

WILLIAM J. KUNZ

Army Veteran – 3rd Infantry Division

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WILLIAM J. KUNZ

Hello. Today is April 11th 1994. My name is Phyllis Gordon. I'm a volunteer at Midway Village & Museum Center which is cooperating with the statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in the momentous events surrounding World War II. We are in the Midway Village and Museum Center and we are interviewing Mr. William Kunz who served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in that war.

GORDON: William, would you please start by introducing yourself to us and give us your full name, where you were born and the date of your birth?

KUNZ: My name is William J. Kunz sounds like guns only with a "K". I'm almost 73, born in Bergenfield, New Jersey, September 28th, 1921.

GORDON: We would also like to have the names of each of your parents.

KUNZ: My father's name was William Peter Kunz and my Mother's name was Frances Eldershaw.

GORDON: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

KUNZ: No.

GORDON: Are there any details about your parents or your family life that you would like to give at this time?

KUNZ: None in particular. My father in World War I was in, I guess, the Air Force in that he—Just a second while I think about this. I don't know much about the details of what he did but he was in those open cockpit planes they had in World War II. He was a rear gunner. That's all I know of him.

GORDON: So both of you served. What was life like for you before the war, if you can remember, and specifically during 1941?

KUNZ: Well, 1941, I had two jobs. I was a musician. Played music part time and also had a job in a bank and soon as Pearl Harbor came, we knew that we all were going to be going so we just kind of waited around for that. I do recall—Everybody recalls where they were on December 7th, 1941. Helen and I, girlfriend then and wife now, had gone to Nayak, New York. We lived in Rutland (?) County, New

York, which was a place about thirty miles south of West Point on the Hudson River. We had gone to get our pictures taken or pick up the photographs. I forget which. On the way back on the car radio we heard about Pearl Harbor.

GORDON: What was your reaction? What was the response of those around you?

KUNZ: Oh, when I got back to Helen's house, she had some of her relatives there. They all kind of looked at me and they all looked pretty serious and six months later I found out why.

GORDON: Had you formed any prior opinion or developed any feeling about what was taking place in Europe or Asia?

KUNZ: Not really. Back then the country was isolationist and we didn't really—we didn't think too much about—we knew it was going—we knew about some submarine attacks for instance off Long Island that were near the coast. We knew there had been attacks on the west coast by balloons dropped from ___?___ from Japan. Hot air balloons and dropped some delayed explosion bombs in Oregon. That wasn't published in the papers but as far as the details are why are we going to fight as kids at that time of 19 and 20 years old you don't think too much about that.

GORDON: That's right. Do you recall reading newspaper accounts of the German aggression in Europe?

KUNZ: Yeah. When they went into Poland, I guess that was in 1939. I guess we could tell it was starting to get serious then.

GORDON: Did you have any knowledge of Hitler's speeches or ideas or events?

KUNZ: Not really.

GORDON: What events led to your entry into the military service. Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

KUNZ: Well, I went down to New York City and tried to enlist in the Air Force in the early spring of 1942. I flunked the depth perception test physical part of it. Later on I found out from fighter pilots I knew

that most of them had flunked it, too. In any event, I waited around to be drafted then. I got my notice in May I guess it was.

GORDON: Was your response to entering military service influenced by your family and friends and their attitude towards the war or was it the threat to national security or other considerations. Of course, if you're drafted why ...

KUNZ: No. Just went. Everybody expected it.

GORDON: Right. Now let's talk a little about your basic training. When and where were you inducted?

KUNZ: I was inducted on the 15th of June in 1942 at Fort Jay, New York, which was a little island just off the battery in the lower part of Manhattan Island. We went over by ferry boat. From there, I went to Fort Mead, Maryland and took basic training there. I had basic training in communications, wire code, radio code, telephone and a lot of, more than I felt at the time, hand to hand combat. Had a lot of that.

GORDON: How old were you when you were inducted?

KUNZ: Twenty.

GORDON: Do you have any special memories of the event being inducted?

KUNZ: Not really. Just a whole bunch of people I never saw before.

GORDON: What did you think of the training you received?

KUNZ: At the time, I thought it was pretty rugged then later, it turned out to be a picnic compared to the real thing.

GORDON: Did anything special happen while you were in training?

