts to decide on than you’ve got. And if I give you a mission, I expect it to be carried out because I know more than you do about the situation.” Well, that happened to be an instance that I knew more about the situation than anybody.

Q: Yes, you had a reverse situation. He seemed to be concerned about General Millikin, the commander of III Corps.

A: Well, Millikin didn’t push us or support us. He was all right, but he didn’t come over. It was on that basis that Millikin was relieved right after that, and Van Fleet took over the corps. I don’t know. I liked Millikin all right. I had known him. He’d been an instructor of mine at Leavenworth. He was a cavalryman, but he didn’t have much force about him, much drive; and I think he once came across the bridge at Remagen and visited my headquarters. He didn’t stay long, but it took somebody like Van Fleet to come and push somebody over there to help me.

Q: Well, General Courtney Hodges, who was then First Army commander, pushed it even before going back to General Bradley.

A: Everybody pushed all along the line. There’s no question about that. Everybody supported me from the first minute. Actually, Millikin supported it. It went to the corps. Then it went on back to the Army. Then it went back to Eisenhower, and all along the line everybody gave a hundred percent support. But Millikin wasn’t a forceful person. Millikin had suggested that it might be possible to get a bridge across.

There was no order about it at the time before I left and went up to the river.

Q: You are quoted again by Hechler. Well, you weren't quoted, but when you heard about Remagen and you cut across country, I think you or one of the other task forces on the right moved parallel.

A: Well, it was the important one, you see, up to that time. It was the one to get those crossings across the Roer River, which separated the Third Army area.

Q: It was parallel to the Rhine.

A: The purpose of the whole operation was to join up those two and for me to drive south and join the Third Army.

Q: Your operations officer at that time was a major, Major Ben Cothran, and Cothran recognized the importance of this even before Colonel [Leonard] Engeman. Colonel Engeman must have been the tank force commander of the task force on the left.

A: He was the tank battalion commander.

Q: And Cothran recognized the importance before Engeman did, called you immediately. You came across country; and then Hechler goes on to say that when you arrived there, Colonel Engeman, who was still trying to size up the situation and take careful action, was spurred into action and issued a series of decisive orders to subordinates. "Directly or indirectly, every man felt the wrath of the general who demanded and got results and satisfied that his calculated display of anger had speeded up the operation and saved many precious minutes, General Hoge began to think about the bridge that incredibly still stood before his eyes." This leads one to think about what a lot of people say of good commanders, that they have to be actors, that they might form or show an entirely different character or personality in a command position than they would in a staff position. However, I haven't found that in a review of your career. It seems like you've always had a very hard-driving attitude. Do you recall in

approaching Engeman and Cothran at this time that you did calculate that anger just to get people moving or—?

A: No, it was just because I just couldn't get them to move fast enough. Engeman was a good man, a good tank commander, but he was very cautious and he wasn't moving fast enough to get down to that bridge. The question was minutes, and while we were standing there we'd captured some German who told us at the time that the bridge was to be blown at 4:00 that afternoon. It was then about 3:30 or 3:00, and Engeman was still cautiously moving down, and I told him to get them down there now and get going—move.

Q: His lead platoon at that time was led by Lieutenant Timmerman.

A: Yes, he was the company commander, I think.

Q: Yes, that's correct. He was the company commander, and he was a second lieutenant at the time and had two other second lieutenants in his company. But it seems that he was a very decisive young individual. He really moved out.

A: Oh, he was. Timmerman was all right, a good man. I don't remember him at all. He just carried out the orders, but when he got the orders he pushed them and they pushed. I had a battalion commander at that time, infantry battalion commander in that task force, who wasn't worth a damn. He's the one I finally got across with this task force, the 1st Battalion. The infantry battalion got over first, then a damned tank destroyer fell through the bridge and blocked traffic for a while—couldn't move anything. But I had gotten this battalion over the river and I was waiting. I had to go back to headquarters and report what the situation was—to find Leonard, because at that time no word had gone back. Maybe a radio message had gone back, I don't know; but I decided to wait until I could see that there was somebody over there, so I could go back and make up a report that that was the situation. So as soon as I found this out I went back and fortunately I met Leonard at my headquarters, which was back about six or eight miles behind the river, and told him about this thing. Well, while I was there, it seems to me I got supper. I got my jeep loaded up and Cothran went with me and I had a radio operator. That was all the staff I had with me. The rest of my

staff I left on the other side of the river. Do you know who should straggle into my headquarters, [that] is back there eight miles behind the line, but this infantry battalion commander. I said, "What in the hell are you doing here?" "Well," he said, "I came back to get supplies." I said, "I'll tend to the supplies; you go back and command your battalion." So I had to get rid of him, relieve him. He got killed during the Korean thing in an airplane accident. That's when Cothran and I went down. We found all confusion down below with this tank through the bridge-and I mean this [tank] destroyer blocking everything, and it was raining at that time, dark as a pocket, and Engeman was in a flap, all excited, cussing, and his headquarters was in a mess; but we got them all straightened out and got them across the river and moving.

