## **Van Thomas Jones Interview**

Company K, 318th Inf Reg

(Library of Congress: Veterans History Project; interviewed by Annie Kathleen Smith) (MS Word Audio Transcript [NOT edited, just transcribed])

00:00:03 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:00:05 Speaker 1

And I listed it for those for.

00:00:10 Speaker 1

Georgia.

00:00:13 Speaker 1

And gosh, I don't know where it was been some months ago, but.

00:00:23 Speaker 1

Hi.

00:00:25 Speaker 1

Went in in any aircraft artillery, but it didn't stay very long. They transferred it to the infantry and I spent my career in three years in the infantry.

00:00:40 Speaker 1

I was.

00:00:42 Speaker 1

In France.

00:00:45 Speaker 1

Writing.

00:00:47 Speaker 1

In the age of Germany.

00:00:49 Speaker 1

When I got wounded.

00:00:51 Speaker 1

And.

00:00:56 Speaker 1

I stayed in the hospital for 9 1/2. 00:00:58 Speaker 1 Months. 00:01:03 Speaker 1 And I've had small Finch in ever since. How? 00:01:08 Speaker 2 Long were you in France? 00:01:11 Speaker 1 Ohh. 00:01:15 Speaker 1 Uh. 00:01:19 Speaker 1 Probably. 00:01:21 Speaker 1 Three or four months, I spend so long and it's hard to remember. 00:01:26 Speaker 2 When you were, you said you were training before. 00:01:29 Speaker 2 What? What kind of stuff? 00:01:30 Speaker 2 Did they? 00:01:32 Speaker 2 Train you to. 00:01:32 Speaker 2 Do. 00:01:33 Speaker 1 They didn't do anything much. 00:01:35 Speaker 1 And I was so.

00:01:35 Speaker 1

Upset.

00:01:36 Speaker 1

Send you out to different camps on them.

00:01:40 Speaker 1

I went, I went from Overthought.

00:01:47 Speaker 1

Any aircraft are terror and I didn't stay there.

00:01:52 Speaker 1

But well, I don't know, maybe six months.

00:01:57 Speaker 1

And then transferred me.

00:02:00 Speaker 2

Were you happy about being transferred or?

00:02:03 Speaker 1

I didn't know any difference. Couldn't tell any difference.

00:02:07 Speaker 1

I just wasn't in when I was in any aircraft. I was on a big gun 90mm then when they transferred.

00:02:16 Speaker 1

Me into the.

00:02:16 Speaker 1

Entrance area. I just had a rifle.

00:02:19 Speaker 1

And then they gave me a machine gun, told me I had.

00:02:22 Speaker 1

A machine gun. So I'm.

00:02:24 Speaker 1

I spent time overseas and.

00:02:26 Speaker 1

lt.

00:02:27 Speaker 1

Seemed better operating.

00:02:29 Speaker 1

30 caliber.

00:02:38 Speaker 2

Do you? Do you remember your?

00:02:39 Speaker 2

Trip across the Atlantic.

00:02:41 Speaker 1

Oh yeah.

00:02:43 Speaker 1

It was going over was nice.

00:02:46 Speaker 1

The weather was great and the water wasn't too rough, but coming back as soon as we left England, we hit a big North.

00:02:57 Speaker 1

Atlantic Storm and.

00:02:59 Speaker 1

Rough it took seven days to go over and took us about 12 or 14.

00:03:06 Speaker 1

Come back in the same distance.

00:03:13 Speaker 1

I stayed in the hospital in France for, oh, I don't know, couple months.

00:03:22 Speaker 1

Spare stadium there and then they transferred me over to England and I stayed in the English hospital.

00:03:33 Speaker 2

Where you say there were.

00:03:34 Speaker 1

You injured had that place in my back about 30 feet place and they couldn't get them. Stay back in, they could put them back but.

00:03:51 Speaker 1

They wouldn't stay.