KUNZ: Other than—We had a Major from the French Forces of the interior that had gotten out of France and came over to train people in hand to hand. I remember his name was Major DeAlesque (?). When I went to his training session, they always had an ambulance standing by to take away people with broken arms, wrists and one thing and another.

GORDON: It sounds pretty rough! Were there any other training camps that you attended?

KUNZ: No.

GORDON: Did you have any leaves or passes?

KUNZ: Not many. There was some once or twice. Two times, I think, during the summer. I ___?___ the summer of '42 I only got home twice on weekends.

GORDON: What do you recall about this period, about the places where you were stationed; the friends that you made or your associations with civilians at that time?

KUNZ: We had hardly any association with civilians but the friends I made, we were all separated later. We all went into different divisions.

GORDON: What was your military unit?

KUNZ: I served with the United States Third Infantry Division which was a regular army outfit, one of three that were activated at the time when World War II began. They were famous in World War I as the Rock of the Marne Division. They had some of it ___?___ stationed in China. The captain was Captain Eisenhower. Later was general. They were moved to the West Coast just before Pearl Harbor and were stationed there when Pearl Harbor happened. They were spread out along the entire West Coast of the United States with one field artillery piece every one hundred twenty-five miles. Since there were twelve of them, must have been the entire coast from Mexico to Canada. That was our defense of the West Coast, one gun every one hundred twenty five miles.

GORDON: Back to your basic training. What were you assigned duties while you were in basic training?

KUNZ: Just to—mostly learning code and communications. The combat part, I think, they just gave us that as a force of habit. We really were communications people basically.

GORDON: Were there any transfers to other units?

KUNZ: No.

GORDON: Where did you go after completing your basic military training?

KUNZ: I joined the 3rd Division at Camp Picket, Virginia. They had come across from California by

troop train and they were preparing for the invasion of North Africa. At that point, I joined them.

GORDON: If you were not sent overseas immediately following your basic training when did you finally leave the United States?

KUNZ: I was sent overseas immediately. We left the United States in October of '42 by troop transport. It took us two weeks to get over to Africa and then we sat around off the Azore Islands two or three days and then we invaded North Africa November 8, 1942.

GORDON: First of all, how did you get there? Do you remember ...

KUNZ: To Camp Pickett?

GORDON: No, overseas.

KUNZ: On troop transport.

GORDON: On troop transport. What were you assigned to do immediately after arriving.

KUNZ: We went into combat right a way. Our first ___?___ was November 8th and we went over the side in early dawn of the 8th of November. We climbed down the ropes in what they called Higgins boats. We had been heavily hit by air from the Germans from the air and a bunch of submarines had come up from Dakar, the middle part of Africa and torpedoed some of the transports. I remember thinking basic training helped a lot because just before we had left the states, they made what they called a dry run off the coast of Virginia and there it was I learned to go down the ropes into the Higgins boats, to slings your equipment on one shoulder. A lot of people didn't really do that or didn't know about it. What happened was in heavy action like that it slipped off and went under and they had a belt around your waist with ___?___ cartridges on it. Later I think they called them Mae Wests but these were the first ones. People put them on over the equipment and when they ___?___ it didn't do any good so a lot of them went right to the bottom. Some of them are still standing in the harbor yet because the equipment weighted them down.

GORDON: Isn't that something.

KUNZ: That's how I remember most about how the training helped because I shrugged mine all off and I didn't fall in the water. I just dropped mine in the Higgins boat and I just went down after it.

GORDON: Wonderful. Can you list for us in order of occurrence any subsequent combat action in which you were involved?

KUNZ: Okay. Our division all in all went overseas in 1942 and didn't return to the States until 1945. In that time the division was engaged in ten campaigns and made five amphibious landings and had a total of, I believe it was something like five hundred and forty days or so continuous combat, continuous contact with the enemy in that period. We sustained the highest rate of casualties of any division in the American Army in World War II. Starting with Casablanca, which was actually the first campaign, from there we went to ...

GORDON: Tell us something about Casablanca or is there anything or could you approximate the casualties, how they occurred or how they were treated or things of that nature? It doesn't have to be accurate, approximate. How were they treated? We were talking about how the first campaign or second campaign being at Casablanca.

