



Voices We've Heard



William K. Feasal

WWII European Theatre

Army - Private First Class

Mr. Feasal passed away on February 27, 2010.

|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 was drafted.

Q: When was this?

Well, it was in the first of November, the first part of November in 1942. I was drafted from Lansing here. And, uh...

Q: And you went in the Army?

Yep. What an experience.

Q: I want you to tell me about it. When did you go overseas?

I didn't go overseas till 1944, '45, '45 I guess it was, yeah, '45.

Q: Where'd you go?

Went to Europe.

Q: Where at?

I went to Germany and eventually---I started down and went to England--we went over on the Queen Elizabeth. I don't know if that's important or not, but anyway, that's what we went on, nice boat ride. We went to Scotland and took a train to South Hampton and--or maybe it [personal expression] but out on to the English Channel somewhere, got on the LST and went across to, to LaHavre, France and got off there and got on a train. Next day, we got off and we got on some trucks and the next day we got off

and [inaudible].

Q: Tell me about that.

Didn't take long. Well, you mean what was it like?

Well, it was scary. The whole thing was scary, you know, in fact they told us when we got on the train that you keep watchin for airplanes. If an airplane, if any of them--come astray to you, you wanted to head for the brush, you know, get off the train.

But they didn't. But then we got on the service company trucks. They were six by sixes that belong, belonged to, I presume, probably part of the quartermaster core, but they were service company. They, they hauled supplies to the 22nd Infantry from wherever they picked them up.

Anyway, we rode on there, on those trucks all day and right up through the Hurtgen Forest and all through that part of France and Germany.

Anyway, when we got off, we got to where service company was located and we got off and--probably I should go back to the start of the war, because when we--preceding the time that you go over, that we went over, we went through a dozen, at least a dozen inspections and maybe more.

Do you have three pairs of underwear, six pairs of socks, six tent pegs, shelter hat, an overcoat, and overshoes, and two pairs of shoes, aw, you know, all the usual stuff you're supposed to have--two of everything, you know, especially the six pairs of socks, you got to have six pairs of socks.

Luckily, I worked in the supply in Fort Mead, Maryland for a couple days and there was a guy in there that was on his way back overseas that--he'd been back here to a hospital and he said, "The main thing that you want to take is socks," he said, "Take all the socks you can steal." He said, "Everybody is looking for a pair of socks and nobody has any," and he said, "If you can take any extras, you do."

So, I managed to salvage 18 pairs of socks out of the supply where I worked there and put 'em in my pockets, packed 'em away in my uniform. So, when I got there, I had 18 pairs of socks and I had a carton of cigarettes and a flashlight and I didn't have a shelter hat, but I had the rope, I had the tent rope.

And anyway, when we got to service company, and of course all this stuff was packed into a barracks or duffle bag, you know. And that was a [personal expression], lug it on the boat, lug it off the boat, onto the train, have to sit on it or put it somewhere where you could keep track of it. And, and off the boat onto--anyway, onto the LSD but down to the truck and when we got to service company, the sergeant said, "If you've got anything in that duffle bag you wanna keep, you best get it out of there and put it in your pockets 'cause you're never gonna see that bag again." And I never did, neither did anybody else. They threw them in a pile and they were gone. We never saw them again.

So, good. I had my six pairs and eighteen pairs of socks in my pockets, my carton of cigarettes and my flashlight and my tent rope and all the other stuff in my pockets. My pockets were big and bulging out, but anyway it worked.

And then he said, "Do you got any blankets? Do you have a blanket?" And, no, we don't have any blankets. "You don't have a blanket?" No. "Well, how--you gotta have something to sleep in." Well, they gave us the sleeping bag. He said, "Sleeping bag? You can't sleep in a sleeping bag up here." Frank said, "Well, that's what they give ya." "Well," he said, "That's what you're gonna have to sleep in."

So, he said, "You see that open field out there?" "Yeah." "Well," he said, "You go out there and lay down

and along that fence row, that hedge row," and he said, "And put your rifle and your sleeping bag with ya and don't, don't, don't get bunched up," he said, "Scatter out," and so--because he said, "It's altogether possible there could be infiltration in here at night." And then we just laid down in the snow and went to sleep and in the morning, we woke up, and we were still there.