00:03:54 Speaker 1

They they couple of them. It's still out. They they just want to study these, they put them back but.

00:04:03 Speaker 2

How are the hospitals?

00:04:07 Speaker 2

Versus you said you.

00:04:11 Speaker 2

Were in one in.

00:04:12 Speaker 2

England for a while, did you?

00:04:13 Speaker 2

Ever come in contact with?

00:04:14 Speaker 2

English.

00:04:16 Speaker 2

People. How did they treat you?

00:04:17 Speaker 1

Ohh yeah, Patriot is great. Good, good. Complain about that at all.

00:04:24 Speaker 1

Hey.

00:04:26 Speaker 1

Yeah, they they let us in the hospital could always walk. I didn't have any trouble in the legs and just my back shoulders and it wasn't.

00:04:41 Speaker 1

It was not. 00:04:43 Speaker 2 What about that strange people? 00:04:46 Speaker 1 Well. 00:04:48 Speaker 1 They didn't know how to treat you. 00:04:52 Speaker 1 Of course they couldn't talk English and I couldn't talk French, so we didn't. We didn't carry on very much conversation, but they was dead as any people that they. 00:05:06 Speaker 1 Just. 00:05:07 Speaker 1 Been freed from the Germans for less they. 00:05:12 Speaker 1 As they happened. 00:05:15 Speaker 2 Did you ever come in contact with any of? 00:05:17 Speaker 2 The German people. 00:05:21 Speaker 1 Nothing but soldiers who is fighting against, and we freed a bunch of Russians one time that had been in German Britain camp and then they were Russian. 00:05:42 Speaker 1 Women and. 00:05:44 Speaker 1 All they thought was the greatest thing since. 00:05:49 Speaker 1 It's nice bread but.

00:05:52 Speaker 1

And you know.

00:05:54 Speaker 1

We couldn't. We couldn't talk to him. There's a few of them that could speak some English, but I couldn't speak any Russians of them.

00:06:03 Speaker 2

Were the prison camps.

00:06:07 Speaker 1

Well, where we freaked them.

00:06:08 Speaker 1

It was. They just had them in.

00:06:12 Speaker 1

A pin almost, you might say.

00:06:18 Speaker 1

They had fairly, fairly decent.

00:06:22 Speaker 1

Food.

00:06:25 Speaker 1

What did you say? They made out? All right.

00:06:32 Speaker 2

Did you say so much when you were?

00:06:35 Speaker 1

Like oh, you get a letter and it'd.

00:06:39 Speaker 1

Be 3-4 months old.

00:06:44 Speaker 1

I got one after I got back home. Long time.

00:06:51 Speaker 1

And I'd I'd write another every few days where you know it's still alive. If it wasn't, it wasn't. Mail wasn't very good because.

00:07:10 Speaker 1

They never you where I was, but I'm moving every day from 1 area to another.

00:07:20 Speaker 1

Where is the German? They just following the Germans where?

00:07:23 Speaker 1

They let us remove.

00:07:28 Speaker 2

To do a have any family or friends who are in service.

00:07:36 Speaker 1

None. None.

00:07:40 Speaker 1

I didn't. There wasn't anybody in service my area.

00:07:43 Speaker 1

With with me.

00:07:45 Speaker 1

They separated this.

00:07:50 Speaker 1

But.

00:07:54 Speaker 1

The group I went in.

00:07:56 Speaker 1

With was scattered all over the world.

00:08:00 Speaker 2

Did you ever get home?

00:08:01 Speaker 2

Safe or?