KUNZ: Our first campaign was at Casablanca. We landed at actually Port Leaudi(?) which was a few miles north of it. There was one of our easier landings. We were inexperienced. We lost a lot more people in the ocean than we did ashore. I guess, maybe we had only a few hundred casualties. Altogether there we ... The battle only lasted three days. That kind of concluded it. From there we went into sort of a reserve. Some of us were detached and went up to Tunisia. Some went with the 1st Division and some went with the 9th from observers. I was attached to the French Foreign Legion for a while to observe and later on we had liaison with them so the actual African campaign for us turned out pretty easy compared to the rest.

GORDON: What was the next campaign?

KUNZ: After the Tunisian Campaign ended, actually by the time we got in there the British had pretty well cleaned that all up. There wasn't really too much for us to do. We had some minor skirmishes on the way up to camp(?) but after that we got into the invasion of Sicily and that was our first real heavy action. There I was on what they called shore fire control. You had to train for this. To do that, we got aboard a Navy destroyer, and we cruised the Mediterranean for three or four days. They put us ashore on a beach and we'd communicate with them by radio and give fire directions to the guns. It's a little tricky because the ships steam in an elliptical circle and in order to

direct the fire, you have to get to know the direction their going in. So this was all done by Morse code. The Navy men, of course, are excellent at that and we were bad. Our speeds were like five, seven, ten words a minute. These fellows were used to forty, fifty and sixty. They had to slow down for us. We didn't have voice communication like we did later on. This was all by Morse code. One thing I do recall, though, is when we were out on one of the training missions, they went to battle stations and had a submarine alert and this was just off the Gibraltar. Maybe a hundred miles in from the Rock of Gibraltar. They circled around and dropped depth charges. At dawn they said they saw oil but they weren't sure if they had sunk anything because it was a common trick back then to release oil from the diesel tanks of the submarine to fool you. So that was a little bit different for us, Navy action. We liked it because we could sleep in a bunk and get decent food. Most of the time you were on the ground all the time. Very seldom inside. When the Sicilian campaign opened up, that was the 10th of July of '43. We went ashore with some rangers. We were in an LCT which was a landing craft tank. That had a tank on it, our little forward observer group which, incidentally, was my function during most of the war, I was a forward observer to direct field artillery fire mostly for the support of the 15th Infantry. In the invasion of Sicily, there had been a heavy storm on the way over there. The waves were quite high. We got separated from the rest of the convoy and this dory came and found us at dark and brought us back in so daylight naturally hit the wrong beach and our LCT got sunk. We came in between a point where they had some farmer up on both sides and they shelled the LCT and sank it. The tank got off and we got off and we took the Navy corpsman, who was running the LCT with us. The poor guy he didn't have anywhere else to go so we hauled him around all the way to Palermo.

GORDON: So you made the wrong landing but got there anyhow. What campaign was next?

KUNZ: Sicily took us—That was in July. That was finished by early August. We went to Palermo and then we went to Messina. The next campaign was the battle of Salerno. We were lucky on that one. We were second wave. They sent in the 36th Division, I believe and got badly beat up on them. It was their first invasion and they hit surprises that they weren't ready for. We went in right behind them and then we started up the Italian boot. By this time it was September of '43.

GORDON: Your group certainly saw enough action. Where did you go next?

KUNZ: We went through—We took Naples. Then we got up to MonteCassino, where the now famous Monte Cassino Abbey was. We started up—We got up as far as a town called Minyanou (?) about two or three miles from Cassino and this was in October, November and December of '43. Of course, there are all kinds of stories around about the mud and the mountain conditions and the air __?__. We had some observers with us. One of them—I'd like to make a note of this because it was Jordan Bittle who came from a prominent family in Philadelphia. He was an artist and he was commissioned by the war department to go with us and draw sketches of the action. He was, about oh maybe at that time, in his forties. He had had a small part in World War I, I believe. He amazed us because he was older than we were and he and stuck right with us the entire time. He made sketches some of which were published in Life Magazine that Helen saved for me. I still have it.

GORDON: Interesting.

KUNZ: He wrote a book and published it. We're in it. In fact, one of our officers who is in charge of our Forward Observer group is on the front cover of the book he wrote. So that pretty much took us through—by now the casualties are starting to build.

