

Recorded Interview
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I was born May 14, 1922. I heard about Pearl Harbor when I was a college student at University of Notre Dame. Within several months I joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps in the Army. I knew that I would eventually be called to active duty. We did not know when, but the expectation was that some of us might possibly be able to finish our degrees. This was in early 1942.

After one year, in March 1943, the entire ERC was called to active duty. My father was a veteran of WWI and he was aware of what lay ahead of me. I suspect my Dad was proud that I was going into the military. I have two younger brothers who also served. One brother joined the Navy during WWII and my youngest brother served in the Navy about ten years later.

I was sent to Camp Wheeler in Macon, Georgia, an infantry replacement camp, and spent an interesting summer with an entire camp of former college students. We felt some hostility from the regular Army soldiers who were training us. Many of us had participated in sports in college and were physically fit. I was a distance runner and ran cross-

country in college. I was ordered to transfer to one of the organized infantry divisions in late '43 (infantry replacement). By this time North Africa was concluded and the Army was organizing for the invasion of France. I was sent to one of the divisions that was planning to go to England to prepare. I applied for Air Corps pilot training. Surprisingly, I was selected. I went from my experience of overnight bivouacs and field food to a hotel in Miami Beach. We spent several months going through many tests. We eventually went into pilot training; the last stop was at an airfield in Mississippi. In March 1944 the Air Corp decided that they did not need more pilots; the ASTP Program was also being broken up. This decision dispersed many former college students into infantry divisions. I ended up in Gainesville, Texas at Camp Howze in the 103rd Division as a private, knowing that this division would end up in combat. I went through training, along with other former college students. We departed in October of '44 and traveled behind a steam locomotive in old coach cars. The trip to New York was long and the weather was hot. We were given free passes in New York while we were waiting to board our ship for Europe. I used the pass for an evening in New York City with my future wife and my mother. The next day we were loaded onto the "Santa Maria" and spent the next two weeks traveling in a convoy crossing the Atlantic.

The transport's bunks down in the hold were five deep. I will never forget going through a storm; it was an interesting experience. Fortunately, I had a couple of books with me and I read when I had time. In addition, I had my share of KP duty or other tasks.

We finally landed at Marseille, France shortly after the Germans had departed. Disembarking was terrible; we had a long night march with full packs, uphill, in the rain, which lasted five or six hours.

When we finally arrived at our campsite, it was already flooded. The luckiest man in our Company was on KP duty on the boat. During a storm a garbage can came flying across the deck and broke his leg. When we got to Marseille, they sent him home. Captain Jim Pepper was the Commander of Company C, 411th Regiment. As time went on, most of the original NCO's had been replaced by privates like me, or other soldiers.

Our first combat experience was in the French area of Alsace. We have books here at the reunion concerning the village of St. Die. We were ordered to chase German troops out of the town. At one point we moved along a road and found two dead German soldiers - our first taste of war. The Alsace people were always under suspicion because they spoke German.

I was in the 4th Platoon. An Infantry Company was organized into three rifle platoons and one weapons platoon (4th platoon). The weapons platoon had three machine gun squads and two mortar squads. I was in the mortar section. Within a few weeks I was a sergeant in the mortar section, and eventually a platoon sergeant. The weapons platoon had an authorized strength of one officer and 34 enlisted soldiers.

In mid-November 1944 we crossed the border into Germany, which was memorable for me. The German resistance was strong; we had many casualties. We were relieved from this area in December and sent to the area of the Battle of the Bulge, a major German invasion of Allied Armies. During this combat, my foot was frozen from long exposure to snow and cold. I was evacuated and spent two weeks in a hospital before being returned to my unit.

Mail was distributed very sporadically. Sometimes four weeks might go by without any mail. Then you might receive a dozen letters from your girl friend at the same time. There was much time spent foraging for local food. You seldom received a fresh meal. Fortunately, a couple of guys in the company were farmers. They knew what to do when we found some live chickens and some eggs. One of the guys was a hunter and he shot a deer. Some other guys knew how to dress it.

Fresh water was a problem. We were issued a chemical to add to the water we took from streams. The water may have looked clean but may not have been suitable for drinking. I don't recall anyone getting sick from the water we treated with the chemical.