Q: There's a good description in the book here on that.

A: Well, that book of Hechler's is an excellent account. I gave him a great deal of it, and then he was up there.

Q: Yes, he did an awful lot of research on that.

A: He did a fine job. His worse job was when he had sold his movie rights and that film that was put out, which was awful.

Q: Yes, I saw that. It was terrible. But I think that this discussion of Remagen gives us a good rundown on your method of decision making, speed with which you can make the decisions and weigh the consequences of a decision that might not coincide with your former plans or your former orders. Going on to information handling and administrative communications, General Ridgway was one who questioned a great deal the reports that he got from staff and he wanted to go out himself; and you're the same way about getting firsthand information. Throughout your career, how did you handle your written and verbal communications from staff or lower commanders? Did you always try to seek verification of that or depend on the individual from whom you were getting the information?

A: Well, generally, it's the individual and the situation. You kept abreast of what was going on. You could judge and make some judgment as to

whether it was reasonable or possible, and then you had to know something about it to make your decisions. That fellow Cothran who was with me was a crackerjack. He was one of the best staff officers that I ever had, and he helped me more than any other staff officer I've ever known.

Q: Did he go with you when you went to the 4th Division?

A: No, he stayed with the 9th. He was only a Reserve officer or he was a temporary officer. He finally retired as a colonel and he died, must have been five or six years ago.

Q: Were there any particular junior officers who had worked for you that you did take along on other assignments or seek to have assigned to you based on their previous experience?

A: No, I did not. I never believed in that idea that you had to take your own people with you. There were officers who were transferred and took their key staff along with them to start up the next one. Maybe that's necessary, but I always felt that you were leaving something that had to go on. It wasn't right to wreck that headquarters to take these people. You had to use what you found on the ground; and I never had anybody that followed me except an aide, and most of my aides were not much. I never wanted to take a West Pointer for an aide. I felt that was a waste of the talents. Generally I kept away from that and I picked some officer who would do the job, pleasant, and could arrange itineraries and things of that sort. I thought that was one of the bad things. There were commanders who had to move and they would only move if they could take along their chief of staff and maybe other key staff officers. Well, they denuded whatever was left behind that was worthwhile. If that headquarters was being dismantled completely, it wasn't right for the new commander to come in.

Q: Who were some of those you knew that did that? Patton, I think, kept his staff pretty much the same as he did—

A: Well, he didn't move but many of them did that. I think that was a general way of doing things among the higher commanders. They took

their staffs with them. Hodges took his, for instance. I'm not sure of that, but I know Bill Kean was chief of staff of the First Army. I don't remember but I know that that was a very common practice for officers to move on to another job, and they'd take along the people they knew and, well, they didn't know any more about the new situation than anybody else. It was better to find someone on the ground who was acquainted with it.

Q: Until you could gain knowledge of it? Well, back to information. I think you've covered this generally. You liked to get detailed information and firsthand information from which to base your decisions.

A: Well, this fellow Cothran was great and we developed a system of orders. A part of it was from the German concept, and we'd draw a map of where we wanted to do it; but the map had to have a key to it to know what the coordinates were that you oriented on, you see, and that was the best way of issuing a quick, clean-cut order I have ever seen and Cothran was an expert at that. He could write an order that was clear and understandable. All you had to have was what your key points were to make this usable. Do they still use that in the Army?

Q: The overlay—yes, sir.

A: It was an overlay, that's all it was. But you had to know the coordinates to tie it in. But your main points of effort, places of holding and all, were just shown by a couple of signs. You could write right on the overlay, exactly who was to do it. It was the simplest form of an order I've ever seen and the clearest. Of course the things like administration, your supply, and all that would have to be covered by an order. I'm talking about an operations order.

Q: But you went in primarily for short, concise, and clear orders rather than the long details.