GORDON: How were they treated?

KUNZ: Well, our division had a triad system which was a method of treatment that unofficially worked like this. If you were lightly wounded and the possibility of returning you to combat was good you were treated first. If you were heavily wounded, the possibility was that you would die or not be able to come in combat, you were put last. This isn't the thing that makes for recruitment now a days.

GORDON: I have heard of that system. Did your mental attitude change as this combat continued?

KUNZ: It had to. When we first got overseas we were just a little homesick. Then we got talking to people like the British and the Australians. They'd say, "How long have you been over here, Yank?" We'd say, "Six months. How long have you been over here?". "I've been over here going on six years. I've been gone seven years. I've been over nine years." Pretty soon we learned not to—quit being babies about all of this.

GORDON: Did you write many letters?

KUNZ: Yeah. As much as I could. The best letter writer was my wife, Helen, who wrote a letter a day, every day. Not all of them got there but a letter was written every day and I wrote back in bursts because there were periods of time you couldn't do it. I tried to write at least a little bit. Couldn't write much. All you could say was "We're somewhere in Italy. It's raining today. I'm feeling all right. We love you."

GORDON: Did you get any packages?

KUNZ: Oh, sure.

GORDON: What kinds of things did you like to get in the packages?

KUNZ: Well, food mostly; cookies and that sort of thing.

GORDON: Did most of the other men write or receive letters?

KUNZ: It depended. This outfit was regular army. A lot of those fellows weren't really the best of family men when they enlisted. I would say about maybe a third of the outfit tried to write regularly and the rest didn't. Some of them, they'd have to come after them. People back home didn't hear anything so they'd get hold of the Red Cross or ask their Congressman if they had high connections to find these guys and call the CO to and told they better write home, their people were worried about them. They hadn't heard from them for a year.

GORDON: I can imagine. Did you forge any close bonds of friendship with some of your companions?

KUNZ: Only the people I initially went overseas with. As time went on and the casualties went up the little group that we had to start with dwindled and as replacements came in you learned not to get too friendly with them. Some of them, I don't even remember the names of the replacements.

GORDON: Have you remained in contact with any of your World War II ...

KUNZ: Just the group that we went overseas with. The 3rd Division has a society like some of the organizations do. We have yearly reunions but most of the fellows only got into this after they had come

home, raised a family, worked, retired, got up into their 60's and 70's.

GORDON: Had some extra time. Did you ever have to help retrieve a wounded buddy from the combat field?

KUNZ: Six, eight, ten times maybe.

GORDON: During your combat duty, did you ever capture any enemy prisoners?

KUNZ: Yeah.

GORDON: Can you describe the circumstances?

KUNZ: The orders came something like this. We're going to have to move out of here and you don't really have space or the time or the capability to keep these people with us. We want them returned to the rear which was like about ten miles, but be back here in fifteen minutes.

GORDON: How was that possible?

KUNZ: Had to kill them.

GORDON: Oh, I see. I wondered how that would be possible.

KUNZ: It's an infantry job but since we were tied directly to the infantry, we witnessed a lot of this.

GORDON: Right. Maybe we should get back and see if we have traced all of your campaigns before we go on to some of these other questions.

KUNZ: Well, we still have to do Anzio. That's next.

GORDON: All right. Let's talk about Anzio.

KUNZ: Okay. A good way to give a little idea of how heavy action is, is to go by the number of artillery rounds that our battalion fired in support of infantry. This is just one battalion of twelve guns. In Sicily I have no record of the amount we fired. We fired a couple hundred. In Sicily we fired 22,518. In Southern Italy, 57,425. When we got to Anzio, we fired 126,454 by the division records. Anzio was like World War I. It was trench warfare. We went ashore and we had an easy landing, no opposition. Four or five divisions were pulled down from other places to oppose us. There's always been a big argument over

should they have stayed on the beachhead or moved off of it and tried to take Rome earlier. People who were there in it, the move was correct. We didn't have the forces to advance any further. We only put ashore our division, a British Division, and we were in there with maybe less than forty or fifty thousand. We would just try anything—and not much armor or not a lot of artillery. You can't really forward under those conditions. So they were right. That campaign was brutal. We lost a lot of people. I think the record is correct by the time we finished the campaign in Anzio, we already lost 15,000 from our division. Our division when it went overseas was only staffed at twenty.

