

## Paul Andert

A decorated WWII Veteran, Paul Andert exemplifies bravery and patriotism.

### Chapter 1 - 0:52

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** Paul J. Andert enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1940 at the age of 17. He served as an Infantry Platoon Sergeant for most of his five-year Army career. While serving in Africa, Sicily and Europe he participated in seven major campaigns, plus two major landing invasions. Paul has vivid memories of General George Patton and General Dwight Eisenhower among others and remembers listening to Axis Sally. He was wounded twice and received the Silver Star, three Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts. Paul speaks with blunt honesty about the horrors of war including the instructions to kill or be killed. You are about to hear the voice of a World War II hero, Oklahoman, Paul J. Andert. We thank our Founding Sponsors for preserving this voice and story on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

### Chapter 2 - 6:05

#### Paul Joins the Army

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is April 7, 2010.

**Paul Andert:** My name is Paul Andert. My date of birth is January 2, 1923. My age now is 87.

**JE:** Where were you born?

**PA:** Saint Louis, Missouri.

**JE:** Your mother's name?

**PA:** Her name was Marie and she was born in France. She was a French war bride from World War I.

**JE:** So where did she grow up?

**PA:** She grew up in France until she was 16 and then she married early. My Dad went back and got her after WWI and brought her to the United States.

**JE:** Your father's name?

**PA:** Charles Andert.

**JE:** Where did he grow up?

**PA:** He grew up in St. Louis, Missouri.

**JE:** So your mother came here at the age of?

**PA:** She was only about 17 when they got married.

**JE:** Your father met her in France?

**PA:** He met her in France during the war, when he was over there in World War I.

**JE:** What did he do in the war?

**PA:** He was in an engineering outfit. He wasn't wounded but he was affected in some way because he spent a long time in a veteran's hospital later.

**JE:** Did you learn French because you had a French-speaking mother?

**PA:** No, we were so little. We got put in an orphan home the two of us, but that's another story. She was left with four boys and my dad went to the veteran's hospital and he died in the veteran's hospital. She couldn't handle four boys by herself and not being able to hardly speak English, so the Catholic Church and the French Mothers took over. The two oldest boys, my older brother and I, went to St. Joseph's Orphan Home in Saint Louis and spent eight years there.

**JE:** Were you in touch with your mother during that period of time?

**PA:** Oh yes. She was allowed to come visit us once every two weeks. My grandfather usually brought her and helped out as much as he could.

**JE:** Did she visit with you regularly over that eight-year period?

**PA:** Oh yeah, over that eight-year period she came on the visiting days when she could come.

**JE:** Did you go home and stay for holidays?

**PA:** As we got a little older and in the later grades, we were able to come home for vacation if somebody could take care of us. We used to go out to see some friends in the country and stay out there with them and with their animals and the cows and all of that.

**JE:** So after the eight years in the orphanage, were you able to reconnect with your mother, did you have a relationship with her?

**PA:** Yes, my older brother left the orphan home a year before I did, he went home and he found a job at a dairy and he was working. Then I got out of the home and I came home for a while and then I went to Hadley Vocational School.

**JE:** You had brothers?

**PA:** I had three brothers. My older brother served in the Navy during World War II and the other two were too young to serve.

**JE:** How old were you when you left the orphanage?

**PA:** I was about 13 when I left and went to Hadley Vocational School. I took up the printing

trade. After being there almost 'til the end, I was expelled one day. I was supposed to have made a face at some teacher on another floor, whom I never even knew. They had me turn in my books and everything and go to the principal and have all the teachers write up how I was. I had a good recommendation because I had been under nuns so long that I knew how to behave. So, he decided that since the teacher would never apologize, she said she would never apologize to me, he said, "Well, I am going to reinstate you anyway." And I said, "Like hell you will, I quit." So I went home and I told my mom I was out of the vocational school and told her I was going into the Army.

**JE:** That happened when you were 16 or 17 years old.

**PA:** Yeah, right.

**JE:** So you had been at this printing school for three or four years?

**PA:** Yes, I had been there for three years. I was just a little bit short of graduating, but I was just pretty mad after what that gal did. (Laughter)

**JE:** Then, you enlisted in the Army in 1940.

**PA:** Right, that's correct.

**JE:** You were how old?

**PA:** I was 17 and they did not want to take me because they said you are too young and I said, "No, I am 18." They gave me some papers to take home to my mother and have her swear to it that I was 18. The papers said I was born in 1922 instead of 1923. She signed them because there were four boys at home then and we fought all of the time and she had a hell of a time keeping us quiet and I figured that if she would do that I could get out of there, so they took me.

**JE:** Did you go to basic training?

**PA:** There was no basic training in 1940. You went to the unit that you were assigned to and you trained in that unit. I was in Jefferson Barracks in the 6th Infantry. Some corporal would be marching you up and down every day and he would kick you in the butt when you got out of step. It was a lot different than it turned out later. The training camps came later.

**JE:** So Jefferson Barracks was just outside of St. Louis?

**PA:** That's correct.

**JE:** And then you were attached to the 6th Infantry in Company F?

**PA:** Yes, that's correct.

**JE:** Tell us a little bit about that training for a young 17-year-old, how did that go?

**PA:** Well, (laughter) because I was so little, this corporal picked on me all of the time. We called him Hog Jaw. Every time I would get out of step in a formation he would kick me. He put me on cleaning spittoons in the barracks. I mean in those days they had spittoons. That was the dirtiest thing there was. He said he was going to make me want to get out because

I was a volunteer at that time. I told him that nobody would make me get out. It even got to the point where they put me in a trashcan one time and tied the lid down on it and rolled me down the cobblestone street. I was screaming in this barrel and I finally hit a tree and the barrel busted open and I came flying out. These guys all came down there and they were all laughing. So I just jumped on all of them and I started scratching them and kicking them and doing everything I could to them. They finally realized they could have killed me. I realized they could have killed me too and I said I had better grow up fast because I was too little to be around that bunch. Those were tough days in a way. But for me, for some reason, it was so much fun. We had so much discipline and I was knocked around in the orphan home that I guess I was tough and I wanted to make it and I was going to make it.

### **Chapter 3 - 5:28**

#### **George S. Patton**

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**John Erling:** The 6th Armored Infantry was divided up.

**Paul Andert:** The 6th Infantry, it wasn't called Armored in those days. There was no Armored Infantry in those days until the 6th Infantry became divided into two regiments. The 6th went to Fort Knox to be part of the 1st Armored Division. My battalion went to Fort Benning. We were called the 41st Infantry to be part of the 2nd Armored Division and then that's when the armored divisions were formed, which was about September of 1940.

**JE:** So at Fort Benning, Georgia, what was your job there? Tell us about that.

**PA:** Well, first I was a Private First Class, just part of a unit. Then because we were moving so fast and getting in a lot of recruits and the draft was in effect, we had to help form the 3rd Armored Division in Camp Shelby, Mississippi. As a private first class though, I was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky to learn to ride motorcycles so I could be a motorcycle scout. That was the most dangerous thing that there ever was. I didn't like it. But I was a volunteer, so I had to do what they told me. We had several accidents riding these motorcycles. I went back to my outfit riding the motorcycle, but not wanting to do it. But because we were expanding so quickly, I was able to accept a corporal position in a mortar squad, so I accepted that and did away with the motorcycle. From there I went on to be the platoon sergeant of a weapons platoon. Then finally they organized that and every platoon had a weapons platoon. So then I became a platoon sergeant of an armored infantry platoon.

**JE:** General Major George S. Patton was in command of the 2nd Armored Division.

**PA:** Yes. He was the brigade commander first. Well, the first time I ever met him he was a full colonel. Then he became a brigadier general, then a major general and he was then the division commander.

**JE:** And you had an encounter with General Patton?

**PA:** I had several of them actually.

**JE:** All right, let's talk about those.

**PA:** One of the encounters I had with him was when he used to surprise you in the camps on Saturdays. He always had reviews on Saturday mornings. We had to march in parades and whatever he wanted. Then he would visit individual companies. He visited my company on this one Saturday morning. We knew he was coming, so I told one of the guys from New York who always did as he pleased, "You stay out of this formation. You go and hide and don't be in there." So when Patton came down to the group, he and I and company commander went walking along the line of the platoon and here was this guy who snuck in the ranks anyway. When Patton got to him he said, "Sergeant, bust this man because he looks like a slob." I said, "Sir, he is already a private." He said, "Make him a private and then bust him." Another time I was with some guys who were practicing digging foxholes. We used to give them a 10-minute break every hour. So during the break I was down in the foxhole shoveling while the guys were on their break. He happened to come up and I knew I had it. He said, "Who's in charge here?" I said, "I am sir." He said, "Get out of that hole. If I ever catch you working while your men are sitting around, you're busted." So I said, "Yes sir." Another time, some of us carried him on our shoulders doing the Louisiana Maneuvers. They would call a bridge and blow it out and then put a white flag on the bridge and they would say, "You can't cross this bridge it's blown out." So we went to the edge of the water and we waded across to the other side and we found a not-too-deep spot to do it. We heard this siren coming and we knew it was Patton. We called him the Green Hornet in those days because the Green Hornet radio show was on and he wore a green uniform. He wanted us to wear green uniforms too, but they wouldn't allow him to put us in green uniforms because the armored division was new. So here he came, the Green Hornet and he had a double turret light tank. He came sailing up this road and we thought let's just see what he does at the bridge. Well, he stopped at the bridge like he was supposed to. He ordered his tank driver to cross it. He said, "Cross right now!" And so he and the tank got stuck in the creek. So here we are standing on the other side and we started laughing. So he gave us a real curse and said, "Come out here and get me out of here." So we went out in the water and got him on our shoulders and three of us carried him to the bank. While we did that, another Lieutenant Colonel named Patton, who was his cousin, who was our battalion commander at that time, came along. He came sailing across that bridge and he went right on across. And General Patton screamed, "Get that

SOB!” So they got him and brought him back to him and Patton cussed him out and told him, “You are out of this war! You’re a casualty.” Boy, he just gave it to him. While he was giving it to him, I looked at my guys and I said, “Let’s get the hell out of here. We are going to be next to get cussed out.” So we left. So he talked about it later on when he reviewed the division. He talked about that deal and yelling at his cousin and so forth.

**JE:** Where was that again?

**PA:** That was in the Louisiana Maneuvers in 1941. We had maneuvers in Louisiana, then we went to Tennessee for a maneuver and then we went back to Louisiana and then we went to Carolina. So we had all of those maneuvers before we went overseas in 1942.

**JE:** So they were training maneuvers?

**PA:** Yes.

## Chapter 4 - 4:33

### Patton - Continued

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**John Erling:** Was General Patton a large man?

**Paul Andert:** Yes. He was at least 6’1” or 6’2”. Yes, he was a tall man. I’ve got pictures of him.

**JE:** He was quite an imposing figure then?

**PA:** Oh yes. He made sure that he was imposing too. He was almost always immaculately dressed. I don’t remember him looking sloppily at any time and he demanded that of all his people to be that way.

**JE:** There was an assembly bowl where he would speak to the troops?

**PA:** Yes, in fact I have a picture of that. In the October 1941, that was the first time he did it. He spoke to us as a whole group. He brought all 10,000 of us together into a boxing bowl and talked to us. He told us about how we were going to whip the enemy and we weren’t even in the war yet. This was in October 1941. He had a cameraman there that took a picture of the whole division. There were two different pictures and we were able to purchase them at the time. But the things he said to us have never been repeated in writing. He always says, “I didn’t say those things.” His speeches were always cleaned up, even though they’re still dirty. They’ve been cleaned up from some of the things that he did tell us.