A: Yes, absolutely. But the five-paragraph order is sound, absolutely, and it's a good check to know whether you've gotten the information over. But it's long and some of them reach the point that you haven't got time to read the damned thing, you get so much of it. But with those other

orders, those overlay orders, you could almost grasp it all in a few minutes. In just a little bit you got the whole concept of who was where and what they were going to do, and it was all easy to do. But the five-paragraph order is absolutely sound. No question about that. Of course now I'm talking about when I was doing that with a combat command. Division orders became much different, but there you had a big staff and you were handling your supplies and all the rest of it, which made a difference in what you did. A combat unit, a combat command, is an operational unit primarily. It had very little supply. We depended on somebody else to do that. Cothran is the best staff officer I ever had.

Q: On the organization of the combat command, I think the triangular division or the triangular concept was introduced in the Army just during the training for World War II. You know, the two-up, one-back concept, which was new at that time. What were your thoughts of that particular divisional organization?

A: Well, it was much more flexible than the usual and it wasn't as heavy. The old square division was too heavy and too cumbersome. The triangular division was much more flexible, and it answered all the purposes. So, that triangular system was carried out not only in the division but in the regiment and everything else. But the four [regiment] square division and that four unit was all brought over from the First World War.

Q: When your combat commands were organized you had A, B, and R. Were they all organized about the same way or were the combat commands task-oriented?

A: No, they were all organized about the same. You could change them if you needed some additional force from the one that was in reserve. You could add up to a company or a battalion to that from the reserve. Usually the R combat command or R unit in the combat command was not as active as the other two. A and B were the active units there. But it was possible. You could have taken a badly chewed up combat command and moved it back, if that was true, and brought R up and put it in its place. I don't know that that's ever been done because usually R acted as a replacement for these units that were decimated or worn out or something like that, the ones that were up front.

Q: It was sort of a support unit then.

A: It could have been and that was the original concept, I think. I'm not sure. It was supposed to be interchangeable as a whole command, within the combat command.

Q: A few days after the capture of the Remagen Bridge, you were ordered out of the 9th Armored Division and went to take the 4th Armored Division. And I believe you took over the 4th in March of 1945.

A: I think it was March the 19th [23 March], I'm not sure, but that's about the date. I know it was the day, the night before the 5th Infantry Division had ferried across the Rhine at Oppenheim and had a bridgehead there; and that next day they threw the first pontoon bridge over, and we crossed on that as soon as it was finished. The 4th Armored did, and from there on we went on to the end of the war.

Q: Was Lieutenant Colonel Creighton Abrams still commanding one of the battalions?

A: He was commanding one of the combat commands, was one of the best men I ever saw.

Q: Yes, he established quite a reputation.

A: All the way around. The best fighter-and he's excellent; he's a thinker, too. I didn't think he was much at the time. I knew he was a crackerjack fighter; the best we had. I've never seen a better combat commander than he was, but I thought he only knew the combat side of it. Well, when I was sent to the Philippines to make that survey, I was relieved from the 4th Armored then and I came back to the War Department, reported in there and got my instructions and got this group together and I went from there on over to the Philippines. Well, he begged to go with me. I didn't know why, but I thought anybody that's done as well as he has deserved anything he could have. I didn't think he would do any good. I didn't expect him to do much, but I took him along to advise on armored warfare. You see, I had an artilleryman, an Engineer, and an infan-

tryman, one from each combat service. Well, Abrams was the best man I had of any of them. He was a crackerjack. Many of them were no good, but Abrams was just a workhorse and had a fine brain and was a thinker; he was a great help.

Q: So he joined you when you left Europe then in June 1945?

A: He went with me, came back to the United States, and went with me over to the Philippines.

Q: That's when you were assigned to the Office of Assistant Chief of Staff of the Army in June 1945 to December 1945 and you were assigned to make the Philippines Postwar Defense survey?

A: Yes, also the time I was in the Philippines at that time. I wrote my report and then I was relieved from that assignment.

Q: You took over the 4th Armored Division in March and kept the division until VE-Day. Were you involved in any of the discussions or briefings or do you have any thoughts on our direction, the American Army's direction, to stop at the Elbe? What were your thoughts about the Russians coming into Berlin and meeting at the Elbe River?

A: I didn't have anything to do with that. We turned south of there. We captured a lot of land, the 4th Armored did, that was later turned over. All of Thuringia, for instance-we captured that. Then a great deal of the rest of Germany, which was later turned over to the Russians. We still have that zone in between that we've had all that trouble over, which was just giving it away. But it was up north of there that they first met the Russians. I didn't meet the Russians until after we'd turned south and entered. We stayed up north in that sector. We got up to the, not the Elbe River, but the one that goes south from Bavaria, and we stopped there and then we were turned around and moved down into Bavaria. We turned it over to an infantry division; and the 4th Armored then went down into Bavaria and came up through Bavaria into Czechoslovakia, and we went into Czechoslovakia and met the Russians down there.

