



Voices We've Heard



Earl Francis Harmon, Sr.
WWII European Theatre
Army - Sergeant
[|TRANSCRIPT](#) [|STORY](#)

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Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

I got greetings from Roosevelt.

Q: Remember when?

Well, been a long time ago, around '42 or '43. Forty-three I think it was.

Q: Where'd you have basic training?

Cheyenne, Wyoming. Fort Warren.

Q: And what branch of the service were you in?

Army.

Q: What did you do in the army?

Truck driver.

Q: When did you go overseas? Tell me about when you went overseas. What was it like?

Went to England first. Then went--stayed on the ship for about a week before we made the invasion.

We went in. On beachhead. Normandy beachhead.

Q: Tell me what it was like.

It was rough. Bodies laying all over. Our LST boat got hit going over. We was out in the water and I swam to shore. Soaked my clothes all out and swam to shore. I got to shore and there was a lot of clothes. All kinds of clothes. Ammunition and all that kind of stuff.

Q: I'm sorry. What day was this? Was this D-Day or right after?

Shortly after D-Day. The same day. But we had to get the trucks in. 'Cause they never got the trucks in. Never got the trucks in 'til about two, three days later.

Q: So you're on the Normandy beach. Then what?

All the truck drivers got together and in my platoon there was about a hundred trucks and we'd stay about a hundred yards apart. Then the planes come in and shooting at us. That's one place I got hit. I got hit three times.

Q: Tell me about the first time you got hit.

Well, I got personnel bomb. Pin(?) went off, went to lift my right hand. But they used that sulfur and stuff and they cured it up. Then the next time, was in Arken. Sniper got me in the back of this leg here. And the next time, plane went to shoot me, shoot at me in my truck. Started shooting at this truck ahead of me. I seen it and I know he was--I was gonna be next in line, so I just bail out. Lay there, right back by the two wheels.

Q: Okay. And then what?

I got hit in the head. Right through my helmet. And I didn't know nothing.

Q: For how long.

Oh, I woke up in England, in the hospital in England. And I went to that--a coma. And I woke up about ten or fifteen days later. Had needles stuck all over me, all over. Said I was about ready to bleed to death. Had this big gash up the top of my head there, [inaudible] straight through my helmet. That's what I'm getting pain from now. This leg and my head, 'cause I have awful headaches.

Q: Let's go back to the second time that you got hit, from the sniper. Tell me the story about when you got shot by the sniper.

I was out in my truck and I got out of my truck. We was just standing there and I heard a bang and I felt just a quick dart in my leg. It went in the back of my leg. Just a small arm. A lady was up in--I see her, I see the lady up there, she was walking her baby up there and she was the one that shot me.

Q: Where was this?

Arken.

Q: What country?

That's in--Arken's in, not in Germany. Belgium, I think. Arken's just out of Belgium. And I went up to--I got hit the last time up by the Rhine River.

Q: So a woman shot you?

Yeah. Woman sniper.

Q: I don't think I've heard that before. So after you got shot the third time, which is too many times to get shot--

I was hauling bombs that time. See I hauled bombs, K-rations, C-rations, prisoners, ammunition. I hauled everything. See I was in the salvage department. We hauled anything. Hauled dead bodies. Hauled it all.

Q: What was the scariest moment you had when you were over there?

Never had no scary--I kept my head. I hunted all my life, ever since I've been a small kid, and so the hunting didn't bother me any. Hunting some snipers and different--didn't bother me.

Q: So you weren't scared the whole time you were over there?

No, I wasn't scared. The worst one was the Battle of the Bulge. We got pulled back. [Inaudible] work, go up there for six, seven days, then we'd get hauled back for three days. And I was shaving. I cut a little limb off a tree to hang my dog tags on it. And they said the--Battle of the Bulge, they said the Germans come in there with our tanks and stuff.

And so I grabbed a pair--set of dog tags, and threw 'em on, and it's another guy's. So they sent my wife all my clothes and everything home. Thought I was dead. I had another guy's tag on, I didn't have my tag on.

Q: When did you find out about that?

I found out it after I got home.

Q: Tell me about your wife handled that.

Oh, she said I wasn't dead.

Q: How did she find out you weren't dead.

