

**Interviewee:** Alford, Barney  
**Interviewer:** David Gregory  
**Date of interview:** July 23, 2005  
**Category:** World War II  
**Status:** Open  
**Tape location:** Box #51

**Gregory:** Mr. Alford, let's start with where you grew up and where you were when the war started, just a little background, please.

**Alford:** Well, I grew up in Pensacola, Florida. I have about four to five generations behind me there. And at the time the war broke out, I was at the University of Florida and was in about the second year, first year there, and I was in the Phi Kappa Alpha fraternity. I remember very distinctly, the day the war broke out we were laying around in the fraternity house on the floor reading the funny papers in the newspapers. When they interrupted the TV [sic], said they had a startling announcement to make and told us about what had gone on. Next few days after that, why, I went home to try to see if I couldn't join the services, because I had a bunch of friends that weren't able to go off to college and I knew they were in the Coast Artillery - National Guard there - and I knew they would be going, so of course I wanted to go, too. But my folks intercepted me after I got there and talked me into staying in school for another—finish out that year and maybe get half of next year in before I left. Which I did.

Then when I did finally decide to leave, why, I wanted to be in the Marine Corps, and the deal then was that everybody wanted to get into the Air Force, so they had quotas in different services. If you went down to your draft board and filled out certain papers, they would see if they could get you into the branch of service that you wanted to, I guess as long as it wasn't in the Air Force. So of course I wanted to get into the Marine Corps, so I thought I was pretty safe bet. I'll interject this—while I was at the university, I was taking ROTC and it happened to be in the field artillery. That's all they had then at that particular time. So I of course just had a little course in that and we went out in the drill field and practiced, et cetera. After I filled out the papers to join the Marine Corps, just in maybe a week later the draft board did call me up. They send your papers down to your induction center at Camp Blanding where it was the center for Florida. So we trucked off to Camp Blanding, and when I got there—no papers. They had lost them. I was quite upset and I asked them to go search for them. They couldn't find them. Having taken some artillery in school, they said, "Well, you'd make good artilleryman." They said, "We're forming a new division up at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and we'll send you up there. Then they'll put you in the field artillery." So I didn't have any choice but to go along with them. So there I went.

**Gregory:** So much for the Marines, huh?

**Alford:** So much for the Marines. Probably turned out to be a blessing, because I understand the people that got into the Marine Corps about the time I did were just in time to get on that bloody Tarawa Island where so many lost their lives. So there I was in Fort Jackson,

South Carolina, in the 106th Division. Where do you want to go from here?

**Gregory:** Let's back up real quickly. When you were at the University of Florida in the ROTC, I heard stories the horses were pulling the caissons - is that correct?

**Alford:** That's exactly right. The horses knew more than the men that [chuckles] were riding them or driving them, whatever, going along with them. Because all they had to do - the officers - would give commands - or the non-coms or whatever they were - give commands and those horses just knew what to do. You're quite right.

**Gregory:** So you're in Fort Jackson, is it? What was that like?

**Alford:** Well, when we got there, they were forming the division. They just had - the skeleton crew there was from some cadre from, I understand, out in—one of those old units out in the Midwest - wasn't Bragg, but Oklahoma, someplace out there. They were there, but when I got there I was just one of a handful that was there. And we had to simply wait for several weeks before they filled our unit with draftees. And this division that they were forming was supposed to be one of the first ones made up entirely of young draftees in the 18 to 20-something year bracket. I was one of the first ones there, and we just went through the routine of drilling and so forth until as soon as they got full compliance of men. Then we started training and doing what we were supposed to do. But until that time, why, it was several weeks before we got enough to be operational. But after we did, why, we got right down to training right away.

**Gregory:** Now you had been in training, of course, in ROTC. Did that serve you in good stead at all? Did it move you up the—?

**Alford:** Oh, yeah, it gave me a little bit of experience, but of course nothing like what the Army was wanting you to do. We went on actually practice fire missions. And we'd go out in— Fort Bragg is where those non-coms were from that formed the cadre of the unit. They said, "They make the rules and set the standards and you're going to break them." So they would work our tails off to do these fire missions PDQ - real quick. You'd go out, you'd drop trails and get in firing position right away, and then after you'd fire a mission they'd jerk you up and you'd get in your trucks and— General Motors had these great big old what they call :prime movers," you know, just to haul the guns. Go down the road for a little while and fire mission again. We did it time and time again, you know.

