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Gift and Release Agreement:

We Bill Brock and Dletcher Cobb
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at Mr. Brock's residence on the date(s) of Sept. 30, 1995 for the oral history collection being compiled at Jacksonville State University.

This collection will be maintained by Jacksonville State University for research into the history of Northeast Alabama and the South. We further grant researchers permission to quote from the interview on this tape.

Bill Brock
(Interviewee's signature)

Date Sept. 30, 1995

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JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

AN ORAL HISTORY OF WORLD WAR II

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

GRETCHEN LEIGH COBB

JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA

NOVEMBER 22, 1995

Questions for the Interview

1. What was your role in World War II?
2. What was the morale of the United States' soldiers?
3. What type of person was General George S. Patton?
4. What types of weapons were used during the war?
5. What were the conditions and attitudes of the German Soldiers?
6. How did the United States communicate during the war?
7. How did the weather conditions affect fighting?
8. Did you come in contact with any Jews or concentration camps?
9. What were your feelings toward the war?
10. How did your family and friends feel about the war?
11. How were you informed about the war?
12. Do you have any memorable thoughts about the war?
13. What was the "Battle of the Bulge" like?
14. How were World War II veterans treated after the war?
15. How were you transferred home from the war?

TABLE OF CONTENTS OF TAPE

World War II

- I. Pre-War Involvement in the United States Army
 - A. Member of K Company 22nd Infantry
 - B. Squad Leader for 60mm Mortar Squad
 - C. Section Leader
 - D. Platoon Sergeant
 - E. Organization Leader of 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion
 - F. Wrote combat tactic pamphlets
 - G. Camp Gordon Billeting Party
- II. World War II Involvement
 - A. Transferred to Northern Ireland for training for D-Day
 - B. Transferred to England for D-Day
 - C. Normandy Campaign
 - D. Battle for St. Lo
 - E. Transferred to Metz
 - F. Battle of the Bulge
 - G. Transferred to Villers-la-Bonne-Eau
 - H. Wounded in Battle
 - I. Treatment
- III. Other conditions of World War II
 - A. Receiving mail
 - B. Weather
 - C. Tank Battalions
 - D. Supplies of soldiers during war
 - E. Fighting at night
 - F. Weapons

- G. Other United States Forces
- H. Relations between Soldiers
- I. Morale of the United States Soldiers
- J. Battle of the Bulge
- K. General George S. Patton
- L. Jews and Concentration Camps
- M. Attitudes toward World War II Veterans
- N. Conditions in Hospitals

Mr. Bill Brock's Chronology Sheet

- January 26, 1918 - Born in Rock Run, Alabama
- January 1923-1934 - Attended Rock Run School and helped on the family farm
- May 9, 1936 - Joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)
- February 1, 1938 - Began farming in Piedmont, Alabama
- May 31, 1939 - Enlisted in the United States Army
- January 14, 1940 - Married Nellie Bee Smith
- September 3, 1941 - Daughter, Carolyn Smith Brock, born
- February 24, 1943 - Son, Charles Edward Brock, born
- June 18, 1945 - Discharged from United States Army
- September 3, 1945 - Employed by the United States Civil Service Department at Anniston Army Depot in Anniston, Alabama
- June 11, 1948 - Son, James Michael Brock, born
- September 16, 1955 - Daughter, Iris Elaine Brock, born
- October 29, 1974 - Retired from the United States Civil Service and began Cattle Farming

Chronology Sheet of Events in Alabama History¹

- November 1920 - Alabama women voted for the first time in state and national elections
- Late 1920's - Great Depression began
- Election of 1928 - Herbert Hoover became President of the United States
- 1931 - Supreme Court ruled in the Scottsboro Case
- 1939-1945 - World War II
- 1940's - Rise in political conservatism
- 1955 - Supreme Court orders all public schools to be desegregated
- 1957 - Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas
- Election of 1960 - John F. Kennedy becomes President of the United States
- 1962 - George C. Wallace Becomes Governor of Alabama and refuses to intergrate the University of Alabama
- 1963 - Selma Freedom March
- November 22, 1963 - President John F. Kennedy is assassinated
- 1964 - 24th Ammendment passed and barred poll taxes in federal elections

¹David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman, eds. The Encyclopedia of Southern History (Baton Rouge: 1979), 17-30.