**JE:** So as we say, he had very colorful language?

**PA:** Oh, absolutely. His wife would sit in a staff car behind a podium behind big-screen he had up there where he could tell us what we were going to do. She wouldn’t come out because of the way he cursed.

**JE:** Where was the assembly bowl?

**PA:** It was in Fort Benning, Georgia.

**JE:** Then we come to December 7, 1941, the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Where were you and how did you hear about it?

**PA:** I was in Fort Benning, Georgia. That month, I was supposed to go home on leave for Christmas. In those days, we only had one radio. The whole company would be (hanging out) in what they called a dayroom. There were no televisions or anything so everybody went to the dayroom to hear what was going on, on the radio. So that's how we found out that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We were on all kinds of alerts. Those of us that had passes were called to the orderly room and those passes were revoked, which meant we didn't go home for Christmas. Our training, of course picked up even more and then because we all thought we were going to Japan right away, but it didn't end up that way.

**JE:** This was a new twist then for you because you were trained to focus on the Germans and the Italians and here comes Japan.

**PA:** Yes.

**JE:** So now we have Japan, Italy and Germany who have declared war on the United States.

**PA:** That's right.

**JE:** They were known as the Axis power, the Allied Powers were United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and India.

**PA:** Yes.

**JE:** Then the next morning I believe General Patton would speak to you on the radio?

**PA:** Yes, on WRBL out of Columbus, Georgia. They told us he was going to be on and we wondered what he was going to say. He started off with, "Those lousy SOBs" and then they cut him off the radio and they wouldn't let him continue to speak because he was really going to give a nasty speech and we knew it. We would say, "That's our general!" But he never got to deliver the complete speech.

**JE:** He knew he was on the radio?

**PA:** Oh yeah! He was at the radio station. They had him there. (Laughter)

**JE:** And they cut him off? (Laughter)

**PA:** Oh yeah. He was that way though. I mean that wasn't surprising to us. It was surprising to them, but it wasn't to us.

**JE:** Wouldn't you have liked to be in the studio when somebody said to him, "I'm sorry, but we can't let this continue." (Laughter)

**PA:** I bet you he threw a fit.

**JE:** Didn't he have a famous quote about blood and guts?

**PA:** Oh yes.

**JE:** Tell us how that came about.

**PA:** Well, he said that when you hit the beaches it will be your blood and my guts, so we called him blood and guts.

**JE:** But he was a leader and he would be leading you into battle wouldn't he?

**PA:** That's what he wanted to do. He wanted to be in the lead tank all the time. Of course, they wouldn't allow it. I mean Eisenhower didn't want his famous general to be assassinated right away because he would have been dead pretty quickly. He always said, "You can't push spaghetti, you have to pull it." So he would tell us to get out in front and to pull it, to lead the way. We used to get really mad at him. They always said that we fought harder when we were mad at him. You can let the other SOB die for his country, but don't you die for yours. Let him die first. Don't ask him who he is or anything. Shoot first and ask him who he is. (Laughter)

**JE:** But you had tremendous respect for him didn't you?

**PA:** Oh yes, we did because we knew he was a leader and he would move. His deal was you never stop, you keep moving. Because when you're stopped you're under fire and you stay under fire because they get your range. If you keep moving they have to keep changing their range. That was his theory.

## Chapter 5 - 5:43

### Drive Fear Away

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**John Erling:** How long did it take then before you actually entered the war?

**Paul Andert:** We entered the war in November 1942. That's was the first time that anyone engaged in the war effort was in November 1942. We went to the invasion of North Africa and he was in command of our task force. They landed in three places, Casablanca, Port Lyautey and Safi. I landed in Safi.

**JE:** That was on the French Coast?

**PA:** Yes.

**JE:** Tell us about that landing and how that went.

**PA:** First of all, Roosevelt decided to wait a day before we landed because he wanted to talk to the French. So he got on the radio and told the French that the ones that are landing at Casablanca, Port Lyautey and Safi are American troops and they will be identified as American troops and that we are here to help you, not to fight you. He made it clear that if you don't fire on us, we won't return fire. We had a saying that if they fired on us, we would get the orders to play ball. If we got the orders to play ball we would start firing back. On

the day of the invasion, November 7, 1942, we landed in Safi. There was a French battery on the coast that fired on our ships and on us. So the WWI battleship, called Battleship Texas was with us at they blew up this gun emplacement. Our job was to land on the beach and take Safi with a Regiment from the 9th Division that was assigned with us. We were to take Safi and then the 2nd Armored Division, which was my combat team, was to move to the highway coming up from Marrakech where the French Foreign Legion was. We were to stop any action by the French Foreign Legions to interfere with the African Invasion. They said they had 21 trucks of Foreign Legion coming up to meet us. We met them at a bridge site just outside of Safi and got into a gun battle with them. What really cut it short was the aircraft carrier Ranger was out there and they had some fighter planes of course on there. We called on the planes. Three of them came in and strafed the French Column and scattered them into the woods. A lot of them turned around and went back to Marrakech and gave up.

**JE:** Somebody listening to this may ask, well, if President Roosevelt told the French that you are not there to harm them, then why were there French shooting at you?

**PA:** A lot of people don't understand this, but France was then under the Vichy government. The Vichy government was a government established by Hitler, after he defeated them. The Vichy government had to promise Hitler that they would protect the French Fleet to keep it from going to the British and they would defend North Africa. That was France's commitment to the Germans. So, they put up what we called a token fight. The French did fight us, but they gave up on November 11, and we had landed on November 7th, so it was like a 4-day deal. We figured it was probably a token deal. On the 11th we were at Mazagan and General Harmon who was our General at that point notified the French that we were coming through and we are going to annihilate you if you put up a fight. They almost acted like they wanted to put up a fight. But on that morning, November 11th, they separated and gave up.

**JE:** So you had joined the 41st Armored Infantry?

**PA:** Yes, which was part of the 2nd Armored Division, yes.

**JE:** You moved toward Casablanca?

**PA:** We were moving toward Casablanca then. After we took Safi, then our job was to leave the 9th Infantry there at Safi and to move on up to Casablanca as soon as possible because Patton was having a bigger fight up there than we were having down where we were. So we headed to Casablanca.

**JE:** You were 18 years old.

**PA:** Yes.

**JE:** And this is the first time, I mean, you had had all of these maneuvers and that's one thing. But then when you finally entered war, what were you thinking? What's going through your mind? What are you hearing and smelling and what's going on?

**PA:** First of all, one of the hairy things about the invasion was we had been on a ship for 16 days or 26 days, from mid-October to November 7th. We had been at sea and there was a storm at sea so we were all kind of wobbly. We had to go down rope ladders to get into the gliders to go to shore. Some of the guys fell off the rope ladders and drowned because we had our packs set to where all we had to do was open our arms and the packs would fall off. But they panicked and didn't do that and they drowned. That was a hairy thing to lose those guys without even fighting. Then when we landed on shore, I definitely remember taking the town of Safi. We were fired on and I hit the ground and the first bullet that went past my ear, I said to myself, what the hell are you doing here? (Laughter) You didn't have to be here, you volunteered, you know. But right away it came to me, because of all the training we had. The part of the training that helped the most was the discipline you got as a leader. You had been told and told and told that your men are what are important to you. So it made you think about them instead of yourself and you knew the rule was MOVE so you moved. But I remember the first bullet and saying to myself what in the hell are you doing here? I did think, I wonder how many more bullets there are going to be? (Laughter)

**JE:** You were obviously afraid?

**PA:** Oh yes, we were all afraid. We always said if you weren't afraid you weren't there.

**JE:** We have to remember here that you are the leader of your platoon at this point.

**PA:** Yes, I had 48 men in my platoon.

**JE:** As soon as you stopped thinking about yourself and started thinking about them that's what drove the fear away.

**PA:** Oh yes, that helped a lot.

**JE:** That's a good lesson for us all to remember.

**PA:** Yes.

## Chapter 6 - 3:36

### "Unconditional Surrender"

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**John Erling:** The Casablanca Conference in 1943, what was that about?

**Paul Andert:** That one, Roosevelt and Churchill and de Gaulle were supposed to meet there too, and Stalin was supposed to meet there too, but he said that he was too busy and he didn't come. In the first place he (Stalin) didn't care about us doing Africa as much as he wanted us to do Europe. Anyway, we were the honor guard there at Casablanca. We saw the whole group. Patton was there too. He was part of the meeting. It was General

de Gaulle and General Jarillot, the two French Generals who didn't like each other, and Churchill and Roosevelt. The King of England didn't come along but he wasn't part of the conference, but he was there to visit and we saw him.

**JE:** Did Eisenhower come to that?

**PA:** Oh yeah, Eisenhower and Clark were there. Eisenhower was at that point our Commander, but he wasn't as high up to us of course as Roosevelt and Churchill, but we got to see them for the first time.

**JE:** But to see all of them together, that must have been an amazing moment for you.

**PA:** It was an amazing moment. Then the Sultan of Morocco gave me the regimental badge from his group. His guards were riding these big camels and-

**JE:** The Sultan of Morocco?

**PA:** Yes, he gave me the regimental badge. He took it off one of his guys and just pinned it on me. It was just a commemoration thing, you know, but I always cherished that.

**JE:** At that time then, did any of those VIPs inspect the troops?

**PA:** They inspected us by driving past us with Roosevelt sitting up in the Jeep and Churchill in his car, but they didn't stop at that point. In later years they did, but at that point they did not.

**JE:** Did they speak to you?

**PA:** Not at that point, no.

**JE:** Wasn't it at the Casablanca Conference that the term "unconditional surrender" came about?

**PA:** Yes, that's where it came about.

**JE:** Unconditional surrender, can you talk to us about what that meant?

**PA:** It was Roosevelt's idea. In fact, Churchill in his book said he was surprised that Roosevelt brought that up and decided that there would be unconditional surrender. That in no case could they give up to us on a conditional basis. There would have to be no conditions involved. It would be all our conditions and that would be called an unconditional surrender. Even Stalin at that time objected a bit to it, according to Churchill's memoirs, he said it would prolong the war by saying it's unconditional. In some cases, maybe it did. As you go on, in later years, and you look at it, it could have prolonged it some because some of the different units tried to give up, but we wouldn't let them give up. The total group had to give up or else because it was unconditional.

**JE:** You were talking about the Germans there?

**PA:** Yeah, the Germans.

**JE:** Some of them wanted to give up, but because they hadn't exactly stated that they were there for unconditional surrender, you couldn't take them?

**PA:** We took them as prisoners but we wouldn't allow a surrender of the troops because it had to be total, all of them.

**JE:** So, as history and as you have read history, was that the proper way to declare this with unconditional surrender?

**PA:** I don't know whether I agree with that or not. I have to say that today. But I can see why he did it because of what they were doing to the population of their own people and what they were doing to the Jewish population. We felt that we should go all the way and really make it unconditional. But today, when you think about it, there is the possibility that the war could have been shortened perhaps if there had been some allowance of conditional groups of different armies surrendering at different areas, but that wasn't allowed.

**JE:** Again, that was Roosevelt's idea.

**PA:** Yes, it was Roosevelt who instituted that. Then Churchill did go along with it of course.

## Chapter 7 - 6:00

### Axis Sally

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**John Erling:** Tell us about Bed Check Charlie and Axis Sally.