**Gregory:** How big is the gun crew?

**Alford:** Seven men.

**Gregory:** What was your responsibility?

**Alford:** Well, of course I went in as a private and I quickly was able to work myself up to

be a gunner corporal. I was the one that did the sight thing, and if you did that, you got to be a corporal. That's what I was for quite a while. Later on I became a sergeant that was in charge of the crew. It was a seven man crew, and you had your gunner corporal, number one man. The rest of the crew was to service the gun and ammunition and so forth.

**Gregory:** What's your biggest problem on a gun crew like that?

**Alford:** Well, biggest problem, I guess, is waiting for fire mission to send you down the information that you want to start shooting your gun. I guess the problem would be to line up your sight right properly and get it set straight so you could shoot where you were supposed to shoot. But that was about it.

**Gregory:** Which is what you were doing as a corporal?

**Alford:** Right.

**Gregory:** Does that relate at all to your hearing?

**Alford:** No.

**Gregory:** Not from the gun?

**Alford:** I can't say that that's true. Not at all.

**Gregory:** How long were you in Fort Jackson?

**Alford:** Well, we stayed there all through the summer and then toward the end of the summer we went on maneuvers in Tennessee with the division. The whole division went, and of course, the division was fighting another enemy division. We went all the way through the maneuvers in Camp—well, it wasn't in a camp, it was just in the woods. After we finished and completed the maneuvers there, it was terrible – rainy, drizzly, cold. [chuckles]. But it was—everything had to be done according to how well you had to dig these howitzers in. We were taught to dig them in, dig them in so that they're protected, and you kind of were shooting out of a pit. So after the Tennessee maneuvers, we were shipped off to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. When we finally got there and got established, they pretty well stripped our unit of a lot of personnel to take as replacements for those people that they knew they were going to lose on the invasion, which was already taking place about that time.

**Gregory:** This would be mid-1944, D-Day?

**Alford:** Right, yeah. It was coming up. We weren't quite there yet, but they were anticipating. So when they did that, then they sent us in a number of replacements to come in. By that time, I had become a sergeant in charge of the gun crew. The sergeant that I worked

under had gotten himself into some trouble, so I was promoted to Section Chief, they call it. They sent the personnel in, and of course a lot of those were the cadets and so forth that didn't quite make the grade for getting in the Air Force, so that was our replacements, a lot of our replacements. And then at that time they were drafting some older men too. I had two pretty—I say older men, because I was at that time about twenty-two, twenty-one, twenty-two, and they were older than I was, the two of those men. The replacements, of course, were young fellows about my age and so forth. But then we trained like crazy then. Again all of them went through all of this procedure again. Fire missions, making fire missions and speed, how fast you can do it and how well you can do it. Wasn't too long, seemed to me it passed very quickly before—I guess we got there in the spring, spring of the year, and then they stripped the unit and put more people in it and then we started training all again, all through the summer, hot months. In the fall, why, they decided to send up to port of embarkation where we gonna be shipped over, at Miles Standish, Camp Miles Standish, and we stayed there and had to wait for our equipment to get us in and everything. Then we went over on—can't say the name of the boat, ship right now—*Wakefield*.

**Gregory:** *Wakefield*, troop transport? Did they let you go home before they shipped you?

**Alford:** Oh, no, not then. Things were getting, I'd say, too hot and heavy. By then, I guess, they had already had D-day while we were there at Atterbury, I guess it is.

**Gregory:** Did you guys talk about D-day at all? Did you know it was coming? Did you talk about it afterwards?

**Alford:** They kept you so busy doing all of these exercises that you really didn't think much about it. I mean, except that you were so pleased to know that they made it. Of course they don't talk about how many people they lost and so forth.

**Gregory:** Who was your pal during your basic? Did you have somebody that you palled around with?

**Alford:** Oh, yeah! As a matter of fact, there were three of us went over there to Europe and toured the battleground where we fought over there just this past – last year. Went over in May for about three weeks. And they were there and we had good fellowship together and went right to some of the places where we were and where we fought the battles. These Belgium folk there just took us in with open arms, wouldn't let us buy a thing. They fed us. Put us up at this crossroads, Parker's Crossroads, where we had this battle. I don't think it was anything— there may have been a country store there, I don't know, but they had transferred that into a very plush, nice little country inn that was a hotel and a bar and an eatery where we had gourmet food and everything when they wined-and-dined us as the returning personnel. This was the first time I had ever been back over there, because I felt it was a little bit emotional for me to go back there earlier, but my friends went over there several times. I'll get you a picture of my friends and show it to you.