And we went back--and that's when he said, "If you got anything in that duffle bag you want, you best get it out of there." Well, who knew where the bag was, there, there was just big pile of them there, you couldn't find it. But anyway, I had my socks and my cigarettes and that's what I was interested in.

But there was a pile of logs, I thought, you know, laying next to the hedgerow alongside of us covered up with a canvas. And, being curious, I wiggled around to where I got over there and could look under to see what it was and it was dead bodies. It was,--I have no idea how many, but probably was 50 or 60 dead bodies stacked up like cordwood. And waiting for the pioneer corp to come and get 'em and take 'em out to a burial or a burial site.

And, anyway, then we, we were there till the next morning and then they, they walked us out, we walked out to the companies that we were gonna be with. And I think they scattered us out about six or eight to a company. And I presume, there probably was 50 or 60 guys got off that truck and was in that bunch that was there. And then, they scattered them all, about five or six to a spot for different companies 'cause that's about all the replacements they put in a company was five or six.

Q: Tell me about the first time you saw action.

Well, that was after they assigned me to, to I Company and after I was there about three days they said, "Well, we're gonna jump off in the morning." And we did and we went across a little river. They just threw some ladders on, we had to walk across on those ladders. And it wasn't very far or very deep, but anyway, we got across.

Across the railroad track into a woods on the other side of the railroad track and the first thing I saw was a dead German laying on the railroad track. And the next thing I saw was another one that wasn't--he wasn't dead, he was alive, he stepped out from behind a tree and he had a burp gun, which was a little machine pistol. They called them burp--we called 'em burp guns. He had that and he stepped out behind that tree and emptied it right in my face.

And I, uh...I, uh...the main thing I remember is the sparks flying out of the barrel. You know, it was like--all I could think of was one of these little Dick Tracy guns that the kids used to have and turn a crank and sparks would fly and that's what it looked like. Luckily, he wasn't a good shot. And I had an M1 and, I, luckily, I grew up with a rifle and it worked.

Anyway, I put two or three clips of shells through that rifle and went on 'cause he was out of business by that time. And from then on, it was a big blur. We went through probably 10 acres of woods, and I have no idea what all took place. I know there was one guy right [inaudible] flopped on the ground in one spot where we come to a stop and there was some other fellas there and this one guy laid right side of me and all of a sudden, a German got up into some brush over on the side and he hit him with a bullet but he missed me.

And that first guy that emptied his little machine pistol at us, he put a bullet in the lining of my jacket. It went through my pocket-- I had a can of sterno in there of canned heat, went through that, went through the C rations, went through my gloves. I don't know what else, probably...anyway, it went through the lining of my jacket and the bullet was in the lining of my jacket when they got all done. But anyway, it was there. It was a...

I have no idea how many guys were killed and there, a lot of them. I was assigned to Company I and

Company K was right next to us and part of Company K was captured in that woods and they were put in a basement of a house and, of course, these old houses scattered through the woods and around the country because it was more or less farmland, you know, farm country.

But anyway, while they were in there somebody else from K Company came up to the house and shot a round with a bazooka through the basement window and that's where these guys were in the basement. And that explosive round went into that basement and exploded and it killed two or three Germans but never touched one of those boys from K Company. And so there was a couple of medics in there and the medics doctored up the Germans that was hit and doctored up the guys from K Company that had been hit before.

And they got out and when came back to our company. And it was kind of a wild day, it really was a wild day. The smoke was so thick you couldn't see across this room I don't believe. You know, probably 50 feet was as far as you could see in any direction 'cause the rifles, the smoke and the ammunition [inaudible].

Q: Tell me about your Purple Heart.