**Paul Andert:** (Laughter) When we moved on up into Algeria and that area, we were in what they call the cork forest. Oh about 11 o'clock at night a German plane would fly over and we identified it as a Falk Wolf because it had a different sounding engine on it. We called him Bed Check Charlie because at first they used to fire on him, and he would identify where we were that way so they could bomb us. So they told us to let him go and that he was just checking us, so we named him Bed Check Charlie. Axis Sally was the radio gal from Berlin. I remember one time I heard her saying, "I know you are hiding in the cork forest and when you come out of there were going to kill everyone of you." She would say things like that, but she would play some good music. We used to like to listen to the music that she played.

**JE:** She was set up to do that by the Germans

**PA:** Yeah, she was broadcasting out of Berlin.

**JE:** She would play the music of the 1940s big band music and all that.

**PA:** Oh yeah.

**JE:** Do you remember any of the music she would play?

**PA:** She played all kinds of music, Glenn Miller Band and all of that stuff. Of course, they had access to all of that before the war. We liked the music and we didn't care for the bull crap that she was putting out, but that was all right because we got to listen to music. We didn't have the American radio station, so we had a German radio station.

**JE:** Even though she was telling you in other words that you should surrender?

**PA:** Yeah. She would tell us that we were going to get it and that they were going to kill every one of us and all that stuff like that. Yeah, she did that.

**JE:** Was this an hour-long program? Do you remember how long it was?

**PA:** No, I think it was a half-hour show at the most. It seems like that's all it was. We didn't have it on too long, because we had other things that we were doing. (Laughter)

**JE:** So you moved to the warfront in boxcars?

**PA:** Yes. After the Kasarine Pass incident they decided to move some of us up there, to be temporary replacements to reinforce the area. Because the 1st Armored Division had gotten defeated at Kasarine Pass more or less.

**JE:** So when you say the front, where were you headed? What part?

**PA:** The Tunisian Algerian front. They put us in these 40-et-8 boxcars, in other words 40 men or eight horses. They would just pack us into these boxcars and send us on this little narrow railroad that they had there and we headed up that way. They would bomb the train every once in a while. We had anti-aircraft units on flat cars. So every once in a while, we would have to bail out of the train in case it got hit and go into the ditches. In one case, when we went into the ditch under a bridge and there was an Arab woman over there with some other women. She was pregnant and about to have a baby. So we put the pregnant lady in the other ladies into the boxcar with us to take them to the next town. (Laughter) It turned out that I was the one that had to hold the flashlight while the baby was born in the boxcar. I'm sitting there and it was the first person that I ever saw and everybody started calling me Dr. afterward. But it was fun in a way because the guys were passing the baby around in the car and just having fun with the baby. At the next town we let them out. They were Arabs. Muslims I would imagine. We never paid attention if they were Muslims or what in those days. But, that was an interesting incident.

**JE:** Was it shortly after she got into the boxcar that the baby was born?

**PA:** Yes, within a few hours. All of the guys in the car turned their back except for me. (Laughter) I sat there with the flashlight.

**JE:** So the other ladies?

**PA:** Yes, they did the delivering and I had to hold the flashlight. There were two other ladies with her and they delivered the baby.

**JE:** Explain why you were in Tunisia.

**PA:** General Harmon, who was our division commander, was sent up there with a group of us to sort of re-establish the Kasarine area because Rommel had attacked the 1st Armored Division at the Kasarine Pass. He actually defeated them there because they lost over 1,000 vehicles and a lot of men. A lot of them gave up and so on and so forth. So we were there to re-establish that area and be temporarily assigned to my old 6th Infantry who

was then part of the 1st Armored Division. We stayed up there with them for about a month or so.

**JE:** Tell us who General Rommel was.

**PA:** General Rommel was in charge of the African Corps. He fell ill for a while there and was sent back to Germany and then he came back. But during that time, Montgomery and the British in Libya got on an offensive. They were pushing the Italians and Germans toward Tunisia. They were going to use the Port of Tunisia to evacuate German troops. Our job was to close in to Tunisia and for Montgomery to close in from Libya to get them in a pocket and capture a lot of them, or destroy them, or whatever. Of course, they were defeated then, and at the port some of them got away. But more than 100,000 of the African corps gave up. Rommel of course went back to Germany. The thing about it is the African corps wasn't as large as a lot of people think. It was just a few armored divisions under Rommel. But he was an aggressive guy like Patton was. So he got a lot of press and homage for the leadership he performed. He really showed the Italians how to fight. Because the Italians claimed that they could clear the Libyan Desert and all of that and they couldn't. In the first place, they had old equipment. In the second place, most of the Italians had a relative in the United States and some of them really didn't want to fight Americans anyway. The Italians did want to fight the British, because they were mad at the British. They tore up some of their fleet in Tunisia, so they were mad at the British for violating the Vichy government's agreement with Hitler. The British and Italians didn't get along very well.

**JE:** Were you around General Rommel, did you see him?

**PA:** No. I fought a lot of the African corps guys of course, and then a lot of them in Europe too, who used to be Africa Corps.

## **Chapter 8 - 1:44**

### **War Front**

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**John Erling:** We've got to remind everybody that you were 18 years old and you are the leader of your platoon.

**Paul Andert:** Yes.

**JE:** Tell us what you observed as you were coming up to the warfront, the sound and the smells and all that goes with it.

**PA:** Of course we had fought the French, but then we were getting involved now with the

Germans and the Italians. As we were approaching the front, the closer you got the louder the bombardments sounded. And then finally after hearing the bombardments for a while you get closer and you start hearing the small arms fire. Then you see the bodies being brought back and the German bodies lying there and the Italian bodies. We never covered an enemy's body, but we always covered a friendly body because that was the rule. We let the enemy be seen so we could say you got it buddy. But for our own, we covered them always. So on the way up there you were thinking, am I going to be like this before it's over? (Laughter)

**JE:** Did you just have to get fatalistic and say to yourself whatever happens, happens and I can't worry about that?

**PA:** That's the way it had to be. It had to be that whatever is going to happen is going to happen. The guys used to say, "You are always after us to duck and to take cover when you are being fired on and then try to keep moving. The guys used to say, "How come you are trying to tell us to duck all the time because if a bullet's got our name on it we are going to get it anyway." I said, "That's not the bullet we are worried about. It's the one that says 'to whom it may concern' that's the one that we want you to be aware of because that one could get you too." So we had that saying. (Laughter)

**JE:** There is some humor in this isn't there?

**PA:** We have to have humor. We have to have it.

**JE:** Yeah.

## Chapter 9 - 5:45

### First Kill

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**John Erling:** Tell us then about the first reconnaissance patrol in combat.

**Paul Andert:** At this time platoons usually had a lieutenant, but we always were short of lieutenants. So I was the platoon sergeant and I was the leader almost all of the time. We had practiced a lot of reconnaissance patrols, but we had never actually been on one. When we got up there to work with the 6th Infantry for a while the battalion commander of the 6th Infantry, I reported to him. He looked on a map and he said, "I want you to go out on a patrol tonight. I want you to penetrate as far as you can. See if you can tell us what's going on up there. There is a change of venue going on. We want to know if you can tell whether the Italians are moving in and the Germans are moving out, or whether it's the other way around." So that was our job. He told us to send a patrol out. So I went back to the platoon and I'm

looking at these guys. I'm saying to myself, if I don't lead this patrol... (Laughter) I picked three other guys to go with me. One of them was named Cermak and he was a cousin of the Cermak who was then the Mayor of Chicago. Cermak was quite a guy and a good fighter. So the two of us paired together and then the other two guys were along this to more or less follow us and to get back if we got knocked out. So we went on. We ran across a German outpost and we went by it because we were not supposed to fight, we were supposed to penetrate first. So we penetrated past this outpost and got up close enough where we could hear the voices. Actually, we could discern that the Italians were moving in and the Germans were actually withdrawing from that particular position. After we figured out that this is what was going to happen we had to start back. The doggone German outpost that was there was in the way then. We couldn't get around it and we had a time limit to get back without being fired on. We looked at each other. We thought well, we've got to take this outpost out. We had our trench knives and those were the only things we could use. We were supposed to be silent. I looked at the trench knife and we had just turned in our World War I trench knives because they had brass knuckles and a spike on them. The Geneva Convention said that we couldn't use those because they had brass knuckles and a spike. We could use the knife, but we couldn't use the spike or the knuckles. So we had to turn those in and then we got new trench knives without brass knuckles or spikes. So there was only one thing we could do and that was killed them with a knife. So we each took one of the guys and...

**JE:** Wait a minute now. You said one of the guys. You came upon a couple of Germans?

**PA:** Yes. There were four of them but two were on guard and two were away apparently because we couldn't see the other two. But there were two that were standing up and we could see them. We knew we had to do this silently and take them out. So that was the deal we had. So he took one and I took one. We got them at the same time from the back praying that it would work. It did. You know, during that point though, the fear is gone. All that's left is the feeling of this has got to be done. So we did it. I can remember after we killed those two German guys and we moved on past a little ways we dropped down and I looked at ole Cermak and I said, "You know what? I said a prayer before I killed that bastard." He said, "I did the same thing."

**JE:** What was your prayer?

**PA:** It was Dear God help me kill this guy. That was my prayer. It was help me get through this. That was the only guy I had to kill with a knife. After that, I killed them with a bullet.

**JE:** That was the first one?

**PA:** That was the first one I actually know I did in.

**JE:** How did that make you feel that you had done this?

**PA:** You know what? The feeling disappeared pretty quickly. We knew that there were going to be a lot more before it was over. We knew that.

**JE:** It was either kill them or let them kill you.

**PA:** That was it. It had to be. So when I got back to the Colonel and I told him what happened he said, "You led the patrol?" And I said, "Yes sir." He asked, "How come you did?" I said, "Sir, Patton says you pull spaghetti, you don't push it." He said, "I remember that." He put me in for a Legion of Merit at that time which was not a decoration for combat. The Bronze Star replaced it later. So later I got the Bronze Star for North Africa. The next morning we attacked the position and it was the Italians in there. Most of them gave up right away. I was able to carry any weapon I wanted. I always picked the Tommy gun because if I'm going to be in front, I wanted to have something that's really going to knock people down. I can remember one of these guys coming out of the foxhole in his hands were up and I couldn't tell whether he was going to fire or anything, it was half dark. So I shot him. But it turned out he didn't have anything in his hand he was trying to give up. But you know, I didn't know that. We had practiced taking a hill the night before. We had fixed bayonets and all of that. Some of the guys were sticking each other and they were making a mess out of this thing. So they said okay, you don't fix bayonets you have your rifles set to fire and only one man in front and he has the weapon. He's going to do the firing until they find out what's going on up there. So that's why I had to Tommy gun and why I was doing that.

**JE:** I suppose I am asking questions that those of us who have never been in war ask, but the man that put up his hand and wanted to surrender, did that bother you later on?

**PA:** No, it didn't. So many things like that happened, it just didn't.

**JE:** It's part of war.

**PA:** It was war, yeah.

## Chapter 10 - 1:34

### Sicily

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**John Erling:** In July 1943 you were in Sicily?

**Paul Andert:** Yes. We withdrew from Africa and we were sent back to our own outfit to prepare for North Africa. Patton was also returned to prepare because he was going to be in command of Sicily. So, we prepared for the invasion of Sicily and we did that in July 1943.