**Gregory:** Tell us what we're looking at here now.

**Alford:** That is at one of those celebrations. I think that it is in the inn where they've been giving us a supper to honor us. He was in our battery for part time, and this young fellow here, he was a gunner corporal in one of the gun sections. That's, of course, that's yours truly. Now this young man here, he didn't get to go to war, he was too young, but he has gone to Europe. He's a buff, a World War II buff. He's been over there about fifteen to twenty times, and he kind of set this whole thing up for us by computer and everything. We had a schedule and everything we went by. It just worked like a charm. But this fellow here, he just, last year – no, year before last – he was the president of the 106 Infantry Division Association, because we have a reunion once a year. And this John R. Shaefer [??], and this fellow here is Gaytons [??], John Gaytons, and this is Ford – he's the coordinator for our outfit.

**Gregory:** Nice looking group. Well, now, when you were in basic training, were you at— was it Fort Jackson or Camp Jackson?

**Alford:** Fort Jackson.

**Gregory:** When you were at Fort Jackson, did you have anybody that you palled around with?

**Alford:** Yeah, I palled around with Gaytons [??] and I think Shafner [??] was also there. He was with the unit back and forth a couple of times. He was somewhat of an individualist. He got transferred to one battery and then he came back. I don't know exactly the time, but I went—palled around with him and Gaytons. There were a couple of other fellows that I can't recall their names right now. But there was one fellow that I—he was really an officer and he shouldn't been fraternizing with the men as much as he did. But he was a real young fellow and very, very smart. And he would pick up a crew to go with him and do things with; he just wanted company. He didn't \_\_\_\_\_ [??] with the old cadre of old officers, the non-coms, and he was too young with the other officers because he was a real young fellow. He was even our age or younger. I think he was younger than we were, really. He wanted company, and he was a good friend. He's Graham Cassidy [??]; I never will forget his name. One time in Fort Jackson, he was going home and he told me he lived in Mississippi. And he said, "Come on." He says, "Why don't you go home. I'll drop you off at your house." So he took me home and he stopped off and stayed with me and we had him as a guest at my house, home in Pensacola. I took him duck hunting one morning. I love to duck hunt. It was a miserable, cold day. And we shot some ducks. But he loved to take a drink, and out there he says, "Oh, I'm about to die." He said, "I'd sell my soul for a good shot of whiskey." [laughter] But he was a character, he was really a character. Fine fellow, fine young man.

**Gregory:** What kind of things would you guys do when you were off base? You got some free time to meet women or drink?

**Alford:** Yeah. We went to some USOs and went in town and went to some of the clubs and parties. You know how they treated the servicemen in those days, and you were always welcome to come in no matter who it was. Sometimes we had some parties at churches and sometimes at just at the local civic center or whatever you want to call it, dances. That's what we did.

**Gregory:** Did they invite you home to dinner ever?

**Alford:** Oh, yeah. Always. We'd always bank on getting a home-cooked meal.

**Gregory:** So they took you to Miles Standish and put you on a ship? What was the trip over like?

**Alford:** Rough. Very, very rough.

**Gregory:** In a convoy or by yourself?

**Alford:** Oh, yeah, definitely in convoy. It was a rough crossing. You know, you stood up at kind of a metal trough when you were eating. It was bad. It was so bad that people would get sick and urp in there. It was a mess. Fortunately, at that time I did not get seasick; it didn't bother me, so I survived. But I had one guy in my gun section, as soon as he walked on that ship, he was seasick and didn't get well until he walked off on the solid ground over in—when we got to England. It was bad. It was rough.

