Oral Memoirs

of

William A. Womack

An Interview

Conducted by

Stephen M. Sloan

May 18, 2012

Collection: Special

Project: Texas Liberators of World War II Concentration Camps

Baylor University Institute for Oral History

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Memoir Procedure

1. Initial contact with the memoirist
2. Arrangements made for interview(s)
3. Recording of interview(s)
4. Transcribing of recording in the BUIOH office
5. Editing of transcript(s) by memoirist. As such, transcript(s) may not match audio recording(s) exactly.
6. Archiving and disseminating completed memoirs: one printed transcript for the memoirist and online access to the memoir via the digital collections portal of Baylor University. The finished transcript of the oral memoir follows the interviewee's stated wishes as reflected in his/her editing of the draft transcript(s), with only minor further editorial revisions by the editorial staff of BUIOH.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) with William A. Womack is unrestricted. The deed of gift agreement was signed on May 18, 2012.

Interview History

The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed in the offices of the Institute for Oral History, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Interviewer: Stephen M. Sloan

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Project Detail

The Texas Liberators Project was an oral history project sponsored by the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission from August 2011 to December 2013. The project consisted of nineteen interviews with veterans of the Second World War currently living in Texas who liberated or witnessed Nazi concentration camps in the spring of 1945. Copies of the interviews were distributed to the veterans themselves, along with their children. Additionally, the interviews were deposited in the archives of the Holocaust museums in Dallas, El Paso, Houston, and San Antonio. The interviews were also deposited in the Library of Congress as part of the Veterans History Project initiative.

The Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission, coalesced by Senate Bill 482, was established to ensure that resources are available to students, educators, and the general public regarding the Holocaust and other genocides.

Stephen M. Sloan was associate professor of history at Baylor University and director of Baylor University Institute for Oral History (BUIOH).

Robert B. DeBoard was a graduate student in the Department of History at Baylor University and a graduate editor and videographer for BUIOH.

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William A. Womack

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Stephen M. Sloan
May 18, 2012
Midland, Texas
Also present: Robert DeBoard

Project: Texas Liberators of World War II Concentration Camps

SLOAN: This is Stephen Sloan. The date is May 18, 2012. I'm with Mr. William Womack at his home [in] Midland, Texas. This is an interview for the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission's Texas Liberators Project. Thank you, Mr. Womack.

WOMACK: It's my pleasure.

SLOAN: I want to begin in Fort Worth.

WOMACK: Okay.

SLOAN: So I'd like to hear a little bit about—I know you're a bit of a historian. You've already told me that. I'd like to know a little bit about your family.

WOMACK: Okay. My father is from a little town in eastern Tennessee called Watertown. That's where he was born. And my mother was from a little town in southern Kentucky called Glasgow. My mother was married to my half-brother's dad for about a year, and he was killed in a railroad accident in Fort Worth. My dad happened to be on the engine, the steam locomotive, when he was killed, so they were good friends. And he knew mother quite well. So when my brother was born about three or four months later, my mother moved back to Kentucky. My dad courted her through the mail and proposed through the mail. They were married when my brother was about seven. Then they moved back to Fort Worth, close to the railroad track where my dad worked. And my sister was born in 1919, and I was born in October, 1921.

So we lived there for several years and then moved to the east part of Fort Worth, they called Riverside. Every summer, my mother would go back to Kentucky to the farm that she bought with her husband's insurance money. So I kind of grew up in the city and on the farm, too. In the city during the school year—days, or months, and then we'd go up there and spend a month or two every summer. So I grew up there in east Fort Worth.

And in—about ’38—I was about seventeen, I imagine—yeah, seventeen. I was going to—there weren’t any jobs around for kids, so I joined the Texas National Guard just to get their twenty-one dollars a month. And in ’39—well, actually in 1940, they started mobilizing the National Guard, and they were drafting twenty-year-olds. I was going to be nineteen in October, so I’d be prime draft bait in about a year. I’d already been in the guard for about a year and a half, so I just went ahead and joined up with them. And we went to Camp Bowie, Texas, down at Brownwood; stayed there about a year, training. And we were supposed to get out in a year. I was actually home, waiting on a discharge, on December 7, 1941. And, of course, you know what happened then.

So I just—I went back to the camp and they said, No discharges. Everybody’s in for the duration. In ’42, we got—the whole division got transferred to North Florida, when we was taking amphibious training. And this unit I was in was the Texas National Guard Thirty-Sixth Infantry Division. After about a year there, we went on maneuvers up in the Pinelands of North Carolina, South Carolina, for several months. Then we moved on up to Cape Cod, a camp called Camp Edwards, which is when we were taking amphibious training out in Nantucket Bay. That was in 1942. In the spring, I think it was April or May of ’43, we loaded on this ship, and the whole division went to North Africa. And that’s where our combat—we were combat reserve in Africa, but we went to Italy in a couple of months, and that’s where my combat experience started.

SLOAN: Well, I want to go back and ask you a few questions about some things that you mentioned. When you joined the guard in ’37, what was that like? What sort of things were you doing in the guard at that time?

WOMACK: The unit I joined was an artillery unit, and it was really easy. We’d just meet twice a month. We’d go in there and they’d show us how to bore sight the cannons and how to disassemble breechblocks and such as that, just general maintenance. How to transport the pieces around and—just pretty essential. We didn’t do any shooting or anything, but it was very simple. And about half of my graduating class was there, so we had a good time.

SLOAN: (laughs) Yeah.

WOMACK: There was really no—not very military. Wasn’t anybody around except people that we knew and had gone to school with.

SLOAN: Now, did your family do all right during the Depression?

WOMACK: Yeah, my dad was a locomotive fireman, and he had a real good-paying, steady job. And we didn’t suffer any from the Depression. And my older brother—half-brother graduated from high school and went to work in a Texaco station down the street. So everybody was making their way. And I had an older sister, and I think she worked a little at the library. And then I had a younger brother. He just played. He didn’t do anything.

SLOAN: So do you remember what your pay was in the Texas National Guard when you signed up?

WOMACK: Twenty-one dollars a month.

SLOAN: Twenty-one dollars a month.

WOMACK: And that's why—(both talking)

SLOAN: You were rich.

WOMACK: Yeah, I was rich. I had money to spend. Well, let's look at that this way. I could go to the movies. When I was a kid, my dad would give me fifty cents about every pay day. I would go to the movies for nine cents, and then I'd buy a sack of popcorn for a nickel. Then I'd go get a haircut for thirty-five cents and I had money left.

SLOAN: (laughs) Well, I'd like to hear a little more about the moment you hear about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I know that made an impression on you.

WOMACK: Yes, it did. I was—I think I was—I really don't recall exactly what I was doing, but I was at home with my mom getting ready to go look for another job—a job that I could—since I was going to be out of the guard I'd have more time. And so, shortly after I heard that, we turned on the—we didn't have a television. We turned on the radio, and they told all about it. And then they said, All discharges are frozen at the moment. Well, I wasn't really happy about it, but I wasn't too discouraged either. I wanted to do my part. So I went in with enthusiasm and to learn the job and do whatever I needed to do. I didn't really know what I was getting into.