Aw, I got--that was at the tail end of the project, pretty near at the end of my tour of duty over there. It was, it was after we had crossed the Rhine. They put us on motorized patrol. And, of course, everything was moving pretty fast. You either rode on the back of tanks or rode in a jeep and this particular day we rode on a jeep and I think if I remember right, there was five of us on the jeep. And it was a little old Ford jeep. And, and I'm thankful it was a Ford because it ran. And a lot of Willys didn't, they let them set where they quit.

But anyway, we went into a town, and I think maybe that we weren't going where we were supposed to be, you know, because the lieutenant that was a platoon leader, he was riding in first jeep. Well in fact, we were riding on half-tracks. I was settin on the back of a half-track,--or up on the cab of a half-track.

And we went into this town and, you know it was a town like we get in there and there was no houses left there. All there was, was just few basements and rubble here and there. And so somebody said, "Well, look up there on that hill, look at all them Krauts up there," you know, and the hill was covered with German soldiers, they was comin' down.

And I presume they figured we got somebody cornered, we're gonna capture them or do something. And so, the lieutenant said, "Let's get the hell outta here."

So, we all turned around, everybody turned around and we started back out and we had to go through a pretty good size archway to get into the town, the road went through this archway. It was a stone arch, and we had to go back out of it too, you know, and we came out of that archway, there was a factory or warehouse or something across a little stream there and a lot of Germans was over there and when we came out, they was shootin' at us.

And so anyway, I was settin' up on top of this half-track on the cab and [inaudible] I carried the BAR and I just pulled the trigger, you know, it was--that was about all you could do. But anyway, somewhere in the process this bullet hit my knee--went across my knee and knocked me off the half-track.

And the next thing I knew, I was laying on the ground. And the half-track was still going. And so, I got, got out, out of the grass or out of the weeds and crawled up in the road and the jeep driver that was drivin' the jeep that was on the tail end of the, of the patrol, he was back underneath this arch. He'd stopped back there, he didn't stop out in the open.

And he hollered, you know, and there was another guy that fell off too or jumped off whichever I don't

know. He was off on the ground and he was behind a woodpile taking shots at the Germans. But anyway, this driver said "You guys want to get the hell out of there you better get back here because we're gonna leave right now."

And boy, we went running back best we could and climbed on that jeep and I think there was seven of us on that jeep, and out of that archway he come full-throttle up the road we went and everybody shootin' as fast as we could, you know.

And we got out of there. And so anyway, after we got out, we discovered where our company had went. And where our platoon had went, that's what it was. And so we found out where we was supposed to go and [inaudible] these boys drivin' this jeep well the one who was drivin' it and the gunner that was on the jeep, were from heavy weapons company. They carried a machine gun, a heavy machine gun and the ammunition for it and so forth.

And so this ol' Mexican boy, he was settin' in the front seat of that jeep. He got off of the seat and stood on the gas can carrier that was on the side of the jeep and fired a machine gun that was fastened right where the right hand post of the windshield would be, it was...he swung it around and he fired it right across between the driver and me, it was right in my ears.

But that was alright as long as it didn't hit me. But anyhow, we got outta there. We took a fifth of schnapps to get us out 'cause this Mexican boy said--we stopped, you know, and tried to get oriented and he said, "We gotta have something to get us over that next hill." And he opened up a toolbox under the seat and pulled out this quart of schnapps and then once around, it was gone.

Anyway, we eventually got back to the company and when we got back there, come to find out we were listed as missing in action. It didn't take 'em long to figure that out, I don't know why, but I guess just 'cause we didn't come out of there when everybody else did. And the medic patched up my knee and that took care of that and that was it.

Q: Those were two pretty close calls. Did you have any other close calls?

Shrapnel. Well, the one that sticks in my mind that I remember the most was a big piece of shrapnel, their artillery broke up in big chunks. It didn't break up in--ours broke up in small pieces. I don't know if it was machined that way or cast that way but when it broke it was like a pineapple blowing up, it was small pieces--went in all directions. But theirs just broke up in chunks and a piece of one of their artillery shells lit in the edge of a field and a piece of it came across that field and I was going up the road.

I often wonder what, what my line of thought was that I didn't flop on my belly and let it go over my back, you know, because that piece that was comin' across that field and I see it hittin' the dirt and I was gonna outrun it but I couldn't, it was coming and it went right across in front of me but it didn't hit me.