The Army come over. See just before that, I had lost one of my children. Lightning hit the baby carriage, and set the house afire. But I went over the hill, I seen that baby one day, one afternoon. I got a three day pass at Fort Myers. I mean at Fort Warren. I got a pass for three days to go to Cheyenne, the rodeo there, and I hopped a train to come all the way back to Lansing. Got in Chicago--I had a hard time getting out of Chicago. My clothes was just black with soot. I made it. The next morning, after I seen the baby, next morning there was pounding on the door and I was [inaudible] me out.

Q: Okay. So you were at the Battle of the Bulge. Tell me about the battle.

Well, I wasn't right in it, because I was pulled back. I was pulled back off my line, [inaudible] shaving and everything. And they come in and said the 69th Division got wiped out. Killed them all, or might near all of them I guess. So one day we had to go back up in a hurry. We had to go back up.

Q: What was it like?

What was it like? Lot of firing. They were using all our tanks, our clothes and everything. That's what they had the salvage outfit I was in, have them pick all that stuff up so the Germans couldn't get it. They had our tanks with our star onto it and everything. The 69th let them in. The Battle of the Bulge, that's why they call it the Battle of the Bulge, and they had a big circle around, kept going around and

around. Found out that there was all Germans 'cause they wouldn't talk(?). And they just started shooting everybody up.

Q: What other battles were you in?

Wasn't--they didn't call them battles.

Q: What did they call them?

They called them--different ones at different stages. I was in five of them. It says right on my discharge, that's five different times I was in the worst part of it.

Q: Well, tell me about another one then.

Well, D-Day was real bad. My uncle was with me. I met my uncle and he got his head shot off right as we were going in. I was right there beside of him when he got his head shot off. There was eight of us boys and there was five of us in.

I think the worst one was, I didn't know where I was at, and I got hit and I got hit, the last time. I had a piece of my helmet go right through my head and into my brain. They say them helmets are good but that--I must have had one rotten or something. It was a piece of liner they said that stuck in my head. See you had a helmet and a liner inside of it.

Q: Well, tell me about some other action that you saw then.

Well, I was in action but I'd get fired on every day. I don't know how many windshields I put on my truck. Probably eight or ten windshields. Most of the time, I had them laying right over the hood of my truck--hood. No, hardest was when I woke up, I didn't know where I was at. I thought maybe I was--be a P.O.W, prisoner of war. I woke up, all I see is people walking around and seen all them bottles hanging up, hanging around my bed.

But I got discharged from the hospital. I got discharged in England. I was in the hospital and I come home on a boat they had there, airplanes land on the, airport--. I got--that's what I come home on, in a bed. I didn't have a march or nothing when I got here.

Q: What year was this when you got discharged?

Forty-five.

Q: Was the war still going on?

No, the war was over about three days--they said the war was over, three days later they give me a discharge.

Q: Can you tell me more about D-Day besides what you've told me?

Well, you could walk for half a mile just on bodies. Just on American soldiers. You'd walk three-quarters of a mile, a mile, just on bodies, without touching the ground. It was that thick. That was one of my days, about three days after D-Day, we went in there and picked out all the guns and all the stuff the soldiers, 'cause I was in the salvage.

Q: That the most memorable part of the war for you? What was the most memorable thing about the war?

Coming home.

Q: I can understand that.

My boy over there, he was just a small boy, not--about a year-and-a-half-old; year, year-and-a-half old.

Q: So it must have been good to see him.

Yeah. Well, he grewed up.

Q: What else you want to tell me about the war? What else should we know?

It was rough. It was rough. All the way. You'd get shot at every day. Get shot at every day. There wasn't a day you didn't get shot at. Be a sniper or somebody. Be somebody coming up to you. Civvie, you couldn't depend on civvie. You'd see one in the road, he had a gun, you shot him right there. You didn't go nowhere. You couldn't depend on nobody.

I got--one day I was going on the tanks. See we was with a tank outfit too. Outfit, about seven guys get on back of a tank and go into town. In the town then we'd jump off. And everybody'd have a house to go to.

I went to this one house, had to look upstairs, had to look in the attic. And I come back down I seen a little girl standing over there looking at that table all the time and I went and took the tablecloth off and here's there's a guy underneath it. He was getting ready to shoot his gun too.