Q: Then you were pulled back out after the Armistice?

A: We stayed there, oh, maybe a week; then we came back and went down to Bavaria. We stayed down there and that's where I left the division. There was an old German barracks down there in a German cantonment.

Q: Well, I might have my 4th Division history here.

A: Oh, I've got a 4th Division history back here somewhere.

Q: I brought it along; I can dig that out sometime.

A: It was there we met the Russians, down in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Let's see -- around Landshut, Germany.

A: We moved back to Landshut. That's where we came back to. And that's where I left the division when I was sent to the Philippines.

Q: Let's see. Combat Command A set up its CP [command post] there at Strakonice and B at Horazdovice. This is in Czechoslovakia and division headquarters was at Susice, and that was your last restraining line and where you were on VE Day.

A: And that's where we met the Russians. The Russians didn't want to observe that line and tried to go through, and they paid no attention to it. We both had the restraining line set up, but they paid no attention to it. So when I told them, they just laughed at me; so I just put some tanks across the road and blocked the road. Then they turned north and went on up north of that line.

Q: So even then they would only negotiate—

A: Oh, they weren't negotiating with anybody. They were rabble, they were raiding and everything. We had a big celebration up there though with,

I guess it was, the armored corps. It was the damndest celebration I ever saw. The Russians invite us first to a big dinner.

Q: That's the German XII Corps or the Russian XII Corps.

A: No, it was the American XII Corps. They put on this thing and they had all these people. They looked as if they'd come from the best theater in Moscow, St. Petersburg, or someplace. They had a great dinner, lots of drinking of toasts and carryings on. They fired a salute. They just turned loose everything with live ammunition—fired right across the German territory. They fired I don't know how many guns; they'd fire in batteries all the salvos. There must have been 100 cannons in that thing. Then the American XII Corps gave an answering party a day or so later. We couldn't put on the show they put on, but we gave them a demonstration of saluting also. They had I don't know how many batteries of artillery-fired salvos, and then in addition they had several battalions of antiaircraft guns which lined up and fired thousands and thousands of rounds. It was just like a sweep of sound everywhere, just curtained with the sound. Well, they were pretty good after that. That's when we turned over that area. There were some Russians who had defected to the Germans before that and they were trying to get back into the American lines because they knew they would be sent to Siberia if they were ever caught by the Russians themselves. But we had the line established. We wouldn't let them come back; and the Russians came and finally gathered them all together and took them someplace, I don't know where. They never showed up again.

Q: You are probably right; they probably wound up in Siberia.

A: But that day of the surrender, you couldn't stop those Germans trying to get back into the American lines. And the order had been that all Germans would stop in place, pull off the road, lay down their arms, and wait to be taken over by whose zone they were in. Well, all these thousands and thousands of Germans were in the Russian zone. A number of them committed suicide because the Russians came and took them. I don't know whatever happened to them, either.

Q: Yes. This little history pamphlet said 80,000 Germans tried to surrender to the 4th Armored Division, so they could get back into Germany.

A: I had to send out planes and threaten to bomb them to stop them and make them get off the road. Those were the orders. We hadn't signed the surrender terms. The Germans and the Russians had signed it along with us. They were their terms. We were just obeying what their terms were.

Q: Oh, the Germans were trying to get back to you.

A: They were trying to do anything to get inside American lines.

Q: One note here is that one German panzer division borrowed gasoline to drive their tanks from the woods to surrender. Were you familiar with that story, sir?

A: No, I don't remember that. I know we stopped an outfit up there that tried to get back in our lines, and I think they were all Russians, but they had fought with the Germans and it was an armored division, I believe.

Q: Those were mostly Ukrainians probably that joined the Germans.

A: I don't know who they were, but they tried to get back and surrender to us. But the orders were to stop in place and they didn't stop; they kept going on. We had to stop them.

Q: That was probably a difficult order for you to carry out.

A: We didn't give a damn. We didn't know anything about the Russians—

Q: At that point.

A: They were our allies, and we had been fighting the Germans at that time. At that point the Russians were great friends.

Q: Evidently, except for General Patton. From some of his readings, he recognized some of the problems that might be caused in the future. Okay, so we've gotten through to VE Day and with your experiences in the Philippines; and, of course, your assignment chronology stated that you were assigned to the Chief of Staff's office in Washington. I assumed that was a tour in the Pentagon, but I'm kind of glad to hear you say that you were not actually there.