Mr. Bill Brock was born January 26, 1918, in Rock Run, Alabama. Mr. Brock attended Rock Run School and helped on his family's farm until May 9, 1936. He then decided to enter the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to help provide income for his family during the Great Depression. While he worked in the CCC, he helped build state parks and roads all over the United States. He left the CCC on December 1, 1937, and moved to Piedmont, Alabama. Mr. Brock farmed in Piedmont until 1939.

On May 31, 1939, he enlisted in the United States Army at Fort McClellan , Alabama, and was a member of K Company 22nd Infantry. After twelve months of training, he was promoted to Squad Leader. His job was to train and supervise soldiers on how to fire 60mm mortars. Eight months later, he was promoted to Section Leader. His duty was to supervise soldiers in the training of operating machine guns. For his next assignment, Mr. Brock was promoted to Platoon Sergeant to supervise and train soldiers in firing, field stripping, cleaning weapons, and map and compass reading. He was then transferred in January 1940, to Fort Benning, Georgia, to organize the 654th tank destroyer battalion. Mr. Brock trained soldiers in the operation of tanks and weapons and wrote combat tactic guides for using the tank destroyers in case of war.

While Mr. Brock was stationed at Fort Benning, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. He was immediately sent to Camp Gordon, Georgia, as an advanced

Billeting Party for the arrival of the 654th tank destroyer battalion. He trained troops for combat until October 1943. At this time, his organization was transferred to Northern Ireland for the purpose of forming the United States Army 15th Corp for D-Day in Europe. In March 1944, Mr. Brock was transferred to England and was stationed at the Marchling Area to train for D-Day. D-Day, the set date of the invasion of France, was to begin on June 6, 1944. Mr. Brock and his battalion were ordered to cross the English Channel to France "for combat with Hitler's army." Mr. Brock has vivid memories of the weather-"it was rough, stormy and raining, but nothing slowed the invasion as planned." But only two days before, the United States President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, had wrestled with the idea of postponing the invasion until June 19, due to the hazardous weather conditions. But on June 5, 1944, President Eisenhower said "OK, we'll go."² At 6:30 A.M., "the greatest amphibious operation in military history was launched as Allied forces, under the command of Eisenhower, began landing on the northern coast of France."³ Mr. Brock describes the landing at Omaha Beach: "There were thousands and thousands of

²John S. D. Eisenhower, Allies: Pearl Harbor to D-Day (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1982), 469.

³Robert Goralski, World War II Almanac: 1931-1945 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), 321.

ships loaded with equipment and troops. The skies were filled with airplanes, bombing, and machine gunning their targets to make way for our landing with armored vehicles. The skies were filled with paratroopers landing behind the enemy lines to secure a beachhead." The forces at Omaha Beach were almost stymied, But the United States V Corps established a firm beachhead by evening.⁴

The next battle Mr. Brock engaged in was the fight for St.-Lo, France. "One of the fiercest battles of war for my organization. There were numerous casualties on both sides prior to capturing the city." General Dietrich von Choltitz, a Russian veteran of extensive combat, reported that "the whole battle is one tremendous blood bath such as I have never seen in eleven years of war."⁵ St.-Lo was reduced to rubble by German shelling and Allied bombing. Allied aircraft alone dropped 7,700 tons of bombs on July 18, and St.-Lo was captured by the United States XIX Corps.⁵ Mr. Brock and his battalion were then in pursuit of the enemy with the objective to capture Nancy, France. The battalion met "stiff resistance"

⁴Robert Goralski, World war II Almanac: 1931-1945 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), 332.

⁵Robert Goralski, World War II Almanac: 1931-1945 (new York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), 346.

from German tanks and infantry, and they requested support from the Air Force to bomb German tanks. "After overcoming the resistance, we continued the drive toward Nancy, France, sometimes running out of supplies, due to fast movement. We would stop temporarily for supply lines to catch up, then continued to pursue the enemy." On September 15, 1944, the town of Nancy fell to the Allies.⁶ "There were many enemy casualties and prisoners taken."

On November 9, the United States Third Army troops broke across the Moselle in an offensive aimed at taking the city of Metz, France.⁷ "We transferred to Metz to support other troops which were meeting stiff resistance. Several stiff battles were encountered, but the enemy was annihilated." By November 22, the city of Metz was captured.⁸

On December 24, 1944, Mr. Brock's organization "received information that the German army had concentrated all forces that they could muster in Belgium to try to break through the First Army Corp. My organization and all Third Army Corps were ordered to Belgium to make contact with the German panzer

⁶Robert Goralski, World War II Almanac: 1931-1945 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), 357.

