

Lowell A. Drudge Interview #1

Company A, 317th Infantry Regiment

(Library of Congress: Veterans History Project; interviewed by Douglas Clanins)

(MS Word Audio Transcript [NOT edited, just transcribed])

Speaker 1

Name is Douglas clan and I'm an editor with the Indiana Historical site in Indianapolis. I'm in the home of Mr. Lowe, Drudge, DRUDGE in Bremen, IN Bremen. Is this town located in Marshall County on June 10, 1995, and beginning this tape recording at about 1:40 PM.

00:00:22

Speaker 1

I'm in Mr. Drudge's home to discuss aspects of his military service as a member of Company a, the 317th Infantry Regiment.

00:00:31

Speaker 1

80th Infantry Division during World War 2, which saw action.

00:00:37

Speaker 1

In European theater of operations, Mr. Drudge, where and when were you born?

00:00:45

Speaker 2

I was born on November the 24th, 1919, near Palestine IN.

00:00:54

Speaker 1

And what were the names of your parents?

00:00:59

Speaker 2

My father's name was Alfred Drudge and my mother's name was Respa Elizabeth Bowser Drudge.

00:01:09

Speaker 1

Did you have or do you have any brothers and sisters?

00:01:13

Speaker 2

Yes, I have one brother, a doctor, Jay, Harold Drudge, of Lexington, KY.

00:01:19

Speaker 2

I have one sister Darland in Mishawaka. IN another sister Donna in South Bend IN and a sister in Bremen, IN by the name of Mary.

00:01:34

Speaker 1

When you were growing up, what were?

00:01:35

Speaker 1

Your parents principal occupations.

00:01:39

Speaker 2

My father was a Doctor of veterinary medicine here in Bremen IN and my mother was a housewife.

00:01:48

Speaker 1

Where did you attend to? Elementary and then high school?

00:01:53

Speaker 2

I attended all 12 years of my schooling in the Bremen public schools.

00:01:59

Speaker 1

How old were you, Mr. Drudge? When you moved to here? To Bremen?

00:02:04

Speaker 2

I was about a year and a half old when I moved here in Bremen in 1921.

00:02:12

Speaker 1

And when you were in?

00:02:13

Speaker 1

High school.

00:02:14

Speaker 1

What sports and other extracurricular activities?

00:02:17

Speaker 1

Were you involved in?

00:02:19

Speaker 2

I was a four letter sports athletic athlete at Bremen High School in all sports basketball, baseball.

00:02:32

Speaker 2

Softball.

00:02:39

Speaker 1

Did you major in any particular field of study at the Bremen High School or was it a general type course?

00:02:46

Speaker 2

I principally took a course preparatory to entering a medical school.

00:02:55

Speaker 2

But.

00:02:57

Speaker 2

Upon graduation, I entered the post office at Bremen and remained there for 37 years.

00:03:04

Speaker 1

There was a tragedy that happened to your family when your father died fairly young. What year was it that he?

00:03:10

Speaker 2

Died and my father unexpectedly died with a massive heart attack on December 29th, 1939.

00:03:20

Speaker 1

Did his.

00:03:21

Speaker 2

At the age of 42.

00:03:24

Speaker 1

Did his death.

00:03:26

Speaker 1

Caused you to rethink about going to medical school. The fact that he died and.

00:03:32

Speaker 1

There wouldn't be any money available for you to go on to get your college.

00:03:36

Speaker 2

Education. No, that my father's death had no bearing on on what my future would be as a like I said before, I I evidently liked my job in the post Office department because I worked there for 37.

00:03:51

Speaker 2

Years.

00:03:53

Speaker 1

And before you were actually drafted into military service, you'd worked at the post Office Department. Then you did you did get married. Then I guess the same year your father passed away, June 30th, 1939 here in Bremen, IN what was your wife's full maiden name?

00:04:04

Speaker 2

Right.

00:04:11

Speaker 2

My wifes full maiden name was Virginia Lorraine Gunderman judge.

00:04:19

Speaker 1

How would you spell her? Her last name? The her maiden name? Last name?

00:04:23

Speaker 2

GUNTERMAN.

00:04:26

Speaker

OK.

00:04:27

Speaker 1

And you subsequently had two daughters. And what are their names?

00:04:33

Speaker 2

My oldest daughter is Anne Kay Scott.

00:04:38

Speaker 2

She lives in, in, in the in my in my home that where I raised my family.

