

Taped Interview

St. Louis Reunion 2007

Hank Gooris, MP Platoon

I was born June 27, 1921 in Chicago, Illinois. I graduated from high school in Chicago. I graduated in '39. I was drafted in '42 into the Army. I took my Basic Training in Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. I went straight to Camp Claiborne and was assigned to the 103rd. I went into Division Headquarters, MP Platoon. In camp, we took Basic just like everybody else. We went on bivouacs. During maneuvers, we found out what our Basics were going to be: directing traffic, prisoners of war, stragglers etc. Our duties included taking care of 103rd Division people by patrolling towns at night like, Alexandria, Louisiana, Gainesville, Texas, or a town in Oklahoma. *Were there other service men in those towns? I know there was in Dallas. Were there Navy and other Army guys?* We were told to take care of the fellows with the Cactus Patch. We were to get them back to their charge of quarters. Get them back in their units before they caused any trouble. *Did you find any that were drunk?* We would find some of them drunk and or rowdy especially in Alexandria; Texas wasn't bad. It was like a different world when you went from Louisiana to Texas. I do not know how New Orleans was. We were in the middle of the state in Alexandria. There is a world of difference between Alexandria and Chicago. *In Alexandria what did the GIs do?* The GIs went to bars. At 5 o'clock, you couldn't find a coke for yourself on a Saturday night. There was Olster Field, Camp Polk, Alexandria Air base. There were GIs all over the place. *How about girls?* I was twenty years old. I did not pay much attention. They didn't treat you like that when you

got to Texas. Gainesville was dry. You had Denton with teachers colleges. They had dances for us. In Louisiana, the people were overwhelmed with soldiers. Texas was a little better. It was the first time I had run into Cajun people. In Texas, the people were Southerners but they did not act like those in Louisiana. I was born in Chicago so it was different. It seems like Louisiana and Mississippi may have been the more difficult states. I hope no one is here from Mississippi or Louisiana. *I know the Division was stripped of about a thousand guys and sent overseas. This happened about four times. Then they discontinued the ASTP program and all the college kids came in, along with pre-flight cadets.* As MPs, we had to meet them at the station. I do not know where these guys came from but some had tennis rackets and golf clubs. They were headed for an infantry division. The discipline is a lot different in an infantry division. The discipline is rough. Even in town, if you saw an officer you had to salute him. Today's *MASH* where you sit there and have a beer with the Colonel, that would never happen. Even a Lieutenant, very seldom. *Was there a penalty if you did miss saluting an officer?* As MPs if we saw someone who did not salute an officer, we were told to pick them up; that was the end of their pass. We had a lot of Air Force pre-flight cadets whose discipline was very relaxed. You have seen in movies Air Force officers and noncoms drinking beer together. In the infantry divisions that does not happen. *Did you have a brig in both camps? Was there a stockade?* We had nothing to do with it. We had a Provost Marshall; he was a Major. We had a Captain and a couple of Lieutenants. It was a Platoon. We were attached to Division Headquarters. *How many platoons of MPs were there?* There was one platoon of MPs. When we got overseas, they shipped about twenty-five or thirty more guys to us. The funny part of it was I was twenty years old.

They loaded up and they put a tag on you that said 103rd Division MP. Everyone else had 409, 410, 411. They said that may save you life; you don't know. We had a lot of guys on our outfit that were private eyes, doorknob shakers, and policeman; they had experience. I was none of that; just six foot three. The funny part of it was that my son became a policeman. He started out as the Chief of Police of Englewood, Illinois. They took you for your height. *You had to be imposing.* When I was growing up a police officer was like a big Irish Sergeant. Now there are small women.

