

## Taped Interview

Dallas Reunion 2006

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Carrol Cook, Co. I 410<sup>th</sup>

I am Carrol Cook from Austin, Texas. I joined the Army in '42. I came into the 103rd from the ASTP in March '44. They called us up the following spring. I was in the ERC, Enlisted Reserve Corp. *What did you do in the ERC?* I just went to school. I was a Geologist. The ERC sounded like a good deal except they did not stick to it. *What schools did you go to?* I just went to University of Texas. That is where I was in school when I signed up. I had about two thirds of a degree when they called me. *You were in the ERC for some months?* Yes, for six or eight months. Then they called us up one bright day in the spring of '43. Put me in uniform. Checked in at Fort Sam Houston. Then they immediately shipped us to Camp Maxey in Paris, Texas. We went through four or five months of Basic. From there I had applied for ASTP. Which is the best deal I could find. So they shipped me with four or five hundred boys out there to Kingsville, Texas (Texas A and I in those days). I think there were too little boys at school and five or six hundred girls. That felt just right! They put the whole bunch of us in a girl's dorm, which was originally made for 45 girls. They put 500 of us in

there. It was a little cozy but it worked a little like camp. We ate in the cafeteria there. They did work our butts off school-wise. I was studying Engineering. I don't know what kind. We were supposed to go through there and end up with an Engineering degree. Since we already had Basic, with our degree we would have gone immediately to OCS. That is what they told us anyway. That was their plan. We were in the ASTP about six or seven months. The whole program fell apart in March of '44. Almost all of our ASTP unit ended up in the 103<sup>rd</sup> infantry. Scooped us up over night and away we went! That is when I became a machine gunner. I was a gunner in the Weapons Platoon of I Company. *Did you have any experiences at Camp Houze or on the train going over?* It was pretty much uneventful. They insisted we go through Basic again, which did not make any difference. Of course, I got to shoot a machine gun a lot, which is why I am deaf now. I am almost totally deaf. In fact, they have a pension on that disability. I was a machine gunner and I did my thing. There was nothing unique in training. *On a machine gun, there are adjustments for elevation? Or traverse? Are there knobs or something?* There is a knob down at the bottom of the machine gun. You could adjust it but you would do it in sequence. You would raise it and slide it back and forth, which would give you, traverse. You would always watch the elevation. It was a garden hose

basically. The big problem was that every fifth round was a tracer. That tracer shows you where you are shooting. It also shows the guys you are shooting at where you are, which is not always good. The trick was to fire, do your damage, and get the hell out of there. That is how you stay alive. I moved every chance I got. *Did an officer ever tell you where to set up?* Never once. Never saw an officer when the shooting was going on. *Who told you where to set up?* Mainly, I did. I had a Buck Sergeant, who was a nice old boy but he could not read a map. He could not read. In fact, I wrote his letters home for him. He was a nice fellow. He must have been about forty-two. Which is pretty old for a guy like that. *What was the effective range of the machine guns in the mountains?* You know, if we were dug in and in a good position for instance on “Day 1”, we were up on a side of a hill and the 411<sup>th</sup> attacked across the valley in front. We were asked to provide overhead fire, “covering” fire. We were shooting at another machine gun across the valley, which I would judge as about a mile and one half away. But you know none of those are very accurate. We had seen an occasional tracer would go out there. But I spent all my time pulling tracers out. I sure did. I would pull them out and throw them away. Plug a ball in there. *You were talking about “what is the effective range”?* Well, it is what you could handle. We had two or three cases where we ambushed a

German patrol coming down a road. At 10 or 15 yards, you can do a lot of damage with a machine gun at that range. Then maybe 50 or 60 yards, same thing, ambush them. Then when you are suppose to be just giving covering fire you are sweeping a whole neighborhood. Of course, you know a machine gun, when it shoots is like a garden hose it spreads out. And when the bullets land, it is in a kind of an oval like that. They call that the beaten zone. That means that is where bullets are hitting. And, if you are shooting into an area, somebody lying out there is going to get popped eventually. So that was the purpose of that. But the other problem was that these guns that we had were air-cooled. So you fired three rounds and stopped. If you were smart, you did that two or three times and moved. For the old guns, you had to have an asbestos glove to pick them up because the barrel would be so hot you could not hold it. I would pick it up with the glove by the butt handle. And we went overseas and I thought it was dumb as hell; they took our old guns away those that we could put together blindfolded and issued us brand new guns still in Cosmoline when we were on the boat. We never had seen one of the damn things before. When we got to France, we had to take them out, clean them, test them out and zero them in. Fortunately, we did not have any damn Germans there. They issued these new guns when we got on the boat. But of course, when you get on a boat like that you don't have