**JE:** So that's when you landed on the beach?

**PA:** Yes at Gela.

**JE:** How did that landing go?

**PA:** It didn't go too badly. The biggest problem we faced was the German Air Force. They were strong because they owned airfields on Sicily and our job was to take them. So of course, we hadn't taken them yet because we were just landing. One of the things that happened to me is the Navy corpsman took our ladder onto the beach let the ramp down too early. My radio operator was in front of me jumping off of this thing. He jumped off and disappeared in the water. I remember this well. I went to the gate as it was down and I reached down into the water and I was able to reach the top of his helmet and he put his two hands on top of my head like this (motioning) and the buoyancy I guess you would call it, went swoosh and brought him right up out of the water and back on to the ladder. Then we had to turn to the Navy guy and say, "You take us in closer buddy." He was scared of course and he wanted to get back to his ship. We had to threaten him. We told him that if he didn't take us back in we were going to shoot him and we would take ourselves back in. But he did take us in and we got in there with the 4th Ranger Battalion, Darby's Rangers, Col. Darby's Rangers were with us.

## Chapter 11 - 3:20

### Friendly Fire

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**Paul Andert:** The worst thing that happened in Sicily was the fact that we were going to have that airdrop of our paratroopers over the convoy. They told us what night they would be there and when our planes would come over. It was at nine o'clock on a certain night in early July. The Germans were bombing the convoy all of the time. So we were worried about what was going to happen because the convoy had lots of anti-aircraft and they would be firing all of the time. So we would say we hoped that they would remember that at certain times those planes that would be coming over would be friendly. Well, it seems like the Germans got wind of it or something because just within the hour before our planes were due to fly over, they came over and were bombing the fleet. Everybody was firing. So then they left and our planes started coming. We were on the beach looking up and the first group of planes went over fine and nothing happened. The second group of planes came and somebody opened up and the whole fleet opened up and we shot down 22 of our own C-47s full of paratroopers. Eighty-two of them, we actually got their bodies back, they were floating in an afterward. But the rest of them were drowned or were killed and there were about 230 of them that we did in that night. Later on, we found out

that the people in the United States didn't hear about it until October and it happened in July. Because they were afraid of how the people would react because of us doing that. The phrase "friendly fire" was born on that night and of course it happened many times after that.

**John Erling:** I keep asking you about feelings. I can understand the Germans, but when that happened, that had to really get to you.

**PA:** Oh it did. It just took us apart. It tore us apart. In fact, some of us were actually crying out, "Please stop the firing!" But there was nothing you could do about it. They tried to court-martial some people over it, but they couldn't ever get to the base of how it started. In fact, Eisenhower at one point said there will never be another paratroop drop. But of course there was. He got out of that. Of course it hurt him because he was the commander over all of us. He was the one that allowed that paratroop drop to happen.

**JE:** You were brave and others were brave. But say you had a platoon of 44 men, was every man brave? Could you tell if some men were as you would call them cowards, who would fall back and let others do the work? Did that happen?

**PA:** Yes, yes it did. Not too often, because you know most of my guys were farm boys. Most of them were from Florida, Georgia and Alabama because they came in through Fort Benning, Georgia. Farm boys were good soldiers. I mean, they knew how to handle a rifle and so forth. They had done a lot of hunting and you could really depend on them quite a bit. But we had probably four or five over the time that I served. I had one that would run away every time they started shooting because he was scared. And he would holler "Shagging ass!" (Laughter) That's what he would call it. I would say, "Where you going?" But as soon as the firing started he went bonkers. We carried him along. We had a few others that went AWOL and stayed away. They never came back. But overall, most of them hung in there. They hung in there, yeah.

## Chapter 12 - 4:50

### Talk to Eisenhower

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**John Erling:** So you arrived off the coast of England and Ireland?

**Paul Andert:** Yes, after Sicily we went to England to get prepared for Normandy. We all thought we were going home because we were heading west. As we went through Gibraltar and we were going west. The third day out we were heading north. They said you're going to the United all right, but not the United States. You're going to the United

Kingdom. We landed in Bristol, England. We went down through the Irish Sea and we landed in England.

**JE:** You were the only American armored division then?

**PA:** At that time we were the only American armored division that was experienced in the invasion. Now the 3rd and 4th, they also joined in England, but they weren't involved in the first initial invasion.

**JE:** Somewhere in there General Eisenhower and Churchill and Bradley would come by to review the troops?

**PA:** Yes, that was at Tidworth Garrison where they would visit us. They would tell us that we were going to be reviewed on a certain date. They would have us prepare for weeks before. We would dye our uniforms a better color of green and oh man. We would call ourselves Blanco-B because we used stuff called Blanco to put on our leggings and on our canvas so it would look really neat.

**JE:** What was Blanco? Was it a liquid?

**PA:** It was liquid stuff (cleaner) that you used on your shoes and your legs and stuff like that.

**JE:** It made everything look good?

**PA:** Yes, so we called ourselves Blanco. On one of the days that they were to be there at Tidworth's, we got there hours of course before they were due, because they would always have you stand up for hours before they would get there.

**JE:** Was this all three of them?

**PA:** It was Eisenhower, Bradley and Churchill.

**JE:** Gen. Omar Bradley and Winston Churchill?

**PA:** Oh yeah, and Eisenhower, those were the main three and then there were other dignitaries but they were not of that caliber. The interesting part about that is when they did finally show up, the train pulled into the station and we were at ease they called it. We were not at attention. Eisenhower and Bradley came out at this end of the train and they were waiting for Churchill. But he came out the back end of the train and he started walking among us. They didn't know he had gotten off the train already. So when they found out he was out, they called everybody to attention. Then they started to review us, but he was already reviewing us. We have the picture in the book, but we had our long bayonets. We always had the long bayonets and we had to have them fixed to the rifles for this review. Captain Charles Berra was my company commander at that time. He was Yogi Berra's cousin. He was from St. Louis too, of course. He and Eisenhower and Colonel Moran and General Brooks and Bradley came down the line. I was standing at the end of the platoon. Eisenhower came up to me and he said, "You're kind of young to be a platoon sergeant aren't you?" I said, "Yes sir." He said, "You lied about your age didn't you?" I said, "Yes sir." So he just laughed and he told me where he was from and asked me where I was from and we talked a little bit.

**JE:** He told you he was from Abilene, Kansas?

**PA:** Yeah, it was a nice little chat. I always thought afterward, gee whiz, I got to talk to the Commander in Chief and the guy that ended up being president. Anyway then they visited the firing range and then Churchill talked to us a little bit. I always remember he would point his finger at you and he would say, "Never, never quit." I always tell that to school kids today, to never, never quit.

**JE:** He had that accent and he would say, "Never, never give up."

**PA:** Yep.

## Chapter 13 - 6:00

### Omaha Beach

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**John Erling:** So then we come to Omaha Beach. On the 6th of June 1944, Omaha Beach was one of the main landing points of the Allied Invasion of German-occupied France and Normandy landings. Omaha Beach was located on the coast of Normandy, France facing the English Channel.

**Paul Andert:** Omaha Beach was the beach where Americans suffered the most. Americans landed on Utah and Omaha and the British landed on the other three beaches. Our job at Omaha was to land as armored infantry so we were to land with the tanks. We had to follow the 29th Infantry Division, which was a new division for battle. We felt for them because we knew that this was going to be tough for that bunch. The 1st Infantry Division, who had also moved to England with us, had experience. But they were on our left side and the 29th was right in front of us. The 29th Infantry suffered tremendously. I was part of the advance guard that was supposed to land with the 2nd Infantry Division behind the 29th and to find an area to assemble the tanks to get them de-waterproofed and get them up to the front to help the paratroopers. That was our first job when we landed with General Rose, who later was killed, was the advance guard for the division. Some of us were assigned to him to find the areas where we could de-waterproof the tanks so they could move and the Infantry could move with him. That was our major job. When we landed there, there was still some activity. There wasn't any small arms fire on the beach anymore, it was and a little bit farther, but there were casualties all over the place. One guy was holding onto a tank trap. We thought he was dead. But going up to him he was alive yet, but he was frozen on that thing. We had a heck of a time getting him loose and getting into the medical station and taking him with us.

**JE:** He was in shock?

**PA:** Oh yes. Of course he wasn't the only one that would have been in shock, but he's one that we actually had to help. But we did get in and we got moving.

**JE:** The Normandy landings happened on the 6th of June.

**PA:** And we went in on the 7th, the next morning right behind the 29th Infantry that had moved in on the 6th.

**JE:** So you saw a lot of the casualties from the Normandy landing on the 6th all over the place?

**PA:** Oh yeah, absolutely, but that was just the beginning at the casualties you know.

**JE:** So they faced the brunt as they came in and then you came in after that?

**PA:** Yeah. There were 6,000 men killed on that beach there.

**JE:** And you could hardly keep from stepping on bodies probably?

**PA:** Yeah. Well, again we always covered them if we had anything to cover them with. A lot of them carried a pack and they had a blanket or a canvas in their pack and we could take that and cover them up because we didn't want them exposed.

**JE:** Did it ever make you sick to your stomach?

**PA:** It didn't at that point because my outfit was used to seeing some of it in Africa and Sicily, so we were somewhat accustomed to it. But I'm sure that for the others, it was the first time for them and I'm sure that they were really not in good shape.

**JE:** So then you moved in and you encountered the hedgerow fighting June 12. That was six days later. Tell us about the hedgerow fighting.

**PA:** Well, after we got up to the river, we relieved the paratroopers somewhat and got them some heavier weapons we went back to the hedgerows and started fighting.

**JE:** Tell us what the hedgerows were.

**PA:** I don't know how to explain them. They were just rows of trees and they were sort of boxed hedgerows. I guess you could call them that. In each hedgerow there was a gully in a square and there were hundreds or thousands of them. Anyway, it was hard to get the Germans out of there because it was hard for tanks to get in there until we developed a tank dozer. One of our guys said, "Let's put the bulldozer blade in front of the tank and we can clear those hedgerows out." That's what we ended up doing. But in the meantime, mostly Infantry went into the hedgerows. We would be within about 30 feet of the enemy because they would be over in the next hedgerow on this other row and if you went into the hedgerow this way (motioning) over here, they could be up this way firing over here and catch you on the flank. So you had to be careful of the whole square of hedgerows that you were in. I can remember every squad I had had a Springfield rifle with a telescope on it, or a sniper rifle if you want to call it that. I was using one of them in the hedgerow with a telescope to look at the other people across from me. As I was scanning this line

of hedges, I spotted a sniper in a tree aiming right between my eyes and I dropped. Everybody else saw me drop and they dropped. And the bullet came across “Whoosh!” just like that. (Laughter) I had a mortar squad. Every platoon had a mortar squad in the Armored Infantry. So I called on the mortars and told them to take care of those bushes over there and they got them. In fact, we even blew some women out of there. There were French women snipers shooting against us. They were girlfriends of the Germans. You see, think about how long the Germans had been there. They had been there from 1939 to 1944, so some of those French gals took up with the Germans. We killed some of them and then the others we would turn over to the French. The French would shave their heads and cut all their hair off. They had to go around the town that way to signify that they were traitors. That hurt them more than anything else to have to do that.

**JE:** These women wanted to be around German soldiers?

**PA:** Oh yeah, sure. Sex is sex eventually. I mean, I guess that’s the way they looked at it. They got to be real friendly with these Germans.