SLOAN: Yeah, I don't think anybody did.

WOMACK: I'm sorry.

SLOAN: I don't think any—you or your buddies knew what you were getting into.

WOMACK: Oh yeah.

SLOAN: Well, take me from that moment forward. I know you talked about waiting on the discharge and your transfer to North Florida, and you're doing amphibious maneuvers there. What sort of training were you doing, and can you talk about that training and what you were doing there?

WOMACK: In Florida?

SLOAN: Um-hm.

WOMACK: Well, we were traveling. Actually, we were mostly moving the guns around. We'd go into an area and set up our pieces and get ready to fire, but we didn't have any ammunition. And we were on the firing range, so we'd just set them up and wait a little while, and take them down and move to a new location. This was all done in darkness, because we never moved during the day. And then, that was the practice we followed in combat, too, and I can understand why.

SLOAN: Um-hm. Yeah.

WOMACK: But it was in the swamps down there, and we'd—of course, we were learning how to get trucks out of being stuck, and our guns would sink in the mud holes. It wasn't all on pavement. It was cross-country.

SLOAN: And the maneuvers up in North Carolina and South Carolina?

WOMACK: Well, we were simulating combat with several more divisions. In fact, it was an army type—it was probably three or four divisions, and we were doing make-believe combat with those divisions. And just about the same thing we did in Florida, moving around at night and what we called dry-firing. You'd load a dummy-shell in the cannon, pull the trigger. Of course, nothing happened. You would take it out, move it a little ways, and stick it back in, shoot again. So it was just practice shooting those cannons.

SLOAN: Um-hm. Hey, can we stop for just a minute?

pause in recording

SLOAN: Well I'd like to go back. We were visiting off the recording about some of your interests when you were younger, if you'd like to talk about some of those.

WOMACK: Well, yes, while I was in the National Guard, I had an opportunity to take some correspondence courses through the mail, and I chose radio and telephone. They were just a regular correspondence course. They'd send questions. They sent me a book, and I read the book. And they would send questions, and I'd answer them. It was interesting. I learned a lot about telephones, how they were constructed, how they transmitted sound. Same with radios. And when I was in the—actually, I didn't tell anybody I knew all that when I was in the National Guard. It wasn't really important to me. But when we got up to Massachusetts, they began to—I could see where I would be of use with that because we had a lot of communication problems. Wire, telephone wire, was a big problem. Picking it up and laying it down and moving it from here to there.

And then we started getting radios. And I said, "Well, I know how to operate a radio." And they said, Oh, you do? From what? And I told them I had a correspondence course through the mail. The captain said, "Well, we'll just use you." And I didn't know exactly what they had in mind. But when I was—when we were in combat, I was actually many times up on the front lines with the infantry with the radio and an observer. I was not qualified to really observe artillery fire because I had never been to artillery school except the Fort Sill, Oklahoma. And then they didn't let me direct fire or anything. I just—up there. But I did learn how to lay the—orient the battery on a magnetic azimuth and such as that, so I could get the battery ready to fire if the lieutenant got shot or something happened to him. So that's where some of the pre-studies did affect my service as a combat soldier.

SLOAN: You also were a musician.

WOMACK: I'm sorry.

SLOAN: You were also a musician, right, when you were younger? Played the bugle?

WOMACK: Oh yeah. Well, I was in the—I played in the high school band. But unfortunately, I was so lousy (laughs) I didn't pass the course. So I just played one semester. I really didn't like it. It was no fun to play in the band. But I did know the scales. And so I was a bugler for a little while until another guy came in who played bugle better, so I gave it to him and let him do it. But I guess I could still play a little bit.

SLOAN: Well, let's go back ahead. You took me to—we went through maneuvers in the Pinelands area. And then what were you doing at Camp Edwards once you transferred to Cape Cod?

WOMACK: We were doing amphibious training. We'd go out in these little landing crafts out in Nantucket Bay and come back in and attack one of these little islands around Martha's Vineyard. We attacked Martha's Vineyard about five or six times. Never did conquer it. But it was real interesting. I liked Massachusetts really well, except for the winters were very cold. I've never been subjected to such intense cold as I encountered there. But still, it wasn't as bad as Germany in 1944, because we did have heated barracks and we didn't over in Germany.

SLOAN: Well, did you—was the expectation—I know you were following somewhat what was going on with the war during that period.

WOMACK: We were aware that we were going overseas when they started what they called surveying equipment. Like if you had a pair of leggings that were just canvas—leggings that we wore at that time. If they were worn, they'd take them up and issue you a new one. Same way with a belt or pack. Or if your rifle wasn't up to date, they'd take it up. And they issued new helmets. In fact, I've still got my old helmet up in the attic. When we first went in, they issued World War I helmets, those soup-bowl-type things. And I think it was a year or two later that we got in the new ones. They were no fun to wear.

But when they started surveying equipment, we knew right then that we were headed for overseas. And in less than two months, we were in North Africa. And that wasn't bad over there—the combat—where we landed was a little place called Mers-el-Kébir, which wasn't very far from Oran. And we stayed there at Mostaganem, I think, for about a month, and we moved to the west coast, to the Casablanca area. And we practiced our surveying. That's where I learned to run a survey instrument, and how to "lay the battery," we called it. And we were in combat reserves because the *Afrika Korps* was just about defeated at that time. And our whole divisions caught one German in about a four month period. And then, let's see, we got up there in April, and then in August, the same year, we went to—made the Salerno invasion in Italy.

SLOAN: How was the passage over for you, on the Atlantic?

WOMACK: Oh, not well. The sea was rough. Had a lot of northeasterly winds. We were about four days out, and our—the ship we were on quit. The engine stopped, and the convoy left us. And we were sitting out there by ourself. And they told us to take our

boots off and get ready to inflate our lifebelts. And we had one destroyer that was circling us, and every now and then, we could hear a depth charge go off. So we knew we were going to get torpedoed by a German submarine just any time. About eight or ten hours later, well, the mechanics finally got the engine running again, and we finally caught the convoy about daylight. Of course, they were doing about ten knots and we were doing eighteen, so we were going full-speed. Boy, what a rough ride, too.

SLOAN: I imagine those were some tense moments where you're just there, dead in the water.

WOMACK: There were a lot of times in that rough sea, the screw would come out of the water and the whole ship would vibrate. Then we'd start digging in the waves again, and away we'd go. But we finally caught up and arrived to our destination safely. Of course, there was a lot of us sick on board.

SLOAN: Did you get sick?

WOMACK: Sir?

SLOAN: Did you get sick?

WOMACK: No.

SLOAN: So you could have been a navy man?

WOMACK: No. I didn't like those ships. They were too confining. (both laugh) You could just walk about fifty feet from side to side (laughs) and you were—then you'd have to turn around and walk somewhere else. (Sloan laughs) So I wouldn't have made a sailor very well, I don't think.

SLOAN: Well, I'd like for you to tell me your first impressions when you got to Mers-el-Kébir. Just take me through that. What were your impressions?