But I thought it was gonna. And why I didn't drop on the ground and let it go over the top of me I don't know but I, I just thought I could outrun that, but I couldn't.

But--and then there was other times where--it seemed like anytime anything ever hit me, it always hit--it cut or got my K rations.

That's what they fed us was K rations and always in a box, you know, they give you three boxes per day, and morning, noon, and night. They'd give it to you all at once and I'd tie 'em up with this tent rope that I took along with--I made a little bag out of that rope for a sling and I'd fasten it on. I had a

harness that I carried an ammunition belt on that harness and I'd tie that--there was a rations on my back.

And then, I don't know, several times somebody would say, "Feasal, what happened to your rations?" "What do you mean?" "Well, your K rations are gone," you know, or there'd be just a rope would be there, the box, or part of a box, them sons of guns were bound and determined gonna starve me to death I guess.

But anyway, that was close enough, you know. The closest anything ever got was that bullet that went into my jacket pocket, into the lining, it was in the lining of the jacket.

Q: Was that as scared as you were at any time?

Oh, no.

Q: What was the scariest time?

Screamin' meemies.

The Germans had what they call screamin' meemies. Did you ever hear of 'em?

Well, they were rocket propelled artillery shells. They fired six of 'em in a--to a--in a group. And they fired them off from a mobile rack or a trailer. And they'd have them in...layin' in there and when they fired 'em off they'd all--they'd go one to a time. And they made a hell of a noise, screech or a scrunch, you know, it sounded like six fire trucks coming over the hill all at once [personal expression].

And you hear 'em comin', and you knew dumb well they were comin' your direction, you could just tell they were. And the worry about where were they gonna hit, you know, and this one particular time another guy and I got caught out in an open field and they plastered that field with those shells.

And I remember--well, I, I got in a hole, a shell hole was out there and, and it wasn't very deep, but it was a little bit of protection. And those shells, they lit all around that hole. You know, you hear one land over here and one over there. [Personal expression] That was, like I said, you never, you never find an atheist in a foxhole.

You're scared, that's all there is to it. Yep. Probably other times, but I don't really remember it, in particular. But one time we got entangled with a whole--I presume it was a company at least of SS troops and on the backside of a hill we went up the hill and they were on the other side. And they weren't gonna give up and we didn't, but, I mean, the next day early in the morning a B-47 [inaudible] fighter planes come over and strafed that swamp that they were in and I think if I remember right that one of our squads went down there on patrol and they counted, I don't know, like 200 dead.

And they captured about seven or eight guys. That's all that was still alive out of that bunch that was in there. So, I was scared when--'cause they--in the morning when it got daylight there was a guy, a German with a bayonet about as far as me to him right in front of my foxhole.

And sometime during the night, several times during the night, why, you know, all of a sudden somebody'd fire a rifle, you know, pow, you know, and there--you'd see the flash. And if, if they returned the fire you knew where they were or approximately. But even if you didn't know where they were, you'd just return the fire off ahead of ya anyway.

And apparently sometime during the night he was out there, he was right out in front of us and there was another fella and myself that was in the foxhole together. And this character was out in front of us

and we both emptied our rifles in that direction, you know, we must have hit him 'cause he was there in the morning. He didn't look good that was for sure. And, and it was scary, it was scary. Yeah.

Q: You've told me some good stories. You got another one?

Well, want some stories from there or from the air, airbase?

Q: What's the airbase?

Well, like I said--I spent two and a half years driving a crash ambulance on an airbase in Connecticut.

And we scooped up quite a few student pilots that didn't get back on the ground, you know, they'd crash out in the hills or around the airbase.

I don't know if you ever heard of Bradley Field in Hartford, east of Windsor Locks, Connecticut, but it's north of Hartford. And we were there; I was there almost two years I think and drove a crash ambulance on the flight line. It was interesting and actually you got into more, more pickin' up pieces of people that were dead, you know, or blew up or whatever happened. Most of them they hit something and the plane exploded and they did too.