00:04:46

Speaker 2

And my youngest daughter is Joe Lynn Drudge. She never married and she is now and has been for.

00:04:56

Speaker 2

Some 20 years of school librarian at the present time, she's at the librarian at Rome City IN.

00:05:05

Speaker 1

Do you have any grandchildren?

00:05:07

Speaker 2

I have two granddaughters, one living in Indianapolis and one in Thorntown IN.

00:05:15

Speaker 2

And I have 5.

00:05:20

Speaker 2

Great grandchildren.

00:05:25

Speaker 2

Living.

00:05:28

Speaker 2

Three of them.

00:05:29

Speaker 2

No, excuse me.

00:05:31

Speaker 2

I got. I've got.

00:05:34

Speaker 2

33 great grandchildren in Indianapolis and one in in Thorntown from my first marriage.

00:05:42

Speaker 2

And have about 5 or 6 great grandchildren from my present wife.

00:05:50

Speaker 1

While we're about it, Mr. Judge, maybe we can go ahead and mention your second wife's name. That whom you married a few years after your first wife's death. She died in, as you said in 1971 is.

00:06:03

Speaker 1

That correct, Sir.

00:06:03

Speaker 2

Right. And and and my present wife I married in in 1981 and her maiden name was Catherine Sparrow.

00:06:15

Speaker 2

And her first husband's name was Heckman. So when I married her, her name was Heckman.

00:06:20

Speaker

I see.

00:06:23

Speaker 1

And you married her. That in Noblesville IN on July 10th, 1981. Second one. And you were married by the chaplain of the VFW.

00:06:29

Speaker 2

Right, right. That's right.

00:06:33

Speaker 2

Past national chaplain Earl V Best of the VFW.

00:06:42

Speaker 1

You continue to work in the post Office department as the war started and you, your first daughter had already been born.

00:06:50

Speaker 1

You were drafted into service. A lot of people think that that gives you an automatic deferment, but it didn't, even though you worked at the post office.

00:06:56

Speaker 1

Departments.

00:06:57

Speaker 1

Of federal position. You were still called up. Was there any reason why they would take a federal employee and go ahead and draft them in the service you're already working for the post Office department.

00:07:09

Speaker 2

No, I I think at the time I was drafted, they needed men, period. And so consequently I was.

00:07:18

Speaker 2

There, there were some that were that were drafted into the service that had many more dependants than I had. In fact, I knew of one that had 11.

00:07:28

Speaker 1

And that made no difference, they.

00:07:29

Speaker 1

Took you into service.

00:07:29

Speaker 2

That didn't make no difference, right?

00:07:31

Speaker 1

And was your younger brother ****, was he also drafted into service?

00:07:38

Speaker 2

Yes, that's right. Out of high school he was and he was, incidentally, was a star athlete in our high school, and he was drafted right out of high school.

00:07:48

Speaker 1

As you mentioned, very tragically he was killed by a sniper.

00:07:52

Speaker 2

He took his basic training at Camp Fannin, Texas.

00:07:57

Speaker 2

And was upon completion of that, he was shipped to the Pacific Theater of Operations.

00:08:04

Speaker 2

And right after a river crossing in.

00:08:08

Speaker 2

In the Philippines, men an hour.

00:08:12

Speaker 2

He.

00:08:13

Speaker 2

Sat on the side of the river bank and sniper shot him directly through the heart, killed him instantly.

00:08:20

Speaker 2

And nine days after his 19th birthday, this he was killed on May the 15th, 1945.

00:08:30

Speaker 1

And right after the end of the war in Europe in the day.

00:08:32

Speaker 2

Yes, the war ended in Europe on May the 8th, and and I received a letter from my first wife.

00:08:41

Speaker 2

It happened to be the second letter that she had written regarding the tragedy. I knew something terrible had happened to my brother and wasn't, but about 3 or 4 days later that I got the 1st letter definitely telling me that my brother had been killed in action.

00:08:58

Speaker

Terrible.

00:09:01

Speaker 1

You were called up and were entered onto active duty yourself on April 11th, 1944, and I suppose you went through Fort Benjamin Harrison for processing.

00:09:07

Speaker 2

That's correct.

00:09:12

Speaker 2

Went to Fort Benjamin Harrison.

00:09:16

Speaker 2

To Fort Benjamin Harrison and was inducted there and then I was sent to Camp Wheeler, Georgia for my basic training.