**JE:** So the Germans were fighting and then they had their girlfriends right there with them?

**PA:** Yes, in those cases where they joined them to be snipers, yes.

**JE:** You guys never got to do anything like that.

**PA:** No.

## Chapter 14 - 6:45

### Kill or Be Killed

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**Paul Andert:** When we relieved the British, again, I was sort of a scout. They would always pick me to go to the front to find the leader up there to find out what we were doing and how we were going to replace them and all of that. So I had an agreement with the British company commander in that area that we would come in at night under cover and that we would change positions so that the enemy wouldn’t know the positions were being changed. Well, the British commander changed his mind and said that we were going to change positions in the daylight, so I had to have our outfit ready to move in. So I moved out and moved in, in the daylight and the Germans knew exactly what we were doing. The British were making so damned much noise. And I said, “Can’t you be quiet?” And the British company commander said, “Sergeant, we’ve been in this war since 1939 and this is 1944. If you think I could get these men to give a damn about what they are doing you are mistaken. Just wait until you’ve been in a war that long. You won’t care either.” That’s what

he told me. So they took their antitank gun out and I didn't get my antitank gun in. I told this British commanding officer, I said, "Don't move that gun until I get mine in." And he said, "I'll take care of that bloke." So he removed the gun and he stands up in the roadway like this looking down the road. He said, "I'll see that those tanks come." They did attack us that night, but they didn't know that we were experienced troops. They thought that we were inexperienced. So we stayed in the holes. We let them go past us and we shot them from the holes. Then we had a group behind us that would chase them back. So when they were coming back down we would shoot some more of them.

**John Erling:** It seems like you are always outwitting the Germans, is that true?

**PA:** We did after Africa, because the Germans were pulling dirty tricks on us. They would say they were giving up and then when the guys would run out to get them, they would kill our guys. So we said if you don't get down in the dirt with the enemy you are going to lose. So in other words, if they pull dirty tricks, you have to do the same thing. And like Patton says, he said you can read the articles of the war to your men once a month, which we were supposed to do, but he says there's one last article. Kill or be killed. He said that was the last thing you tell your men. You tell them to shoot first or they are going to be dead. That's the way we learned and you know we did just as dirty things to they did to us.

**JE:** So then if some German soldiers came out with their hands up you shot them?

**PA:** After that, we shot them. We said that we were not going to take any more prisoners until they give up in big groups because that's different. Because in that case you know that they are really giving up.

**JE:** Patton would have said, "Take no prisoners".

**PA:** Yes. He not only said, "Take no prisoners," he used to tell us, "After you take them, tell them to take off their shoes and run because they can't run very fast and then shoot them." He got in trouble in Africa over that. They court-martialed a captain and a sergeant for shooting prisoners. Bradley told Patton they were coming up for court-martial. And Patton said, "You go back and tell those two to tell them that those prisoners were running away from them and that's why they shot them. Tell them I have never issued an order for you to kill the prisoners." And I have two pictures where he (Patton) told 10,000 men to do just that. (Laughter)

**JE:** But as much as you were under fire and almost hit, there was a time that you were wounded.

**PA:** Yes.

**JE:** Tell us about that.

**PA:** Well, we went into Saint-Lô breakthrough after Normandy was built up enough in the last part of July. During that time though, another friendly fire thing happened. We had 1,000-plane raid over Saint-Lô, a thousand planes. One of the groups of planes bombed

us and killed 300 of us and killed Gen. McNair who was visiting from the United States to see how the breakthrough would go. He got killed there. That was friendly fire. They made a mistake. I met with some of the 8th Air Force guys that are from here in Tulsa. I met with them not long ago at Furr's Cafeteria. A couple of guys were in that group. They said when we got back to England and we were told that we knocked out a bunch of our own guys—those guys sat up and cried all night. It was tough. It was tough. So anyway, during that time then just before I got wounded, we were told to put on a camouflage suits because we're going to fight in the forest. What happened was somebody woke up and realized the Germans wear camouflage suits so we were told to take them off. So the units changed out of the camouflage suits except us because as 2nd armored division, we were moving already. We couldn't change. So we went through Saint-Lô and on down. We were fired on by British aircrafts and we were fired on by the 29th division and also by some of our own artillery, because we were in camouflage and they thought we were Germans. Three British fighter planes attacked my column that I was in. The first plane came down and he started firing. One of his rockets went right in front of my driver and killed him. I'm standing up on this remounted 50 caliber. Of course I'm not shooting because I know that's a friendly aircraft. So we threw yellow smoke out which meant we were friendly troops. So as the second plane turned around and started to come down, he saw the smoke, and changed direction right away. He started going like this, (motioning) which meant recognition, so they quit. That happened on the way down as we were going through Notre Dame. There's some stuff in the book I wrote about Notre Dame and what we did there where we chased a reporter away. We had a guy from TIME magazine. I think his name was Lindsay, but I can't remember. He was pretty famous in those days. He came up with a camera and it was the first time I'd seen a reporter. We were about to be attacked and I said, "What are you doing here?" And he said, "I want to take some pictures." I said, "What you need to do is put that camera down and pick up that gun there and you help us. You're an American." He said, "Oh I just want to take some pictures." I said, "Get the hell out of here!" so he left. After the battle we had there, which is described in the book, Gen. Brooks came up with our division commander. The cameraman had reported back to the division and told the general that I had chased him away. So Gen. Brooks came up and he said, "Are you the sergeant that chased that reporter off?" I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Good job Sergeant!" (Laughter) He said, "What did you tell him?" I told him he wasn't going to like what he was about to see because this is killing man. At that time we had never had reporters around us filming us fighting. We couldn't believe it at the time. Of course today, they (reporters) are all over the place and a soldier doesn't know whether he should shoot or not shoot anymore.

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**Chapter 15 - 5:00****Wounded**

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**Paul Andert:** So we went on down from Pont-Brocard to Notre Dame and then we went to Saint Denis. My platoon was put on the south end of town on a roadblock. Then another roadblock was put on the north end of town because Patton then was coming into Cherbourg. He was driving the German troops down from Cherbourg toward us. Our job was to cut off as many of them as we could. The goal was to not let them escape into the other part of France where they could be free to fight some more. So at Notre Dame we set up the roadblocks and tried to keep them from coming through Notre Dame. I got word in the middle of the night to move to the north end of town. My lieutenant was at the CP and he couldn't get back to me so I had to do it. So we were running up the street going to the north end of town and some officer stopped me and he said, "Who are you?" And I said, "I'm the 41st division, second platoon." And he said, "Good. They broke in the north end of town. Go up and stop them." I said, "Yes sir." So it was so stupid I said, "Yes sir." (Laughter) So we were running up there and then suddenly I heard these tanks coming. I knew the sound of German tanks because we were used to hearing them. I said to myself, stop them with what? I don't anything to stop them with. My antitank gun is back there at the other roadblock and I don't have the half-track with me to pull it because we put the half-track in the safe area because they are thin skinned. I thought those German tanks are coming and the first one that rounds the corner is going to fire. So I told everybody, "Get out of here! Take off! Leave the street!" Except for me. I was against the wall. I couldn't get past there. I thought oh hell. So I just hugged the wall and the first tank came around the corner and wham! I heard that cannon go and I don't know whether it was an 88 or a 75 or what the hell it was, but it was loud enough and big enough. There is a wave from a shell as it goes by you know. It just picked me up and put me on top of this wall that I was standing by and knocked me on the other side. I always said that I had to have a guardian angel with me that helped me to get up on the wall besides the force of the tank. When I landed down on the other side of the wall I had been hit with a fragment in my left leg and I was lying there. So I started crawling around and hunting for the guys and we crawled back to our half-tracks and we found our mines. We carried mines on the half-tracks and we took them out to the road and put mines down to keep the German tanks from coming up the road we were on and to protect that part of the town. During the night, a couple of times they tried to get me out of there because they were telling me that I was hit and I was crawling around. I said, "I'm not going anywhere tonight."

**John Erling:** So your shrapnel wound was in your leg?

**PA:** Yes.

**JE:** That had to be tremendously painful.

**PA:** Yes it was, but I wasn't thinking about that because you could have worse pain than that!

(Laughter) So anyway, the next morning the company commander came up there and he knew that we had a hell of a fight that night and he said, "Where's Andert?" And they said, "He's lying down over there because he was hit last night and he wouldn't leave." So they picked me up and took me to the aid station and flew me to England. So I woke up in a hospital in England and there were two MPs by my bed. I wondered, what the heck are these guys doing here? So I raised myself up in bed and let out a big loud cuss word. A couple of nurses came running over and they said, "He's an American!" And I said, "Yes I am!" I pulled out my dog tags and showed them. And they said, "Well, you had a camouflage suit on, we thought you were German, so we were holding you for interrogation. All we did was cut your pant leg and take the fragment out and we left you alone. We didn't clean your wound or anything." So...it was awful the way I treated those people because they were doing the best they could and what they were supposed to do. They sent me to two psychiatrists. One of them said, "You're crazy." And I said, "No, I'm not crazy." So he sent me to another psychiatrist and that one said, "You're not crazy. But I'm going to do you favor and I'm going to send you home." I said, "No, you're not." He said, "What do you want?" I said, "I want to go back to my guys up there." He said, "You want to go back and get shot some more?" I said, "Those are my guys. Do you think I could sit at home and be wondering what's happening to them? I'm not too badly wounded and I can go back." He said, "Well, I guess you are crazy and I am sending you back." So I did go back.

**JE:** How long were you in the hospital?

**PA:** Probably about a month, as soon as I could limp I left. I didn't want to stay there. I was mad at everybody there because they didn't know what was going on up there. That was the wrong approach for me to take, but then I couldn't take it. People having a ball in the back while there were guys up there getting killed, I couldn't take it.

**JE:** So they thought you were crazy because of your actions?

**PA:** Yeah, oh yeah.

**JE:** That's why they sent you to two psychiatrists?

**PA:** Yeah.

**JE:** And you could have gone home?

**PA:** Twice I was offered a chance to go home during the war and I wouldn't go. I couldn't do that. In my mind I could not do it.

**JE:** This was a band of brothers wasn't it?

**PA:** Well, kind of like that yes. Sure.

**JE:** You were just so bonded with those guys.

**PA:** Because we were brothers in so many ways.

**JE:** That was your first wound.

## Chapter 16 - 5:25

### Wounded Again

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**John Erling:** Then you were wounded again?

**Paul Andert:** Yeah.

**JE:** Tell us what happened.

**PA:** This was in a Siegfried line.

**JE:** What's a Siegfried line?

**PA:** A Siegfried line is a German fortification of antitank traps and pillboxes that they built opposite of the French Maginot line. It ran all along their border there. Our job was to get into the Siegfried line and push them back because that was their first fortifications in Germany with the Siegfried line. I always like to explain if I get the opportunity, that when we attacked it, it was thunder storming and we had artillery fire coming from both sides. There was small arms fire and all of this was going on at the same time while we were moving up. I got to thinking and a movie that I saw called The Fighting 69th with James Cagney about World War I at Jefferson Barracks. I thought, gosh this is just like The Fighting 69th. So we took over a house to sleep in that night before we took over the line. The house was hit by artillery. The basement of this house was above ground, and we didn't notice that. So I'm sitting in the corner of the basement and the shell hit the corner of the basement right above my head and busted a barrel of sauerkraut, which was right next to me and just flooded me with sauerkraut. I was stinking mad. So here I am flooded with sauerkraut and then we go into the Siegfried line. While we were in the battle in the Siegfried line my Lieutenant got hit in the temple and his blood just splattered all over me. The first thing I thought of was I've got to stop the bleeding. It had been raining for 16 days, so I reached down and I picked up some mud and I slapped it on his brain and I stopped the bleeding. Months later, he wrote me a letter. His name was Woodberry. He was part of the Woodberry Soap family. He was a good man. He said that they said that whoever slapped that mud on him saved his life, if not his eyesight. So I used to tell my guys if there is mud around use it to stop the bleeding. So I had blood on me and sauerkraut and I was out on patrol. Some guys went crazy during this constant bombarding of us all night long.