WOMACK: Okay, we went through the Straits of Gibraltar about two or three o'clock in the morning. And they were lit up like New York City. You could see every ship in the convoy from reflected light. And so, about daylight, we got to our designation, which was a small port. We were the only ship there debarking. And I was standing on the fan tail looking down, and I was amazed at how clear and green the water was. You could see the prop on the tugboat churning the water as they pushed us into the wharf. And so, before we got off the ship, they handed us all a bandolier of ammunition. First time I'd ever had that much—many cartridges. So we knew right then that we were in trouble. (Sloan laughs) That we were expected to use that stuff.

SLOAN: Did you have any encounters with any of the locals there?

WOMACK: The locals stayed their distance. We didn't see a few of them on ship board, acting as sort of roustabouts and ship-board laborers. And most of them just wore a breechcloth and a raghead. In fact that's what we called them, ragheads. But they were—

I didn't see many of them. I put—a few weeks later we got passes, and we went into Algiers. And we got to see a lot of Muslims and—I guess they were Muslims. Native people in their dress. We were awed, you know. They looked at us, and we looked at them. We couldn't converse, so we just passed by. It was an experience.

SLOAN: It's a long way from Fort Worth.

WOMACK: Long way from Cow Town. (both laugh)

SLOAN: So then, you said you got to go to Casablanca as well. Right?

WOMACK: Well, no we never did.

SLOAN: Oh, you didn't. Okay.

WOMACK: We could see it. We was close enough, but they didn't give us any leave. We were up to—the nearest town of any size was Casablanca, but there was a small town nearby called Port Lyautey. But it was sort of inland. It wasn't really on the sea. And we'd go down—on our time off, we'd go down to the sea. Lot of times, we'd have a supply of hand grenades that the navy had salvaged out of a ship that had sunk during the invasion of North Africa, and we'd take those hand grenades and throw them—pull the pin out and throw them in the ocean. They'd go off, and a whole bunch of fish would come up. The native boys would swim out and get the fish. So we had plenty of fish to eat. (Sloan laughs)

SLOAN: And time on your hands, it sounds like, a little bit.

WOMACK: Yeah, there wasn't much to do. My section was called a survey section, and we mapped all of the—well, it was a big cork oak forest there. The oak trees looked a lot like they did here, but the bark on them would be four or five inches thick. They'd peel that off, and it was used for cork and insulation. And so we would map those trees and plot them on a piece of paper. That was just to keep us busy.

SLOAN: (laughs) Now, I know you're also preparing for the Italian campaign while you're there.

WOMACK: We knew—we kind of expected that when they invaded Sicily, to go in on that, but we never did. So they were priming us for the Salerno invasion. We were part of the Fifth Army at that time, and that was made up of the Forty-Fifth Division from Oklahoma and the Third Division—I've forgotten where they were from, up north somewhere. And of course, there was a lot of support, navy support people involved in that, too. But we got bombed several times, but we had no casualties. We had good air cover. They kept the German air force at such a high altitude that they couldn't do much. We did—on D-Day, we did lose—our first casualty was a casualty from strafing. It was one of my best friends, too. He was a Golden-Glover, and we used to box—I used to box with him all the time. He got killed in an air raid. So from then on it was sort of a—it was no fun anymore. Fun and games ended.

SLOAN: You knew at that point that you were in war.

WOMACK: We stayed in Italy about a year, I guess. And then we went to the Anzio beachhead after that. And then, after the Anzio beachhead, we moved as far north as a little Italian town called Civitavecchia, which is a small town on the west coast of Italy. It's on the Aegean Sea. And we pulled out there and went back to the Naples area. Went to a town called Pozzuoli. And we boarded the LSTs and went to southern France. And in southern France, of all the things—I've read about this before. We landed up at the town Fréjus—F-r-e-j-u-s I think it is. It was the town that Napoleon returned to after his exile in Corsica. I thought that was really neat. We didn't have a very big battle there.

SLOAN: It wasn't a lot of resistance.

WOMACK: No, not a lot of resistance. The Germans made a token resistance and hightailed it out of there because the—the army at Normandy was starting to move at that time, too.

SLOAN: Yeah, so they had pressure on the northern front there.

WOMACK: Yeah, it was real funny. The day we took Rome was about the sixth of June. And I think it was the same day as they made the Normandy invasions. (both laugh) The papers didn't say anything about Rome. That was fun. It was like going to a big parade.

SLOAN: Well, I'd like to hear more, before we get to southern France, some of your memories from the operations in Italy.

WOMACK: Okay—with artillery, we couldn't bypass roads very easily. The Germans had made a practice of blowing down trees across the roads, dozens of big trees, three or four feet in diameter. When we'd try to drag those out of the way, they had them booby-trapped. It was real—it was a fun game, trying to get in there and help the engineers get those trees out where we could get through. A lot of times—we didn't have chainsaws at those days. They had to cut the top of them out and tie a tank on to them and drag them on out of the way. And we'd try to get through there that way. That was a big problem.

We didn't get very much counter battery fire except when we got into the Liri River valley. Then we were hit pretty hard at times (buzzing sound) around the Monte Cassino Abbey. I remember when they bombed that thing. I was laying on my back in my foxhole, and I looked up and here come all these airplanes with bomb bay doors open. And I said, "Oh my, we're going to get it now." But they didn't drop a bomb until they just got past us. Then they bombed the abbey pretty well, but it didn't do any good. We didn't make any more progress after that. They just tore up everything. And funny thing about it, my neighbor across the street was one of the guys who loaded bombs in those airplanes. He was in Italy, too, at the same time. But they were down in the southern end of the country at Bari. I was over there talking to him, and he told me that he was loading bombs for that bomb run. I said, "You SOB, you liked to kill me." And he said, "Too bad."

SLOAN: Now, as a forward observer are you with an artillery unit?

WOMACK: Yes, I was with the Battery B, 155th Field Artillery, Thirty-Sixth Infantry Division. I was cross-trained in everything. I could not only go up and run radios at the forward observer post; I was a good gunner. I could lay the battery. I could sight the gun. I could ram the shells in. I could fire the piece. There wasn't anything about that that I couldn't do. And I'd already been in the army three or four years doing that same job back in the States, so it was nothing new except we got counter-battery fire a lot. I didn't like going up on the forward observer too much. After you got up there it wasn't too bad, but a lot of times you'd run across enemy patrols at night, and that's when we moved. And the first time I went up I was carrying a box of rations under one arm and a Tommy gun under the other. And I don't know, if we'd have run into a bunch of Germans, I'd have probably dropped both of them and run (laughs) because I couldn't fire. I might have thrown the rations at them. That would have been no good, really, as far as protection. But they insisted, so you have to do what they tell you to.

SLOAN: What was your impression of the artillery units that you worked with?

WOMACK: Our artillery was devastating. That's what the captured Germans said. Because we had a system that they developed at Fort Sill, and it was called the fire direction center. Every artillery piece in the area was tied into that. And when you got ready to fire, if you had—if we had a bad attack or something, we had a system called Time on Target. That's where every gun within range would fire at a certain time. We had them coordinated so that the time of flight from the muzzle of that gun would be the same with the gun behind us, or a gun in front of us, so that they'd all hit at the same time. It was called Time on Target. And the people that coordinated that were behind the lines in what they called our fire direction center. And it was very effective. So we'd have—they'd make an attack—you might have a hundred or two hundred artillery shells landing in that same general area at one time.