Q: So what happened then?

He stayed there. Stayed there shot laying down. We didn't let nobody get by. Civilians, some of them were nice, some of them were bad.

Q: Any other experience in the war you want to tell me about?

I don't know what to tell you about. All I can tell you is you'd get shot at every day. Hope you made it, you made it through the day. Every day was a good day, you lived through it.

Q: You'd think you'd get tired of being shot at.

Yeah, you'd think so, but you had to. Had to get shot at, or else--you can't duck. Well I had this one, hit in the leg. It hit the sidewalk, or the cement and flattened that out, that head out. 'Cause I had a gangrene start to set in and I had it taken out after I got out of the service, down in Florida. My mother lived in Florida at that time. I had it cut out down there, 'cause it was gangrene that was setting in. I didn't have time to up to Gainesville to the veteran's hospital. They wanted to take it out right then.

Q: So how long were you overseas?

I was overseas almost all my time, about four months.

Q: So you went in June of '44 and you were--

Forty-three I went in. Does it say '43 on there?

Q: No I'm saying you went over--you landed on Normandy in June of '44.

I stayed in England for quite a while.

Q: Yeah. Then you got taken out in a coma in '45. All in all, not a good year.

Wasn't a good year. Good for me.

Q: You lived through it, so I guess so.

Been a long time ago.

Q: You still think about it?

Not no more. When I first come home, anybody shoot a gun around me I'd fall, I'd hit the ground. You'd slam a door real loud, and boy, I'd hit the ground. I had a hard time going hunting. Somebody'd shoot a rabbit or something, man, it would just about tear me up.

Q: But that went away?

I'm all right now. I go hunting with my boy. Yeah, that war's something else. I wouldn't want to be in the one they have now.

Q: Did you have any good times over there?

I know--in the hospital, when I got out of bed. No, there was no good times. Rough time when we had to go back. Awful rough when we had to back to the Battle of the Bulge. We just got out and had to go right back fighting. Worst part, I had to haul all the infantrymen in my truck up there and they jumped off [when we] got [to the] Battle of the Bulge. They wouldn't have time to walk it up there. The Germans would have had them all killed.

Q: I'm sorry, I'm not sure I understood. You had soldiers jump off your truck, and they got killed.

I say, when we went back in, some of them did. Some of them jumped off the truck, got shot right there. Lot of them didn't. 'Cause I just wheeled in there and dumped them off, and right back to where I come from. You can't take a couple hundred men in one truck. So we had to wheel them up there. They couldn't have walked. They'd got up there too late.

But in the mountain, over in Germany, it goes across the Rhine River, they had great big balloons. Up in the air, for the planes couldn't come down and hit the soldiers. Had a truck, had a whole regiment of Germans in there. And every day, they'd undress one. It was cold of winter and set him in there bare naked, tell him, "You guys should give up." He'd stay in there, he wouldn't come back out.

There was paratroopers lived on the other side of the mountain, went through the mountain after you crossed the Rhine River. And we was on this side and they was all trapped, trapped in there. They all give up. About two days later, they all give up. It's hard to remember stuff like that. You just hit the high points, all I'm doing. That's all I can remember.

Q: So the worst part of the whole experience was what?

The worst part? Battle of the Bulge. Was [inaudible] Rhine River. Drove the truck right alongside the pavement out there. Always hit landmines and that's where got my hand, landmine. But we had a tank, had a--went along in front of us. [Inaudible] rode(?) things off, mines off.

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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.

THE WAR MICHIGAN VOICES



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By FRAN WILCOX

Lansing Community Newspapers. Reprinted with permission.

Earl Harmon, Sr., 85, has no good memories of World War II.

A truck driver in the Army, Harmon was drafted in 1943 and had basic training at Fort Warren in Cheyenne, Wyo. before going overseas. They went first to England in 1943.

Harmon said he went into Normandy later in the day on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

"It was rough," he said. "Bodies laying all over. Our LST boat got hit going over. We was out in the water and I swam to shore. Soaked my clothes all out and swam to shore. I got to shore and there was a lot of clothes. All kinds of clothes. Ammunition and all that kind of stuff."

Harmon said he was with his uncle when his uncle was killed on D-Day.

