

Recorded Interview

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I was born in Topeka, Kansas in 1924, and when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor I was 17 years old and a senior in high school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I told my father I was going to join the Air Corp when I turned 18 instead of being drafted. I remember that everyone had very patriotic feelings about serving in the war, including my friends. But I didn't want to be in the infantry; I wanted to be in the Air Corp and fly. My mother almost hit the ceiling; she was almost frantic begging me not to join the Air Corp. My father, George Ernest Greider, had the first pilot's license and the first aircraft license in Kansas, and he said it was a poor choice to get in the air war. He was a medic in the army in WW I and an entrepreneur after the war. My grandfather was an army surgeon and administrator, and stayed in France most of the time. At one point he was in charge of a French town. My mother's brother, James McCormick Jr., also served in the army and a German mustard gas attack left him with permanent damage to his lungs.

A year after Pearl Harbor, I was in my first year at Tulsa University. After turning 18, I was waiting to be drafted but decided to enlist because we were told we would receive a commission. I signed up at 18 in 1943 and the Dean of Men at the school said the Enlisted Reserve Corp was definitely the place we should be. I think he thought that would keep the enrollment at Tulsa University from dropping. The Dean said we could continue with our education, receive a commission and enter the army as officers. Almost all the men at Tulsa University decided to do that but in less than four months they called us up and sent us to infantry training.

At that point they gave us the option of becoming army engineers and they sent us to college. That was fine with me because I was thinking about aeronautical engineering anyway; my parents supported my decision.

We were sent to Camp Maxie in Texas for basic training, and then to Texas A and I to study engineering. After only two semesters, the army discontinued training engineers. By that time I was 19 and was sent, with the others, to the 103rd infantry Division. We knew we were going to be infantrymen but they didn't say that. No one was afraid and we did what we were told to do without much grumbling. At that time all of the recruits were just like the general population; one hundred percent behind the war effort. Many of the men could have been disappointed and could have felt

mistreated because of the way we were inducted. The recruiters had told us good things were going to happen to us that never happened. But we felt that we had to do our duty.

The basic training at Camp Maxie included an obstacle course. When I was nine-years-old, I began working at hard physical labor in my father's shop, so I was muscular. I thought the obstacle course was fun; I got a kick out of it. At one station we had to go hand-over-hand across a ladder with water below. Of course if you missed a rung on the ladder you fell into a pit of muddy water. It didn't occur to me that I would fall because I thought it would be a snap. But I found out that some of the rungs were wet, and when I grabbed a rung, my hand just slipped off. I fell into the water, which was embarrassing. At first, I thought the muddy water below was a punishment for not doing it right; later I concluded that it was to keep us from being injured. That station also provided entertainment for the guys who were watching, especially if your arms and legs were flailing as you fell into the soup. I never fell again after that because I was more careful. One of our fellows from Brooklyn, New York was Rayfield Berg, a nice guy, very intelligent. During one part of our training we were to lunge, with fixed bayonets and growl, as we plunged the blade into a straw dummy. I felt unsure about whether I could do that to a man and I didn't growl because I

thought it was silly. Ray wouldn't do it at all; he would just run passed the dummy. I thought he would get into trouble but he never did. What he realized was that the training we were being given was for Civil War soldiers, or perhaps WW I, and that our instructors did not have any experience in the battles we would be fighting. Their teachers probably didn't have that experience either. They were training from books that were written about the Civil War and WW I. Our training, in a lot of ways, would have been a joke if it hadn't been somewhat tragic. When we got overseas we learned in the first two or three months what to do and what not to do. One of the training procedures was to run forward and fall on the ground with your rifle while other guys would run past you and fall on the ground. That was repeated until the enemy was reached and cornered. That wouldn't work on the Siegfried Line bunkers in Germany, which were not vulnerable to our small arms. Nor would it work on other targets because while you were lying there, on the ground, you were a stationary target for the enemy to shoot at. We learned that if you come onto a vulnerable target, you rush it and keep shooting. If everyone is shooting, that lessens the chance of the enemy shooting you; you get there faster and you are not an easy target. We did training for paratroopers. They had mock up gliders and we practiced entering, seating ourselves, and exiting. We never jumped. I don't know