We also had a fuse, what we called the posit fuse that we'd use. It was radio controlled, and it would send out a little impulse. When it got so close to the ground, it would ignite the powder charge and the shell, and it would explode thirty or forty feet off the ground, and that was devastating. The worst thing we had to contend with was with German artillery firing on us. But we were also close enough that we'd get mortar fire. At the Liri River valley near Monte Cassino, we were only thirty-five hundred yards from our target zone. I would get behind the artillery piece with binoculars, and I could follow the flight of that shell until it hit the side of that monastery. And that's way too close.

SLOAN: Yeah. How's your hearing as good as it is?

WOMACK: What? (both laugh) I get a disability payment from the Veterans Administration now for hearing loss.

SLOAN: Yeah, I would imagine. That did a lot of damage to your ears, all that artillery that you were around. Yeah.

WOMACK: Well, it went on for—I think we were in combat—our division was in combat for 360 days, actual combat. But the artillery unit was in much longer than that

because we'd support other units. And we belonged to what we called the Corps Artillery. The Corps Artillery is an artillery battery that is not attached to any division. We were attached to the Thirty-Sixth Division, but they'd use us to support other divisions, so we were in combat a lot longer than just 360 days. (coughs)

SLOAN: All right, well, let's—you had taken me to the invasion of southern France. So you're into southern France now, and you've established that position there. Can you take me forward from there?

WOMACK: Yes. (clears throat) We were in the Eighth—I'm sorry, Seventh Army, which is made up of the Thirty-Sixth Division, the Sixty-Third, and the Forty-Fifth, and probably the Third Divisions, and other supporting units. We went up the Rhone River valley. The Rhone River runs north and south, just west of Switzerland. And it's the main river drainage for that part of France. And the Germans were set up for defensive positions along that. They were in the defensive all the way. We'd take one little town after the other and then get ready for a counterattack. And sometimes the counterattack drove us off, and we'd have to go back and do it again. But the counterattacks were what we were prepared for. We could kill a bunch of people during that. And we—

SLOAN: Because you could establish their position?

WOMACK: Do what?

SLOAN: Talk about that. Why counterattack?

WOMACK: Well, the Germans would—they liked to counterattack before you could really organize your defense. And they had counterattacks prepared in case they lost an area, that they could send those other troops in, counterattack troops, and retake that area. That was the thing. And we were prepared for that. So we knew that they were going to have counterattacks. That was just the name of the game, and that's the way everybody works. We didn't—well, a lot of times we'd fire a heavy barrage, and we immediately moved through our impact area. And you could see the damage we did. The houses would be all blown up, and there'd be dead soldiers all over the streets. None of them with bullet holes, but they'd be—buildings knocked down. A lot of them crashed into the debris. So we were effective in really destroying emplacements like that. We didn't have any real devastating battles. Our casualty rate was very low. The most casualties we had at one time was, I think, three men killed and seven or eight wounded.

I remember the worst casualty I encountered was there in Italy. We were in a position, and there was a creek behind us, a little circular creek. We were in a direct observation of that Monte Cassino Abbey. We were in that position probably twenty-eight or thirty days. All we got was small-arms fire—I mean mortar fire in our position. One day they decided they'd really give us a working-over and they did. I was in the dugout up in front of the battery. The battery was firing over me. So we started getting the fire, and when we shut down everybody went in their holes. I was listening over the radio when the number-one gun hollered, "Help, help, we got casualties on number one." I said, "Stand by, I'll call the medics." I called the medics on another phone. And in just a minute an ambulance

went right by us and down to the gun position, but the shelling continued. Then we got another phone call, this guy said, "God damn, both our medics are down." I said, "Well, I'll be down there."

So I threw the phone down and took off, jumped out of my hole and run down there. Shells were still coming in. They'd come in, and there was a big bank to my left, sort of an erosional feature, and it went down into the creek. I was running down parallel to that bank. Shells were hitting up in that bank, and every time I'd hear one coming in I'd hit the ground and double up. I lost my helmet, so I didn't pick it up. I didn't go back and pick it up. I finally got down there to where the ambulance was, and it was shot all to pieces. Two medics, they said. One of them was hit in the back, and he couldn't move. He was a captain, and he was laying down close to that bank on one of the wheels of the ambulance. And the driver was laying under the ambulance. I looked around, and there were three or four bodies lying in the creek, floating in the creek. So I waded out about waist-deep and got one, drug him back and turned him over. He started talking, you know. I went back and got another one, turned him over, and he started moving. I knew he was—and this last one I got, he just kind of moved a little bit. And in the meantime, another guy from the other gun came over and helped me. So there was two of us out there in that creek.

When we got all those guys out, two of them were dead. And this one guy who was a friend of mine, he was from Fredericksburg, Texas, a German boy. He was hit right in here and right in here real bad. This one up here was really gushing blood, so I pulled his shirt off and put a bandage around and tied it real tight around his shoulder and around his neck. And he hadn't moved. I knew he wasn't dead because I could feel his heartbeat, and so I was cutting his pants off with my pocket knife so I could get to this wound down there. It was bleeding pretty bad. I was—my knife was kind of dull, and I was jabbing and pulling and jabbing and pulling. All of a sudden he opened his eyes, spit out a bunch of water and said, "God dammit, Womack, watch your—watch that fucking knife!" I said, "Shut up!" Just kept working. I got him all bandaged up. And then, by that time the shelling had stopped.

And another guy came over from number-two gun, and we loaded them in—there was six of them in that ambulance. We left the two dead ones laying there. And I got in the ambulance, and one of the shells had hit up on that bank, and a big fragment of the shell had went right through the right window, through the instrumental panel, right in front of the—through the steering wheel. I said, "This thing will never start." But I turned on the switch and hit the starter. Cranked right up. I drove out to Highway Six, turned left, and saw a little sign on the road that said Aid Station Point with an arrow. We went down there, drove in there. The captain come out—somebody come out and said, "I'll take those two right there." I said, "What about the other four?" He said, "I don't have any more room for them. Take them down to that other ambulance—that other field hospital." I said, "Where is that?" He said, "About two miles down the road."

So I took them down there and I unloaded them, and all of those guys survived. I was sitting in there muddy, dirty. I didn't have my hat. I picked it up when we went by. I said, "You got a cup of coffee?" And they gave me a cup of coffee, and I sit there drinking this

coffee. I looked up, and then in walks my best buddy with a big old bandage around his arm. I said, "God, what happened to you?" He said, "I was lighting a fire to make some coffee and it caught my shirt on fire." (laughs) That was Cliff Puckett. So that was one of the hazardous experiences I had.

SLOAN: Oh my goodness, yes. Yeah.

WOMACK: After the war was over I went by and visited my friend down in Fredericksburg. He was in the car business, and I bought a car from him.

SLOAN: (laughs) I hope he gave you a good deal.

WOMACK: Oh, he did. His wife and daughter thought I hung the moon.

SLOAN: Well, they should, they should.