A couple of them started beating their own heads in with their helmets. When it had calmed down a little bit I was able to get a couple of them back to the aid station. When I got them back there, they said, "Take them back. They can't get combat fatigue." I said, "What in the hell are you talking about?" They said, "Only an officer can get combat fatigue." That really made me mad and I said, "They are staying right here." So I went back to the Company and I reported to the 1st Sergeant. He said to me, "Did you get the replacements that I sent up?" I said, "When did you send them?" He said, "I sent them last night." I said, "Who brought them?" He said, "Nobody, I just told them where the front was." Boy did I get him. I said, "They are dead." He said, "What you mean?" And I said, "They never made it to me. They got shot during the night because they wandered right off into the enemy." I never forgot their names. It's still here all of the time. I never mention it because you think of parents and people that are relatives that those people had to hear about how their family member got killed by stupidity. But anyway, we decided to move on to the Royal River. On the way, we had to put Bangalore torpedoes and barbed wire to blow the wire so the tanks could go through and set off the mines. So I got wounded there, I was hit by artillery there.

**JE:** Where was your wound?

**PA:** It was on my other leg and then on the palm of my hand, I had shrapnel in there, but it was a little bit. They took me (inaudible) but they were bombing it so bad that they decided that they needed to take all of these wounded guys to England. They knew they couldn't leave him here. So they flew us to England and our plane crashed when we landed in England up on its nose. (Laughter) They pulled us out of the plane and took us to an aid station. I went to a hospital and then went to a replacement depot because mine was a flesh wound. My second wound was a flesh wound. In other words, it didn't break anything so I could recover quickly. I went to the replacement depot. At the replacement depot, Colonel Lee, they called him The Infamous Colonel Lee. They reduced him (in rank) later for the way he was treating the guys at their replacement depot. But he told us, "Don't think you mean anything to me. You've got medals or whatever, but you mean nothing to me. You are going to do what I tell you while you are here." The next morning they put me on KP peeling potatoes. I'm sitting there looking at the potatoes and I had one in my hand. This mess sergeant came up to me and he said, "Let me show you what to do with that potato." I said, "How many numbers are in your serial number?" He said, "Eight." And I said, "There are only seven in mine. So let me tell you what you do with potatoes." So I shoved them at him and I left and went AWOL. I went back on my own to get back to the front. I joined some captain who was bringing some Infantry replacements over. He was new. So he was glad to talk to me because it helped him out to have somebody that had been in combat talk to him. He said, "You can come with me." So we were on an LCI crossing the

English Channel. We were hit by another ship and the LCI sunk in the English Channel. (Laughter) We got picked up out of the water by the LST and got on board the LST and this captain, when he met me on there, he said, "I didn't do you any favors because if you would have drowned you would have been a deserter from the American Army and you would've been in bad shape. You would not have been considered a guy trying to get back.

## Chapter 17 - 7:00

### Adolph Hitler Bridge

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**John Erling:** I've got to go back to when you said you were AWOL, were you punished for that?

**Paul Andert:** The way I was punished is that Colonel held my records and wouldn't release them and they took my soldier's deposit away from me. It was part of my military record. I had money in there that I was saving and they had put it on a yellow card and put it in my record. So the Colonel or somebody removed that card. So when they finally sent my record back—they kept it from December to March—they kept that record and they wouldn't release it. They had me under orders to be court-martialed and I'm fighting them. When my general, General White, found out about it, he ordered them to release my records and to cut this court martial crap out. He told them that we were fighting a war up here. That's when I got the Silver Star that they gave me way back during the St. Denis thing. The day they pinned that on me, is when General White told me, he said, "I have ordered your records to be released. It's ridiculous that they have kept your records all of this time in England." Nobody knew where I was I guess except my own outfit knew where I was. They did have me under charges but they had to drop them because I was up on the other end.

**JE:** In December, so it was all very, very cold.

**PA:** Oh yeah. I think they said it was about 26 degrees below zero. It was the coldest winter ever that's been recorded in that area. To keep from freezing to death, two guys would get together in a hole and hug each other because that way they could share body warmth. If a man tried to sleep by himself, he was dead. He would freeze solid. So you had to have two guys always. That was our rule anyway to never have one man by himself.

**JE:** When you look back now, doesn't it make you think how did I ever survive all of that?

**PA:** Yes, but you have to say that there was somebody with you all of the time. I mean there was a reason that you survived and that's how you have to look at it. Really, you have to

believe that. I believe that. There were so many times, I counted personally that I knew of, there were more than 17 times that I should have died during this period. But, I survived all of those things.

**JE:** You were to seize the Adolf Hitler Bridge across the Rhine River?

**PA:** Right.

**JE:** Talk to us about what was happening there. This was early. It was about the 4th of March in 1945. General Hines was our Combat Commander. He was ordered to take the bridge if he could move on it. So we moved quickly toward the bridge. We got to the bridge and we got across, but we couldn't stay across because they couldn't get any tanks across to support us. So we were ordered to come back, to withdraw. After we withdrew, the bridge was blown up. The Germans blew the bridge up. But without any tank support, it was decided that we couldn't make a viable bridgehead that would hold without tanks. So they told us to withdraw. Gen. Hines said that he could make a crossing at another place. Gen. Simpson, who was our Army Commander, talked to Eisenhower about it. Eisenhower told him, "No, the 9th Army has been assigned to Montgomery to cross at Wessel." We were told to lie back and to move north of Hitler's bridge and cross on a pontoon bridge that we laid by Wessel. So when Montgomery went across, we went across. He went across on the 29th of March. The Adolf Hitler Bridge was the first one we hit, but it was blown up and we had to withdraw. The interesting thing about that is Krefeld, Germany is right near there. So when we withdrew, we went back to the town of Krefeld and we let all of the animals out of the zoo. Manny Gamallo from the Tulsa World wrote about that one time, about how we let all of the animals out of the zoo. They tried to find out who did that, but we never would admit to doing it. (Laughter)

**JE:** So you saw monkeys and lions and?

**PA:** Everything. We had a ball. We went into the beer joints and we drank everything we could find. We were having a little bit of respite from the 4th of March and the time we crossed again.

**JE:** So you made it across the Rhine River in March. When you would approach these German towns, would you have them put out a white flag?

**PA:** We would send in for the mayor. We had what we called a propaganda gun. We had spearhead groups. We would have a platoon of tanks and a platoon of infantry just break through and go into a town. We would call on the loudspeaker on the top of the tank for the town mayor or a representative of the town to come out. They would come out and we would tell them to tell people to put out the white flag and we will go on through. But, we told them that if they did not honor the white flag, we would call an air strike and blow the town up. We would tell them that if they were going to fight us and not let us move through, that we were going to do that. Well, most of the town's did give up except for

the fact that we would have to shoot the steeples off the churches because the enemy artillery observers would be in the steeples of the churches because they thought we wouldn't destroy the churches. The German people started telling us that they couldn't do anything about the people up in the church steeples. We could, so we would blow the steeple off. Some of the towns that we went through would start to fire on us. We would withdraw and call for an air strike and blow the place up. Then in a couple of other towns, we would go in and get in the middle of it and they would start wanting to fight. We did have one case where I killed a kid that tried to put a Panzerfaust into my vehicle and I shot him before he could do it.

**JE:** What was that?

**PA:** They called it a Panzerfaust. It was a grenade at the end of the tube that you would carry and you could just point it and fire it and it would blow up anything.

**JE:** So he tried to put that in your vehicle?

**PA:** Yeah. He was coming toward the vehicle. Several times I told him to stop and he didn't so I shot him. The mayor of the town told me, he says, "He was a Hitler youth and he was going to do you in." So I had to do what I had to do. We went into another town where they fought us. When we finally stopped fighting, the mayor that did give up to us, we later found him hanged. The German troops hanged him because he did give up to us.

**JE:** The mayor of the town?

**PA:** Yes, they hanged the mayor of the town because he gave up to us to save his town.

**JE:** You would go into their homes?

**PA:** We would take over their house, yes.

**JE:** Did you see pictures of Hitler on the wall?

**PA:** Oh yeah, we would throw them out the window. We would take the pictures off of the wall and tell the people to leave. They would ask us, "What do we do?" And we would tell them, "You go find a place to live and when we are gone you can come back." So we would take their homes over and eat their food and whatever we wanted. Sometimes a German woman would stay there and cook for us and be friendly.

**JE:** Would you stay in the house for 24 hours?

**PA:** Yeah, we would stay there for about a day because we were always ordered to keep moving.

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**Chapter 18 - 5:40**  
**The Cuckoo Clock**

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**Paul Andert:** In one town there we shot up a cuckoo clock.

**John Erling:** What was the story with the cuckoo clock?

**PA:** The school kids love this story. When the teachers hear about it, they want to make sure I tell the kids about it. We were in this home and we were all sitting in our favorite spot, which was the kitchen table. We would drink their schnapps and tell jokes and have fun. We had this one guy who was standing over here (motioning) and he is looking at this cuckoo clock and he was cussing it. I told everybody, "Let's just be really quiet and see what he does." He kept inching over toward the cuckoo clock. Finally, one time when it came out he grabbed the bird, pulled it out of the clock, threw it on the floor and he pulled out his side arm and he shot it. He said, "Damn Nazi bird!" We just died laughing. We wondered what those people thought when they came home and their cuckoo clock was splattered all over the floor.

**JE:** Near the end of the war, didn't the Germans round up people and put them in buildings and burn the buildings?

**PA:** Yes. Because we were assigned to break through, the Germans didn't know where we were a lot of times. They didn't know how fast we were moving because there were several breakthroughs all going on at the same time. The foot troops would follow. Our job if we met resistance was to go around it and keep going to the rear and shoot up the rail stations and airports and all of that. They also told us if we came into town and we saw a fire to go to the fire directly. The Germans would put political prisoners and Jewish Holocaust victims that they were moving to another spot and animals and they would put them all in a barn and lock it up and set it on fire with these people in there. Our job was to get to the barn and to get them out. This one particular town, we got to the barn and we got them out. People were running in every direction. We had a duck and a rabbit that we got drunk in once in a while and had fun with them. But the people got a hold of the rabbit and they started pulling it apart trying to eat it raw. Some people ask what happened to the duck and I don't know. It got away somehow. While this was all going on, the people in the town who hated the SS, you know, Hitler's worst group of soldiers was called the SS. They were the ones that were doing a lot of this dirty work. They told us that there was an SS officer hiding in one of the barns, so we got him out. He came strutting out of there and he said, "I'm a Colonel in the SS Army and I demand to be treated according to the Geneva Convention." Private First Class Archer was standing next to me. He hit this guy right in the mouth, knocked him down on the ground and he leaned over him and said, "I'm

just a PFC in the American Army and I don't give a damn about the Geneva Convention. You're going to do what we tell you to do. So, we turned him over to the town folks because they were really angry. They were German and he was German, but he was SS. The next morning he was lying on the side of the road in a ditch full of bullet holes naked. As we were leaving town we were looking down at him and we said great, that's the best thing that could've happened to him. I'll be damned if he was going to go to the Geneva Convention and get three meals a day and be treated like a human being after he did those people that way.

**JE:** He was burning barns and burning buildings and things like that?

**PA:** Yes, he was having his troops do that. Toward the end of the war, the German people more and more got rebellious against a lot of that type, not the people's army that they forced into fighting. Most of those guys if they could they gave up toward the end. They weren't dirty, let's put it that way. But there were still a lot of those dirty groups around that would do things.

**JE:** These years that you were in Germany, did you hear about the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust?