**Gregory:** So this was like November of '44 or something like that?

**Alford:** Yeah. That's right.

**Gregory:** Went to England, and then what did they have you doing?

**Alford:** Well, it was either the end of October or the first part of November, I imagine, in that bracket, and we landed in Liverpool and then we went to the lower end of England around Southport, or whatever they call it, and waited for our equipment to assemble, which took maybe almost a month, several weeks. But we didn't have any shore or leave time then to go in and visit around, as I recall. After we got all of our equipment and they had us what they called "battle ready"—when you got your gun, you got your ammunition and everything—and then they loaded the battalion on these LSTs or whatever. It took two of them to accommodate our battalion. And when they did, we went across the English Channel to France and unloaded at Rouen, France, up the Seine River. From there we just got in a convoy and started going right straight up to the front lines where we replaced the 2nd Division that was already in position. We were to replace them—we dropped our gun tracks right into their—where their wheels were, we dropped ours into there, and got ready to fight the war. We stayed there—we got there on I guess the 9th, 10th, of December, and then the Battle of the Bulge started on the 16th.

**Gregory:** Now what's it feel like, Mr. Alford – you've not been in combat before, you're loaded up, you're going in there and you're putting your gun in position – what are you thinking?

**Alford:** We're just wondering what it's all about. For me, I had not seen any snow, and I remember going up to the front line – this stuff started hitting the windshield. I said, "Look's like we're getting some rain." The driver said, "No, that's snow." Then I remembered seeing snow. And then when it falls on those coniferous trees over there, it's absolutely beautiful. But you might remember, that winter over there that year was historically the worst that they've ever had. It was brutally cold. But anyway, when we got to the front lines, we zeroed in, you know, to get a target, I mean, fired a gun or two. My gun was – most of the time, because I was in the second position, right in the middle of the battery— not the middle, but – there's only four guns to the battery. But anyway, we got zeroed in and then we'd just fire what they called a "harassing" fire over the crossroad just every now and then. Maybe we had received an incoming round, maybe a couple two or three times, not even anything real close, nothing to alarm us, but we knew it was enemy fire. It was hard for you to understand it. Just like you say, we'd never experienced any kind of battle or fight or anything or knew what it was all about, but we got oriented pretty quickly.

**Gregory:** I'll bet. What's your quarters—you know, were you sleeping on the ground?

**Alford:** When we got there the 2nd Infantry Division was an old, seasoned division and they had actually built some dug-out quarters and had them really very well prepared. We were sleeping on hay and these bunk-type things in this little cubby-hole maybe as big as the end of this thing for just a few men to put a gun—each gun section had one. It was kind of dug in and protected with logs on top and everything.

**Gregory:** Logs and mud and—

**Alford:** Yeah, that's right. That's where we were when we—

**Gregory:** Did you have a fire in there somehow?

**Alford:** Yes, they had a—I don't know—had a Jerry-can stove in there. Somebody was very innovative and made a stove out of the thing that they put some wood in, that got a little bit heat in there. So it was real good duty right there for a few days. [chuckle]

**Gregory:** Almost bearable, huh?

**Alford:** Yeah. And then, of course, back at that battery they set up the mess hall. The mess hall was the mess hall that was left behind by the 2nd Division, too.

**Gregory:** So take us forward then. You're moved in and you've got your battery place.

**Alford:** Right. And there wasn't anything much going on except that the Germans let us know that we were there, welcomed us by dropping us some leaflets or something that told us "welcome to the front."