why they trained us that way because 103d was not an airborne division. In September or October of '44 we took a train from Camp Howze in Oklahoma to New York where we boarded the Liberty ship *SS George Washington*. Company A was assigned guard duty, so we kept guard posts on the ship. Before we left Camp Howze we were instructed to tell no one when we were going or where we were embarking. They were having trouble with Hitler's U-boats, so they tried to keep the transport of the troops secret. My father visited me at camp several weeks before we were to go, and I wanted to tell him but I followed orders. It took us two weeks to get across the Atlantic. The Company had guard posts all over the ship, both day and night. My post was aft, above the props; there was a bunch of machinery there. We went through two storms on the way over; one was pretty big. I remember sitting on the fantail and when we would bounce up it looked like the sky surrounded us, and when we came down we were surrounded by a big wall of water. But I wasn't scared. It was like being on a carnival ride. I had seasickness only once during the voyage. I was in the sleeping compartment. The bunks were stacked four high and there was a big trough on the wall. I was on the top bunk and I realized I was going to regurgitate so I hurried down to that trough. After returning to my bunk I was surprised I was not feeling sick at all.

When I would go to my post or come off duty I would stop at the bakery, where they would give the guards some freshly baked goods.

The thing I remember the most about the trip were horrible showers and facilities. The ship had only salt water showers and we were given only a half helmet of non salty water to shave. So I took just one shower. It was the “first” and the “last,” and I stayed dirty. When I was off duty I read books that were provided.

The food on the ship was very good, but after we left the ship in Marseilles, we ate K-rations--individual meals in small cardboard boxes. The boxes might contain cheese, crackers, and various meats in little cans. Most of the time there was no bakery and no cooking facilities like we had on the ship, but I thought the food was good. Many of the other guys hated it because they came from families whose mothers were good cooks. My mother was not a good cook but she was a good dietician. So she fed us the right foods to eat but she was not much on spices.

I have a fond memory of standing at the ship railing with two other guys who both became architects, Dan MacMillan and Stanley Myers. Dan is going to be here today but Stan died less than a year ago. They talked about architecture together, which intrigued me even though I planned to study aeronautics. They talked me into changing my mind on the ship and

the three of us vowed that if we survived we were going to go to school to study architecture. After the war I broke my vow but they followed through with their plans.

We landed in Marseilles in October, two weeks after the invasion there. We had to debark into launches to get to the shore because the port had been damaged so badly by bombing. We marched up through the town, up very steep streets. It was chilly and it rained a lot. The streets looked like narrow alleys to me. We pitched tents up there behind the town, like a tent city. Someone named it Camp Lucky Strike. We were the first ones up there after the invasion. When it rained it nearly washed out half the tents. We didn't realize it was going to rain like that. We stayed there for two weeks, going back down every night for two or three hours to unload ships.

One time we took a break and I was sitting, leaning against a building. There was a filling station across the road with only one pump right next to the road. It had a sign on the glass globe that named the kind of gasoline, a very familiar company name in the east coast. I looked up and said, "They sure have funny names for gasoline over here!" We all laughed; most of the guys were from the east coast. I was a private at that time, but so many were being shot I was promoted eventually to staff sergeant. General Haffner was division commander, and he was later replaced by General

McCauliffe. Our company commander was a First Lieutenant; shortly after that he was promoted to captain, which was equivalent to the rank of a company commander. Regimental commander was Colonel Donovan P. Yuell. I encountered him one time when I was on a guard post in France when he came by in a jeep with a driver and two other guys. We had orders to stop vehicles that did not have a trip ticket. Colonel Yuell was in the jeep and I recognized him immediately. But they didn't have a trip ticket. I was with another man and I told him to hold a gun on the other three. I said, "Colonel Yuell, would you please come with me?" We walked down the road and I asked him if everything was alright. I was concerned about his safety because there had been English speaking Germans infiltrating our lines. This occurred during a week our Company was in reserve behind the lines. I saluted him and he said everything was OK, so I took him back to his jeep, saluted, and they drove off. I felt that he was more irritated by my performance than impressed by it.

As a private, I was not told our itinerary, and I was surprised to hear the rumor that when we had our first regimental relief, we were to be relieved by French troops, and it turned out to be true. It was nighttime and they came in riding in trucks with their headlights on, singing songs. That

was very different and foolish, we thought, considering that the enemy was set up right across the river.