**PA:** Oh yeah. We had heard bits about it all along. Just bits, because you know, if you read the story about Roosevelt and World War II by (inaudible), they never pushed they never pushed the Holocaust until much toward the end of the war. Morgenthauer, one of Roosevelt's secretaries kept telling him what was going on. He said we need to talk about it and we need to let the people know. But Roosevelt really didn't do much about that or say much about it. There wasn't a lot of talk about it until we ran into the camps themselves. You see, I lucked out this way, I saw some small camps, but when May 9th came and the war was over, within a month I was on my way home because I had enough points that I didn't stay there to go any further. I didn't go into Berlin like my outfit did. There was no more war going on when my outfit went in there. I was home on June 13 and the war had ended on May 9. So that's how quickly I got home after the war.

**JE:** You said you came up to some of these persecution camps?

**PA:** Yes.

**JE:** And nothing was happening then because everybody was cleared out by the time you got there?

**PA:** Yes. They were moving them and the only one we ran into was the one on fire, the one we talked about, because they had already moved the others on to the next spot. They didn't have very many places to move them to because the Russians were coming from the other direction and we were coming from this direction. It got to the point of course where they had to just let them go and get out.

**JE:** The Jews?

**PA:** Yes. They had to let the Jews and anybody in the camps go. Because they also had political prisoners they had put in there, people who had done things that the ruling political party didn't like.

**JE:** But you weren't near Auschwitz or anything like that?

**PA:** No, no.

**JE:** So then these camps that you came upon weren't like Auschwitz?

**PA:** No, no they were not.

**JE:** They were just holding people there?

**PA:** Right. Some of my guys that were in my group were at Northausen and Auschwitz, but I was not because I came home on points.

## Chapter 19 - 5:20

### Easter Egg Hunt

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**John Erling:** Also you went on an Easter egg hunt?

**Paul Andert:** That was on Easter Sunday in 1945. I was out on a separate patrol with my guys on a roadblock in some town and we were told to pick up and to go and join the forces in Lippstadt. On the way there, there was a German house at the road and we needed a break so I told platoon to go up there. So we went up to this house and we put our camouflage nets over our vehicle and we went in the house. We had gotten a bunch of eggs from a cold storage house in another town and we gave them to this lady. She had three kids and we let her fry the eggs. I ate 17 eggs that morning. And then we had her boil them and she didn't know what we were going to do then. We went out in the yard and we planted the eggs and then we had the kids go on and Easter egg hunt. And here they were, her family was fighting us in Lippstadt. A company commander came by and he caught me and he said, "You could be court-martialed for fraternizing with the enemy. Get the hell out of here. We're fighting up in this next town, get up there!" (Laughter) So we went up there to Lippstadt. Lippstadt was where Gen. Rose was killed. Incidentally, he was the only Jewish general that we had in the American Army. A lot of people didn't know he was Jewish. General Maurice Rose. At one time he was with me when we went to Omaha Beach, because he wasn't in command of the division then, he was a combat commander. Then he ended up being commander of the 3rd armored division and that's where we encircled the Loire Valley there in Lippstadt where they closed the deal. The 3rd Division met with the 2nd Division and we closed the valley where they couldn't operate anymore.

A lot of times we went into towns where didn't even know we were there. The German soldiers would be walking the street on leave and here we were and we would surprise them. In a couple of cases there, we got friendly with the German girls, some. We were in formation and one of the girls came out and was talking and fraternizing with me and the Company Commander asked, "What the heck have you guys been doing?" I said, "Well, they were nice to us and so we were nice to them." You know. There were some that were really nice. One thing we didn't do and the Russians were reportedly doing this constantly was violating the women. I never ever saw an American soldier violate a woman. Never. We never did. We just had a different mentality about that. Whether they were German or whatever they were, we didn't do that. In one case, a couple of my guys did pull a deal. The mayor of the town told me that they had done something. I did have an officer at that time, so I preferred them for court martial. They told me that I couldn't do that because I wasn't an officer. Those two guys were going to kill me because-

**JE:** So two of your guys had raped some German ladies?

**PA:** Yeah. That's what the mayor told me. I put them up for charges and a couple of nights after they found out that I did that, they were going to kill me. By one of my other sergeants was right there at the same time and he said, "Well go ahead, we'll kill you first." We were getting ready to have a shootout with our own guys. But that night they went AWOL and we never found them. I never have forgotten those two names either. They were from Missouri, same as I was. They were real ornery cusses. What I used to do with them before I found out that they had done something like that, because of the dirty things they used to do, I would tell them, "You are always in front of me. You are my scouts. When I holler, 'scouts out' that means you two will go." I always wanted them in front of me and not behind me because you didn't know what they might do.

**JE:** One time you came to a town in what you call a half-track?

**PA:** Yes.

**JE:** Tell us what a half-track is.

**PA:** A half-track is just a steel-plated vehicle that has truck tires in the front and tank tracks on the back. I had five of them in my platoon. We carried antitank guns and mines, barbed wire and all of that kind of stuff on these half-tracks. It was a good transport item. It allowed the Armored Infantry to operate a lot better than the foot troops could because near us we had these half-tracks and we could live off of that equipment where they had to carry it.

**JE:** If you would come into a town, you would most of the time get out of your half-track?

**PA:** If we were in a fight we were out of the half-tracks.

**JE:** So you came to this town when you chose not to get out of your half-track?

**PA:** Yeah.

**JE:** Then what happened?

**PA:** We got caught in the middle of the town and that's when that kid was going to blow up the half-track. Because in the first place, we weren't supposed to stop in the middle of the town and in the second place, we were supposed to be dismounted the back of the tanks. One of the tank drivers got out of his tank and was talking to a German girl and she shot him. The German girl shot him and she killed him. It turned out that she did it because one of her relatives was killed just before that and she was determined that she was going to get one of us. She took his own weapon and shot him with it. They said, when are you ever going to learn the lesson that you weren't supposed to do what you did in the first place (talk to a German girl) and it wouldn't have happened.

**JE:** When she shot at soldier, did somebody shoot her?

**PA:** They did. Yes, I don't know who it was but they got her right away because they didn't know whom else she might shoot of course.

## Chapter 20 - 4:42

### President Roosevelt Dies

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**John Erling:** But you did have some prisoners. I think you had 22 prisoners. How did you dispose of them?

**Paul Andert:** Well, that's a good story. We were across the Elbe River at the time. We were stuck there because we couldn't get tanks or anything across. So it got to a certain point where they were evacuating us out of the Elbe River back onto the other side. As we were moving south of Magdeburg, my company commander who I just had for a few days decided that he was going to go into the town ahead of me. I told him not to, but he did and he got killed in the town. Then, his executive officer got shot in the mouth. So Gen. Hines called from the other side of the river and he said, "I'm going to evacuate you." I said, "Well, what about the rest of the battalion that's behind me?" He said, "There's nobody behind you. You are over there by yourself. I already evacuated all of them." What the hell? He said, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm Sgt. Andert, I used to ride motorcycles for him too when he was a major." He said, "What the hell are you doing there?" I said, "Because guys like you that guys like me and this position." (Laughter) He said, "I want you to get back over here as soon as you can." So we had a machine gun unit that I stayed with and we were the last ones to leave the Elbe River to get back on the other side. Roosevelt died on April 12 and this was April 13 that this happened. I went back across

the Elbe and then that's when some of our guys were drunk and they didn't support us and we got into a fight with our own guys. We got locked in a house and that was another bad one. You know, so many things happened that people don't realize that could happen in a war, things that are unthinkable. That your own artillery would get drunk and they didn't support you and leave you over there on the other side of the river. And you get back on the other side of the river and you find them drunk and drinking up. And you say, "What the hell is the matter with you guys?" And they say, "Well, Roosevelt died." And so they were drunk, you know and so we started fighting them. We were fist fighting them so they locked us up and put us in a house and sent the Colonel down from headquarters. The funniest thing was that this Colonel was a lieutenant with me in the United States during the Carolina maneuvers. He pulled some dirty tricks that we were not supposed to do while we were over there. He blocked out civilian electricity and all of that that we were not supposed to do in the states. And I knew all of that about him and he was a Colonel now, a Lieutenant Colonel at the headquarters representing the infantry. They sent him down to investigate. He said to me, "The supreme headquarters are sick and tired of the way you guys act." I said, "Sir, we are sick and tired of the supreme headquarters too, because of the way you left us on the other side of the river on our own. You have been mistreating us for a long time." He told the company commander to get out of the room so the two of us sat there and talked. He said, "I'm not preferring any charges because I know how the infantry is because I was one of you. I am going to put the artillery people that were drunk on report. But you stop what you are doing and calm down, this war is almost over, or you are going to get in serious trouble." I said, "Well, I am ready for serious trouble because I am so fed up." You see, just before that, I had a Colonel that abandoned us. I knew that Colonel when he was just a lieutenant over on the other side. We put up a defense to help our tanks get across and they couldn't get them across. They kept blowing the bridge up, so we had to withdraw. This Colonel was with me and German tanks were coming and we had no tanks across there and he said, "Sergeant, stop those tanks!" He's a Colonel and I'm a Sergeant and I figured the Colonel would take charge. He's supposed to be more experienced than I am. I said, "Sir, I have nothing to stop those tanks with except a bazooka." He said, "Well, put those bazooka guys out there." I said, "As soon as they fire a bazooka, if there's more than one tank, they are dead." Because the other tank would see where the shot came from and he would blow those guys up. He said again, "Stop those tanks!" And he took off with his staff running to the rear. I waited until he got out of sight and I said, "Let's go!" So we withdrew too, because we would have all been dead. When we got back toward the river there he called me into a meeting and he said, "I'm ashamed of you." I said, "Well what are you ashamed of?" He said, "You ran." I said, "Sir, I ran after you ran." He had his staff and all of

his people sitting around him and they are going like this (motioning) because they knew that they ran. So he changed the subject. So that's why I was so upset, because you get to the point where it seemed like nobody gave a damn where you were or what you did. I finally got to that point. (Laughter)

## Chapter 21 - 7:00

### End of War

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**John Erling:** Before you left there though you wanted to have a piece of memorabilia?

**Paul Andert:** Oh yeah. That was in the (inaudible) forest. One German group was hiding out there. They wanted to fight and they wouldn't leave, so they told us to clear the forest. While we were in the forest, this one guy jumped out at me. I didn't look to see if he had a weapon or what he was going to do, I just shot him. His helmet flew off. I looked at that helmet and I knew this is about the last battle of the war. I always wanted a German helmet and I thought that's going to be mine so I took that helmet. But my left-handed baseball pitcher, a guy that was one of my squad leaders got killed there. He would always drink and he would stand up on the back of the tank and he would sing: "I eat when I'm hungry and I drink when I'm dry and if a tree don't fall on me I'll live till I die." They told me he was singing that song and he got it right between the eyes.

**JE:** Wow.

**PA:** There he was lying on the side of the road. He was covered up and I could see his feet. I said, "That's McCrea." And they said, "Yep that's McCrae." That was the last battle we had.

**JE:** So did you bring that helmet home?

**PA:** Oh yeah. My grandson has it now. I promised it to him. I mailed it to him recently. I have pictures of it and I used to have it to show, but I'm starting to get rid of all of that stuff.

**JE:** So the end of the war was May...

**PA:** They say 7th, 8th and 9th. Those were the days were when the treaties were signed or whatever you want to call them.