WOMACK: He died several years ago. In fact, there's only one of us left; I showed you his picture.

SLOAN: Yeah. Well, there's another story that I know you've told I want to ask you about, and that's the two clerks at Anzio.

WOMACK: The what?

SLOAN: The two clerks that came by your post. That story of the two clerks that came by the post that missed the battle of Anzio.

WOMACK: Oh, oh yeah.

SLOAN: It's more of a lighthearted story than the one you just told.

WOMACK: They were catching up. They'd been bypassed. Cliff Puckett and Jim Pridemore is who it was. So what happened was—I didn't even know this story until years later. They said that they were on their way up there, and they went through this little village. The traffic was real bad, and they were riding in, sort of, an open pickup in the backseat—in the bed of it. And they were sitting there, and the traffic was all stopped. There was a couple of good-looking girls come walking by. Neither one of them were Italian; they were just ole Texas boys. But they had enough lingo about them to figure out that these girls were going to a party, and they invited them to go with them. They said, Why, hell, yes, let's go. So they bounded down from the back of that truck and followed these girls. They went around through a bunch of little old, narrow streets and up some stairs and went around a little ways. And finally they got to this building.

One of them said, "Reckon we ought to go in here?" And about that time, a bullet ricocheted off the top of the—the part over their heads, so they just went in. They jerked their pistols out and one of them said, "Hey, Cliff, have you got any bullets in your gun?" He said, "Yeah, don't you?" "No, I don't have any. Give me some." They were real prepared soldiers. So one of them was the battery clerk. He never was exposed to fire at

all. They went on up to the party. And they were having fun. Pretty soon Puckett got separated. Pridemore heard all this commotion, and this other fellow, his buddy, was being patted on the back. And a little later, he rushed up as his buddy was kissing a girl. He asked, "What the hell's going on." "Well, you know Carla there"—that was one of the girls they picked up on the way. "She said she'd go to bed with me if I would take her to America." (laughs) He said, "What did you say?" He said, "Well, I said, 'Hell yes, let's go.'"

The party went on and on and nobody ever left, and they were getting stone drunk in there. And they said—they got together and said, We better get the hell out of here and get back to the battery. Well, they finally found their way back to the road where they left, but there was no trucks there. They were all gone. So they sat down and waited for another convoy, and finally they found a ride. It was a day later that they got back to the battery where they were supposed to be. We were sitting there eating supper. They come walking in. I said, "Hey, hi guys." I didn't know all this had taken my place. I said, "Where you been?" They said, Oh, we been down the way. And so I guess it was probably twenty years later that I heard that story. (both laugh) But they got away with it.

SLOAN: Are there any other stories from that time in Italy? I know there's a lot, but are there any others that stand out to you?

WOMACK: Yeah. I have—my friend, who I talk to all the time, was telling me the last time we got together about—we—let's see, I guess that was up in northern—the northern part of Italy, somewhere. We took over, ran the Germans out of a position, a gun position. And we took it over. It was just perfect for us. So we set our gun up and there was a dugout. They had a dugout sort of cave, and then they had sandbagged the front of it. So we said—

They had a new guy; we had a replacement come in for somebody that got wounded. And so, after that night, they had to put a tarp over the thing. And two of them decided they'd sleep in there. Well, old Vince was my buddy. He said, "We were—got in there. We both went to sleep, and I felt something on my leg. I poked this guy and said, 'Keep your hands to yourself.' He said, 'What the hell are you talking about?'" So pretty soon, he felt it again. He said he had a flashlight. He turned it on, and there was a big rat on his leg. Said the rat ran in there and jumped—crawled—jumped out. Crawled in between the sandbags. He pulled out his .45 at the range of about a foot, blasted that rat, and he said the sand just covered him up in there. It was just terrible. (Sloan laughs) He said the next day that rat smelled so bad they had to get out. But that was an interesting story.

SLOAN: Well, let's go back to—you're, kind of, moving village by village in southern France. And because of the excellence of the artillery, you're not meeting a lot of strong—you're having a lot of success in kind of paving the way as you move forward.

WOMACK: Yeah. At that time, we had brought our battery up to strength pretty well. I didn't have to work on the guns, and I was available for observation. There wasn't much going on. We'd go up there and watch for the Germans. We were at a little place called Bergheim. It was on a little hill out in the Alsace plain. You could see the Rhine River

just past it. And you could see the enemy gun positions. And when they fired, we'd fire back at them. So I was—we were having artillery duels daily. We were using up artillery shells by the truckload. So everybody that had the driver's license for a truck got drafted into hauling ammunition. And I would happen to get in that bunch. And we'd go back to that little place—an ammo dump, in France—a little place near a town called Nancy. Well, Nancy was about twenty-five or thirty miles away, and that was a sixteen-hour round-trip in a GI truck because the roads were clogged with traffic, and it was dark and you had to drive slow.

Well, I come back one morning with a load of ammunition about—well, it was pre-dawn. The battery was firing at that time. And this fellow—well, let's see. I'm getting ahead of my story. Anyway, I went back to the—we were billeted in the houses. I went back to the house I was billeted in. I'd been up all night driving that truck, and I was going to sleep. And I had just got my boots off and crawled into that sack when I heard these shells coming in. They make a peculiar sound, you can tell. There was four explosions right outside the house. And I'm not—a minute later, I heard somebody holler, "Medic, medic. Number three," I think it was. And one of my friends, whom I've known for years, was on that gun. So I ran out, got my shoes on, ran out there, and there was some bodies laying out there. There was a shell hole still smoking.

And I found three guys that were—two or three that were already dead, and one of them was alive. Medic wasn't even there. I tried to stop the bleeding as much as I could, and we rolled him on. Finally they came with a litter, put him on; then I saw another one. He was kind of holding him up against a wall. And he was—this particular guy was named R. B. Bryant. He had married a girl that was in my graduating class from high school, and I knew him really well and I knew her really well. And when we were in Massachusetts, his wife came up to see us—to see him. She didn't want to see me especially. Anyway, they invited me to dinner. And I went to dinner with them. They got a big kick out of me. I put on one of the ladies' aprons and washed dishes.

So this guy was laying up there, and his arm's gone from right there. I put my belt on his shoulder for what's left of his arm and finally got that stopped. But he had several more wounds in his back, and pretty soon the blood was everywhere. He said, "I don't want to die here." And in just a second, he was dead. And that was one of the things that kind of haunted me. Years later, I was in college and I was writing a geological report for one of my classes. I was staying at my dad's—I was living with my dad. I was in the front bedroom, and it was cold in there. We didn't have any central heat or anything. And so I finished my report and went to bed about one o'clock.

I slept about a few hours, and then I woke up and I was just soaking wet. I had this dream that I was laying on my back, flat on my back and I couldn't get up for some reason. I looked up and there was this shadow of a man standing over me. And he said, "Here, Bill, take my hand." I reached up, and he offered me this half an arm. And I woke up in this cold sweat. That went on for periodically for several years until Char and I had kids. And finally it—I wrote a story about it and it finally quit. That was the worst thing I've ever had was the particular dream about that guy. But I wasn't subject to any small-arms

fire. Artillery fire is bad enough. But I made it without a scratch. (Womack crosses himself) I guess I—thank goodness.