A: I was never assigned to the Pentagon. As I say, I was only there to get those instructions and organize my party. I had that to do twice, once when I went to the Philippines and again when I had to go to Alaska and straighten out a command situation there; that was after the war was well over. That was in 1946.

Q: Your assignment to the Philippines was to conduct a postwar defense study—to review the organization there and to determine what type of bases we should have?

A: It was just what areas we wished to have for any purpose, from training areas or airfields or harbors and what not. And the Philippines had promised that we could have anything we wanted; so does the agreement.

Q: The war in the Pacific was still going on at that time?

A: Well, I tell you, when we were leaving San Francisco, the first bomb fell, first of the atomic bombs, fell on Hiroshima that afternoon or evening we left to fly to the Philippines. The second one didn't fall for, well, we were in the Philippines at the time, I think, and the second one fell on Nagasaki, wasn't it?

Q: Yes, sir. That was in August 1945. Taking advantage of the fact that we are now talking about the atomic bomb, what was the first that you knew of it—after it occurred, or when it was announced in the newspapers?

A: I knew nothing about it until—"Snake" Young, who was an Engineer with me, he knew what it was about. He's the only one, I think, who knew. The night we heard it, we were waiting at the airport to take off for the Philippines, and he remarked that they'd finally made it work and they'd

dropped it. Before that nobody knew it would work. They made that experiment down in the desert, but it hadn't been used at all.

Q: It hadn't been dropped from an airplane.

A: Of course, I knew Tom Farrell very well. He had a great deal to do with the development of that bomb. He was an Engineer, too.

Q: He worked with General Leslie Groves at the Manhattan project?

A: As I remember it, he was there and went with the first plane that dropped the first bomb; went along with the pilot over Japan, Farrell did.

Q: What were your impressions or did you recognize the significance at that time of just how much impact that might have on future strategy?

A: I knew nothing about it. I didn't know what it did have, except the reports that we got and the destruction. And of course after the second one dropped, then the surrender came. But while we were there, we were all getting ready for the invasion from what is it—Okinawa-on up into Japan. We would have lost more men in that attempt than the Japs lost in the bombing because that awful storm hit just at that time. The whole fleet, with all the transports, would have been at sea and would have been wrecked. We would have lost that, in addition to the losses we would have gotten on the landing itself.

Q: So you never had any second thoughts about the morality or the rightness of it?

A: No. Mine has been that it was always right. We had every right to do it, and it was most humane all the way around. It's true we killed a lot of innocent Japs—supposedly innocent women, children, all kinds-but we would have lost as many or more able-bodied Americans if we hadn't done it.

Q: Well, after you came back from the Philippines—

A: I was in command, I know, at Belvoir. I got the group together and went up to Alaska and was present and supervised the American part of the turning over of equipment and so on to the Canadians. We had the ceremony up north while we were up—where in the hell was that? We were up there north of Whitehorse, but the Canadians came and we turned our bulldozers and trucks and so on over to them, and they took them and drove off. That was when we turned over the road; and then we went from there on up to Alaska to make that survey that I spoke of when we were trying to get them, I think, coordinated out of all that mess it was in [with] these various bases and so on all working separately.

Q: This was at Fort Richardson and Elmendorf and all the—

A: No, this was out along the chain mostly.

Q: Oh, on the islands?

A: It was all out on the Aleutian chain. We went all the way up as far as Adak. But there were posts all along there. I've forgotten what the name of the place, where there's a base there still. I know we stopped at the various bases in turn and Adak I think it was—wasn't Adak the base up there on that chain? It's about halfway over.

Q: Let's see. This map doesn't go out—oh yes, it does. Attu Island.

A: Attu is the end of the chain. That's the last one. Now Adak, I think it's Adak, is back about midway down the chain.

Q: There's an Adak.

A: Beyond Dutch Harbor. Oh, we stopped at Dutch Harbor. The biggest establishment, I think, was at Adak and that was where all of them were together. Had three establishments of everything.

Q: That's the three services-Army, Navy, Air Force.

A: Yes. As I said, chapels, post exchanges, everything was separate.

Q: Were you able to get them back together on acceptable terms?

A: Yes, we got them back together. Well, we had nothing to do with, of course, that was all Navy back on the, what's that island just off of Alaska? It's a Navy base. I know where it is.

Q: Atkas or Cape Shaw—

A: No. Anyway, I think it's still a Naval base. I'm not sure of that; it may not be.

Q: Well, just off Seward there's St. Lawrence island.

A: No, that's up further north. That's up the north side of the chain.

