



Voices We've Heard



Clyde Bert Ray
WWII European Theatre
Army - Staff Sergeant
TRANSCRIPT

These materials reflect the thoughts and memories of those who were interviewed for or provided written information to "The War: Michigan Voices." The comments and language offered reflect the opinion of the speaker or writer. Names of people or places experienced in the distant past may not be accurate. Where possible, WKAR has attempted to verify locations of wartime battles, cities and ships, but in some cases, information was not available.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

I enlisted.

Q: When was that?

In 1943.

Q: Tell me what happened after training.

After training, I ended up in Fort Mead, Maryland. And while I was at Fort Mead, Maryland I got home and I married my wife in 1944. And three days later, I shipped overseas and was sent as a replacement, to the 28th Infantry Division, which is the Keystone Division.

Q: When was that? When did you get over there?

That would have been in '44.

Q: What month?

I do not know just for sure which month but it was in the spring.

Q: Okay. When did you get to the mainland?

Well, I first went over to England and went down through England and was shipped, by boat at night, over to the mainland and went up through one of the areas where you come up through the sand on to the hillside there. And--

Q: How close was this to D-Day?

This was several, several months after D-Day.

Q: Okay.

Yeah. But there wasn't any opposition to us going in at that time.

Q: When did you first hit some opposition?

First hit opposition the first night that I was in the front lines I was hit with a barrage of artillery or mortar fire.

Q: Tell me the story about that night.

Well, I probably had the worst headache I've ever had from that bombardment and I'll also tell you that the friend of--one of the students from Michigan State that traveled with me over to Europe was in L Company and I was in H Company and he was killed the first night. And this was rather striking to have that happen right away.

Q: Tell me what it was like being in this barrage.

Well, I went down into the foxhole as low as I could get and, but the, as I said I had the terrible headache from that barrage and it didn't last long. But the other soldier that was in the foxhole at the same time calmed me down and told me we were lucky, we didn't get it this time.

Q: Was it like a constant din or was it explosion?

No, no it was a, there was space in between the shelling. Yes.

Q: Were there explosions going on all around you?

Yes. Yes.

Q: So you think you got a headache from the noise or the light or the, or just the whole experience?

The concussion.

Q: The concussion?

I'm pretty sure that's what caused that.

Q: Do you remember what you were telling yourself, like--

Well, I had pretty well prepared myself up to that time with the idea that if it's my time I'm gone. If it isn't, I'm lucky. And all the time that I was in the front lines I never was hit with any shrapnel or anything of that kind, but, four or five different times, I was close to where the shells landed. But luckily I didn't receive any.

Q: So you knew at that point that you were in a war.

You bet. Yes. There was one thing about it in the war that there was very little fighting at night. The Germans just seemed to settle down at night and pretty much. But once in a while they would sneak a

shell over there just to keep us, let us know that they were still around.

Q: Do you remember the first time you saw a German?

I never saw a German. I never saw one. I cannot say that. I did find a German soldier that was a casualty. That's the only one that I saw. Now I was with the 60mm mortars so I was back behind the front lines except when they would send me up to the observation post in front of the lines to direct fire if we were going to use any of the mortar fire. That was a rather scary place to be. Out in front of the infantry line waiting to know what was gonna happen.

Q: I can imagine that it was scary. Would you stand there all by yourself or did you have other people around you?

No, I was alone. The observation then, in fact we crawled out there. We didn't walk out there. We crawled out there and got into the best cover we could. We found the lowest spot in the soil that we could find to be down and just peek over the top to see what was goin' on, if we could find something.

Q: Did you have a radio?

Yes, a telephone. Had a phone line. You gotta take your line in with you.

Q: Was that barrage experience, was that the scariest time for you or what was the scariest time?

I think, I think probably the time that I was really the most shook-up, was we were moving up into the line and I had stepped up on to a dead tree trunk and just as I stepped off of that dead tree trunk a bullet hit the tree right beside of where my head would have been. Now that shook me up for a little while. But that was just it.

Q: I can see how that'd shake you up a bit.

Yeah.

Q: Aside from a scary thing, or maybe a scary thing, what, what's a really vivid memory you have of when you were there?

Probably the methods of travel that they, that we used. We traveled on the back of trucks. We traveled on the side of boxcars, in boxcars and all kinds of transportation to get to where we wanted to be or we walked. Quite often we walked up into the lines when we were being shifted from one part of the line to another.

Q: You got frostbite?

Yes.

This was in November. It was wet and cold and we weren't given any foot protection except our leather boots. So they were wet most of the time and we were issued two pair of wool socks. One pair of wool socks we would put into our shirt during our day to dry and the next day we would wear those and put the other one in to dry. Now that's just in the side gear I should tell ya.