SLOAN: Somebody's looking out for you. So were y'all able to reach the German positions from where you were?

WOMACK: I'm sorry?

SLOAN: From that artillery, were you able to reach the German positions from where you were?

WOMACK: Yeah, we could. We could, but they were like us. They'd move around. And we—they had—we had an elevation advantage, but they had spies in that little town. It was, sort of, a little German town, really. They spoke German and French in this particular town. They knew everybody in there. And they knew everything we did. So we were glad to get away from that position. Really, we didn't have too much more trouble until—I can't think—we really—well, except when we started capturing those concentration camps. The only one I went to was Landsberg, and I didn't know about that until they come up. Well, the captain come down and said, "I want you to take three men from this gun section and get on this truck and go up to this—follow this other truck." I said, "Okay, what are we going to do?" He said, "There's something up there you need to see." So that's when we saw Landsberg. It was a—kind of a pretty location, really. There was a big row of dense pine—fir trees and a lot of them scattered around.

When we got there, all the prisoners were on the inside. We went inside, and then the prisoners started, kind of, drifting out. Then we saw all these dead folks, and then we decided we'd get out of there. The poor inmates were just kind of—were in sort of a daze. They didn't act like they knew what they were doing. They just milling around from one place to the other, in between the trucks. And they'd get in the trucks and out of the trucks. Some of them were just boys, you know, like teenagers. And some of them were old men. But they all walked with sort of a stiff-legged gait. They were nothing but bones. They just had a little skin. So they wanted—they'd come up and they'd say, Food, food. Of course, when we first started that, we had rations in the truck and food scattered around the area, you know, like soldiers do. They'd get so much every day and they wouldn't eat it all, so we started giving them stuff. And the next day we found out we made a big mistake in doing that, because our rations were so concentrated that it killed some of them. Why, they had been on a diet of water and turnips for years, and they didn't—couldn't handle any high-protein food. I later wrote a story about it. We really didn't have any action there, but to flower up my story I made a little action out of it.

And then we came back, or we went back to our battery, and then we saw a lot of them. We passed crowds of them on highways, walking one way or the other. Sometimes they'd be walking back towards us, sometimes they'd be walking forward. And we didn't enter—I didn't go into any more. I know we captured some more. They asked me if I wanted to go, and I said, "No way." And when the war ended we were in Austria, and our unit captured Hermann Göring, of all people. He was trying to get away to Austria—to Switzerland. When we—a lot of the concentration camp people were in pretty good

shape, and they put us to work hauling those refugees from the concentration camps to Switzerland. And we'd go up to—I think we were at Geneva, and we'd go up to the border, and right, stop—we wouldn't go into Switzerland. We'd stop right outside the line, which was a sort of a fence. We had to unload and walk across the border. And then we'd get in our trucks and go get some more.

SLOAN: Did you have occasion to have much interaction? We talked about you sharing food with them, but did you have any other interaction with any of the—?

WOMACK: Yes, especially when we started hauling refugees back. In fact, I even have a picture with a couple of refugee girls that looked like in pretty good shape, and most of us spoke—I think most of them we picked up were French and Italians, mostly French. And they'd tell us what they had to eat, which was nothing, and about their life. They was just treated like animals. I even had one of them gave me a pistol. He said, "I can't take this into Switzerland." He says, "Here, you take it." And I said, "Where'd you get it?" He says, "I stole it from a German." Okay. And I think my son has the pistol now. All those—I sent home gobs of souvenirs: knives, bullets, helmets, pistols. I gave them all away to somebody that wanted them. I didn't want them anymore. They just brought back bad memories for me. The only thing I got is a couple of helmets in the attic, but I don't know where they are. If you want a helmet, you can go get it.

SLOAN: (laughs) Well, can you describe the camp itself in Landsberg, what you remember? You said about the grove of trees, but what did the camp look like?

WOMACK: Okay. The fence looked like it was prefabricated. The posts were—they had a—looked like about a four-by-four, and they'd stick it up this way, and then a two-by-four out this way on another post and then a two-by-four on the ground so that they were self-sustaining. You didn't have to dig a hole to put them in, but they were supported by barbed wire. They had a mesh wire on this side, but heavy barbed wire on the top. They were just out on sort of a flat plain. Looked like they had cleared the trees off, because the trees were in a perfect line. Looked like they'd just took a bulldozer and went down that and cleared all the trees off. And there were a few trees around the front, but the gates were made out of wood and wire, real flimsy.

But they had guard towers, probably fourteen, fifteen feet high. There was a wall—the fences were about, I'd say, probably eight feet, eight to nine feet, about like these walls here. But the guard towers were about twice that high, and some of them were—had insulators on them, were electrified. But these that were in Landsberg that I saw, weren't. They were just tacked on there with a staple, looked like you would use them around the barnyard. Barbed wire was very different, definitely. It had spikes on it that long. And these houses, barracks, I guess, some of them were sort of buried. One of them we saw. But most of them were just sitting out there in plain—I didn't go in. I wasn't about to go in any of those things. But they'd have windows down, and it wasn't—just ordinary small buildings. They were about ten to twelve feet apart. But I don't know about where the—I imagine they had separate latrines somewhere, bathrooms. But then I didn't look around that closely. I saw all those dead bodies, and I wanted to get out of there.

SLOAN: You didn't spend a lot of time in the camp?

WOMACK: No.

SLOAN: Why was it you think that they wanted y'all to see the camp?

WOMACK: They wanted us to see the atrocities that were committed. And these—most of the bodies were just bones and skins. They were starved to death, I think. The cold will kill you. But that was just one of the things they wanted us to see about why we were there, why we were fighting. But it was something I haven't forgotten easily. I'd like to forget it.

SLOAN: Did it change at all your thoughts about why you were fighting?

WOMACK: It did. I told them, at that time, I felt like we ought to keep on shooting them because there was no justice. And when I read about the gas chambers, that was pretty bad, too. But I didn't see any of those. Looked like these prisoners were—well, there was a boxcar, a couple of boxcars full of bodies on a siding right outside of the camp. They would open these gates, and they would have access to the boxcars then. But I guess the inmates loaded the dead on those things, and they transported them up to Dachau, which is where the crematoriums were.

SLOAN: It sounds like it hadn't been liberated very long when y'all went in.

WOMACK: When I got there, there was—they had got there. Just had—somebody had got there. The doors—gates looked like they had run through them with a tank or something, because they were just splintered. And the inmates were just wandering out. They'd try to talk to you, but most of them didn't speak English that I could understand. And, of course, we weren't prepared to feed any of them or do anything with them except look at them. We stayed up there about an hour probably, maybe two hours. And everybody got back in the truck without being told to.

SLOAN: Well, I want to take you back a little bit. I left you on the wrong side of the Rhine. When did y'all break through and get an opportunity to cross the Rhine?