When we shipped out at Camp Shanks in New York, do you remember what boat you were on? I was on the General Brooks. *That was one of the smaller ones.* It was a Navy ship. A lot of officers and nurses were on our ship for fourteen days on the way to landing in Marseilles. We landed and had to march fifteen miles inland, a lot of them did not make it. From being fourteen days on a boat being cramped down in quarters there was no way you could march fifteen miles with a full field pack. They thought you could with your training. *As I understand it, they told us it was five miles and it was fifteen.* They gave us ammunition. We didn't know what to expect. The Germans had already bombed the harbor. We had to use the cargo nets on the landing crafts. One of the things I remember was, "Cigarette for papa? Chocolate?" *Were you on duty in Marseilles?* "No, when we got to Marseilles, we were in bivouac. We went back to where they were unloading their equipment in Marseilles. It was very dangerous. Marseilles is a port. The French had African troops there. For a carton of cigarettes, they would cut your throat. We were told to be very careful. I think they were soldiers from the barracks in the city. *They were Moroccans primarily and Algerians.* You know how cigarettes were very valuable. I remember we relieved the Third Division. We went into Lyons. We

were going up on trucks. We were getting strafed. I thought, gee we are Division Headquarters coming in. I remember we went into a ditch and one guy starts firing his M1. I had a carbine. I told him never do that again especially at night until you find out where you are. You can come back again. Leave the guy go. I was in the motor convoy that went up the valley. I remember it was the Third Division. They were on their way back. Just coming off the lines. Which was all up hill.

We weren't rifleman. We were MPs. We were ahead of the artillery, ahead of the engineers, etc. Company CP captured three prisoners one night and somebody had to go up to get them. You could take a jeep only so far and then you would walk, go get them, and bring them back. Then the German interpreters would get them. I shuttled back and forth. I was issued a pistol after the war was over. I do not know why we were issued a 45 when we already carried a carbine. Most of the guys had M 1s. *We got up there and relieved the Third and then we started moving. First attacks.* We were the first Division into Germany in the Seventh Army. December 16, the Battle of the Bulge started. We pulled back and went north. Metz or someplace else. We were protecting Patton's flank. It was cold. I remember that. We had shoe pacs. *Originally, we had combat boots then they gave you the shoe pacs.* We weren't really prepared for it. Our feet were wet. Somebody said, "How cold was it there?" I said, "15 degrees, 18 degrees, 20 degrees, it was never like Chicago's 10 degrees below. My wife said, "I hate to bring this up but where did you guys go to the toilet?" I said, "All France was a toilet." When you had to go, you went. You hope you would not get diarrhea. I accepted it.

If somebody misbehaved on the line or in the rifle company, you had to go get them. You would be surprised. I hate to admit it; a lot of guys were deserters. They

were going the wrong way the front lines were this way. MPs got a bad name. We were Division MPs. Some people were trying to sneak back and get away from the front line. Not our MPs, but some guys disappeared when they got over the front lines. Some riflemen. They reappeared after the Armistice. They had to go on trial. A lot of these guys were rapists, black marketers, and murderers. They were being sentenced back in the United States. A lot of bad elements in there too. They came back in the same boat that we did. *They were tried and convicted of crimes?* They may have gotten out after five years. There were deserters from the war too. They went to live with French families. I wouldn't say there was a lot of them because I wouldn't know. Being an MP, you saw some of that stuff. We got the respect of the men after awhile. Even when we come to the conventions and reunions, people would boo. We had about four of them killed; some directing traffic and were killed by the shells coming at you. We were in front of the artillery and behind the lines.

When the war got down to the real nitty gritty almost end, the MPs were first into the German town. The people were scared of us. The people knew MP meant "police". *You had a mark on your helmet?* And our rank. We would go right to the Burgermeister's house. They knew right away we were police. They did not know what was going to happen to them. We told them to bring all their weapons. They had white flags hanging out of their windows in Germany. Somebody asked me if I knew about the Holocaust. I said, "Not really." The first time we saw something was when we saw some Polish and Russian prisoners with striped uniforms on. They said, "Me Ruski, me Polski." People did not know what we were going to do. They knew we were the police. They knew how the German police, Gestapo operated. *When we were going through*

Germany and into Austria, slave laborers were on the road. I remember seeing them.