GORDON: Very hard hit.

KUNZ: Yeah. You get constant replacements. The people that made it through all ten campaigns are extremely fortunate and rare to find. I'm happy to be one of them.

GORDON: I should say so. After Anzio, where did your division go?

KUNZ: We took Rome on the 5th of June and on the 6th had D-Day in Normandy so that completely wiped Rome off the front pages. It was on for twenty-four hours.

GORDON: Taking Rome and it happened at the same time as the Normandy invasion.

KUNZ: Within twenty-four hours. Our part of it took place on August 15th, 1944. We invaded southern France near St. Parfait (?). It's east of Marseilles about fifty or seventy-five miles, I guess. That coast there is all rocks and it was only one little speck of sandy beach that we could get ashore on. One thing everybody remembers about that invasion was that Churchill came by in a speed launch and went through when the invasion fleet departed from Naples and cruised along with his hand up in the familiar "V for Victory" sign. The landing in southern France was his idea. He promoted that all along. I'm not too sure everybody on our side was in favor of this but it was his baby, so he came down to give us sort of a send-off. So we landed in southern France on the 15th of August and it was relatively easy going up until the time we got further north into what they called a Vogue (?). Vogue Mar in Philmare pocket. This was in October, November of '44. At that point we were all in one—By that time Patton's people and his armor come through from the English Channel. We

were all strung up in a line across the northern part of France almost into Germany but not quite by—it took us until—To get up to the Rhine River, it took us up until March of '45. That campaign was in southern France. We fired 93, 728 rounds of artillery. That was down a little bit from the Anzio Beach.

GORDON: Still sounds pretty heavy.

KUNZ: Yeah. It was extremely. They called the southern France and up until the Colmar Pocket, one campaign. By that time we'd done nine so there was only one or two left to go, I believe.

GORDON: And so then after France.

KUNZ: Then in the spring of '45 we crossed the Rhine and down into Strasbourg, Frankfurt and down into Munich. Munich was our first major city of any large size that we had come across and we had house to house fighting just like we had in some of the smaller towns except this was bigger. And as we went into Germany, the opposition from twelve and fourteen and fifteen year olds and some of the seventy year olds got stiffer. The kids were the worst ones. They were Hitler youth and they were out there to save the Fatherland and die for the Fuhrer and that's why they did it. The older people, they didn't really have their hearts in it. So from Munich, we went on to Salzburg and then we made an end run down from Salzburg and got into Berchtesgaden and over Salzburg which was Hitler's hideout, it was famous known as the Eagle's Nest. We were the first ones into it on the 4th of May of '45. We took it and the war ended on May 8th.

GORDON: You were ___?___ an unbelievable series of campaigns. As you were going along were you aware of any civilian concentration camps.

KUNZ: Well, we were only seven kilometers from Dachau, the famous one. We didn't see it. The forty-second Division or one of the other divisions actually went through it or right next to it. But some of the fellows drove down to look at it. We knew they were there. We were also aware of the fact that they had a lot of slave labor in the prison camps that were forced to make ammunition. All during the war whenever we'd get a couple of duds that would come in close which was not too often, another civilian worker tried helped us out. They'd try to stick material between the firing pins of the shells and they'd try to block it so that when it landed it would be a dud. We had a lot of that.

GORDON: I never heard of that.

KUNZ: We used to say, "Well, somebody else in a prison camp gave us a hand."

GORDON: Is there any highlight occurrence of that combat experience.