WOMACK: Steve, I don't remember exactly the dates. But we left—there was no bridges down in that area where we were. And we went north up the river to Mannheim. There was a bridge, and we crossed the river at Mannheim into the little town of—I've forgotten the name of that town. (coughs) The main town was Frankfurt. We went south, turned due south from that point. All that, all the Seventh Army turned that—we were sort of in the middle. The west flank went through—went to Munich and turned south. And we went through the little town of Ulm, U-l-m, and sort of turned south there. And, of course, with a big long line because we knew that the Germans would be trying to get into Austria. And I'm sure there was an army on our left somewhere. On our right was the Rhine River. So we knew they weren't going to go back that way.

But we caught thousands. I've got pictures of them. We set up POW camps. One time, I think the day the war was over, well, I was—they assigned a lot of us to guard a certain

area. They took me and one of my old high school mates, a fellow named John Rothrock, who was from my hometown, and in fact he went to school with me. And we were out on this road, just an empty highway like you—there was no houses around, just trees. Kind of like being—kind of, land, really, a lot like going from here to Andrews, anyway. We were just down out there on the highway, and all of the sudden, we heard all this noise. We looked around, and here come a whole company of German soldiers in columns about ten abreast, ten or fifteen abreast. There was this guy out in front of them leading them, and they were stamping that ground. Boy, they were marching in precision.

Well, they got up there pretty close. We had our big ole heavy-duty carbines and we put them down and said, Halt. And they all stopped. We went over there and said—I went over there and poked the little guy, that captain in the belly with my gun, and I took his pistol. I said, "Come this way." I said—let's see, didn't I say—I said, "*Raus*," and I pointed this way. And they all started marching again. We waltzed up to a POW enclosure with two GIs out in front and about a hundred Germans behind us. But that's the most I ever participated in capturing. I think I gave the gun away. It was—somebody wanted it and I said, "Here take it." I already had one. (laughs) I like to have a lot of guns, guns and helmets, and junk.

SLOAN: You liberated these things, we've already established.

WOMACK: I liberated these things.

SLOAN: (laughs) Well, I know when you crossed the Rhine, you knew the tide was turning when you started taking on all these—

WOMACK: Well, we really knew that when we got into Alsace because they were—Patton and the Third Army had wiped out two German armies up there at Falaise Gap, and they were almost unopposed from there to the Rhine river. And after we got across the Rhine, we didn't have hardly any opposition at all. Of course, the Russians were on the outskirts of Berlin at that time, too.

SLOAN: Um-hm. So where were you when Germany surrendered?

WOMACK: I was at Bergheim, Austria. There was a nice, quiet little town, and they gave—an order came down, says, Hold your position, Don't fire unless fired upon. We didn't know what it was. I remember a little later they said, The war's ended. (laughs) Boy, everybody sat down—and Man, I'm so glad—there weren't any cheering or fire in the air or nothing. Everybody sat down and relaxed.

SLOAN: Yeah. Well, how many points did you have at that point?

WOMACK: I had 103 points, and that was enough to get me an airplane ride back to the States.

SLOAN: I know there was a divide at that point between those who didn't have—because the war with Japan was still going on.

WOMACK: Yeah. Yeah, a lot of them didn't have enough points and they had to stay over there in the occupation army for a while.

SLOAN: So when were you able to get home?

WOMACK: Well, I was at—we had pulled back from Austria and into Germany in a little town called Memmingen. And I caught a truck from Memmingen to Metz, France, which is just across the Rhine River. At Metz, I got on a—they had a train. Boy, that thing was rough. Square-wheel train, I felt like. We rode that for, I don't know, three or four days, clear across France to Marseilles. And then at Marseilles, we stayed there and played volleyball for three or four days. Then they called out my name. And me and twenty-four more guys got on a couple of trucks and went to an airfield. And there was a bunch of old, worn-out B-17 bombers. They'd taken out the bomb bays out of those things and put in wooden seats along each side. And boy, I was really skeptical about that. I was even more so when they issued me a parachute. (laughs) Now, the parachute they gave me must have been worn by a midget because I couldn't straighten up. So I spent the entire trip from Marseilles to Casablanca adjusting that parachute harness. When I got there they said, Well, take off your parachute. And boy, I was so glad to get out of that thing.

And we stayed at Casablanca for four or five days, and then we caught a C-54. It was plush compared to what we'd been riding in. And all you could take along was what we called a ditty bag, with a few toothbrushes and stuff in it. We flew from Casablanca to the Azores, which is a little group of islands off the coast of Portugal. And we gassed up, fueled up there, and then flew on to Bermuda, when we stopped again. That was a British island, just off the coast of Florida a ways. And then we flew from there—on in from there to Miami Airport. That was a real thrill. I mean, you see guys who got down and patted the floor—the ground. I was one of them. (Sloan laughs) We went into the airport, and they had just row after row of Coke machines on each side. All you had to do was just push the button and a Coke popped out. And they had good Red Cross girls giving you candy and Cokes and whatever you wanted.

Then we got on a—I got on a troop train, and we went north up to about Jacksonville, Florida. And then the train stopped there, and we got off that train and got on one that was headed west. This one we were on went on up north, towards Pennsylvania and those states up there. This one went west, and we got off at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio. Stayed there several days and got a discharge. And they gave you, let's see, some of your discharge pay: fifty dollars, I think, and then twenty-five dollars for bus fare. And so I got on a—got my discharge, and the guy that was typing up the discharge asked, "Would you like to re-enlist?" And I said, "Would you like a fat lip?" He didn't pay any attention, just kept typing.

So I caught a bus home, and I got to Fort Worth about three or four o'clock in the morning. Caught a cab in town. My mother heard the cab stop out there, and she knew I was coming in. You know, everybody got up and we had a big, big time. I'd been gone three years. I finally made it back and alive. That was in August of '45, and September the first was school starting. I went over to TCU and signed up for the GI Bill and spent

the next four years in college. Then I got out and I went to Texas [University of Texas at Austin] and went to graduate school down there and got out in '50. First place I come was Midland.

SLOAN: You were a geologist, right? That's what your degree was in?

WOMACK: Yeah.

SLOAN: Yeah. So what did you do your undergrad in at TCU?

WOMACK: Well, it was in geology.

SLOAN: Geology at TCU.

WOMACK: I just went on down to university working on a master's degree. And I took a lot of courses that I didn't have—that TCU didn't offer. And I didn't have any trouble going to work. In fact, I worked ever since, just about.

SLOAN: So what was your first job out here in Midland?

WOMACK: I went to work for Core Laboratories. It was a core analysis down here across the street. Well, you're not familiar with that part of town, but it was right here in town. And I stayed here about a year, and then I went to Abilene, and guess who I met in Abilene?

SLOAN: Somebody in the room who has been very quiet. Yeah.

WOMACK: Somebody in the room. (Sloan laughs) And that was almost sixty years ago. We'll celebrate our sixtieth anniversary this fall.

SLOAN: You should be sainted. (Mrs. Womack laughs) I'm not looking at you, just so the camera knows. (all laugh) That's wonderful!

WOMACK: It's been fun.

SLOAN: And so I know—so how many kids?

WOMACK: We have two.

SLOAN: Two kids. You have a son and a daughter.

WOMACK: A son and a daughter. Son is—how old is Ray? About fifty-five? Fifty-five. Graduated from—let's see, he went to Tech [Texas Tech University], didn't he? And Midland College and Odessa College. And our daughter was in Tech and got an MRS degree before she finished.