Did you have to gather them up or send them back? Yes. We called the medical people right away to try to get them some food. We visited Dachau. I did not realize these people were going through this. The German people I talked to seemed very intelligent. I asked them how they could do this to other people. *Most of them said they didn't know.* Sometimes I can't believe the German people didn't know about the camps. If we lived in Chicago and forty miles away is a camp and the trains were going back and forth with prisoners you got to know something is going on, especially if you lived in a country like Germany. It was different in the U.S.; even if you lived on the East coast, you knew about the Japanese being interned. A lot of times I thought that was a good thing. I tell you the truth in 1943 if a Japanese man walked into a bar on the west coast they would have just beaten him to death. They wouldn't have paid any attention if he were Japanese or Chinese; he was oriental. For his own sake, it was a good thing. I don't think they should have taken their property away. We thought some were going to be spies or something like that.

When the war ended and we were in Innsbruck, Austria, where were you stationed there? I was stationed up in the Alps in a town called Hellenberg. The only way you could get up there was by cable car. That is where the Division Command was. We were billeted in homes. We had to do check points for refugees after the war was over. The French took over for us. There was no fraternization. You could not talk to anyone. If you saw a pretty girl going down the street, you couldn't talk to her. Supposedly. Everyone went through the chow line twice to feed their girlfriend. Then I got transferred to the 45th. I came home with the 45th on the US Marine Panther. *So you had*

eighty-five or more points? No, I had sixty-two or something. I was on a waiting list. We went to Le Havre France, Camp Lucky Strike. I got transferred to the 45th. We got all new uniforms and our guns cleaned. We were on our way to Japan. We had started dropping the bomb on Nagasaki. They didn't know what to do with us anymore so they sent us home to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. I had a steak dinner and milk. I got a 30-day furlough. Then I got a telegram, which said fifteen more days. My mother was getting tired of looking at me; I didn't have any work or anything. Every night was Saturday night and every Saturday night was New Year's Eve. This is bringing back memories but that was the way it was then. Everywhere you went when you just came back, they would say, "Give that GI a drink." You couldn't actually go get a job because you were still in the Service. I reported back to Camp Greer, Illinois. I stayed there for five days and got my discharge. You had to have 85 points; you were right. The guys who had eight-five points went to the Fifth Infantry Division. I went to the 45th, Oklahoma National Guard. *The guys that spoke today were sent to the 45th in January of '45 while the war was still on.* The war actually ended in May of '45. The war with Japan was still on. We were training with the 45th. The 103rd was already deactivated. Still had the 45th patches still on.

Did you hear about Roosevelt's death, April 12? Yes, through the *Stars and Stripes*. I saw the paper. *Did it affect you?* I thought it would hurt the war effort because he was so much a part of the war effort. He was like Churchill, a leader. What I read later, was that he was only 62 years old when he died, not a real old man. He grew up during The Great Depression and knew how tough things were then. I was discharged December 7, 1945, Pearl Harbor Day. It was a great number. My grandpas were

printers. I used to work for National Tea Company before I went into the Army. It was a change store like A & P. Then I went to work as a paper cutter in a print shop. But the first year in December of '45, I worked in the Post Office. Then, I took the police exam naturally the next year since I had been a MP. They weren't hiring during the war so they were looking for policemen like mad. I was called right away. My mom said, "You are not going to become a police officer!" You are not going to become a police officer!" I am thirty-one years old. So, I said, "OK. I won't do that." So, I went to work for the Post Office at the Christmas rush. Then I went into the printing business. It was night work. I knew a friend of mine that was in the plastering business. So, I got into the construction business, 38 years plastering. *Was it a big outfit?* No, there were 25 or 30 men. It was construction. They are not big outfits. I got married April 1949. I have good children, two girls and a boy. My one daughter passed away a year and a half ago. Lindsay is here with her two children. The first reunion I attended was held in Springfield, Illinois. I have been to everyone since except for the one in Phoenix. I was still working and Phoenix would have been very hot. *How did you find out about the Association?* I was at a memorial in Skokie, Illinois and a guy from Company E 411th was standing there with his VFW cap on with 103rd on it. I said, "Lieutenant, are you from the 103rd?" He said, "Yes, you know we have reunions?" I've been to the reunions at Schaumburg, outside of Chicago. I moved to Skokie, Illinois in 1954. I have lived there ever since. I am retired. Last year I went to the monument dedication. We stayed at the Marriott in Washington, DC at that reunion. I have been to the reunions in Williamsburg, Oklahoma City, couple times at Dallas. *Have you met any other MPs in the Association?* I have met a few. The MPs had there own reunion. I didn't like the