**JE:** 7th, 8th, and 9th?

**PA:** Yeah.

**JE:** When you knew that the war was over, there was a celebration time then wasn't there?

**PA:** Yes. We were told that it was all over. Anyway, a bunch of us started to celebrate and we had a brand-new company commander. We were getting new commanders all of the time because they were getting sent off or they would run off or they got shot or something. So

we went and got this company commander and we dragged him out of his bed and threw him out in the city street. (Laughter) the 1st Sgt. was running around us and hollering, "You can't do this! You can't do this!" And we were thinking oh yeah, we can! Anyway, he was a good-natured guy. I mean he was a brand-new 1st Lieutenant and he didn't know anything. But he knew what we had been through and that we had to celebrate. So he took it great and that's how we celebrated that night.

**JE:** How did you come back then to the United States?

**PA:** They called me to the company command post because I was the one with the most points in my outfit at that time that was still there. They offered me, number one, a commission and they did that a couple of times before and I refused them.

**JE:** Why did you refuse the commission?

**PA:** I didn't want it because if they gave you a commission, you couldn't stay with the guys that you were in charge of. They sent you to another outfit to a brand-new group. That was one thing. And another thing, the guys really wanted me to stay there and I wanted to stay there so I didn't want to be a lieutenant. Actually, three times they offered me that. Another time they offered it to me when I got back to the states before I was discharged. But I told them no I don't want anything like that. They would say, "Well, what do you want?" And I would say, "I want to get the hell out of here. That's what I want to do." They said, "Well you sure have enough points." So they sent me back to a group with some other guys that had points from other outfits. They put us on a ship called the Mariposa and sent us home.

**JE:** What port did you come into?

**PA:** Boston. I wanted to see the Statue of Liberty and I didn't get to see it going out or coming in. Yes, I went into Boston.

**JE:** Then where did you end up?

**PA:** I ended up back at Jefferson Barracks. I was discharged from Jefferson Barracks.

**JE:** You had a disability though didn't you?

**PA:** Oh yeah. This VFW was there at the separation center. I was getting ready to leave because they had given me my discharge papers and all of that. They said, "Were you wounded?" And I said, "Yeah." They said, "Go back and get signed up for compensation." They made me do that and I'm glad they did. As the years went on, my eyesight got bad because I had been in an explosion. My legs don't work right. I had several concussions and my ears went bad. So my compensation of course has been raised and I've been happy to get it. I worked until 1992 and then I quit with 69 years old.

**JE:** What was your profession after the war?

**PA:** It ended up being in the lumber business. Lindsey Lumber in Florida and then Lone Star Industries. I was a merchandising man for 162 stores at one time and I visited with different heads of different organizations about making deals for supplies in that kind of thing.

**JE:** What was it like then to be headed home and to get back into civilian life again? I'm sure there was an adjustment period. How many years and months were you in the war?

**PA:** I was in from 1940 to 1945. I spent 30 months in what they call combat situations. So when I got home, I wasn't doing very well. I don't think I treated my mother right. I didn't treat my brothers well. I could hardly recognize them in a way. I just started walking the streets of St. Louis. I would walk from North St. Louis all the way downtown and back. I would just walk all over the city. I could ride a bus but I walked. I just couldn't find what I wanted to do. I took a couple of jobs in the printing business because I had some experience from Hadley. I didn't like the union because I was very independent. I had to join the printers union. In the first meeting I went to they were discussing the contract. But nobody was allowed to say anything, they were just telling us how it was going to be. I started to say something and they said, "You don't say anything." I said, "I'm leaving." So I went to the door. The Sgt. of Arms or whatever you call him at the door said, "You can't leave." I said, "To hell I can't leave! This is the United States!" So I just shoved him to the side and I left. I had an uncle that was the president of the optical workers union, so this president of the printers union got a hold of my uncle and told him to make me understand how unions work. I said to my uncle, "You don't have to make me understand. I'm free to do what I want to do. They are not going to tell me I can't say anything. What the hell is going on?"

**JE:** Freedom was what you were fighting for.

**PA:** Yeah and that was a surprise. Finally, I worked in the printing business for a little bit and then I met the girl that I married, which helped a lot.

**JE:** Your wife's name?

**PA:** Gurney is her first name. It's a southern Illinois name. Sometimes it's a man's name too. So sometimes she gets mail addressed to Mr. Gurney Andert. (Laughter) She had to move with me. We moved 23 times all over to different parts of the United States trying to settle down. We couldn't settle down. I worked in a Veterans hospital in Los Angeles and in Tucson, Arizona. Then I finally settled back in Florida and I started working in the lumber business down there and then I settled down some.

**JE:** How long have you been an Oklahoman?

**PA:** I bought a house here in 1978. I did work 7 years away from here but I kept the house. So we've been residents since 1978.

**JE:** What a remarkable story this has been.

**PA:** Well, it's kind of a long one, but I don't mind telling it.

**Chapter 22 – 2:24****Dead Count**

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**John Erling:** You give of your time liberally to schools and you go in and tell them the story.

**Paul Andert:** Yes, I tell them the story and I answer their questions. Also, I never end up without telling them what I think they ought to be doing. I tell them they should be patriots and they should honor their country and know that this is the greatest country on earth. It is. I've been to Japan, not during the war, but after the war. I've been to Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, all through Europe again and I've never found any place like the United States. We're it. We do things wrong, but we're still it. Everybody wants to come here. They don't want to leave. They want to come. The biggest part that bothers me today and bothers most World War II veterans is we can't win a war anymore. We are not allowed to win a war anymore. We have to appease everybody. To me, that's wrong. We should remain strong. Our job is to protect our people. I've got a granddaughter whose husband is 26 years old now in the service. He's been over there to Iraq and Afghanistan four times. He is adamant about the fact that they can't do what they are taught to do to win a war. It's just terrible the way it is. I mean they train them in one fashion and then they get over there and they have to be politicians instead of soldiers. The majority of the soldiers don't like that.

**JE:** When students ask you questions, do they ask you strange questions or good questions, unusual questions?

**PA:** One of the ones that they ask the most is "Were you scared?" The other question that they will ask is, "What did you eat?" The answers to those two questions they really want to know. Then they want to ask, "How did you sleep? How many people did you kill?" They get into that.

**JE:** What do you tell them?

**PA:** Well, it depends on their age. I tell many that had to be that way because it's either you or them. Actually, we did keep count at one time and in Africa and Sicily I had killed 128 myself. Then in Europe we were starting to count them again and we decided that we were going to stop this damn counting. Because we were trying to see how many each one of us could kill personally. That was bad because then you start killing people that maybe didn't have to be killed to up your count, so we quit that.

**JE:** You were at 128?

**PA:** Yes, and it was probably 300 all together.

**JE:** That you personally killed?

**PA:** Yeah. It's not good to take that attitude.

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**Chapter 23 - 5:30****Medals**

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**John Erling:** Paul, you are inducted into the Oklahoma military Hall of Fame in 2008?

**Paul Andert:** Yes.

**JE:** Overall, you have received special commendations. I believe you have two Purple Hearts, a Silver Star and a Bronze Star?

**PA:** Yes. Actually I have three Bronze Stars with "V" device for Valor on them. Also, the Presidential Unit Citation, the Combat Infantry Badge and the French Croix de Guerre and the Belgian Croix de Guerre. I had about 17 of them all together. Some of them are just commemorative medals, like Battle of the Bulge, Battle of Normandy medal from the French.

**JE:** Were any of these particularly important to you?

**PA:** Of course, the Silver Star is the third-highest decoration that the Army had, but I think probably the Purple Hearts mean more to me. Incidentally, in New York they had they have The Purple Heart Hall of Fame that I got in. Of course, anybody that has a legitimate Purple Heart can be in that, but they have to send their thing in to New York before they put you in it.

**JE:** The Purple Hearts, the first one?

**PA:** July 30th in St. Denis, that was in France.

**JE:** What did you do there?

**PA:** That was when I got shot at by the tank and was blown over the wall. The second one was in November in this Siegfried line when I was planting Bangalore torpedoes and barbed wire. I was running back to the hole to set the charge off and I was hit by artillery. I had a lady call me one time and she said, "I wanted to thank you for fighting a clean war." I said, "Ma'am, what do you mean?" She said, "You fought a clean war and the enemy fought dirty." I said, "Ma'am if we didn't get down in the dirt with the enemy and fight the same way they did, we would have lost." We would have lost because if we would have told them everything we were going to do before we did it...if we said we were going to treat you nice...how in the hell can you do that to a guy who is determined to wipe you out and you are going to say I am going to treat you nice. How do you do that? I don't know how you do it. Maybe somebody knows, but I feel so bad about it. The last two things I tell some of the kids is that there is nothing more important than God, family, duty, honor, country and you should always wear a smile on your face because it's contagious. I don't smile enough, but smiles are contagious and another reason is it the longest word in the dictionary because there's a mile between the two S's. S-M-I-L-E-S. So I tell them they should smile, because

it's the longest word in the dictionary. The final word I have for you when you go home if you doubt whether you are doing the right thing or not, look in the mirror at only your eyes. Tell the story yourself and your eyes are going to tell you are the answer. I had a lady call me and she was the mother of one of the kids in school and she said, "He came home and he looked in the mirror and he came out and he said. 'Mom, I've sure been screwing up.'" (Laughter) She said that he said, "Mr. Andert told me to look in the mirror and it told me that I was doing wrong. My eyes told me that I should straighten up." (Laughter)

**JE:** That's cute. I think you said earlier that there were probably 17 times when you should have lost your life.

**PA:** At least. I am sure there were more times than that. I don't know how many people had me in their sights.

**JE:** That's true, but do you ever ask yourself why you escaped all of that? It was probably to come home and talk to these kids.

**PA:** I have a lot of people tell me that, John. You know, everybody doesn't have that gift. It's a kid in a way because...

**JE:** To get to tell them stories, right.

**PA:** Yes, because so many of the guys that tell their stories that I've been with, we used to go in groups, will only tell their story. But the kids are sitting there on edge waiting for them to tell them something about themselves. They are waiting to hear what you guys think about them and what the guys think about today and what we are doing today. The teachers tell me that the kids want to hear this. I keep telling the guys that they are not telling them (what the kids want to hear). They say to me, "But you do a good job." I say, "Yes, but I don't go to every school." See they go to every school. I'm trying to not spend too much time away from home, but I do go to schools and she (Gurney) supports me. That's the best part of it, because if she didn't support me I couldn't do it.

**JE:** So the students like when you talk to them?

**PA:** Oh yes. I went to Webster the other day and they had one class that they were going to have me talk to. Then they said, "You've got to stay." I said, "What do you want?" They said, "We've got to bring in all of the classes." And they brought seven classes in. Finally, I said I can't do anymore. I did that at Nathan Hale the other day too.

**JE:** Well Paul, to say thank you for all of this doesn't seem like enough but you know it comes from a sincere heart. The many generations that will be able to listen to this because of the technology of today will certainly respect you. They will say thank you for your service to your country. They will understand how you put your life at risk. Then you came home and how you remained active in telling students your story. What a legacy to leave behind.

**PA:** The VA has told me that one of the best things that I ever did was join this group and be monitor of it for 15 years. So we could talk about our experiences and let it out instead of

keeping it all in for all of those years that we did before. They said that is better for you psychology wise than anything else you could ever do.

**JE:** Thank you Paul so much for this.

**PA:** Yes, I thank you.

## **Chapter 24 - 0:25**

### **Conclusion**

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**Announcer:** You have just heard Paul J. Andert tell you his story of service in World War II.

Paul's book, *Unless You Have Been There*, is available in our bookstore section. We thank Paul and veterans like him who gave so much in the protection of our freedoms and we thank the foundations that believe in preserving these stories one voice at a time on [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).