**Gregory:** Did they call you by name, 106th?

**Alford:** Yeah. They knew exactly who we were and what we were doing there, so it wasn't anything new to them. Everything just kind of rocked along easy until the morning of the 16th, when a great big barrage of artillery and everything started hammering us. Of course, we were hammering right back at them. We fought all of that day, and it was—of course, the communications got all messed up from headquarters to us, and you know, the Germans had gone in to purposely destroy that, so it made it easier to have a confused bunch of people that were inexperienced. We fought all that day, and they finally, toward the end of the day, they said, "We're gonna have to get out of here because they made a breakthrough and they don't know where we stand. But we're gonna have to go to another position. We'll have to fall back and get re-entrenched." So we did that under cover of darkness. The driver that I had was stricken with pneumonia or a cold or something and I had a substitute driver that was driving for me that night. As we were pulling out and in line to move along very, very slowly, he rammed the gun muzzle of the gun that was in front of me and caused my radiator to leak. So that meant that I had to kind of pull out of line from time to time and kind of rest and let it cool down before I could go forward, because there wasn't any fixing it that night, and they wanted to keep us all together if they could and go in as a unit. So just before we got to this second gun position where we were to set up again—three of our guns got in there because they hadn't rammed a gun, the muzzle of the gun. The lieutenant came by and told me, he said, "You set up along side of the road here as sort of an anti-tank weapon for us and protect us, and when the Germans come, you blast off a round or two at them and keep them at bay. And if we have to pull out, we'll pull out." Well, it was apparent that they were going to have to pull out before long because the situation with that blitzkrieg type of warfare that the Germans had shot past and were doing their thing. So there I was out there alongside of the road. He finally—the lieutenant came back down there. He said, "We're gonna have to move." He said, "Get down the road." He said, "Get on the other side of Schönberg," where this little town of Schönberg was. And fortunately it was kind of on a downhill slope. I pulled up and got my gun together and he said, "because the Germans are right there." You could hear them and the tanks were coming and all. So we got out of there as quickly as we could and went down the road and got just on the other side of Schönberg, on the other side of the little river there – I don't remember the name of the river. But my truck just completely died. It was just frozen up completely because we were gunning it to get out. We were alongside of the road there, just waiting. An officer, one of the officers in the outfit came along and saw our predicament. And he flagged down what they call a "wire truck" that laid wire for communications. It had a type of hitch. It was a much smaller truck than these prime movers. He said, "We're gonna use your gun, put your gun on that wire truck," and he said, "we'll see what we can do later on." But in the meantime they had gotten some radio communications in there and they said, "Well, we'll just take your gun and use you to go at the back of the trail and set up as an anti-tank protector and blast off a round or two to the Germans and then haul boogie down to the next curve of the road,

and keep moving that way.” Well, you can imagine how we kind of felt about that, because we were going toward the Germans and everybody else was going down the road that way, getting out of the way of them. They said, “Hey, Mac, you’re going the wrong way.” I wish I wasn’t. [laughter] So we went the other way. That went pretty good until the Germans got tired of our popping off a round at them. They’d stop and put infantry out on the sides and would flush you out that way to get you to move out. Take your cannon with you, you know. So we did that for, seemed like it was two days, anyway. Weather was absolutely horrendous. We didn’t have any air power to support us because of the fog and miserable weather at that particular time, if you might remember back or reading about it. But anyway, we stopped at night. There was just mass confusion about where we were, what we were going to do, and so forth. Finally on the—when we finally got to this crossroad we had this—Major Parker was with us—we stopped at the crossroad. I don’t know why. Well, I do know – they had gotten some communication, radio communication, and they told us that you’re at a crossroad that is vital. He said, “You set up and hold that crossroad just as long as you can, because this road is going to lead—it leads down to Liege, Belgium, and that’s one of the major supply depots for the northern section of the Allied lines. And that’s where a lot of gasoline is.” And of course, the Germans were woefully short of gasoline and they needed it. So that’s the reason we were there, and they told us to set up a defense. We had three guns then. I had my gun and this Gaytons [??] boy and then another one of the gunner sergeants had a gun there. And we set up with our guns pointing down these roads, dug them in, and then set up a perimeter defense with our cannons that we could spare, that we didn’t need to operate the gun with in, you know, in just pits out there, gun pits. We stayed there until about the 23rd or 24th, I think, of December, until the Germans finally just busted through.

When it finally came to that point, one of the officers came by and said, “It’s apparent we’re going to get overrun.” He said, “We don’t have enough personnel to hold them off.” He said, “You’re on your own.” He said, “You get your men to do whatever you want them to do, just stay with you and you’ll be captured or either you can try to get out if you want to.” Well, I told my men that I was gonna try to get out and they could come with me or they could stay. And most of them stayed and were captured. I did get out, get through. I knew basically where some higher ground was, and I knew that the 82nd Air Force, Airborne Infantry, was up there. So I made my way over there to them by hook or crook, slipping through the enemy lines, because they had us surrounded and finally encircled the whole thing. And what we were doing is holding that crossroad because the tanks, the heavy tanks in that division—it was a panzer division—couldn’t navigate and move around in the fields with all that snow. It made it slushy and mushy. They had to stay on the highway. So we did our job, and actually we held it long enough that Patton, General Patton, they knew he was coming up to establish a defensive position there to hold them, which he was doing.

**Gregory:** So you abandoned your gun?

**Alford:** Yeah.

**Gregory:** Given license to do that by an officer?

**Alford:** Yeah.

**Gregory:** Now how did you happen to know that that other group, you said the Airborne—

**Alford:** Yeah, 82nd Airborne was up on the high ground because—I don't know how we knew it, but we basically knew that we had to go that way instead of going this way to the teeth of the enemy, and we were hoping they would be there.