We had an experience in March, 1945 in a castle which was up on top of a mountain. It was a makeshift prisoner of war camp for the General Staff of the Polish army. When they capture guys like that they treat them well. We might be the next guys! We got into that castle and the place was full of booze. It was a great party with these prisoners.

We were in a combat condition at Thanksgiving, the captain passed around the word that we were going to have a hot Thanksgiving dinner at the end of November. For almost a month we had been in day to day combat so we were looking forward to this dinner. I think one platoon at a time could go to dinner. The mess sergeant was there with all this fresh food! It might have been quite an uplifting experience except...the turkey was "bad." So many guys were sick for several days.

I was greatly relieved when I heard about VE Day. By then we had come full circle, into Southern Germany, Bavaria, Austria, and Italy. My company was the first to go through the Brenner Pass. (An Alpine pass

linking Innsbruck, Austria, and Bolzano, Italy.) We met up with the Fifth Army coming up out of Italy. The German Army was retreating and we were taking prisoners by the thousands. The German prisoners feared the Italian population and desperately wanted to get back to Germany. We got a lot of souvenirs off of those guys.

We came across one of the German concentration camps. The men in striped uniforms in the camps looked like death walking. Of course, we offered them food, but the first thing some prisoners wanted was cigarettes. I could not believe it. There were bodies that had not been buried. We moved out of there in a hurry when our follow up groups came in to seize the place. Obviously, the German guards got out of there before we arrived.

We had conversations with many of the German prisoners that we captured. I studied German in high school and in college and knew enough of the German language to get a few words out of them. We had to pass those prisoners back to persons who would send them to a permanent location. We did not get much information out of them. I think most of the prisoners were happy to be captured. As much as we complained about our food I think it was better than the food that they had. We picked up a few prisoners who were Russian, Latvian, or Polish. The Germans had captured

these men and put German uniforms on them and put them in the German Army.

I was transferred out after D-Day. We were positioned just below the Brenner Pass. The division had to come up with recruits to go into divisions that were to be involved in the Japanese invasion. I was sent to the Fifth Division. At that time there were designations for the number of points you had accumulated (time in service, time overseas, and other classifications). People with the lowest number of points were transferred to the divisions that were heading back to the States and then to the invasion. I was one of them. I went from the 411th Regiment to the 11th Regiment in the Fifth Division. We assembled at Le Harve. When we got back to New York we were given a thirty day leave. We were to assemble at Fort Campbell, Kentucky after the thirty days, then to head to Japan.

I went home to Cleveland, Ohio where my family lived, and was married within three days. Two days later, the Atomic Bomb went off. That changed the whole complexion and the end of the war. We were required to assemble at Fort Campbell. We stayed there for about three months before I was discharged. The news was out that the surrender had taken place. I was a platoon sergeant at Fort Campbell and to try to maintain any discipline was a challenge. My wife arrived and we rented a room in a nearby rooming

house. We went home after Thanksgiving. This was the year we had two Thanksgivings. The Federal law was changed because the normal date was the last Thursday in November. The Federal government decided to give an extra week to the retail stores for Christmas. So, when we were in Kentucky we celebrated on the Federal date. When we returned to Ohio, we found that Ohio refused to go along with the Federal government's date. We had Thanksgiving in Ohio again when we arrived. It was great to have Thanksgiving at home!

I joined the Army Reserve and was commissioned in the Transportation Corps after the war ended. I was employed by a CPA firm. I had finished my college degree and went to work where I actually started to draw a salary. The first week of the Korean War my unit was called to active duty. I spent one year in the Service, six months of it in Korea. Most of the people I was with were transportation veterans. After a year, considering some of us had families and were being paid for dependents, we were mustered out.

We first attended the 103rd Division reunions about thirty years ago. We also had Company reunions every year. We had more veterans at our Company reunions than we have at this reunion for the 103rd Division. Company reunions were great because we were very close. The reunions

were very informal. We had one of the 103rd Division meetings in Dallas fifteen years ago. During that reunion, we rented a bus and all of our Company went out to my daughter's house for dinner. We had many combat discussions.

There were 26,000 names that came through the 103rd although the Table of Organization is 15,000; with all the turnover, KIA, wounded, new replacements coming in, etc.

Today there were only twenty of us here at this reunion, (2012).

There were twenty guys today who looked out at forty cameras snapping pictures.

I may be the lone survivor of my company.