00:08:02 Speaker 2

In the hospital or? 00:08:02 Speaker 1 Well. 00:08:05 Speaker 1 When I first went in to before I got into my regular outfit was pretty homesick being. 00:08:15 Speaker 1 You got over that after a while. 00:08:19 Speaker 2 What kind of things? 00:08:20 Speaker 2 Did you do on your outfit from? 00:08:22 Speaker 2 Like day-to-day novel. 00:08:25 Speaker 2 Jobs. 00:08:26 Speaker 1 Well, you just, you just wanted to make sure that you had your machine gun. That's machine gun that I had my machine gun very clean. I mean it was. 00:08:38 Speaker 1 Clean as it can be and take it down. Clean it, put it back together, even if it didn't need it. You didn't know when you were going to need. 00:08:47 Yeah. 00:08:47 Speaker 1 It and so. 00:08:50 Speaker 1 And I was very fortunate. I saw General Patton couple of times and I had the General Eisenhower came in and sat down on my phone. 00:09:04 Speaker 1

When I was in, when I was in.

00:09:10 Speaker 1

Friends.

00:09:13 Speaker 1

Well, he came in. He was going. He came through to the hospital and he was going down through there and he saw my Insignia on my.

00:09:22 Speaker 1

Peel Jacket that was hanging on the enema.

00:09:26 Speaker 1

He said. Where are you from? Said I'm from Tennessee and.

00:09:35 Speaker 1

He sat down on my bunk and talked to me 2-3 minutes and asked me about what was going on up front and then a General Patton. He didn't do anything except standard attention, and when I got.

00:09:50 Speaker 1

Through.

00:09:52 Speaker 1

About.

00:09:54 Speaker 1

I guess it was a month later or internalizing how was going through the hospital in England that I was in and he stopped and he got my book, he said, hey, Tennessee, how you doing?

00:10:10 Speaker 2

It's amazing.

00:10:10 Speaker 1

But but he remembered.

00:10:13 Speaker 1

He had his memory, was very good because he remembered that I was from Tennessee and he got my vote. But.

00:10:23 Speaker 1

Said that, they talked.

00:10:24 Speaker 1

To him a little.

00:10:24 Speaker 1 While. 00:10:25 And what was he? 00:10:26 Speaker 1 Like he's really nice. Very nice, very nice. 00:10:32 Speaker 1 And and General Patton, he was strictly business. 00:10:37 Speaker 1 When I was over in France and when General Eisenhower got through talking, we got through talking up there. So then General Patton asked me some questions, but it was strictly about what was going on up front. It wasn't about where I was from and. 00:10:57 Speaker 1 Nothing else. He he didn't care. But generalizing was very. He's a very nice man. 00:11:06 Speaker 2 Did you did you ever get? 00:11:07 Speaker 2 In trouble or were? 00:11:08 Speaker 2 You pretty good. 00:11:10 Speaker 1 Well, I never did get court martial. I've got on KP a few times, but I never did. I didn't did, did anything business? No. 00:11:18 Speaker 2 Did you have a lot of free? 00:11:19 Speaker 2 Time. 00:11:20 Speaker 2 Or are you mostly?

00:11:23 Speaker 2

We're in the hospital. What kind of stuff did? 00:11:25 Speaker 2 You do. 00:11:25 Speaker 1 No. Well, I didn't do anything except lay up in the bed and play cards with. 00:11:33 Speaker 1 The guy next. 00:11:34 Speaker 1 To the bed. To me, we push our beds together instead of Fair and play cards all day. And that's that's about all there was to do. 00:11:43 Speaker 2 Did did you ever expect the war? 00:11:45 Speaker 2 Would last as long as that thing. 00:11:48 Speaker 1 Really. I thought it last longer than it did. 00:11:55 Speaker 1 It seemed like it was a long time, though it seemed like. 00:11:58 Speaker 1 It never would get older, but. 00:12:05 Speaker 1 I don't know. The chairman were very good soldiers, very good. 00:12:12 Speaker 1 And. 00:12:15 Speaker 1

They.

00:12:18 Speaker 1

They just.

00:12:22 Speaker 1

They were very clean, very neat and.

00:12:28 Speaker 1

They're just good songs.

00:12:33 Speaker 1

That I I didn't. I didn't have much, you know.