KUNZ: Well, maybe on the Anzio Beach when Darby's Rangers tried to take Susterna(?)—this has been written up a number of times—We were with them and we had tried to take Susterna(?) Delatoria. It was a crossroads about ten miles—six or seven miles off the beach. They had been unable to do it. We had armor and artillery and Air Force. Can't speak highly enough of the Air Force. They were over that thing in waves. Hundreds of Sorties. They'd be blown apart right in mid-air and shells hit their bomb loads. Come down with their parachutes on fire. They did a lot to help us out all through it. In any event, Darby, Colonel Darby Rangers decided to go in there and try to take that town however lightly armed force. The heaviest they had was BARs, Browning Automatic Rifles and we were shaking our heads at the time. We couldn't get in with all the stuff we had, how are they going to do it. But they made the attempt and they got cut off. They got pretty well decimated. They hit armor and the hit flak wagons and they hit the usual stuff—I don't know how the heck they're going to get around all this. I recall a little meeting that had a couple of our Generals in it. They were all standing around. Audie Murphy was one of the—at the time was one of the officers. I think he was still a Sergeant at that time. They were trying to figure how to get these guys out and it was decided they couldn't do it. So the following morning we went up there. There was a railroad spur line and there must have been four or five hundred of these guys laid out all across those tracks and they couldn't even walk on the railroad ties because they were all laying on them. They had to step on them to get around them. I recall that and the heavy bombardment that took place on Anzio plus a number of other things that were maybe a little bit lighter but of a similar nature.

GORDON: Can you tell us what you and the other men did to celebrate America's traditional family holidays such as Thanksgiving or Christmas?

KUNZ: At Christmas we always made a point of pulling a heavy artillery barrage, as heavy as possible. Merry Christmas to you guys. Made a point of it.

GORDON: Was there anything else for Thanksgiving?

KUNZ: Same thing.

GORDON: When and how did you return to the United States?

KUNZ: When the war ended they had a—interesting thing about all of that was that we were actually slated to go to Japan. The thing that saved us was that the Army had instituted a point system for discharge. By the time the war ended everybody—he had so many points for each campaign and so many points and so on. The guys that were left had so many points that they couldn't do anything else but send us home... Regular Army. You wanted to stay in for a life time career so they decided to make it a occupation force. Keep it over and its still there. Actually that division is the major—is NATO.

GORDON: I didn't realize that.

KUNZ: And so some of us they called the "high flingers" we had enough points went home what they called the "green flight." This was kind of nice. They took us by troop train down to Marseilles and we flew a transport, C54s, to Casablanca. Then we got on B17s and flew to the Azores and took on fuel and then flew into Miami. Stopped at Bermuda and got to Miami. It took us about a week. Flight time was only several hours. We got home relatively fast. Some of the other fellows with lower points, went to Paris, went to the coast and got on a troop transport and came home maybe a little while later.

GORDON: What happened when you arrived in the United States?

KUNZ: We got a free phone call anywhere in the country which was at 2:00 in the morning. I called Helen up. Woke her up. Let her know I was back and then we got on a troop train to Fort Dix, New Jersey for discharge.

GORDON: Can you tell us about you military rank of your decorations?

KUNZ: I started out as a Private and ended up as a Staff Sergeant. I have battle star for each campaign. That's ten and a little insignia that they give you for amphibious landing which are five. I have a purple heart; a bronze star, Croix de Guerre, which is a French decoration I got from DeGaulle, and presidential unit citations.

GORDON: Sounds as if they're all well deserved. And you were in ten campaigns in all?

KUNZ: Yeah. I can list those.

GORDON: All right. Why don't you do that?

KUNZ: Under battle credits, I have a little folder here that was issued by the War Department. Algeria French Morocco is one. Tunisia is two. Sicily is three. Naples Pogas (?) is four. Anzio is five. Rome-Arno is six. Southern France, seven. Ardennes-Alsace, that's the Colmar Pocket. Rhineland and Central Europe make a total of ten.

GORDON: I think that's good that we listed them. How did you get along with the men with whom you had the greatest contact?

KUNZ: You have to have complete trust more than anything. You don't necessarily have to like people but they have to know that if you say your going to do something or going to be there at a certain point, if you didn't make it, because you couldn't do it.

GORDON: I think that's a very good answer. Were there things that you'd do differently if you could do them once again?

KUNZ: I'd get promoted to Major so I wouldn't have to go through all this.

GORDON: What was the most difficult thing you had to do during your period of military service? It sounds as if it were all difficult.

KUNZ: Oh, I guess—every once in a while we get letters from relatives who write to see what happened to people and try to get an answer back to that. Sometimes you had to treat civilians a little harsher than we should have. Some of the PWs, too, was kind of marginal on the sort of thing you had to do.

GORDON: Is there any one thing that stands as your most successful achievement during that time besides survival?