00:09:24

Speaker 2

And that was 13 weeks of training and it was very, very stiff training.

00:09:31

Speaker 2

And I remember the cadry telling us men that.

00:09:36

Speaker 2

Take this training seriously, because you could be in combat within the next three or four months.

00:09:41

Speaker 2

Well, thank God I took that seriously because I wouldn't be here today if I had not taken it seriously.

00:09:49

Speaker 2

There was a couple of mysteries in in my service that.

00:09:53

Speaker 2

I still don't have the answers. When I completed my basic training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia.

00:10:00

Speaker 2

My company did there all of them, but about 12 of them. Twelve of us men.

00:10:06

Speaker 2

12 or 15 were sent home on furlough and then sent to Fort Ord, California, for deployment to the Pacific area of operation, and why I was one of the 12 or 15. I have no idea.

00:10:23

Speaker

Yeah.

00:10:24

Speaker 2

But then I was sent to Camp Pickett, Virginia.

00:10:30

Speaker 2

And.

00:10:32

Speaker 2

There it was. It was kind of a rough situation there.

00:10:36

Speaker 2

We had a shaved tail, in other words, the second Louie.

00:10:40

Speaker 2

That was, I'll use just the word checking.

00:10:44

Speaker 2

Uh.

00:10:45

Speaker 2

Give us a rough time, but anyway, after spending six weeks or so there I was sent home on furlough with the possibility of going on overseas and after 10 days furlough at home, they I was sent to Fort Meade, MD, for processing for overseas service.

00:11:06

Speaker 2

And I shipped out of Camp Shanks, New York.

00:11:11

Speaker 2

On.

00:11:15

Speaker 2

1st of November 44.

00:11:19

Speaker 2

And.

00:11:21

Speaker 2

We took the.

00:11:24

Speaker 2

And we took the we shipped out on Francis Francis's largest luxury liner, the elder France.

00:11:33

Speaker 2

And it was manned by the British.

00:11:36

Speaker 2

And how well I know this, because at 3:00 in the afternoon you had tea.

00:11:41

Speaker 2

But that's just a humorous part of it. But we took the route the North Atlantic route, and it was between 12 and 15,000 of us on this ship.

00:11:52

Speaker 2

And that Atlantic was just lousy with German submarines. And we zigzagged across the.

00:11:58

Speaker 2

There.

00:11:59

Speaker 2

And on the 9th of November of 44, we landed in Greenwich, Scotland, which is just right outside of Glasgow.

00:12:09

Speaker 2

And we hardly got off board. But a short period of time and they load us on trains and we headed South, passed through Scotland down into England all the way down to Southampton and we boarded the ships there for a shipment over to France.

00:12:31

Speaker 2

And I remember all all night being on on board this ship and.

00:12:39

Speaker 2

And British or German bombers coming over and and dropping eggs all around us.

00:12:47

Speaker 2

But finally the the under darkness the next morning we sailed for Lahore, France. And that's where I landed in in Europe.

00:12:56

Speaker 2

And and from that point on.

00:13:01

Speaker 2

We were.

00:13:04

Speaker 2

Classified somewhere and I was sent to.

00:13:09

Speaker 2

To the 80th Division, which at that time was at Saint of Old France, and at that time when they were the 80th Division was kind of on a hold for further action.

00:13:23

Speaker 2

And.

00:13:25

Speaker 2

I was assigned to company A of the three 17th Infantry.

00:13:29

Speaker 2

And on about the 14th or 15th of December.

00:13:34

Speaker 2

They load us in two and a half ton trucks.

00:13:36

Speaker 2

That was a.

00:13:38

Speaker 2

They alert us in the middle of the night.

00:13:40

Speaker 2

And they load us on these two and a half ton trucks and we headed north.

00:13:45

Speaker 2

I had no idea where we was going. It was all seemed to be a a secret thing and we ended up in in Luxembourg City and I remember that first night up there.

00:13:59

Speaker 2

I slept on the floor of a church.

00:14:02

Speaker 2

And the next day we got up.

00:14:04

Speaker 2

And then they load us back on the trucks and we went just north of the city and finally just dumped us.

00:14:09

Speaker 2

Out.

00:14:11

Speaker 2

And slow, but at least knee deep.

00:14:14

Speaker 2

And boy, there was uh.

00:14:17

Speaker 2

Tanks coming back through 4th Armored and I remember the 4th armored in particular and some of those guys on there. They said boys, it's hell up there. And so that was the beginning of my service in the Battle of the Bulge.