00:12:42 Speaker 1

I don't know whether I was a good soldier or not.

00:12:44 Speaker 1

I doubt it.

00:12:49 Speaker 1

I didn't like work.

00:12:54 Speaker 2

Yeah. Did you make any good friends while?

00:12:57 Speaker 1

Yeah, but you didn't. You didn't keep them.

00:13:01 Speaker 1

They they divided. Do they separated? They didn't want friends together because they figured it might cause one of them.

00:13:12 Speaker 1

One of one of them got hurt when they hit the other one and try to help him, and then he'd get hurt. But then.

00:13:21 Speaker 1

They didn't let you get half too good a friend and they didn't where I.

00:13:26 Speaker 1

Was.

00:13:28 Speaker 1

They kept moving us around all the time.

00:13:32 Speaker 2

Well, how did?

00:13:33 Speaker 2

They move you around.

00:13:35 Speaker 1

Well, they just, they just changing from one company to one battalion to the other and.

00:13:35 Speaker 2

Keep trains and.

00:13:42 Speaker 1

That way you.

00:13:44 Speaker 1

You wouldn't get too attached to me. They didn't want you too attached to anybody. That's the reason they didn't like to have brothers staying out there.

00:14:00 Speaker 1

And I guess that was this.

00:14:06 Speaker 1

My best friend.

00:14:10 Speaker 1

When I got wounded, it was coming back.

00:14:16 Speaker 1

In the hospital, at some of the vehicles.

00:14:18 Speaker 1

Right.

00:14:26 Speaker 1

Cooking bugs up in in those old.

00:14:31 Speaker 1

Crooks.

00:14:33 Speaker 1

That's when I was coming back. My best friend was coming, going to the front and I saw him at the back of the vehicle and I hollered at him.

00:14:46 Speaker 1

And.

00:14:47 Speaker 1

He came over and walked along.

00:14:53 Speaker 1

Trucking, with riding in, he came over and walked along there and talked to me for about a mile. And then he had to go on back because he's going.

00:15:02 Speaker 1

Act as a son.

00:15:05 Speaker 1

And that's the last time that I saw you. And I never didn't learn what happened to him or anything that maybe you got killed because it was pretty rough.

00:15:17 Speaker 2

What did you do for the holidays? Did you celebrate?

00:15:24 Speaker 1

Now we have.

00:15:27 Speaker 1

A lot of times they have a they have Turkey or something, you know, Thanksgiving that they give you to eat. As far as celebrating you did well, we didn't. We didn't celebrate much, was glad to get a good meal, but.

00:15:46 Speaker 1

That is that it.

00:15:47 Speaker 2

What? What did you eat from day-to-day that they feed you well or.

00:15:51 Speaker 1

Well, if that you see rations, K rations and about once a week, they bring you of hot food. But usually after eating all those sea rises and key rashes, this was just dry food. You ate a a good meal a.

00:15:54 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:16:10 Speaker 1

Not soup or something could make you sick. And she, that's where you didn't. You didn't care much about eating.

00:16:19 Speaker 2

We have you when you get home. Now what?

00:16:21 Speaker 1

Oh yeah, yeah.

00:16:26 Speaker 2

Now, what is the weather like?

00:16:30 Speaker 1

Well, when I first went up there, it was nice and.

00:16:38 Speaker 1

But then after about a month it started getting cold and raining and it started snowing, sleeping. It got pretty rough outside.

00:16:55 Speaker 1

You just slept wherever you could.

00:16:57

Right.

00:17:01 Speaker 1

One one time.

00:17:05 Speaker 1

How was moving up this road in Daytona?

00:17:10 Speaker 1

Word came back, fall out and did some sleep well. I went over and it kind of pile of leaves and stuff there and I kind of pushed into them and got got all fixed up and.

00:17:28 Speaker 1

Started, went sleep and I kept feeling something on my feet. I kept pushing on. It gets straightened out next morning and it got daylight. It was a dead German, I've.