The 103rd Division started their campaign at the edge of the Vosges Mountain; some units took trains and some took trucks north from Marseilles toward St. Die. Our Company joined the frontline at Saulcy, France. I never felt that I needed more clothing than I was issued, but some of the men complained about the cold at night.

Our first combat began just outside of Saulcy on November 22. We were in a pine forest with needles covering the ground. Lights were prohibited because we were going on the attack. I had a silver Indian Head Ring on my finger that my sister had given me a year or two before. It was cold and that ring slid off of my finger into those needles. It was dark as pitch but I hunted and hunted; it's still there in the Vosges Mountains.

The first time I heard shots and saw men fall, I experienced sheer fear. I was in the 2nd squad, which was leading the attack. The squad leader, Sgt. Fucci, was about three or four yards in front of me. In front of him about five yards or so was the 2nd scout and then the 1st scout. We had been told before we got to the hill that a report from Intelligence said the enemy had moved out during the night and we should not expect any resistance. We were climbing this steep terraced hill, through cuts in the fences the 1st scout

had made with wire cutters. The Germans had strung crisscrossing barbed wire fences on the terraces that the farmers had already put in.

When we got through the last cut we could see the tree line about twenty or thirty yards away. I saw helmets bobbing in the grass on the other side of a barbwire wooden post fence. I told the sergeant what I had seen but he told us to hold our fire in case they were our own men. (At one of the barriers, before we got to the hill, a colonel had told Fucci about the Intelligence report of no resistance).

Fucci motioned to Hoppy and me to go around the right flank. Then he kneeled down and the two scouts that were in front of him stopped. Those three people were completely still. Hoppy and I turned, looked back at Fucci and I thought, "We have never done this in training." Within a few seconds, three shots were fired from behind the fence. I saw one of the three shots go through Fucci's head and come out of the back of his head, with what seemed like purple and blue smoke. He just crumbled to the ground.

We happened to be behind the first terrace on that hill and it was about ten inches high. Hoppy and I dropped behind it immediately. There were two men, Ciricello and Gann, on the other side of Fucci, and they did the same thing. The next seconds seemed like an hour to me; I was scared out of my wits and I didn't know what to do.

The night before, Fucci got us together and explained the order of command in case of casualties. The assistant squad leader would take over if Fucci was hit; Sam was next in line and I would be third in line. That is the way we left it at that point. We still were thinking that we would be OK because of what we were told at the barrier.

That incident was one of the first things that alerted me that our training had been a joke. I didn't know where the assistant squad leader was and the squad leader was gone. Gann was on the other side and he would have been the next one. I would have had to rise up and look to see if Gann got hit.

There had been more than three shots but those were the three shots that I heard. Hoppy was OK and he was suppose to take over the squad after me. We stayed where we were at the time but I was questioning myself; how am I going to lead the squad if I don't know where the Germans are? If I show myself then I might get shot.

After a short time, three Germans came around the hill from my right with their hands on their heads. I don't know why but they were looking at me. I motioned to them with my rifle to go down the hill. We stayed there the remainder of the day, afraid to do anything.

During the afternoon, the enemy mortars fell all around the squad, and the German 88 artillery shells screamed over our heads and exploded at the bottom of the hill.

When it got dark I called quietly to Hoppy. I couldn't hear him, so I assumed he did not want to make any noise either. I told him I was going to crawl down through the places that the first scout had cut in the barbed wire. There were about five different places where he had cut the wires. I thought I might not find them but I did. Hoppy was right behind me but I didn't know it until we got to where the company was at the bottom of the hill.

Most enlisted men were issued M-1 rifles, which was standard. Officers carried small rifles and handguns. Later I carried a Browning automatic rifle (BAR), and during one attack, I accidentally fell on it and was injured. This happened when the whole battalion was on a night raid behind the lines.