⁷Robert Goralski, World War II Almanac: 1931-1945 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), 359.

⁸David Irving, The War Between The Generals (New York: Congdon and Lattes, 1981), 336.

division-the best on earth-to stop the break through." Two gigantic panzer armies, almost 600,000 men, had been training for weeks and had caught the Allies off guard. Adolf Hitler, the dictator of Germany, had discovered that a sector of the American front line was very thinly held. Only three American divisions-the 99th, the 106th, and the 28th-were holding the front line, and the 28th had taken heavy casualties in previous fighting. The other two divisions had never seen combat before. Hitler drew up two large German forces, the Sixth SS Panzer Army and the Fifth Panzer Army. By starving the others on the front, these two armies had enough gasoline and ammunition for a long and fierce battle. Hitler's attack was a surprise for the Allied forces because he had all messages about this attack transferred by landline, not by radio. Hitler's plan was for the German armies to break through the front line, destroy the three weak divisions, and then expand westward and northward.⁹

On Christmas Day, 1944, Mr. Brock remembers the events leading up to this famous battle that would be known as the "Battle of the Bulge." "It's a day I will never forget. We parked on the side of the road and our kitchen trucks served us

⁹David Irving, The War Between The Generals (New York: Congdon and Lattes, 1981), 336.

Christmas dinner, knowing that afternoon we would all go into combat. We hastily ate...we had a good Christmas dinner. It was outstanding, just like if you were home." Mr. Brock's organization then proceeded to Bastogne "to support the First Army where Hitler had made his last stand against the Allies by concentrating his entire army, causing a breakthrough and almost annihilating the First Army." General George S. Patton's Third Army arrived and engaged in battle with the German armored tanks, and the German drive was stopped. Because the ground was covered with several feet of snow, "everything was an open target." This battle was costly to both the United States and Germany. The United States had 70,000 casualties and serious losses in equipment. The Germans lost 220,000 men (half of them as prisoners) and over 1,400 tanks and assault guns.¹⁰ This battle was a key victory for the Allies because Germany was never able to recover from their massive losses.

Next, Mr. Brock was told to proceed northeast to the city of Villers-la-Bonne-Eau "for the purpose of cleaning up any pockets of German troops which could still be remaining in the area. On December 29, 1944, Mr. Brock's organization

¹⁰David Irving, The War Between The Generals (New York: Congdon and Lattes, 1981), 379.

"encountered a strong pocket of German tanks." During this battle, Mr. Brock's tank was struck by enemy fire. "The enemy fire...penetrated the tank turret, striking my right arm above the wrist, completely severing my right hand. Also wounding the operator of the tank and setting the tank on fire. The three remaining crew members escaped from the tank...but I remained trying to rescue the wounded driver. One of the tank crew members noticed me attempting to rescue the driver, and returned to lend assistance. We managed to get the driver out of the tank and was carrying him to a nearby ditch for protection, when the enemy opened up with machine gun fire." This enemy fire killed the driver and the other crew member who helped Mr. Brock. Mr. Brock was further wounded several times in the legs and hips. Despite his condition, Mr. Brock "managed to crawl to a nearby ditch, pulling with his elbows, and got into the ditch...until firing had ceased." After about thirty minutes, Mr. Brock's battalion commander came to his rescue and carried him to a field hospital. He was then placed on a train to Paris, France. As soon as Mr. Brock was strong enough to make the trip, he was sent home to the United States to McCausky General Hospital in Temple, Texas. After undergoing extensive surgical procedures and operations, Mr. Brock was discharged from the United States Army on June 18, 1945.

Mr. Brock was awarded two overseas service bars with four service stars, a good conduct medal, an American Campaign Medal, a European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign medal with four bronze stars, and a World War II Victory medal. He was also

awarded the Bronze Star for "meritorious service in connection with military operations against an enemy." He also received the Silver Star for his "gallantry in action in Belgium." The French awarded Mr. Brock the French Government Award. He also received the Purple Heart for being wounded twice in action in Belgium. "His intrepid actions, zealous devotion to duty, and loyalty to wounded comrades at great risk to his own life reflect credit upon his character as a soldier and in accord with the best traditions of the United States Army."

Truly, Mr. Bill Brock is a courageous and loyal Alabama citizen and he helped not only the Allied Forces in World War II, but he also helped make Alabama History. Although World War II is considered to be a victory for the United States Armed Forces, many unpleasant memories are forever etched into the minds of soldiers. "You don't ever get used to it."