00:17:40 Speaker 1

Been.

00:17:41 Speaker 1

Sleeping with him all night.

00:17:50 Speaker 2

When did when she go home? 00:17:54 Speaker 1 Gosh. 00:17:57 Speaker 1 I don't know. She's got it down. I. 00:17:59 Speaker 1 Think in my sacred. 00:18:02 Speaker 2 46 February. 00:18:14 Speaker 1 I believe I, I believe is at home people celebrate. 00:18:22 Speaker 1 But it's pretty they're pretty fried and have warm come to the souls, and that's what it did it shortly. 00:18:30 Speaker 2 Have you been discharged, children, or were you something you said you were in? 00:18:35 Speaker 2 The states, when you heard about them. 00:18:38 Speaker 1 I think I was. I I really. I don't. I don't really remember the truth about it, but I didn't keep up with the Japanese side. 00:18:51 Did. 00:18:51 Speaker 2 You think they? 00:18:52 Speaker 2 Will ever end up sending you to Japan? 00:18:56 Speaker 1 Well, I don't think so because after I got back home a lot. 00:19:06 Speaker 1

I was injured and I couldn't, couldn't operate as well as I was good and I didn't. I I stayed in hospital, my pay for. 00:19:12 All right. 00:19:19 Speaker 2 Right. So did you go home in hospital or did you go back? 00:19:22 Speaker 1 Out no. 00:19:24 Speaker 1 I went home and the war was over. The crime I got out of hospital. 00:19:30 Speaker 1 Then I want you to learn. 00:19:35 Speaker 2 There I know when you got injured but so. 00:19:37 Speaker 2 Were there any other close calls? 00:19:41 Speaker 1 Yeah, I had. I had my. 00:19:48 Speaker 1 Back of a pant leg. 00:19:53 Speaker 1 She ain't got her. She ain't gonna shoot the whole back out of my pant leg and. 00:20:01 Speaker 1 I don't know if it was a. 00:20:04 Speaker 1

00:20:09 Speaker 1

Machine gun or a piece of shrapnel went through my pack and.

Show up now.

00:20:14 Speaker 1

Flight we ate out of we had last year and.

00:20:19 Speaker 1

It was in my pack and I we was getting some soup one night, which was not very often and we just went through a couch.

00:20:29 Speaker 1

Thing apparently folded in. I put it in mine.

00:20:35 Speaker 1

I started to eat.

00:20:36 Speaker 1

lt.

00:20:36 Speaker 1

And it wasn't nothing in there. And I thought I said you missed my. You missed my missed here. And he said well, put it back over here and I put it back up before then. Again he.

00:20:45 Speaker 1

Said.

00:20:46 Speaker 1

Why he said. Hey, you ain't got no bottom in it. I said. What do you mean?

00:20:53 Speaker 1

And then I fell and a piece of scrap metal set the bottom out of my mess.

00:20:59 Speaker 1

Here.

00:21:00 Speaker 1

And hardly put in there was just going.

00:21:02 Speaker 1

Through the song, the band.

00:21:05 Speaker 1

Hey, it's Sarah. What it's called and when I got wounded, hurt, it sent me back home.

00:21:16 Speaker 1

A motor shield I was sitting standing in a slit trench and had my elbows.

00:21:21 Speaker 1 Up on me. 00:21:23 Speaker 1 The tanks as they drink and a motor shell hit about that close right straight behind, and it had that open steel helmet on. It jerked my head forward, and that's when it hurt. The verdict is out of place. 00:21:38 Speaker 1 And. 00:21:38 Speaker 1 That's that's what. 00:21:41 Speaker 1 That was enough. 00:21:43 Speaker 1 Yeah, come on. 00:21:49 Speaker 2 What do you think are the most important things you learn from these things? 00:22:00 Speaker 2 If you learn to appreciate life. 00:22:01 Speaker 1 More or, if you. 00:22:03 Speaker 1 Yeah. 00:22:05 Speaker 1 Security. 00:22:11 Speaker 2 Just like disappointing. 00:22:15 Speaker 1 Ohh well, we just did what they told you. 00:22:21 Speaker 1 It wasn't a matter of want to or anything, you just did it.