access to nothing. So when we got to Marseilles and landed we did not have a machine gun. I don't think anyone in the Division had one. Fortunately, we did not need one. The first things we did were uncrate these brand new guns, clean them because of the Cosmoline, go to the firing range that they had set up and learn how to shoot them. The new guns were different because they were a bi fi arrangement and a shoulder so you could lay flat and shoot. We also had the tripod that went with it if you needed it. So, in a fixed position we would put it on a tripod to keep it out of the mud. But other than that, about the same difference. *So actually, the new guns had a shoulder?* The new ones did. It looked just like the German gun. Except that, the German gun was built a lot better. You could dump the hot barrel and put a new one in without any trouble. With ours, you had to be a mechanical genius to do it. *So you could not shoot more than three or four rounds at a time?* Obviously, you could. If things got tough, you could hold it down. But your barrel when it gets red-hot it starts throwing bullets all over the place. So after Marseilles we went up the valley. *You said you were covering fire for the 411<sup>th</sup> across the valley?* That was the first day. *I have a story from a Lt. John Neely. I think he was I Company 410th. He talks about machine gun positions covering fire for the 411<sup>th</sup>, shooting across a valley.* He was probably right behind us. Was he Third Platoon,

something like that? *He was Company Commander, I believe. Captain Thompson's Company. He was 410<sup>th</sup> another company.* He was in our Company for a while but he was not Company Commander at that time. He was the Platoon leader. I didn't remember him. I read his story someplace.

*After St. Die, what happen then with your outfit? Went through the mountains?* We sat there and they shot the hell out of us one day with artillery. Actually, it was on 12 November. The reason I remember that is because the 12<sup>th</sup> is my birthday. They are in that first position. For whatever reason I was out wandering around someplace and they started shelling us. I jumped into the first hole I came to. It turned out to be an old German hole. A good deep hole! I sat there for nearly twelve hours. They shot the hell out of that part of the woods because when they got done the trees that we had been under before were just kindling. It was amazing. They knocked all the trees down. We had one guy get killed. If he had any sense he would have been in the bottom of his hole and he would not have been scratched.

*Were you wounded later on? Yes. From what? Artillery? An eighty-eight.* I almost out ran it but not quite. *What month was that?* Early December.

*They evacuated you to a hospital? Yeah. I have no idea which hospital. I went to the hospital and then to the recovery. The most interesting thing that happened there was one of the nurses was working on my fanny. She says,*

“Oh, you have lice.” I knew I had something that itched but I didn’t worry about it; I had other things to worry about. It turns out I had three kinds of lice: Red Cross, White Cross and something else. Three different types of lice. The treatment is very simple actually. What they do is strip you down and shave all your bodily hair off that you could get to conveniently. Then they give you a can of grease that has poison in it and you smear it over your entire body. All your clothes and everything else goes in a gas proof bag. Then they pop a Cyanide capsule in there. It sits for twenty-four hours. In the meanwhile, I was wandering around this evac hospital with nothing but grease and a blanket. That is not a fun way to spend the time. Of course, it is cold as hell in there all the time. At the end of twenty-four hours, the aide man came in and said, “Take a shower”. I hadn’t taken a shower in three months. I was delighted to get that grease off me. After that, I had a can of DDT with me. A big can! I carried it with me at all times. Whenever I’d think about it, I would sprinkle myself. I was not allergic to DDT, obviously. I would have been dead if I had been. One thing about it, I did not get into anymore German holes with blankets in them or straw. Because the Germans had horrible bugs. And they did not have the DDT to take care of it with. As long as we had DDT and used it, no big deal. You didn’t tempt fate. *What did you think decades later when they said it was poison?*