00:14:33

Speaker 2

And.

00:14:35

Speaker 2

So.

00:14:38

Speaker 2

I I really don't know how we even survived the the elements to start with, but we got up in there and and I.

00:14:46

Speaker 2

And.

00:14:47

Speaker 2

One action I remember so well that I'll never forget.

00:14:51

Speaker 2

On Christmas Day of 1944.

00:14:55

Speaker 2

My company a.

00:14:57

Speaker 2

And I'm not too sure whether it was Company B, but I kind of think it was.

00:15:02

Speaker 2

We jumped off at daylight or before daylight on on the 25th December 1944 Christmas morning.

00:15:11

Speaker 2

And when our objective was to take a tour with the name of Cayman Keeman KEHMEN, it was on the Belgium Luxembourg border. Now I'm not too sure where this town was in Luxembourg or what it was in Belgium.

00:15:25

Speaker 2

But that's incidental. That that doesn't make any difference. I remember going up, we started up and there was a a crooked two track.

00:15:35

Speaker 2

Lane like or Rd. like, leading up this this long great hill and I'm sure this hill was at least.

00:15:44

Speaker 2

At least a mile to to to the Crest.

00:15:47

Speaker 2

And we got just about a fourth the way up that road.

00:15:52

Speaker 2

And all hell broke loose. They the the Germans were waiting for us. I found out later that they had a whole regiment of Germans in in this town of Cayman.

00:16:02

Speaker 2

And and they had that that road zeroed in. It didn't take me long to figure out that that wasn't the place to be.

00:16:08

Speaker 2

But us boys and empry our our first thought was was cover one once you're fired upon you hit the ground and find cover. And so naturally, everybody hit that hedge Rd. that followed this.

00:16:23

Speaker 2

This trailer, or lane like Rd. up up the hill and it didn't take me long to figure out that this is no place to be, that you'd be better off out in the open. And so I I got out in the open and I guess I got lucky because.

00:16:40

Speaker 2

I don't know how many foxholes I dug that day or tried to dig them.

00:16:44

Speaker 2

And I, and I'll never forget one thing that the the the, the ground was about half frozen. And then even I had one of these air folding shovel like trench shovels that I carried on the back of my belt.

00:17:01

Speaker 2

And when I go to dig a hole that was this year slate like you find in a in a.

00:17:06

Speaker 2

In a school.

00:17:08

Speaker 2

Blackboard and that slate would be broken up in pieces and be running every direction every once you when you try to put your spade into it.

00:17:16

Speaker 2

It you you had to dig most of it out with.

00:17:19

Speaker 2

Your.

00:17:19

Speaker 2

Hands and I must have dug 5 or 6 foxholes at that day. And finally that night I'll never forget it. I I dug my last foxhole and it was getting just about dusk.

00:17:31

Speaker 2

And his shadow come up in front of me and said, soldier, I'm taking your your foxhole. And I said the hell you are.

00:17:40

Speaker 2

I said you're not going to take us and he says, soldier, he said. I'm captain so and so from company C We're we're leaving you well, I said then. That's a different.

00:17:49

Speaker 2

So then.

00:17:51

Speaker 2

We come out and retreated back down this hill and got back to a kind of a Chateau. There was a like a farm buildings and.

00:18:02

Speaker 2

It was just wonderful to be able to crawl in this, this barn and and crawl into the hay and the next morning I'll never forget this, that Captain Woodside.

00:18:14

Speaker 2

James Woodside.

00:18:16

Speaker 2

He came to.

00:18:16

Speaker 2

Me and he said he said. Sarge, he says I'm sorry.

00:18:21

Speaker 2

That we lost all those men. We lost half of our men and I was the only one left in my squad. And I said, captain, it wasn't your fault. You had your orders.

00:18:31

Speaker 2

And there's nothing more that you.

00:18:32

Speaker 2

We do.

00:18:34

Speaker 2

And so.

00:18:35

Speaker 2

We had our Christmas Day dinner on the 26th and then we were being shelled. Even then they were shelves going over the top of this. These, this, these buildings.

00:18:46

Speaker 2

And.

00:18:48

Speaker 2

So that's the worst day of that I've lived in in my lifetime.

00:18:52

Speaker 2

What did you have for Christmas dinner that day? We had all the trimmings. You did. It makes you wonder. You know, there were times there were times during the Battle of the Bulge.