On September 3, 1945, while Mr. Brock was recovering from his injuries that he suffered from the war, he wrote this about his involvement with D-Day.

"I have just seen the greatest show on earth. It cannot be described with mere words. Imagination becomes powerless. The most fantastic dream cannot compare with the excitement, thrill, and blood curdling drama of D-Day on H-hour. For a brief two hours of the actual invasion, one lives life to the hilt. Living from second to second. Witnessing the most horrible sight that has ever darkened the earth since the beginning of time. Flames leaping to the Heavens, licking at the clouds that are so colorful in this part of the world just at sunrise. Debris, Germans, and giant trees were blown to bits, and hurled through the air like feathers in a whirlwind. Even the water along the edge of the beach shot up like giant fountains, like rich oil wells

of Texas. The sun kept busy making rainbows on the great milky white spray and in the background smoke boiled thick and black. The noise was deafening. I Have seen shows in my time but all these seem as nothing in comparison. It is an experience I would not sell.

Yes, the greatest show on earth, a ringside seat! It was D-Day alright and almost H-hour. The old convoy was cruising along at a slow pace. Rifles were oiled and cleaned and as glossy as black satin. They were loaded too. There was no food for breakfast, just black coffee.

There was no hysteria. Everyone was calm, joking, wisecracking, flirting with death. The show was about to begin. Greatest show on earth.

The convoy was spread out now surrounding the beach. We came closer and closer. The tension was almost unbearable. Do something! Let off the first shot or drop a bomb. Give us the go ahead signal. Stop the chills that are running up and down the spine. Alright, relax. All hell has broken loose at once. Giant bombers are swooping down above the plains and dropping their cargoes of death. Charges by the ton. The ship's guns have opened up too. Cannons roar and huge guns spit fir and lead. The battle roars on, the ships come closer. Hurry now. Set the small boats ashore. Send the tanks, ducks and water buffalos ahead. Send the men in wave after wave. The beachhead should be safe. Nothing could be alive in such rubble.

'When the hurly burly's done, when the battle's lost or won'--poetry at a time like this? No matter, you must think of something. Men are coming ashore. Crack, pop, crack. Who said nothing could still be alive? German snipers are crawling up out of dugouts like magots. Watch your step. One boy is wounded, another, and another. Hundreds are dead and the battle has scarcely begun. Send in the report for the morning paper of every hamlet and city. The beach has been taken; our losses are heavy, but no, the battle is not over. Never mind though, this is war. We push on for a whole day and night. The Germans fight savagely. There were many more than we expected. We must have reinforcements, and quickly. We are all but exhausted.

Think fast! Wire the paratroopers. Fly them in and drop them behind the lines. Two and a half hours later, men start dropping from over head. The air is full of parachutes--red, white, blue, and yellow. Yards of billowing silk floating gently to earth, but not too gently. Many of these 'dare-devils' get broken legs. One kid has a stob run through his stomach, another caught in a tree. Down, down they come. Hundreds of men in dun colored clothes floating slowly to earth. Parachutes; red, white, and blue. Shows, circuses, parades, rodeos are all put in the shade--the show goes on--the greatest show on earth. Right--ringside seat!"

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Interviewee Background Information

Name: Bill Brock

Address: 3694 Alex-Juille-Hwy, Jacksonville, AL 36265

Phone Number(s): 820-1884

Approximate age or date of birth: Jan. 26, 1918

Mother's name: Ala Brock

Father's name: Roy Brock

Places lived and when: Born in Oak Run, AL, Cherokee Co. Lived there until May 1936. Entered Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Discharged 12-1-37

Moved to Piedmont AL and farmed until May 1939. Enlisted in U.S Army 5-31-1939 Discharged June 18, 1945

Education: High School Dip. and College Correspondence Course at home

Religion: Protestant

Business, political and social memberships (past and present):

Calhoun Cattleman Assoc, V.F.W., DAV, American Legion, American Rifleman Assoc.

Present occupation: Retired 10-29-74 U.S. Civil Service

Former occupation(s): Chief maintenance and Equipment Div.

Special skills: Farming, Maintaining Farm Equipment

Major Accomplishments: Raising Cattle

Local events in which you have participated: _____

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: _____

National events in which you have participated: Served in the U.S Army Training Troops.

International events in which you have participated: _____

Served in the Army in World War II in the European Theater of Operations.

Natural born U.S. citizen? Yes/No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: N/A

Country from which you emigrated: N/A

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession: N/A

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral history interview: _____

Additional information: _____