I questioned what the military had in mind because the raid seemed like a wasted effort. Three battalions, First, Second, and Third, attacked that town at night with orders to kill anyone in an enemy uniform but not to use guns. A lieutenant at the briefing told us what to do but not how. He said, "The books all say use the knife." It was a meaningless instruction since we had turned in our bayonets before the first day of action. The next night,

behind enemy lines, in a dense fog, we crossed a wet field with a thin layer of ice over it, which made a loud crunching noise. I felt that we were not going to surprise anyone. Then someone fired a gun accidentally which should have alerted the Germans. In addition, the lieutenant in charge discovered he had misread the map causing him to back our whole company up across the field and the ice. Finding the correct route, we crossed a small bridge and turned toward the town.

The fog was starting to lift and become patchy, when we saw a German walking out of the first house with his gun slung on his back. He was walking along just as happy as could be.

Smitty, the first team's leader, was about 6' 3" and really a good guy. He rose up and put a headlock on the soldier causing his helmet to fall off. One of Smitty's team members started hitting him on the head with a grease gun, (a light machine gun). That knocked him out and at the same time an enemy machine gun up to our right started firing tracer bullets (the bullets make orange or yellow streaks as they race to their target). The gunner could hear us but couldn't see us in the dark.

After the first squad started the assault on the first house, the lieutenant asked Dan to knife the German but Dan said, "Johnny, I can't knife that man; he is still livin'". The lieutenant didn't pursue his question.

The man came to later and was taken into the first house where they captured three more Germans.

While they were doing that, the second squad, my squad, was standing in front of the second house, out of the field of fire from that machine gun. I had my BAR hanging down in the bushes; it was so dark I couldn't even see the ground. Somebody in the shrubs grabbed the muzzle of my rifle. Thinking they were trying to pull it away from me I fired a shot. I heard a German voice growl, and I continued to feel the tugging on my gun. I fired another shot, and then pulled the man out of the bush. Both shots had missed him and he wanted to surrender. He had come out of the basement window of that house while the first squad was taking it. I don't know where he was taken but we started toward the second house.

There was a walkway that led to a door with a window beside it. It looked like the roof sloped toward us but it was hard to see. Hoppy was leading that squad. He and two of the others decided they wanted to fire a rifle grenade into the door and then rush it.

That turned out to be a poor way to do it. We didn't know whether civilians were in it. Someone brought up a rifle grenade and fired it. It hit the roof above the door instead of the door and it exploded blowing a hole in the roof.

I thought we were going to be a target right then if enemy soldiers were in it. I didn't want to be there so I ran out to the side of the walk about ten feet or so, and started in toward the house, avoiding the walkway. I got almost to the house and there was a drop off of about a foot to a concrete terrace.

In the dark, I tripped over an ornamental wire fence, fell to that terrace and my rifle hit so hard that the gun sight flipped up, and my lip came down on it. The gun sight went through my lower lip and hit my upper teeth. It hurt a little but I was thinking more about who might be in the house. I got up and ran to it, plastering myself against the wall between the window and the door. I looked up to the place where guys had fired the grenade and wondered if they knew it was I who had accidentally fired that shot. I thought I might be the target of another rifle grenade. But by that time I was close enough to the door that I could see it was open. So I ran through it firing, and my muzzle flashes allowed me to see that no one was there so I called to the others that the room was empty. They came on down to clear the building and Hoppy looked at my lip and noticed that blood was dripping down the front of my suit.

A medic looked at my wound and said there was nothing he could do except lap gauze over my lip until they could put stitches in it. The squad

went on without me; Hoppy said I should go back and help guard prisoners. But my friend Dan, in the most compassionate voice, said that since I was the only one with an automatic weapon in the squad, they needed me. I was mad but not at Dan. I was mad at losing my cushy job and mad at the gun sight for flipping up. My lip had stopped bleeding, so I went down to where the squad was waiting.

They were at the corner of what looked like a business building, maybe a lumber company, and were focused on an ugly hole in it, at sidewalk level, that could have been a gun emplacement. I was still mad, and I fired a few rounds into it as I hurried by it and ran up the steps through the front door into what looked like a showroom. We discovered it was empty.