KUNZ: No. I don't really. A lot of guys in that outfit in terms of accomplishing, did a lot more than I did. Just getting out of it alive, I guess, is the biggest thing—The real heroes are still over there yet. They're buried in the cemeteries.

GORDON: I think you're all heroes. How did you learn about VE Day?

KUNZ: We were gathering kind of groups. We happened to be right down the hill a little ways from ___?___ where Hitler's chalet there. We had heard a

rumor that there was a redoubt—a group of people in a redoubt area that we'd have to go get and so I said isn't the war over. They said, "Yeah, it's been declared over. You have to go get these people anyhow." So everybody saddled up and started down the road. Then it was all called off. It turned out to be a false rumor. When the actual announcement was made, some artillery was fired in the hills and that was the end of it.

GORDON: What was your reaction to it?

KUNZ: We were all ready to get out of there and go home. It didn't turn out that way. We still had a lot of prisoners that we had captured. We had to get them in behind barbed wire and hold them. Also we had to transport some of them back to the rear. A lot of them were die-hard Nazis yet and they weren't ready to give up. We had them in behind barbed wire and it kind of looked like and "Stalag." It had been one, I guess. It had machine gun posts all around it. Eventually, the higher-ups came along and a lot of the people were taken off for interrogation. Probably for war crimes trials here and there.

GORDON: How did you learn about VJ Day?

KUNZ: At that point, I was happy to climb the high tide because I was back in the States and I got discharged on the 15th of August. I think that was pretty close to VJ.

GORDON: What was your opinion of the use of the atomic bomb when it was used against the Japanese in August of 1945?

KUNZ: I was 150% for it.

GORDON: Has that opinion changed over the last fifty years?

KUNZ: Not a bit.

GORDON: When and where were you officially discharged from the service?

KUNZ: On the 15th of August, Fort Dix, New Jersey, at 10:47 a.m.

GORDON: Wow. Really exact. Do you have ...

KUNZ: It's the sort of thing you want to remember.

GORDON: Do you have a disability rating or a pension?

KUNZ: Yeah.

GORDON: Do you have any opinions about our nation's military status or its policies?

KUNZ: I'm worried about it. At this point in time, I think its been taken apart too much. Its—We're starting to disarm again and it worries me.

GORDON: Do you have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

KUNZ: No. Not much.

GORDON: What is your opinion of the VA?

KUNZ: I think they do a good job. I think they do the best they can under the circumstances. I think they try to do—I think that—this may be a little selfish here—but I think that some of the service is overdone. In other words, I think if you're not in there for service connected conditions, you shouldn't go in. If you're going in because you fell down the steps of the USO or something like that, that's one thing but if you got hit and the effects are still with you that's another. I think that too much money is spent on guys to go in and get a physical when they could just as well pay for it themselves and go to a private doctor and not overload the system.

GORDON: Have you ever gone to a VA Hospital?

KUNZ: No.

GORDON: Would you like to tell us how your family supported you during all your military service?

KUNZ: My best support is my wife here.

GORDON: Were you married at the time?

KUNZ: No. I tried to talk her into it but she wouldn't ...

GORDON: Were you married as soon as ...

KUNZ: September 9th, 1945, 4:25 p.m.

GORDON: I love these exact times. Anything else about ...

KUNZ: She was late ten minutes or was it twenty.

GORDON: You'll have to forgive her for that. Anything else about how your family supported you during those years?

KUNZ: Well, I heard from my father and my step-mother once in a while but not too often.

GORDON: Is there anything else you would like to tell us before we conclude the interview?

KUNZ: Only that I feel that the division I was with was a stellar attraction, a stellar division in that conflict and I like to pay a tribute to all the people in it that didn't come home.

GORDON: I certainly would, too. This concludes our interview today. We've been sitting here reminiscing just a little bit before we end this interview and we're remembering one very special occurrence. Would you like to tell us about that?

KUNZ: Okay. In 1942 in Casablanca, President Roosevelt came in for a meeting ___?___ Churchill and a few of the others—I'm not too sure if Russia was in this one or not. In any event, they had a special Guard of Honor set out. Roosevelt reviewed the troops and I happened to be part of that at the time. And he drove along in a Jeep. They turned out the entire division for this but we were front rank because as a part of the Guard of Honor, I guess, we had to hold the flag and stand up in front there.