SLOAN: That happens. (laughs)

WOMACK: But she finally wised up. Then she had three kids, and she moved back here about ten years ago. Been here since. She worked at the hospital. She got her degree in nursing.

SLOAN: Now, you weren't in Midland for very long that first time?

WOMACK: About a year.

SLOAN: All right, okay. And then you moved. When did you—where did you go from there? I know y'all met.

WOMACK: We stayed in Midland—Abilene—ten years, and then we got transferred to Midland again. That was in '61, and we stayed here four years. And then we transferred to Fort Smith, Arkansas, and stayed up there a couple of years, then over to Oklahoma City, stayed there four years. Then I left that company and got a job back here in '71, wasn't it? And we've been here ever since.

SLOAN: So has your work—your work's been in and around the oil business, doing core sample analysis.

WOMACK: I worked for oil companies for a long time. The last ten or twelve years, I've worked for myself.

SLOAN: Okay.

WOMACK: Best boss I've ever had.

SLOAN: Yeah. (both laugh) So you saw a lot of changes in the oil business.

WOMACK: I certainly have. Right now, I'm glad I'm out of it.

SLOAN: Well, I want to make sure, is there anything I should have asked you about that I didn't ask you about, before we wrap this up here? Are there some stories that you want to make sure we get in that we didn't touch on? Sometimes when you start to talk about these things, you begin to remember them.

WOMACK: I remember one position we were in. Yeah, I was in Italy. We were on Highway Six, which was the main highway that goes up the Liri River valley from, I guess, northeast. And we were on each side of the thing, and the Jerries had us pinned down. I crawled into—I was in the exec section, and I was helping them with the fire control. I had a lieutenant with me and he was a shavetail. He'd just been there for a short time. That's a shavetail. He didn't know much what was going on. And boy, the shells started hitting right and left. We were down in the bar ditch. And fortunately, it was a culvert under that road. It was about a forty-eight-inch thing. You could stoop and walk through there. But it was half full of gravel and rocks and snakes and scorpions and one thing or another. And this lieutenant crawled in there with me. And we took the telephones in there so we could stay with the battery, and we'd tell everybody to take cover.

Boy, the shells just kept hitting and we were in there all day, six or eight hours. Every time we'd start out, somebody would open up again. Anytime they'd see any movement, they'd start shooting again. So we had to stay until dark, when we got out. And that guy went bazookey. He went nuts. He was throwing his helmet out the door and throwing rocks and cussing and chewing out people that weren't even in there. Just me and he were in there. He and I were in there. So he just—they sent him to the rear. I never saw him again. What crowned him off was we had a medic attached to us, and this medic had dug him a slit trench and it wasn't quite deep enough. He'd been laying in that slit trench four or five hours, and he raised his knee up, raise his leg up to try to flex it, and shrapnel come along and shot his kneecap off. Well, that really did the lieutenant in. He really went ape after that. But this old medic, he was Indian from up in—he was Chippewa Indian is what he was. Big old round head. He'd drink a glass full of wine and he'd go plum crazy. He was a nut. Anyway, we had a lot of people like that. He bandaged up his knee himself. He had his stuff there. I never did see him anymore. That was a kind of wild experience with that goofy lieutenant.

SLOAN: There was nothing you could do to get him in line, I guess, either.

WOMACK: Well, he just—some guys went that way when they got under shell fire. They lose it. The only thing I ever wanted to do was clean out my fox hole a little deeper. But I never stuck my head out as long as it was half-way hidden. I've got a book in there I want you to take with you.

SLOAN: Okay.

WOMACK: It will tell you some of those stories.

SLOAN: Well. I know you learned how to dig a hole when you were in Europe.

WOMACK: I'm sorry?

SLOAN: You learned how to dig a hole.

WOMACK: Oh yeah, I can do that real fast.

SLOAN: Well, anything else?

WOMACK: No, I guess that's about it. I never was—I liked what I did in the army. I could do anything anyway, and the captain that was in charge of it knew I could and he would let me. So if I didn't want to do something else, I would say, "Well, Captain, I think I could do better with so-and-so and so-and-so." And he'd say, "Well, okay, go do it." So I was in like Flynn most of the time because I'd been there so long. Consequently, I didn't get really easy jobs, but I got jobs that I knew I could do well.

Actually, I was on an FO [forward operating] party when they made the trip to Anzio. And I knew they didn't need any FO people, so I talked with the captain, said, "So-and-so on that number-one gun is kind of green, and I'd sure like to take his job. You can put him up here on the bank somewhere and do something else." He said, "Okay." So I went

down there and told the gun sergeant, "I'm the new gunner on this thing." Of course, I knew him real well so he said, "Okay, you know what to do." So I went to Anzio as a gunner. When I got there, as soon as they needed the FO man again, I said, "I'm gone." And I could drive a truck as good as any of them. And we got these two wheeled—two little track-driven movers. I could drive one of those, but not very well. When I'd put in the clutch, it would go whoop and throw everybody out, just about. But I got along well in the army, and I didn't have any problems with anybody, really.

SLOAN: What do you think you took from your military experience, as far as into your professional career?

WOMACK: I believe probably tolerance of individuals and sympathy for the downtrodden, and that's just a plain old Christian attitude. It's like I learned in Sunday school. The guy my sister married, I met him in our Sunday school class in Fort Worth back in the thirties. He just died, what, two years ago? Last year, year before last. Last year. And that was sort of his attitude, too. And I have—I always like everybody until they—just about everybody until someone gives me a reason not to like them. So let me tell you a story.

Here awhile back, I was down at the barbershop. And I went in there, and one barber was—both barbers were sitting in their chairs. And one barber was busy. I went in there and sat down; he cut my hair, you know. There wasn't half a dozen words spoken in there. One guy was mumbling and kind of cussing to himself. So when I got through, I paid him—paid the good barber, went over and got my hat and jacket. In the meantime, there was a fellow who come over and sit in the barber chair. I'd seen him before somewhere. So I zipped up my jacket and I walked over. I kind of leaned over and I said, "Hey partner, I know you from somewhere." He looks at me and says, "I don't think I ever saw you before." I said, "Well, Bill Womack is my name." And he told me what his was; I've forgotten. I said, "My, that's a familiar name, and you look familiar." I said, "One time there was a guy in the cell next to me that looked exactly like you." (laughs) His eyes got real big and he said, "Oh, I never been in jail before." (both laugh) I said, "Well neither have I, but you still look like the guy." And boy, the barbershop just went zoom. Everybody started laughing and talking. They were still doing that when I left. So if you need a good opening for a stranger, try that.

SLOAN: All right, I'll try that. (laughs)

WOMACK: He might hit you in the jaw, but your size, I doubt it.

SLOAN: Well, that's a good story to end on. That reveals a bit of your personality there. So, Mr. Womack, we want to thank you for sitting down with us today. Robert and I both want to thank you for your service to our country and taking the time today to share your stories to make sure they're recorded.

WOMACK: Well, that's fine. I enjoyed meeting both of you.

end of interview