On another occasion, when we were in Reserve, I met some civilians in the little town where Yuell didn't have a trip ticket. I was on guard duty with Bill Byerlien at the edge of a street where there were some civilian houses, when a kitchen truck came by and put food in our mess kits. The day was cold and a lady who lived in a house right next to the road opened her door and invited us to come in and eat where it was warm. She and her daughter spoke some English. I had been ill with food poisoning a month before that, and as a result, my health was second rate, prompting my fellow

soldiers to look after me. They encouraged me to go into the house. I shouldn't have but I did. The lady left the room and her daughter, who was about my age, stayed. I ate but felt embarrassed because of the condition of my clothes and the fact that I had not been able to clean up. I saw a violin on the piano, and I asked the daughter if she played. She said she played the piano. I told her I could play the violin and she suggested we could play a duet. I tuned the violin and we played "South of the Border," which we selected from her stack of music. One time through the piece was enough, and I went back outside with Bill.

During the winter, we were able to keep going because we were medically prepared (immunizations), and had plenty of good food. We knew we had to do it and we knew that we could. There were a few guys that lost control of their fear. I never thought battle fatigue was wrong; it was something that happened. There were times when I had a sick feeling in my chest and was scared out of my wits. I don't know how close I was to breaking up. I knew I had experienced things that they were experiencing and I felt sorry for them. I wanted to help but there was nothing I could do. We did not talk to the officers about our feelings but we would commiserate with each other sometimes. We talked about what we might have done wrong. I learned that I should not remain stationary on the ground in front

of men firing at me. When the Division jumped off on March 15th on a new attack I began using tracer bullets. When I got the BAR I asked Ray Berg if he would be my assistant BAR man and I talked with him before that attack. We arranged a procedure we would use if we were under fire. He had extra ammunition cartridges he could pass to me, one at a time, when I ran out. But when the bullets started flying that all went out the window. Talking about a plan beforehand didn't always work.

Once again we were all flat on the ground; it was another situation like the first day when we got pinned down. But we didn't have any wire fences to go through this time. I knew that I had to do something and then a machine gunner from the fourth platoon came up the hill behind us carrying a light machine gun. He had his finger on the trigger and the other hand forward while his assistant was beside him feeding the belt of bullets into the gun. He got abreast me and I didn't even think about it. I jumped up with my BAR. I had three cartridges, each with 20 rounds, one cartridge in the rifle and two in a bag. I tried to measure them out because we had about thirty yards to go to the top of the hill where the fire was coming from. When I first dropped down I had seen that bullets were spitting out from under a log at the tree line. When I jumped up I looked at that log and put some of my tracer bullets between it and the ground, three or four shots at a

time so I would not run out. I kept looking to either side of the tree line to see if there were any other places I should be shooting. When I was getting close to the log, I knew I had almost used up all three cartridges, and I didn't want to walk up to the log without any ammunition. With that in mind I quickly ran around the end of the log and hoped for the best. One of the three Germans that I found had a bandage on his head. They were ready to give up. The machine gunner walked around the other side of the log. I didn't have a hatred for the Germans; I knew from the start that they were just like me, victims of Hitler's world domination plans.

In April I was sent on furlough to London; it took a month to get a two week furlough because so many of the railroads were destroyed. Some were under repair. While I was gone the company rode on tanks and trucks down through Germany, past Munich, into Austria and up into the Brenner Pass. That's where they were when I got back from furlough. On my last day in London I met a girl at a dance, and she showed up the next day at the train to see me off. While I was gone, my unit went to Munich through Austria where they came upon a concentration camp. I didn't see it personally. I was in Paris on my way back to the company on VE Day. We celebrated by marching ten to twenty abreast, arm in arm, singing and

marching up and down the Champs Elysées and through the Arc de Triomphe. The people in Europe were beside themselves.

I was very aware that the war in the Pacific was ongoing because a short time after VE Day the 103rd Division was dismantled and the men were sent to other divisions as replacements. They sent me to the 5th Division which was on its way to the Pacific. I had a thirty day leave, and of course I went home to Tulsa. I was to report to Camp Campbell in Kentucky to train for fighting the Japanese.

I wasn't aware of the atomic bomb until it fell. VJ Day came several weeks later. I remember it like it was yesterday. I was on leave in Tulsa getting ready to go back to camp. I was driving West on Eleventh Street with a date and another couple going to a movie. We were listening to the radio when the program was interrupted by an announcement declaring that the war was over; Japan had surrendered unconditionally. I nearly went crazy. I was ecstatic.