GORDON: Was that pictured in Life Magazine?

KUNZ: I guess it was. Helen says she has seen it and it's our section which shows Roosevelt in his Jeep with his fedora hat. I think it was well published

GORDON: I think I've seen that We were also talking about a reunion of ...

KUNZ: Well, 1984 some of us from that division went back overseas for the Fortieth Anniversary of the action at Anzio and Cassino and visited the ___?___ Cemetery and looked up the grave sites of many of our friends over there. We toured some of the battle sites and one of the fellows in particular was trying to find the house on the beach head that he had spent some time in and it still had the Italian family in it. It was kind of rare. Most of the people had left when the shelling started. Not only did he locate the house some of the family was still in it. Not only that his kind of former girl friend was there, too. So we all had a big spaghetti dinner. I guess his wife was still

talking to him when he got back to the United States.. It was quite interesting. They had ceremonies and later on we went up into France and visited the division in Burg (?), Germany, where it was—still is stationed there. They had a ceremony for the Fortieth Anniversary of that action. The division sends Guards of Honor and representatives to these occasionally all through France and Europe as part of the NATO Alliance. It was interesting. We had the usual speeches and ...

GORDON: Were you on of the ones honored?

KUNZ: Yeah. There was about six of us there as part of the group.

GORDON: Tell me about the time that you met some Germans who had been fighting in the same ...

KUNZ: Oh, it turns out that during this tour in 1984 some of the Germans who had been in a corps opposite us in Colmar got together with us. This is a little bit a meticulous situation. This was the first time they put together Germans and Americans, kind of together. They weren't sure how it would go. Some cases it didn't work out well. A couple of the fellows who were Jewish didn't really want to meet with these guys and I can understand it. They just didn't attend it. One man in particular, a seventeen year old radio operator at the time—a sixteen or seventeen real young. They were taking anybody as it got further along in the war. He operated a radio. He recalls being in our area on Christmas Eve of 1944 in Colmar. We had a heavy artillery exchange at that point. He remembered the positions. We were talking about that. We correspond a little bit. The guys a radio amateur—radio operator and he contacts people in the States now and we write back and forth occasionally. When we go back over there this summer for the Fiftieth Anniversary we might get to see each other again.

GORDON: You're planning to go back this summer?

KUNZ: Yeah.

GORDON: When will you be going?

KUNZ: June. Early June of this year.

GORDON: How long will you be there?

KUNZ: Two weeks.

GORDON: Is there anything else that we should remember?

KUNZ: I don't really think there's ... Yeah. I can remember something. When the war ended I came back home for a discharge. An interesting thing happened. The more I think about it, the more interesting it is. Just before the final ceremony where they played some military music and handed us our discharges, we were all taken in a room and had a talk by I guess what you would call an Army psychiatrist. It went kind of like this. "Now I want to tell you heroes something. When you get back into civilian life, people will be a little interested in that you got back but they don't want to know anything at all—they don't care about what you did. You get a lot of benefits. You get a thing called the "fifty-two twenty club". You get \$20 a week to get you started for fifty-two weeks I think it was and you get some education under the GI Bill. My advise to you is to forget about all of this, get off your rear end and go to school and get to working. Never mind what the civilian attitude is." And he was right.

GORDON: I was just going to ask if that was good advice.

KUNZ: Yeah.

GORDON: That is interesting.

KUNZ: So the Vietnam Vets and Korean Vets weren't the only ones that—they got more of a cold shoulder because of the political circumstances. World War II Veterans especially the heavy combat ones weren't all that popular. Whenever you talked to somebody and they'd say stuff like "Gee, I'm glad you're back. Wait 'til I tell you about the great defense job I had."

GORDON: I imagine that's the real reaction you got.

KUNZ: Sure. Once you get over that than you just get back to work and start getting a life again.

GORDON: Is there anything you want to say about your return to civilian life?

KUNZ: Once I got back into the civilian area I just stayed away from the military as much as possible. I was pretty well sick of it and it took me a number of years before I could even really start to think about it and talk about it. Most of the other fellows felt the same way Nobody did or said much until they were

all retired and got together at these reunions and then the war stories start.

GORDON: I can believe that. This concludes our interview today.