**Gregory:** Was someone with you when you did that?

**Alford:** I finally caught up with two or three other stragglers.

**Gregory:** Anybody that you knew or just stragglers?

**Alford:** No, I didn't know these people because at the crossroad— it was, I guess a major crossroad, and the officer – called Parker's Crossroad – any personnel that came by that had any kind of firepower, he confiscated. I say "confiscated" them, and integrated them into our defense because they called it an "Alamo Defense." We had what they called an anti-aircraft gun; it was four 50-calibers mounted and they converged to fire like that. We had, I think, two of those units like that and then we had a light tank unit. Finally – they knew we were so desperate, I think they dropped an Airborne—was it a company—I guess a company of soldiers to come in there and set up a perimeter defense. I'll show you this area map of where we were.

**Gregory:** Now what's that you got there? What's that for?

**Alford:** This book? It was—I'd be glad to let you use this book if you want. Take it with you if you'll send it back to me.

**Gregory:** I'm not sure I want to take it from you.

**Alford:** Okay. And this is Parker's Crossroad here. Just about that—

**Gregory:** Named for Major Parker?

**Alford:** Yeah. And this is on-the-job-training about the whole division of where we started and get over there and it's told by individuals. Let you scan it over, whatever you want to do. I'm not trying to get you to take it if you don't want to. But anyway, after I got up there with 82nd Airborne, of course, they let—trying to keep my group, my gun section operational, we tried to switch off and sleep when we could. I just was so sleep deprived [sic], I was practically like a zombie almost. When we finally got to the 82nd—and also starving. We didn't have a field kitchen with us and we were only eating some—a little like these—looked like a Cracker Jack box and have just a few things in there you could eat. I'd used that up early on, and the only thing I had was what they called D-bars. It was a hard chocolate-like bar that

you could chew on, give you some nutrition. But then when we got finally to this 82nd Airborne, they recognized us for who we were, and they came in and they said, “Did we want something to eat?” So, boy, did we ever eat. They fed us, and then they had a barn that they were using sort of as their headquarters, and they told us to go up there and sleep because they saw we couldn’t do anything that was functional much. Then the next day they annexed me into their little artillery unit. They packed .75s, light-weight .75s, and I was with them for several weeks. Then, I guess, later on in the war as things got stabilized and we had started pinching off the bulge, I was called, given orders to report to Stavelot and given a ride there. I forget the intricacies of this. But anyway, I received a battlefield commission and was awarded the Silver Star. I guess some of that rear-guard action they tried to maintain that.

**Gregory:** Yes, sir. That’s important. What’s it like when you leave your gun and you have to get through enemy lines? I mean, you got to be—you’re surrounded at that point, right?

**Alford:** Yeah, right. I’m not real sure, things were happening so fast and furious then—

End side A

**Alford:** —or whatever you want to call it. If you pull it or squeeze the hand on the thing, it burns and kind of melts, and you’re supposed to disable your gun. I think we disabled our gun before we left it, our howitzer, put it in the gun chamber so they couldn’t use it and left it with it.

**Gregory:** So how many days between when you had to leave your gun and you got to 82nd? How long did that take you?

**Alford:** It was—that attack happened in the morning, and in the late afternoon by the time it was getting, probably getting toward dark before I got where I was supposed to go.

**Gregory:** And you say you received a battlefield promotion as well as a Silver Star?

**Alford:** Yeah.

**Gregory:** So now what rank are you?

**Alford:** Second lieutenant.

**Gregory:** Second lieutenant, very good. Did they give you a new duty then?

**Alford:** Oh, yeah. I was assigned then to—they used me in the 12th Corps as a forward observer for a while, until we practically had the war won. Then after that, the war was going so well then, they had decided that they were going to reorganize the 106th Division, and they sent us to France to a section called the “Lower End’s Pocket.” It was a group of German submariners had captured this town and were in it, and they had surrounded them and were just keeping them in there. And we were sent down there close to do this reorganization, but at the

same time to keep the lid on those Germans. But when the war was over, they didn't surrender; the Germans there didn't surrender right away because they didn't have any communications that knew that it was really authentic. So it was a couple of days before they actually did their surrendering. Then we went on with the training. Of course, we were getting ready to go in for the invasion of Japan, is what they said we were doing, because we were training all over again. Organizing, getting our new guns and everything. Actually, part of them men in that unit had already gotten aboard ship when they dropped the first bomb and everything shut down. Those that got on the ship were fortunate enough to be sent home, but those of us that didn't get on the ship, they reassigned us to different units and we were an army of occupation for about another year, year-and-a-half.