00:22:26 Speaker 1

Whatever it was you just did it.

00:22:29 Speaker 2

Did you get to?

00:22:30 Speaker 2

Can you ever seems to get to hear?

00:22:33 Speaker 2

All of the news about war on the other front, what was going on pretty unaware?

00:22:38 Speaker 2

Of what was happening.

00:22:41 Speaker 1

Wait pretty well. I'm aware of that.

00:22:45 Speaker 1

We wouldn't worry too much about the Japanese. We just worried about the German.

00:22:57 Speaker 1

And I I wouldn't. I wouldn't go through.

00:23:01 Speaker 1

It again for anything.

00:23:04 Speaker 1

But I wouldn't take anything for having gone through it.

00:23:10 Speaker 1

I think I did my part.

00:23:12 Speaker 1

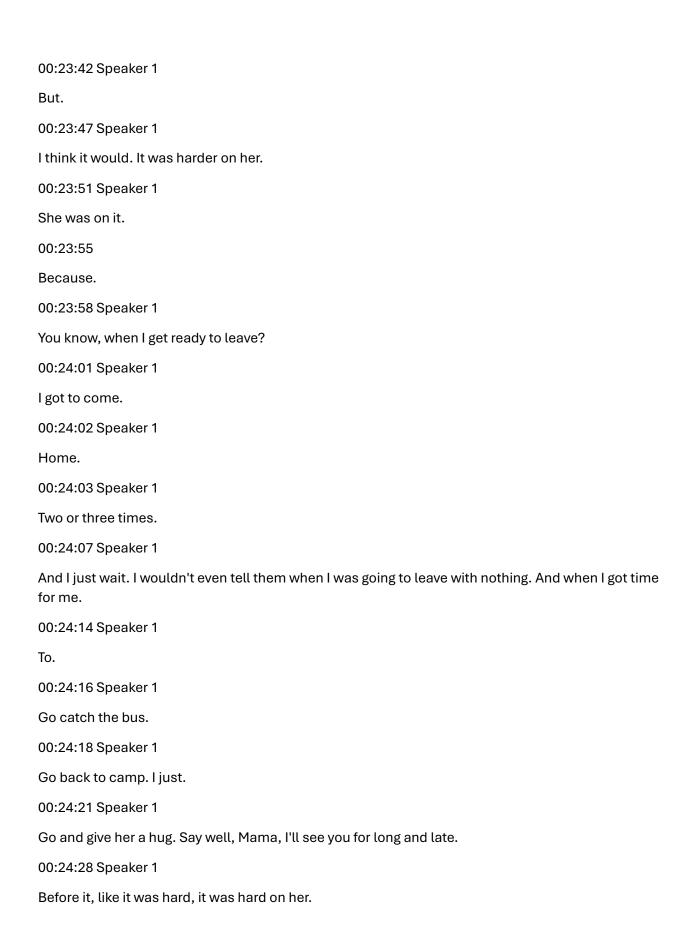
For my country. So I'm I'm well pleased. I'm happy with it.

00:23:19 Speaker 2

Do you remember the day you came home from?

00:23:25 Speaker 1

Yeah. Yeah. When I came home, I just. I didn't tell him I was cleaning and nothing. I just walked in, asked my mother to get back at supper. Ready.



00:24:33 Speaker 1

She didn't travel in, not to let on, but.

00:24:37 Speaker 1

It will be really tough.

00:24:42 Speaker 1

Think more is because.

00:24:44 Speaker 1

Rock around.

00:24:46 Speaker 1

Mothers and fathers and and people at home. And it really wasn't on us.

00:24:56 Speaker 1

And we knew what kind of chances he is taking and.