way they operated. Like when they went to Green Bay. They stayed in “Mom and Pop” operations. I did not mind them. I stayed in a hotel or motel. Maybe thirty or forty showed up. They didn’t tell me there was a National Reunion. I got involved with Ken Hurdigan. He was E Company 411th. They kind of adopted us, me and my wife. We became good friends. You know what my wife did last year. She called Harold Branton and got these booklets and sent them to all the widows. A lot of them don’t come any more. Also, there are a couple of invalid guys. *Harold Branton was the historian for many many years and very active.* I bet you know Harley Richardson and Mel Wright. *He was the Monument person. It took him seven years to get the approvals and raise the money.*

Do you remember any MPs at a reunion? *I think at one reunion recently, I remember that there was an MP. It was probably you.* It probably was me. *Because you stood up and you were the only one.* Everybody booed me. *Everybody booed; that’s right.* *When he stood up, this was about three or four years ago, they pointed him out.* Last time I saw a lot of the MPs was Springfield. There were about four of us there. A couple of them are alive in Chicago. I used to be in contact with a couple of them in Chicago. A lot have passed away. We had a couple of reunions in Chicago. Most of the fellows are from Illinois or Michigan. *The original draft that filled up Camp Claiborne was from those states, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan. That is when the fillers came to Claiborne.* They wanted to do their part. I never thought I would be an MP that is for sure. People were kind of scared. I made good friends with Baxter. That was one of my grandson’s carrying the flag here. *Baxter has a lot of equipment, an ambulance, a jeep, all kinds of stuff.* He brought a lot to Schaumburg?

Can you remember where most of the guys you had to arrest and bring back were from? Regiments or Medical detachment? Mostly from the Rifle Companies. Did you ever run into any that were “battle fatigue” as they used to call it? Now they call it Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Yes and No. A couple guys like that. One time I even got sent back for R and R. I think it was to Lyon, France for three days. A Sergeant and myself got some rest in a French Barracks. It is called something else now. I got some clean clothes and cleaned my rifle. We saw some guys that had mental problems. They may have had mental problems when they went in. The war may have tipped them over.

We saw a lot of dead German soldiers but not a lot of American soldiers. They tried to pick up the Americans right away for morale reasons. We had an outfit you don't hear much about, “graves registration”. I was watching them one day pick up the bodies and put them in bags. They put up a shield so you could not see what they were doing. Did you escort German prisoners back? Yes. A lot of them I talked to between their broken English and my broken German. Some could speak English very well. Did you know German? I took German in high school. And they gave you that book. A lot of the Germans knew English pretty good. A lot of people had relatives in Chicago and Milwaukee in Germantown. Yesterday they said that St. Louis had a lot of German immigrants way back in the 1800's also. St. Charles that is near here also had some Germans. We saw some businesses with German names. When you picked up the German prisoners in rifle companies, did they have their helmets on? The ones I remember didn't have their helmets on, but they had their caps on. I was just going to bring that up. We asked the German prisoners why they did not have their helmets on. They had something like baseball caps on. They said they did not need them anymore.