**Gregory:** So what did they have you doing as an occupation army?

**Alford:** Well, I was with the Seventh Army Headquarters and I was in the MP department. I was in charge of, I guess they call it "G-1," securing personnel for the units that needed personnel. I did that.

**Gregory:** Where were you stationed?

**Alford:** Heidelberg, Germany. That was one of the safe cities and the Allies didn't bomb it or destroy it; they went around it under some sort of an agreement with the Germans because it was sort of a very historical place. It had this old, old, old university there. What is it, Wittenberg University? It was there. It was \_\_\_\_\_[??].

**Gregory:** Were you allowed to keep your commission?

**Alford:** Oh yeah, oh yes. Yes, I made 1st lieutenant before I left there. Had been promoted to 1st lieutenant there at the MP Section.

**Gregory:** So when did you go home then?

**Alford:** I guess it was in May of '45 or '46, I forget.

**Gregory:** Must have been '46.

**Alford:** '46, yeah, '46, right. Might have been later than that. It was later than that. I forget when it was. Yeah, it was '46.

**Gregory:** Were you writing home?

**Alford:** We came back over on another troop transport and had another rough, rough crossing. It was really rough. But again, I didn't get seasick.

**Gregory:** Now when you were overseas, were you corresponding with anyone? Your folks or girlfriend or anything?

**Alford:** No, I wasn't. Didn't have time to do that.

**Gregory:** You were too busy?

**Alford:** Too busy.

**Gregory:** You were in the think of it, for not being in the war and at the front that long.

**Alford:** I tried to write my mother a postcard or two and let her know, because the headlines in the paper was the 106th Division was wiped out, annihilated. And of course, she knew I was in the 106th Division. So I did, I tried to write her and get a postcard in the mail right away and let her know that I'd survived. [chuckles]

**Gregory:** Now the 106th is credited with salvaging the Battle of the Bulge. You guys got a lot of credit for that. Tell me what it's like, you're trained on the gun crew for the artillery, for the long range, what's involved if you're going to set up and fire at tanks like that?

**Alford:** Well, first of all, I mean, you've got another kind of ammunition, armor-piercing shells that they use. And you use that and you put full charge in that. And then, of course, the gunner tracks – puts the sight on that and it's direct fire. He sights that while you traverse it back and forth, and when he's on your target then you tell your number one man to fire and pulls the lanyard.

**Gregory:** And at that point, the panzer's coming right at you, huh?

**Alford:** Right. Yeah.

**Gregory:** And you didn't have much of the infantry support then, is that correct?

**Alford:** No, we didn't have too much infantry support. No.

**Gregory:** Now the Silver Star was for your action in that withdrawal. Was there a citation that came with that to describe—

**Alford:** Yes, and my son has it. I don't have it. He has the Silver Star and my citation that came with it.

**Gregory:** Well, what's it like coming home? You've been over there, you've been through some tough stuff. What's it feel like coming home?

**Alford:** Just glad to be in, glad to be in America where people speak the same [chuckles] language.

**Gregory:** Did you come through New York?

**Alford:** Yes, we did. Came through New York, and a lot of people opted to stay in the services and later, but I didn't. I said, "I've done my duty; I was glad to go and did what I did, but I wanted out without any strings attached." But I came back. Went back and rested for, oh, a few months, and then at the break of the school year, I went right back into the University of Florida and finished up my education. Got a degree in horticulture there. That was it and went into the nursery and greenhouse business with an uncle of mine that was for eighteen years in that business. He died about the second year we were together, suddenly, so I had made arrangements to borrow the money and buy his part out. Then after that, this was eighteen years doing that, built a couple of greenhouses and—. But it was tough going. So I was going to the University of Florida to get a brush-up, a refresher course, in what would help me be a better nurseryman and greenhouse operator. When I was down there, my wife told me, she said, "Why don't you just ask them what kind of openings would be available to a person like yourself with your experience that you have?" So I did, and to make a very, very long story short, I ended up as the horticulturalist over here at Bok Tower.