I said, "So be it". But it worked then. *What happened after the hospital?*

They sent us to a replacement depot. Meanwhile, I was getting my strength back. I did a little discreet inquiring. And found out they were going to ship us someplace but I did not know where. I said, "No. I am not going just anyplace." I am going where I belong! They said, "It does not work that way". I said, "See you later". Three or four of us got together and found a 103<sup>rd</sup> truck. Just happened to be there. I do not know why, maybe to pick up some people. We left the depot without orders. I went back to the 103<sup>rd</sup> to Company I. We got there about the first of January, I'd say. We were dug in above Sarreguemines in Lorraine. They had apparently spread us out as part of the Bulge aftermath. I had one interesting experience there. We had one guy every hundred yards, something like that. It was scary. I had a machine gun section or machine gun. I was sitting in a hole with another man one morning when they bombed Sarreguemines. We watched these bombers come right over our heads. I counted over one thousand airplanes. They come in batches. I was counting them and marking them on the side of an ammunition box. When they went over the Sarreguemines, we could see the bomb bays open. We could see the bombs drop. See them hit. See the flash. Then, the concussion wave would come up. We would hear a little noise. Then the ground would give a dance. Meanwhile the Germans

were shooting at us too. They knocked out two or three planes. One of which was burning and it circled back over us. I was watching him through the binoculars. This plane was obviously in big trouble. It has a chunk off the body. While I was watching, the crew started to bale out. I was counting them. It was a B24. I do not know how many people they are suppose to have. It was 12 or 13 or so. I counted 12 I think. I was looking at that plane and it looked like it was going to land in that hole with me which made it very interesting. We were watching and all of a sudden, the last man dropped through the bomb bay; he dove through the bomb bay opening. We watched him tumble coming down. I don't know how high they were. Someone said about 10,000 feet. He was tumbling but no chute would open. I thought the guy was wounded or something. He looked like he was going to drop in the hole with us. Just before he hit the ground, his chute opened up. And his feet hit the ground at the same time. *Do you think he survived?* We didn't know. He was about 75 to 100 yards away from us. Between us and the enemy. We sat there and watched this. Finally, I saw this guy move. So I got this other guy and the two of us ran down to see what we could do. His feet were mush from about that far. He was alive so we put tourniquets on his legs. His feet were literally just mush. We started to drag him back up to where our hole was and where we had a phone.

About halfway up, the Germans started shelling us with mortars. We went through that and finally got him up to the hole. I called in on the phone and said, "We have a wounded man down here. Send some aid men down to pick him up". Two guys came down to pick him up. I had given him a shot of morphine and all, which helped some I think. At one point, he woke up kinda halfway. We told him, "don't worry we have your legs tied up, so you are going to live." I said, "Why did you wait so long to pop your parachute?" He said, "Wait? I was so busy putting that sucker on!" He had baled out with it under his arms. You can imagine falling and hooking a parachute. But he made it. I do not know what his name was or anything else. That plane hit about a half mile behind us. We went over there the next day but there wasn't much left of it. As I recall we moved from Sarreguemines over to an area called Wissembourg. We were actually in some Maginot pillboxes for a few days. Then they pulled everybody back and in our case to Pfaffenhoffen. In those days when they pulled a unit out it was at night of course. All the rifle people got up and walked out about midnight. Each rifle company left two machine guns in their positions to discourage anything. We sat there and waited and nothing happened. They told us to get out about 4 am or 4:30 am. We walked back out. We were told to walk up to the square or something like that. I knew where it was.

They said there would be six trucks there to pick up the rear guard. So we got back there and sure enough, there were six trucks. So we threw our stuff on the trucks and said lets get out because we could hear the German tanks coming. The trucks turned around and started up the hill. But they couldn't get up the hill because it was icy and snowy. So they were just sitting there spinning their wheels. I said, "Forget it". We pulled our equipment off those trucks and we started walking. I walked every yard from Wissembourg to Pfaffenhoffen. That was a long walk. *What happened to the drivers?* We don't know they didn't come with us. I threatened to shoot them if they did. Those men were sitting there drinking booze when they could have been putting their chains on. So I said, "Let them discuss it with the Germans". *You don't know whether they got out?* No. I would have cheerfully shot them if I thought I could get away with it. *It was twenty-two miles that you walked.* I thought it was about thirty. *It could have been for you because you were the rear guard.* It was probably twenty-five to thirty miles. As I recall it took us two days to get back. We stopped off once or twice and let some German tanks go by. We hopped off, got down in the brush, squatted down and they went on down the road. I don't know where they went but when we got to Pfaffenhoffen, we just wandered in there. I asked one of the guards, "Where are your headquarters?" We have to get a