When I went back to camp, I remember the captain saying we were going to Japan as occupation troops. He said he had more points than anyone in the division and he was going so we were going. Later, we were out in the field, when a jeep pulled up and the driver informed me my discharge papers were ready and I could pick them up at Division

Headquarters. I guess I had more points than the captain. I did have some bronze stars. That may have been the difference. My practice of, no hesitation, had paid off.

The war ended in August, and I stayed in the 5th Division until November. It only took three days to get back from Europe. I had come back to the US and gone on a thirty day leave. After my leave the 5th Division was reassigned to do occupation duty in Japan. But I was discharged a month or so after the leave and they sent me to Arkansas to finalize my discharge. I hitchhiked back to Tulsa and didn't realize it was Thanksgiving Day until I left the camp. I had told my parents I was on my way home and my last ride let me off in front of my house. I stepped out onto the curb and I remember thinking this is truly Thanksgiving. I had written home every couple of months when I got a chance. Someone got a Brownie camera in January or February and took some pictures that were distributed and provided me the opportunity to share a piece of my experience.

Talking to civilians after the war was not something I wanted to do because I knew they could not associate with what I was telling them. The total experience is lost if the person you share with was not in the war. My mother heard me having nightmares and encouraged me to write down some

of my frightening experiences. People would ask questions but I didn't want to try to explain my feelings.

When my buddies from combat got together after the war we would talk about our experiences. It is hard to say if we were homesick; we were sick of the situation and sick being part of it. When you are frightened to death most of the time your emotions can only cover so many feelings. I did find that after the war, some of my comrades had false memories. I remember from hour to hour the details of being under fire. Every two weeks we would go back into reserve for awhile and those experiences all blend together. When we were not in any action we enjoyed sleeping as much as we could, getting clean clothes, and enjoying being out of danger. I trust my memories except for "distances." The events are just as clear as if they happened yesterday. When we went out of Saulcy I thought it was just one hundred yards up that road after we passed the barrier where we started up the hill. About eight years ago my wife Judy and I went back for a visit and I saw the road again and saw it was about a half mile. Going back brought back some memories but they were memories that were already alive. I didn't recognize much in most of the places because it had been a long time. We were with a group from the 409th regiment. Harley

Richardson lived in Oklahoma City not too far from us and he invited us to go with them.

When I returned to Tulsa after the war, I enrolled in the music school at Tulsa University. I took music, violin, voice, piano, arranging and composition. Two years later I became attracted to a classmate and we were married. When I finished enough courses for a degree I realized I was not at a professional level. So, my last semester, I took mathematics and graduated with dual degrees in mathematics and music. My first wife and I divorced and I met my present wife, Judy, at the University of Oklahoma, where I got my PhD. We have been married for forty years and she is a joy. I have two sons, Robert Dean and Daniel whom I named after my best friend/overseas comrade. My wife has two children from a previous marriage. The war had a tremendous impact on my life; it influenced my career possibilities.

I visited Stan Myers, Dan McMillian, and Rayfield Berg after the war. Rayfield survived the war but has since passed away. In 1956, eleven years after the war, one of my buddies called me and told me that the 103rd was having yearly reunions and were meeting that year in Denver. Judy and I decided to go and have been attending every year since then, except when the reunion was held in Las Vegas.

My first teaching job was in New York at New York State University. I taught graduate math at State University Campus at Oneonta for three years. I took a leave of absence to come back to OU to get my PhD and that is where I met Judy. She was in pharmacy school. It was more important for her to stay in Oklahoma because of school so I took a job at Oklahoma City University for a year. Then Rose State Community College offered me more money and I found a home there. I was the Dean of Engineering and Science there for three years before I realized I wanted to teach the rest of my life. When I got into the Administration job I, didn't like it. I asked to go back to teaching and they let me teach math until I retired in 2004.

I followed in my mother's footsteps and started writing a few years before I retired. It took me about a year to finish the first edition of my memoirs. The book was finished in 1995 and self published. Since then, I have rewritten it and added pictures. My second edition is not published. In the first book, Warrior, I just wrote about what happened to me during the war. I thought it would be a nice addition to WW II literature because it tells what happened honestly and factually without enhancement. I also write novels now.