**Gregory:** Oh, great! Great, that's a lovely place.

**Alford:** Yes, it is. I'm real glad I went there, and I'm glad I had an opportunity to work over there.

[personal conversation not transcribed]

**Gregory:** Did you use the GI Bill for your education?

**Alford:** Yes.

**Gregory:** That was a great opportunity, wasn't it?

**Alford:** Yes, it was. It certainly was.

[personal conversation not transcribed]

**Gregory:** Let's go back to December of '44 real quickly. You just got your guns in place and then the Battle of the Bulge and you guys are moving pretty intense, pretty fast—what's it like? I mean, you don't get time to stop and eat, you probably don't get time to wash your face, what's going on?

**Alford:** You mean after the breakthrough, you mean after that?

**Gregory:** Yeah.

**Alford:** Well, you're just extremely busy. At that time you're a non-commissioned officer and you do what the officers tell you to do. And that was about it. At that time there was an awful lot of confusion in communicating, in communications between units and between – even within units, because they didn't have enough direct communication to kind of get you coordinated. You're kind of hanging out at the loose ends all the way around.

**Gregory:** Did you get to sleep at all?

**Alford:** Not very much. Not very much. I'd try to catch a few winks and put my gunner corporal in charge of my gun section. But you wanted to be alert and awake and know what was going on \_\_\_\_\_[??]

**Gregory:** Yes, sir. Of course, of course. Any final thoughts?

**Alford:** No, I guess not. I mean I hope I've answered the questions that you have and oriented you to what you want to hear.

**Gregory:** I want to hear about you, that's what I want to hear. Some of the guys carried good luck charms. Did you have any good luck charms or knew anybody that did, a rabbit's foot or anything?

**Alford:** No. I've been a Christian ever since I can remember almost, and I always felt like the Lord was with me. And I certainly think he had a Guardian Angel sitting on my shoulder the whole time during this battle at Parker's Crossroad. Because, I'll just tell you one little funny thing – the Germans had closed in on us and they had us zeroed in with mortars and you know how mortars go “boop, plump” and then they lobbed around. But to shoot that projectile out of there, they kind of make a popping sound. “Pop, pop, pop.” So you know that they're going off. Well, one morning—the weather was so horrendous, it was just foggy and snowy and come in kind of snow squalls and fog, and then all of a sudden up in a certain breeze would make that fog raise up and then you could see for a good little distance. So one morning I had to relieve myself and went right back of the gun, and it is out in the open, but I wasn't too concerned because it was foggy and messy wet weather, so I was back there trying to take care of business. All of a sudden the breeze came and the fog lifted and I heard the mortars going off. [Imitates mortar noises] I knew what it meant, because they had us real well zeroed in, so I just grabbed my britches and pulled them up and snatched them on and dove in the gun thing. And right where I was, “Pow! Pow! Pow!” So I got through with that.

**Gregory:** They had your range, didn't they?

**Alford:** They had us. The reason we were so well protected, we were under some of these very, very dense coniferous evergreens and the mortars couldn't fall through them. They'd hit

the branches and go off before they would come through to the gun position. But boy, they sure shot the tops off of those trees, I'll tell you that.

**Gregory:** How do you think your life is different, having been in World War II?

**Alford:** Well, I don't know how to put this. I'm just real glad I was able to take part in that battle. I think that it meant a lot to me because it was at a time when everybody was pulling together and wanting to do something to help the country. And it kind of frightens me a little bit – I don't know if we have that kind of feeling today or not. But just like Tom Brokaw's book says, *The Greatest Generation*, or whatever, I was proud to be part of it. I don't know if—you live your life by the cards your dealt with and that's just it. You try to do the best you can with it. Try to live a decent, clean, bright life and try not to—as I say I've always been a—I'm not a real, I'd say, “religious type” person that's always preaching and proclaiming it, but I always like to make a good witness if I can to somebody that's not a believer. I think believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior is a sure ticket to Heaven. And I'm looking forward to it. I'm really looking forward to that. Just live the best we can and be the kind of person that you want other people to look up to and like and be friendly with because what you givet is what you get. Life's been good to me and blessed me with an abundance of good health. Can't say that I don't have an ache or two here or there and about, but overall, I mean, I'm able to go and got full movement of all my limbs and everything and I look forward to a few more years around.  
[chuckles]

End