truck to get back to our outfit. It was an artillery outfit. I said, "Where is your "big shot" so we can borrow a truck to get back there?" I ended up talking to a full Colonel. I was polite and saluted and all of that. I explained the problem. He said, "What makes you think I am going to help you?" I said, "I don't know. I just thought it would be the logical thing to do." He said, "You may be a spy." I said, "I am not a spy." He said, "I don't know about that and I am not sure we are going to help you at all." I looked out the door and here a fellow walked by that had been in my Calculus class at the University of Texas. His name was Bernie Stenson. We called him the Mighty Mouse. He was a little guy about five foot two inches and big muscles. I said, "Colonel, I know that man right there." The Colonel stopped him and said, "Bernie, come in here." He was a Buck sergeant, I think. Bernie came in, looked up at me, and said, "Hey Cook, how are you?" I said, "Colonel, what more can I say?" He told the guy at the front desk, "Get these guys back to wherever they need to go." So Bernie didn't know what a big favor he did for me at the time. We went back to Company I and caught up with everybody. They quartered us in front in a little town. I forgot the name of it. They were overlooking the small town of Nieffern. We were off to the right and our machine gun was overlooking a road junction. I think that is what we were supposed to be guarding. We

didn't see anything to shoot at. We sat there for nearly three or four weeks. We had a real scare with some tanks. About a week after we had been there we heard these tanks revving up and coming up the valley. I called in and reported it. I asked the First Sergeant, "You guys better get us some help". I had one machine gun and a squad of infantry. He said, "Well you have to take care of what you've got." I said, "Well, send us a couple of bazookas". He said, "I cannot do that." I said, "Well how about directing some artillery?" He said, "the artillery officer is here let me talk to him." A guy came on the phone I didn't know. I told him where I was. He said, "What are your coordinates?" I said we didn't have a map. I said, "Look on your map; here's where we are; you can spot us." He said, "Yeah, I see that." I said, "That's your coordinates. That's a good place to start from. Put your shells there and I'll adjust it from that point." The target was a little culvert and a little bridge. He came back and said the artillery is real busy right now. But we will let you have one shot from the two forties. I said, "The more the merrier." He said, "On the way." And boy, here this thing comes. It sounded like a boxcar coming in "end over end". Then when it hits the hole folds in on it. The first shot hit dead center on that bridge. And this is eighteen miles away. Two 40's and then the 155s; then the 105s. All three batteries. Of course, the Germans went away. Fortunately! I recall when

the Colonel made us stand up and put our hand up and he said congratulations you are now Second Lieutenants of the outfit. "Go back to your outfit." That is about the way it happened. I asked this Colonel, "Can you suggest where I can find a rifle and a bar? He said, "I will tell the 1<sup>st</sup> Officer to loan you some." And he did. He said, "Oh, by the way, you probably will be getting a Silver Star for adjusting artillery. We had so many things going on at the same time. I never heard a word about it. It worked out. *You stayed with them until the end of the war?* I had my eardrum blown out a second time. As a result of that, I wasn't much good, so they put me in Division Headquarters. And my job for about four weeks was training the replacements. We would pick them up at the repot depot. We would pick them up and give them three days training: how to load an M1 and pull the pin on a hand grenade. After that, they sent me to school for 2nd class battlefield commissioned officers. "Now you're an officer; here is how to be a gentleman. Here is what you are supposed to do." That was about three or four weeks. About that time, the war was over. *You got a battlefield commission?* That is it right over there. I picked up the phone when I was sitting in the hole and was told to report back. I said, "Nobody told me yet, why?" I really thought I was going back to OCS which was even longer. Which is what I had in mind to stay off that line. I came back

to Texas and finished school. I got out and could not get a job. I went back to the Dean, said I was on the Dean's list, and asked him what he would suggest. The Dean said you have three more years of the GI Bill, why don't you get your Master's Degree. I did not know what a Master's Degree was. He told me where to write. He said write to Harvard Business School, Stanford, and Michigan State. They were the three best business schools at that time, 1948. I wrote them. All three sent me forms. I filled them out and sent them back. The first one to come back was Harvard. I called them and said, "I accept". I got up there before I found out it was a two-year course. Well, I didn't care.