00:25:00 Speaker 1

Wasn't it? Wasn't the movie do about it? And then?

00:25:04 Speaker 1

They just.

00:25:08 Speaker 1

And cheat. Always one thing. She always say. Well, be careful now, son. Like I could be careful.

00:25:19 Speaker 1

Oh, that's extremely lovely.

00:25:26 Speaker 1

Like I said, I wouldn't. I wouldn't take anything for it because I guess I owed it to my country.

00:25:33 Speaker 1

And.

00:25:33 Speaker 1

But I wouldn't go through it again. No mountain.

00:25:41 Speaker 1

I could be I could be that lucky again.

00:25:52 Speaker 1

And I had I.

00:25:52 Speaker 1

Had lots of buddies that.

00:25:56 Speaker 1

They get shot of set back to the hospital and some.

00:26:01

Of.

00:26:01 Speaker 1

Them didn't make it. Some of them, you know, just they got killed but.

00:26:10 Speaker 1

And nothing to do with the good Lord with you. You make with me. It's not you. But I had a guardian Angel.

00:26:19 Speaker 1

Sitting right on my shoulder all the time.

00:26:23 Speaker 1

Yeah, I did.

00:26:31 Speaker 1

I have one experience that.

00:26:37 Speaker 1

I'm all. I've always been proud of the way I handle it. There was a group of Germans, about 15 of them here.

00:26:47 Speaker 1

Pinned us down and we just laying down in the ditch.

00:26:51 Speaker 1

And neighbors old icy water running back.

00:26:55 Speaker 1

And I didn't understand the answer. But on the side and they fired at us.

00:27:03 Speaker 1

And he in fact, shot back out of my pant leg.

00:27:08 Speaker 1

And.

00:27:09 Speaker 1

Until they ran out of ammunition and they couldn't go get any more ammunition, so they just.

00:27:17 Speaker 1

And the little white flag started coming down the hill right to us. It's about 10 on the, I guess I felt my body, I said.

00:27:27 Speaker 1

Just wait till they get right down here. Right, close right back in the hole.

00:27:34 Speaker 1

I'm gonna. I'm gonna shoot it all ranging.

00:27:38 Speaker 1

I said they've been shooting me and.

00:27:40 Speaker 1

I'm fixing to shoot bag.

00:27:42 Speaker 1

He said you're gonna kill him.

00:27:43 Speaker 1

I said yeah, sure.

00:27:46 Speaker 1

And then you put the belt ammunition in it.

00:27:50 Speaker 1

He did.

00:27:53 Speaker 1

And they just kept coming right down, too. And when the guy right down.

00:27:57 Speaker 1

Almost to me.

00:28:00 Speaker 1

They had a little German boy. Looks like he's 1415. He got up and they put him up front and he was just crying his eyes.

00:28:13 Speaker 1

There was the bone because he figured.

00:28:15 Speaker 1

I was going to.

00:28:15 Speaker 1

Shoot him and I just.

00:28:19 Speaker 1

I couldn't. No, I can't. Since I kill all those S troops behind him not have to kill him too. But I'd be in bad trouble.

00:28:32 Speaker 1

And the same one back they had, they had gas. It took me.

00:28:38 Speaker 1

Predators back to prison camps. I just sent him on back to them.

00:28:46 Speaker 1

But I almost did.

00:28:48 Speaker 1

So II can understand why somebody would shoot somebody if they were scared of. Uh, yeah.

00:29:02 Speaker 1

Thing come around like I guess because I almost did myself and I can. I can understand it.

00:29:13 Speaker 1

But I sure was glad I didn't.

00:29:17 Speaker 1

I had filled my.

00:29:24 Speaker 1

Move that on my conscience.

00:29:32 Speaker 2

If there's anything, if there's not anything else.

00:29:39 Speaker 1

Yes.

00:29:40 Speaker 2

He did a really good job. It's very interesting.