00:19:02

Speaker 2

That we.

00:19:06

Speaker 2

Had no no.

00:19:06

Speaker 2

Food other than than care rations that we carried on our back and and I I could eat the breakfast unit. That's about the only one I could I could eat. It was a ham and eggs and and a can and others. Crackers and and.

00:19:23

Speaker 2

And stuff like that in there with that. And I think a fig bar or something on the end or a chocolate bar or something.

00:19:30

Speaker 2

And.

00:19:32

Speaker 2

About once, maybe once a week, our kitchen would catch up with us. And you. You never went during the day. You you always went under under night cover of night.

00:19:44

Speaker 2

Even even in the mornings, usually we usually we went in the morning if we if we got anything to eat at all, they'd have the kitchen set up, cart Sergeant Rizzo, I don't know how he got his crew there to even even do it, but I want to tell you that that the warm oatmeal and.

00:20:05

Speaker 2

Concentrated milk.

00:20:08

Speaker 2

Tasted awful good.

00:20:11

Speaker 2

Back then when when all you had was K rations deed, it was it. It was it. Like I say it, I don't know how.

00:20:18

Speaker 2

We lived through just the environment alone, let on being shot at, bombed and whatnot.

00:20:25

Speaker 2

And then finally after.

00:20:28

Speaker 2

It seems as though the capture of of Bastone then was that was the turning point for us and then then when we came down to to in pursuit of the Germans and I came down.

00:20:40

Speaker 2

Through.

00:20:42

Speaker 2

I remember some of the towns Kaiserslautern and some of them and we got down to mains France, it's across the river from from Wiesbaden, Germany and that's where we were scheduled across the rain.

00:20:56

Speaker 2

And I'll never forget, I don't know whether this.

00:21:01

Speaker 2

This message from General Patton came over a one of these portable PA systems. Or what?

00:21:09

Speaker 2

But he said.

00:21:11

Speaker 2

You soldiers, he said. We're going to cross that GD river if it takes a box car full of dog tags.

00:21:20

Speaker 2

And I want to tell you, I thought it was going to take that many because I don't know. We we crossed on in barges, it was between I'd say between 15 and and 25.

00:21:31

Speaker 2

Of us in each one of these landing barges that crossed the river, and with all of our equipment and everything and some of them didn't make it, they had direct hits right in the middle of the right, in the middle of of the Rhine River, with a mortar or or an 88 and.

00:21:49

Speaker 2

I don't recall, just I think it was after that then that we had to really had the Germans on on the run. We were anything we could crawl on to, to ride or whatever. We took off and I think it was up around Castle or someplace up in there on the on the 14th of March 45.

00:22:10

Speaker 2

We were going up through a wooded area and we got at the top of the hill.

00:22:16

Speaker 2

They got at the top of the hill and someone hollered, tanks and all the all you got to do is have somebody holler. Tanks when we're in the infantry and I mean.

00:22:24

Speaker 2

It's just like a bunch of Gophers.

00:22:26

Speaker 2

And we took off and down back down in the wooded area, and these tiger tanks started firing. 88 direct fire right up, right up through the the Pine Forest. And I remember laying on my stomach and down in the roots of one of these pine trees.

00:22:44

Speaker 2

And I shall hit up above me and I got a piece of shrapnel in my right arm.

00:22:49

Speaker 2

And that's the only wound I received all during the war. Thank God that's that's all all that's happened to me.

00:22:56

Speaker 2

But after that, then that was a I had over Surf Germany and and I think it was up around I'm I'm not even sure that I think it was around Castle I think.

00:22:58

Speaker

Yeah.

00:23:01

Speaker

Open. Jerk.

00:23:08

Speaker 2

The town of Castle and then and then we from there.

00:23:13

Speaker 2

We kept heading east and.

00:23:17

Speaker 2

And that's and that's when we came.

00:23:23

Speaker 2

We came to castle and then we came across.

00:23:31

Speaker 1

Is that Weimer?

00:23:32

Speaker 2

Yeah, effort and.

00:23:33

Speaker 2

I remember I remember outside of Erford, Hereford is is is where I was awarded the Silver Star for.

00:23:41

Speaker 2

For gallantry inaction by.

00:23:44

Speaker

Uh.

00:23:46

Speaker 2

Just on the outskirts of of effort.

00:23:50

Speaker 2

It was just. It was.