"You could walk for half a mile just on bodies," he said. "Just on American soldiers. You'd walk three-quarters of a mile, a mile, just on bodies."

Harmon said his experience hunting all his life kept him from being scared while he was overseas. He said the worst time was the Battle of the Bulge.

Harmon was in a unit of trucks used for hauling.

"I hauled bombs, K-rations, C-rations, prisoners, ammunition," he said. "I hauled everything. See, I was in the salvage department. We hauled anything. Hauled dead bodies. Hauled it all."

During the Battle of the Bulge in December of 1944, Harmon hauled troops up to the battle ground.

"Some of them jumped off the truck, got shot right there," Harmon said. "Lot of them didn't. 'Cause I just wheeled in there and dumped them off, and right back to where I come from. You can't take a couple hundred men in one truck. So we had to wheel them up there. They couldn't have walked."

They'd got up there too late."

At the beginning of the battle, Harmon was shaving, with his dog tags and things hung on a tree, when someone announced that the Germans were coming in.

"So I grabbed a pair — a set of dog tags," Harmon said. "And it's another guy's. So they sent my wife all my clothes and everything home. Thought I was dead. I had another guy's tag on, I didn't have my tag on."

Harmon said he did not find out about the mix-up until he got home.

"I wasn't right in it [the Battle of the Bulge], because I was pulled back," Harmon said. "And they come in and said the 69th Division got wiped out. Killed them all, or might near all of them, I guess. So one day we had to go back up."

There was a lot of firing in the battle, Harmon said.

"They were using all our tanks, our clothes and everything," he said. "That's why they had the salvage outfit I was in, to have them pick all that stuff up so the Germans couldn't get it. They had our tanks with our star onto it and everything. The 69th let them in. The Battle of the Bulge, that's why they call it the Battle of the Bulge, and they had a big circle around, kept going around and around. Found out that there was all Germans 'cause they wouldn't talk. And they just started shooting everybody up."

Harmon said there were five times he was in the midst of heavy shooting, but he got fired on every day.

"I don't know how many windshields I put on my truck," he said. "Probably eight or 10 windshields."

"It was rough. It was rough. All the way. You'd get shot at every day. Get shot at every day. There wasn't a day you didn't get shot at. Be a sniper or somebody. Be somebody coming up to you. Civvie, you couldn't depend on civvie. You'd see one in the road, he had a gun, you shot him right there. You didn't go nowhere. You couldn't depend on nobody."

Harmon himself was hit three times.

The first time, a bomb injured his right hand.

The second time, a sniper shot him in the back of the leg.

"I was out in my truck and I got out of my truck," Harmon said. "We was just standing there and I heard a bang and I felt just a quick dart in my leg. ... A lady was up in — I see her, I see the lady up there, she was walking her baby up there and she was the one that shot me."

The third time, a plane was shooting at the truck ahead of him. Knowing he was next, Harmon bailed out and lay on the ground.

"I got hit in the head, right through my helmet," he said. "And I didn't know nothing."

He woke up from a coma about 10 to 15 days later in a hospital in England.

"Had needles stuck all over me, all over," he said. "Said I was about ready to bleed to death. Had this big gash up the top of my head there ... straight through my helmet. That's what I'm getting pain from now. This leg and my head, 'cause I have awful headaches."

The hardest part was waking up.

"I didn't know where I was at," Harmon said. "I thought maybe I was a P.O.W., prisoner of war. I woke up, all I see is people walking around and seen all them bottles hanging up, hanging around my bed. But I got discharged from the hospital. I got discharged in England."

Harmon was discharged in 1945, he said, three days after the war ended.

The most memorable part, he said, was coming home.

"My boy, he was just a small boy, about a year and a half old," Harmon said.

"When I first come home, anybody shoot a gun around me I'd fall, I'd hit the ground. You'd slam a door real loud, and boy, I'd hit the ground. I had a hard time going hunting. Somebody'd shoot a rabbit or something, man, it would just about tear me up."

That went away eventually, Harmon said.

"I'm all right now," he said. "I go hunting with my boy."

Looking back on the war now, Harmon says there were no good times, only hard day after hard day.

"I don't know what to tell you about," he said. "All I can tell you is you'd get shot at every day. Hope you made it, you made it through the day. Every day was a good day, you lived through it."