Q: Yes, sir, it's way up north of the chain. You want Kodiak or—

A: Kodiak was the island.

Q: Well, then, after you went to the Philippines, you came back. You were actually assigned as Division Engineer to Boston, but it didn't appear that you ever made it.

A: I was up there about two weeks, I think, or a week [13 December 1945 -10 January 1946]. At that time Pat Timothy, who was in command at Belvoir, [was retiring], and I was given that; I took command at Belvoir. So I was only at Boston about two weeks, I think.

Q: Well, you hadn't moved your family up there yet then.

A: My wife was there, that was all. We hadn't gotten a house. We were living in a hotel over in Cambridge.

Q: Well, you're fortunate you didn't move too fast and buy.

A: I was very happy, too.

Q: Now, when you were at the Engineer School, you commanded that from January 1946 until June 1948. Is that the time that you expanded Belvoir and built the field houses?

A: I built that at the time that I built the field houses. That's the time it became the Engineer Center. Before that it was all separate. The school was separate and the troops were separate and the experimental station was separate, and I took the lead from, well, principally from the Infantry School which had the Infantry Center. I got approval from the Chief of Engineers to change the name of it, and we combined them all under my command.

Q: And it still exists that way now.

A: It's still the same thing. Well, I guess they've gotten rid of the Combat Developments now.

Q: Yes, sir, that's done. But it was still known as the Engineer Center in Fort Belvoir.

A: Well, it is; that's what it is. But that's the time it was changed because prior to that there were all these separate ones.

Q: Well, during that two-year period following World War II, did we go through a similar demobilization [as] that we have recently gone through following Vietnam? I know we demobilized rather rapidly after World War II.

A: We demobilized quite a bit, but, well, they closed, I think, the training center. No, I'm not sure whether the training center was still running in those days or not. I think it had already closed. All the post was there and that's where I had built the field houses, one on each side of the road; and I put a battalion of Engineers in charge of one side and another on the

other side. We had nothing down there at Belvoir. We didn't have even a basketball court. There was nothing you could get together under cover, and that's the time somebody came along and offered me the airplane hangars, four of them. So I grabbed them. I wasn't sure what we were going to do with them, but I decided and I had to use them. Bidgood [Clarence Bidgood, USMA 1935] was with me and several other good Engineer officers. We worked it out so that by putting one hangar on top of another and separating them with timbers we had between the two, then filling that space with some sort of a fiber—

Q: Insulation?

A: Insulation—that we were able to do. And then, of course, we had no floors there; it was all dirt. And that's when somebody offered me all the dunnage that was coming back on merchant ships and so on, which had been carrying supplies to Europe. There was a hell of a lot of dunnage and that was all hard wood. So I got the dunnage delivered up to the post. We had no money. Well, I did get some money, a little bit. It seemed to me that it was about that time that they broke up the wartime officers' club and the enlisted men's clubs, and they distributed the assets among the different posts. But you had to put in a project, and it had to be approved at the War Department. So I got some money from that. And one of my projects was to build these field houses. Another was to build that golf course, which we built at that time. Then we took this dunnage. One of my helpers found a man at a sawmill, and he was willing to saw up this dunnage into flooring for, I think I had to give him half of it. I gave him half of it, and I got the other half sawed up and made into floors. They were tongue and groove. It was all right. With that we got a floor. Oh, we had a hell of a time just getting things together and trying to make it work out of nothing. And we eventually did. I think the field house has been pretty good.

Q: Yes, sir, it's still in use.

A: I don't know whether the one across the road was ever used.

Q: Well, the one on the main post is used quite a bit.

A: I know it is. That's where they have the Engineer Dinner. Well, it was trouble getting any water in there and any toilets and so on and any heat, but we finally worked something out on that. Of course, it was just a shell to start with. But by everybody working together and doing something, we had some good workmen. We had to teach a lot of them. A lot of the men had never done any flooring, tongue and groove work. You had to teach them on the job and they learned how to do this.

Q: Well, we still do.

A: And they were all right; they were enthusiastic. Well, I look back on some of those things and I think they did some good. That was the time we built the golf course. We were running a school, heavy equipment school, and all they were doing was just moving one pile of dirt to another pile of dirt, back and forth, learning how to handle a shovel or bulldozer or whatnot. And I decided that we had that ground out there, and if it ever became necessary to use it for training, we could always turn it back. Their training area was just a training area at that time—just lying fallow. We had to do some scrounging around to get help, but first I had some golf enthusiast on the post who tried to design the golf course. Biff Jones, I don't know whether you know Biff Jones or not; he used to be Athletic Director at West Point and he was football coach.