But the, the night before I left the front lines there was a barrage came in to our location. The sergeant and I took the captain, who had been hit with shrapnel, down to where he could be picked up for the evacuation. He told us, he said, "Fellas, head back for battalion headquarters."

So, I started back. I came across an engineer battalion and they said, "Don't go any farther. You stay here tonight and we'll send you out in the morning." So the next morning, I took off and went back, and walked back to battalion headquarters.

When I got there, there was a small fire burning [in] there and I stepped up beside of this fire and a few minutes later my feet were hurting, bad. I took off my shoes and my feet just ballooned. And that was the indication. So they loaded me right on to a vehicle, back to the train. I rode on a gurney on the side of a box car from there on back through France and across on a boat to England, and spent the rest of the winter and spring, until the next spring in England recuperating with my feet.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard the Germans surrendered?

Yes.

Q: Tell me about it.

I was in England in the hospital when they, when they, when we heard that they had --see the Battle of the Bulge came three days after I left the front lines and -- so it was a very short time after that, after the Battle of the Bulge that they surrendered. But I was in England at that time.

Q: Do you remember what it was like when you heard?

It was, rejoicing there in the hospital. All of us were really glad that that was over because we knew weren't goin' back to front lines on that duty anymore.

Q: Let me ask you if you remember something else. Do you remember when you heard that Roosevelt died?

No. I don't remember exactly on that.

Q: Did anything pleasant or funny happen while you were in the service?

Well, it was interesting to me. I traveled across the ocean going over in the big, Aquatania--one of the big British ships. Four days trip. And it was interesting to me to see the, the way the ship went through the water, how it zigzagged and so forth to [avoid]--cause we were running alone. There wasn't a convoy.

The other part of it was coming back. I was in the Liberty ship and in that November storm where several of the ships were sunk and we were out there for 14 days bobbing up and down in the ocean waiting till it could settle down so we could run the propeller. All we could run the propeller was enough to straighten the ship as you went up and down in the waves. That was real interesting and probably more scary because them Liberty ships were not very, very strong. So that was some of the interesting things.

Q: I can imagine. Well you survived the war and you were in a storm on the way back.

Yep.

Q: Do you remember when you got--did you go to New York?

Yes. Came in to New York.

Q: Tell me about when you hit New York.

When I hit New York we pulled into the harbor. They let us off of there and told us to be back in a half an hour so I immediately got to a pay telephone and called to let them know I was back.

Q: What was that like?

Well it was nice. I called my brother. My brother went and picked up my wife and brought her over to his place and I told them that I would call the next morning. So I was about to call them the next morning and let them know, talk to her.

Q: Any other memories of when you were in Europe you want to tell me about?

Well I was an agricultural student here at Michigan State and I was real interested when I had some time to get out and see what the agriculture was like in France when we were traveling through there. We were there for, in a certain spot for almost a week I think it was. Well I got a chance to go and see the farming operations around the area that, as long as I stayed within sight of the camp. And in England I was interested there in terms of what the agriculture was like. Considerably different than here.

Q: So it was an educational experience for you?

Right.

Q: That's different. No one's said anything like that.

Yeah.

Q: Have we hit the high points? Is there something else we haven't hit?

Well, I think we've pretty well covered it.

Q: How old were you when you were in Europe?

Well, I was 24 and 25.

Q: It seems kinda silly, but were you like one of the older ones there?

Well, yes and no. See the, the unit that I was with was the National Guard from Pennsylvania and so they had all ages of people in that area. But the younger ones that came in with me, I was one of the older replacements that went in.

See I graduated from high school and then I took one year of training and then I taught country school for two years and then I came down to Michigan State in 1940 and in '43 was when I went into the service.

Q: Going back to when you came back, where did your family meet you when you got back?

I went from New York down to Camp Atterbury, Indiana and caught the milk train at night and rode that milk train all night up to Decatur, Michigan where my wife was teaching school. And I, she got a three weeks leave and I came back to Michigan State on the fifth of [January]. I was released at Camp Atterbury in January 2. Came back to Michigan State on the fifth of January and started student teaching at Williamston. And my wife was with me for three weeks.

I didn't, I didn't get to see the rest of my family until later on when the time would come.

Q: So you met her at Decatur.

Yes.

Q: You got off the train and she was there.

No, I got off the train and walked to where she, where I knew she would be.

These materials reflect the thoughts and memories of those who were interviewed for or provided written information to "The War: Michigan Voices." The comments and language offered reflect the opinion of the speaker or writer. Names of people or places experienced in the distant past may not be accurate. Where possible, WKAR has attempted to verify locations of wartime battles, cities and ships, but in some cases, information was not available.

WKAR would like to acknowledge David M. Miller for his volunteer effort identifying and clarifying place names and other historical information. Mr. Miller is a student at Grand Valley State University, pursuing a B.A. in history.