So that was messier than when you were in Europe, somebody got shot, you didn't touch 'em because the pioneer corp would come behind ya, they'd pick up the remains or medics would be there and they'd doctor 'em up and haul 'em out immediately so they [inaudible] litter bearers would haul 'em out.

Q: Where were you when Germany surrendered?

In Bavaria where, what'd they call it, the Reichsgarten or something, where Hitler's hideout was anyway. We were going up there.

Q: Do you remember when you heard about it?

Well, it was scattered over a period of probably a week. You'd hear it every day. "Well, it's over with today boys, today's the end of it." And then, pow, somebody would take a shot at ya, you know, or somebody--artillery shell would come along and they, "Yup, it ain't over yet." And so back at it again.

And so we were down south of Munich, we were down in there for probably a week and working towards this, this Alps hideout or redoubt or whatever they called it. I was up near Lake Geneva and I think I remember--I think they said we were seven kilometers from Italy, you know, almost to the border. So--well, that was quite a relief, I'll tell ya, when it was over, wow [inaudible].

Q: There are three minutes of tape left, do you have a three-minute story for me?

Well, I don't know. Like I said, we went overseas on the Queen Elizabeth, which was quite a ride. It took three days and three nights.

Q: Tell me when you came back to the States, what was it like?

Unbelievable, it was just like--took a load off your shoulders, you know. We got off--we came back on a little ol' banana boat that was a ferry boat run from Panama to New York City and they was 25 or hundred or [inaudible] elbow to elbow. We'd sleep on the deck--all over, wherever you could find a place to lay down and use your jacket or your helmet for a pillow, anything to put your head on.

And anyway, the boat came in New York Harbor, wow, man, the boys were home, wow, here we are and

yeah, look at all them girls and there was a boatload with a girl's band, you know, and who knows where they were from, some college or something. Come out from shore, you know, and come alongside and everybody on that ship all went over to that side to look at all the girls and the dumb boat, I thought it was gonna tip over and I think the crew began to think so too 'cause there was a PA system, they said: "Everybody back to the other side."

So, it leveled back up again, but [inaudible] moment, it was kinda scary. But if it have tipped over, we'd all swam ashore and let it go at that, I'm sure.

And then we got off the, off the boat and in the buses and back to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Now onto the train on the Erie railroad and back to Chicago we went.

George Wilson, you heard me speak of him back there. George was a company commander for H Company. He, he went through a lot longer period of time than I did 'cause I was only there about seven months and he was there the most of two years. And he was company commander for a long time and he never knew how he escaped either, you know, he eventually did get hit in the ankle or the leg or somewhere and they put him in the hospital.

But he lost a lot of men, a lot of his men were shot, you know, and killed or captured. One of my friends that I used to work with, and I still know him quite well, he lives in Lake Odessa. He was with Audie Murphy and was with him the day that he got the Congressional Medal of Honor.

He got quite a lot of stories to tell too. The main thing is to get him started [inaudible]. It was, it was unbelievable; there was a lot of men in, in my company and probably in all those rifle companies that were 45 years old. No business being in someplace like that, you know. One man was retired, I don't know if he was retired, but he was an ex-Detroit policeman. He was in my company. I don't know why he didn't get killed, he come awful close to it a lot of times. But, you know, he survived.

And I often wonder whatever happened to him, you know. Those things, you don't do like you're supposed to. That's like, in that book, I--there's a newspaper article about a boy from Leslie who was killed and they, they couldn't find him and 24 years they didn't know where he was. And finally somebody dug him up over there and I knew where he was, I knew where he got killed, I saw him get shot, but I didn't know what they did with him.

And there was two men, one was right next to me on the left and the other was out in the woods a ways and we're going through this woods and this fellow right here close said, "I'll cover for ya," and he walks across in front of me and my rifle jammed, I had that BAR. And a BAR was about as poor excuse for a rifle as it could be for my money. I mean, it was probably, originally it was a very good piece of machinery but it was wore out. Anyway, it jammed and I knelt down behind a tree to dig that empty cartridge out that-

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