Q: Yes, sir, I've heard of him.

A: He was a great friend of that professional golf man whose name is Jones [Robert Trent Jones]. Not the—

Q: Bobby Jones.

A: Not Bobby. Bobby was a golf player and there's another Jones though who was a professional—designed some of the best golf courses in the country—and Biff got him to come down there and look my place over, and he gave me free advice. He took the whole thing apart, the way we'd laid it out. He said it was no good and redesigned it; and I think he designed a good course. I don't know.

Q: Yes, it's an excellent course.

A: But at that time anybody who wanted to play golf at Belvoir had to go down to Quantico because that was the closest place. We had that little nine hole course, that flat course on the south side of the road. [The] post side of the road, but that one didn't amount to anything. But Jones designed the new course, and then I had trouble getting waterworks in there. Well, we built a club house on the hill and we got some water in and a sprinkler system around and I think it's a good course now.

Q: Yes, it's a very good course there. Did you have any deterioration of morale among the troops following the war? Evidently all the things you were doing there for troop welfare kept them busy and kept it up pretty well?

A: Trying to keep people busy—no, we had no particular trouble with that. I wouldn't say they were inspired with a great deal of enthusiasm over a military career, but they were finishing out and we kept them busy as best we could.

Q: Were most of the troops you had then those who were brought in and trained to enter World War II but did not enter?

A: They had been. Some of them still hadn't finished their training. We stayed on there; I don't know, maybe it was before I got there that they closed the camp; I'm not sure about that. I think they probably closed the training camp at that time, and they were just getting rid of the last of them, sending them out. Of course the Army was still active, and there was a demand for men in Germany and the Philippines and Japan and so on. There was a need for some. It wasn't as it had been during the war. So we got rid of those people. I don't know who we had on post. We had a couple of equipment companies, I guess, and we had a battalion, I know, and a battalion on the south side and a battalion on the north side, while the 91st was Negro, wasn't it? Usually those 90s were all Negro. I've forgotten the one Bidgood had. He had a white battalion. He was on the south side.

Q: The 91st was the battalion there when I was at West Point in 1954. The 91st always came up and supported the training.

A: Well, were they white or—?

Q: Been integrated by then. The Army was integrated in 1952.

A: Yes, I remember that. I remember the integration. That took place in Korea. That was a great integration because the blacks had failed with all-black units. We had tried some integration during the war by having companies and platoons of blacks in a white regiment. That had done a little bit, but it was when we were in Korea that we had trouble with the black units. And it was when, I guess, Van Fleet was in command at that time. I'm sure he was, when we broke up that Negro regiment. And I think it was the 24th Infantry. They took their name off the rolls. I'm sure it was, because they had been at Benning when I was down there before the war-service troops but you couldn't depend on them in combat.

Q: Well, before you went into Korea, I think you had your only assignment with a military mission. You were commanding general of the US troops in Trieste for a little over two years, June 1948 to March 1951.

A: That's right.

Q: What were your thoughts on that type duty?

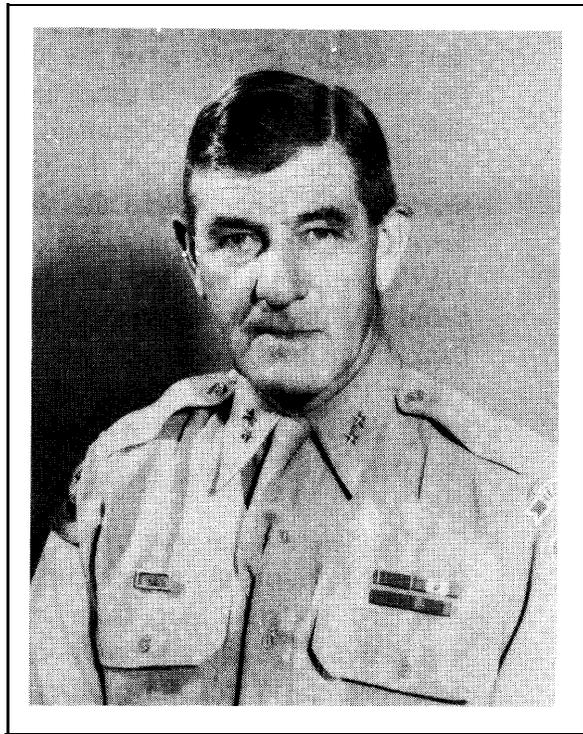
A: It was fine. I enjoyed it tremendously because we were half and half with the British. We had the same number of British troops, same as Americans, and the British commander was the civil chief; he commanded but he was really in command of the civil end of it. I had no civil duties, but the population of Trieste was very cosmopolitan and delightful; and there were all kinds of people—Austrians, there were some Italians, not so many Italians as there were Austrians and Greeks, Yugoslavians—they were very kind and hospitable and we had a very good time.