They all had overcoats on. One time I dug into a guy's pocket. It had a can of goose grease in it. They used goose grease for butter. They did not eat like Americans. Americans fed everybody. The Germans lived off the land. I asked him what it was and he said it was goose grease. Our food was decent. Their coffee and cigarettes were terrible. *Even in films, you rarely see one with a helmet on. I think it was a mental thing, a sign of surrender, to take your steel helmet off. Did you pick up any German pistols from the prisoners?* No. Most of the time we had the Burgermeister receive all the weapons in town and we confiscated them. I have a dagger at home with a swastika on it. Those are valuable. I had about six pistols. When I got to the harbor, sailors were giving me about forty dollars for them. They wanted a souvenir I sold a couple and brought some home with me. My wife said we are not having any guns around the house. I gave them to my uncle. I got some medals. I got a German combat medal. It is a little different because it is round. I took, which I shouldn't had done, an iron cross off of a guy that says 1914. It is from WWI. I took a religious medal, a cross, from a German prisoner and the German interpreter called me in and said to give it back to him. We were not supposed to touch anything religious.

I would search the prisoners. In France, we used French Francs. In Germany, we had ration Marks. If you lose the German Marks you could use the French Francs. In town, there was a bakery where we used to buy bread. Sometimes you could go to a place and get a glass of wine. Everybody had wine. They always had Schnapps in their basement in the wine cellar. *When you moved into a house that is what you looked for right away.* In France, you could not do that. There were our allies. In Germany, they had five minutes to get their bedding and their food and get out. Our squad would take

over the house. That's how you lived. If you were out in a field, you slept on the ground. If it rained, you drowned.

You were in a squad with a buck sergeant in charge? Yes. Did you ever see him when you got back? Yes, at a reunion. He was from Kansas City. He was an older man. When I say "older" I'd say he was thirty-five or so. There were a couple Chicago policemen with us. How about the Major, Lieutenant, Captain? The Major came to one of our reunions. Major Allison from Maryland. She, my granddaughter here, was born in Maryland and I lived there for many years. He was a nice guy. He was a little guy compared to a lot of big guys that were around. Maybe that made him feel better. Our Captain was Lyons from Battle Creek, Michigan. Was the Major regular army? That is a good question. I think he was in the service already and came as part of a cadre. Was the Captain an ex-policeman? I found out later he worked for Sears in the advertising department. How did he get to be a Captain? OCS probably. How about the Lieutenant of your Platoon? I remember a Baxter, from Louisiana. They were basically nice guys. I did not really see them after the war.

You said you had so many men in your company and when you got overseas, they sent you thirty or forty more. They were in the Rifle Companies. They just assigned them to us. What kind of transportation did you have? Just jeeps or two and one half tons? Just jeeps and we had weapon carriers, ¾ tons. The guys would say that we were lucky because we moved up in trucks and jeeps. They had to walk. We had these things on the front of the jeeps to cut wires. Jerry (Germans) would put wires across the roads. A lot of them drove with the windshields down. If you were driving along it would cut your head right off. It was piano wire.

How about your food did you have a kitchen? If we were near Division Headquarters we had a few cooks in the mess there. Otherwise, you were eating K rations or C rations. We didn't have a separate kitchen. They tried to get you one hot meal a day. They tried to get it up to you once a day. We had little Hershey Bars. *We had D rations, dark, hard chocolate bars that you could hardly eat.* K rations had four cigarettes in a pack either Chelsea or Camels. We got a pack of cigarettes when we went through the chow line. Very few guys didn't smoke. When we were in Le Harve, France waiting to go to Japan, the going rate for American cigarettes was twenty dollars a carton. That was a lot of money. Everybody automatically smoked them when they were given to them. *I didn't smoke. After the war, they gave us a carton. I was stationed in Vienna. I sold it for two hundred dollars.* When we were in Le Harve, France, we were in tents. Everyday a Frenchman would come through the tents and he would ask, "What do you have to sell today, shoes, clothing, stockings, pants, anything?" We were waiting to go to Japan. *What did you think about Truman dropping the atomic bomb?* We didn't know that there was such a thing. At the time, it probably saved a lot of lives. A lot of people were against it but I was not against it. They would have killed Americans, especially Marines. We didn't see any Marines in Europe.