Q: Well, how many troops did you have?

A: We had five thousand each. Five thousand American and five thousand British, that was the limit.

Q: And what was the primary mission there—to support the civil government?

A: It was to hold the area; no, it was to return to Italy. See, we were the governors. It was then an independent territory. It didn't belong to Italy. Italy was trying to get it, and Yugoslavia was claiming it. There was conflict constantly between the Yugoslavs and the Italians; and they were fighting, and the Yugoslavs



Major General Hoge as commanding general of TRUST, 1949.

are just as mean as hell on the other side. Well, I know they would have those lines around there. I know a British soldier up there on sentry duty on the outpost who stepped across the line. I don't think he was as far as you are from me. He was seen by this Yugoslav sentry and killed right there. And they would not allow the British to get that body, wouldn't permit them to take it home. All the British commander wanted was to get it back for burial. He tried to get it back, and they wouldn't let them have the body. The body lay there with flies all over it. I don't know how they finally got it back, but they eventually did and buried the soldier; but it was just as mean as it could be.

I know they would threaten me all the time. We had these outposts along the line, and I don't know how many posts we had, but it was just four or five men at each of these posts watching the line because we were afraid of being invaded. And they sent word to me one day that they objected to the officer of the day's jeep shining his lights when he went up to check on the outposts, shining his lights into Yugoslavia; and if he

showed up anymore they were going to shoot the lights out. Well, I just sent a couple of tanks up on the hill and I said, "All right. Whenever YOU get ready to shoot, we'll shoot back." We had no trouble then, and they didn't shoot. We were hemmed in there, and our only way at that time of getting out was through the harbor of Trieste, which was then within machine-gun range where the ships docked and all that. Those docks were within machine-gun range of the Yugoslavs right across the line. I built a resort up there, too, but the idea was that if we had to evacuate we could take them up there and that would be ten or twelve, fifteen miles back from the border, and we could get them out on ships. But you couldn't have if they wanted to stop us in Trieste. You couldn't even bring the Navy in there without bombarding Yugoslavia and destroying that part of the town.

Oh, they were mean sons of bitches. I remember one of the celebrations. It was the 4th of July parade and they had—I guess it was the man before who had gotten a flag from every state in the Union; it was quite impressive. We had all the 48—at that time there were 48—states and the color bearers in this 4th of July parade came down the street with this mass of colors. Yugoslavia said those were captive nations of the United States, in bondage; that it was these flags that we were showing. Anyway, they'd chisel the Italians just as bad. There were Jugs who lived over in Trieste and some of them were buried in the cemetery, and they had Yugoslav names on the tombstones. You know those bastards made them chisel off the names of Jug language.

Q: I was going to say, were those Serbs who were buried there?

A: Those were Serbs, but they were in Italy in the Italian population.

Q: Oh, I see, and the Italians made them chisel the names off.

A: They were fighting all the time to get control of that city, and there was constantly some row going on between the Yugoslavs and the Italians or ourselves. Of course, we were the governing people. We were under—was it the United Nations or I don't know. We came under the British and American Joint Chiefs of Staff, I guess. We had taken it over right after the war, moved in there at the end of the war, and took that territory which had been Austrian, I guess, during the war or at the

beginning of the war. The Germans had captured it or the Yugoslavs had and they wanted to keep it. Of course, the harbor at Trieste is an excellent harbor and a very valuable one, but there was a constant fight, rowing and carrying on.

Q: You were more or less a peace-keeping force?

A: We were peace-keeping, that was all. Our five thousand men were made up of a regiment of infantry. What was that regiment? 351st, I think that was it. We had a company of tanks, and we had motor transports and I don't know what all. We had a conglomeration to make up our five thousand. The British had separate, what they called, regiments; they were really battalions, but they would change them every so often. I remember the Royal Scots were there once, and the South Lanes were there at one time. I've forgotten the rest of them. They were nice people; we got along with the British beautifully.

Q: Well now, when you came out in March 1951, was that the end of the occupation of Trieste?

A: No, it went on. I was ordered to Korea; they kept it up for some years after that. I've forgotten when it was finally turned over to Italy, but that was a number of years later. That was when I was ordered to Korea.