00:23:52

Speaker 2

It wasn't day break yet and we was going down this road going leading in into this small town. It was a suburb of of Erfurt. Erfurt is a pretty good sized place.

00:24:02

Speaker 2

And all of a sudden it was the same old story. Someone hollered tank.

00:24:08

Speaker 2

And I know I went off the right side.

00:24:10

Speaker 2

Of the road.

00:24:11

Speaker 2

And it was an orchard there.

00:24:14

Speaker 2

And I didn't realize it till I heard a motor start up and here I was laying within about.

00:24:20

Speaker 2

Oh, maybe 100 feet of a tiger tank.

00:24:24

Speaker 2

I said, boy, there's no place for me. And so I took off. I crossed the road, but when I got to the.

00:24:29

Speaker 2

Rd.

00:24:30

Speaker 2

There was a weapon carrier there and there was a machine gun and, well, several.

00:24:39

Speaker 2

Boxes of ammunition and stuff. So I said to to two other guys there. I said grab some of that ammunition.

00:24:45

Speaker 2

And I rushed down and the on on the on the left hand side of the road, there was a kind of a a, a ditch. There was no water in it, but it was, it was like.

00:24:53

Speaker 2

A canal.

00:24:54

Speaker 2

Like and I set that machine gun up on the on the top of that bank.

00:25:00

Speaker 2

And started loading it with ammunition and I and and.

00:25:05

Speaker 2

You you could just. You could see you could see the soldiers, the Germans coming. And I just, I sprayed it and that's how I got my silver star for setting up that and at least I I stopped that counter attacked and so that's that's the action where I got my Silver star.

00:25:24

Speaker 1

How many Germans would you?

00:25:25

Speaker 2

Ohh I I have no idea. I have no idea how many I could have, maybe killed. Maybe didn't kill any. I don't know. I I couldn't. I couldn't tell. You know, you just.

00:25:35

Speaker 2

But anyway, I stopped them because of and and not only that, but, but this ditch was full of GI's all the way down. It was full of GI's and and if I wouldn't have been up in that position firing, they would have come down in there. And I don't know. I don't know how many boys we would have lost. I have no idea.

00:25:52

Speaker 1

So it's a desperate situation.

00:25:53

Speaker 2

Well, yeah, it was. It was desperate, yes.

00:25:56

Speaker 1

You had to.

00:25:56

Speaker 2

Do and we had enough of them killed as it was. They they some of them had had got ahead of us.

00:26:03

Speaker 2

And had got into some buildings and I know we found them later. And what happened? The Germans had thrown these potato mashes, which was their grenades, right in the basement windows and and killed our GI's right in the basements. I know because we we found them.

00:26:17

Speaker 2

So and then and this was just just a few days before we got to the buck and oil prison camp. In fact, I think it was the next very next day Erford is very close to Weimer. So I'm assuming it was it was that next day then.

00:26:37

Speaker 1

Booked Waldo is near the Weimer, I think. And then.

00:26:42

Speaker 2

And then limmer and and it's it was close to Wymer. Lima, Gina and Guerra. There's there was three towns right there.

00:26:50

Speaker 2

And and this bucket wall prison camp was was out in in in the country from from those three towns Weimer Gen. Lynn Leimer, Gina and.

00:27:01

Speaker 1

Gara, Jena.

00:27:03

Speaker 2

And GERA.

00:27:04

Speaker 1

ERA garris.

00:27:05

Speaker 2

Right. Yeah. And so.

00:27:09

Speaker 2

We were not the we were not the first units in the Buchan law when we got there, I think it was about the because I understand that the first units went in there early in the morning.

00:27:21

Speaker 2

And by the time we got there.

00:27:25

Speaker 2

We we never, I never fired a shot.

00:27:28

Speaker 2

But my gosh, when when we got to that camp, the the prisoners that were able to.

00:27:33

Speaker 2

To.

00:27:34

Speaker 2

Run or whatever. We're just running wild. They were all completely out of control, and I remember being grabbed and kissed and and mugged. And there was times when I thought I was going to be thrown to the ground. Just they were so jubilant, seeing us come in there, you know?

00:27:55

Speaker 2

And so once things are under control.

00:27:59

Speaker 2

I remember walking down there. There was lines of berries. This this was. This was a big camp. I I've heard later that there was over 30,000 of prisoners in that camp at one time.

00:28:12

Speaker 1

Could you estimate dimensionally how big?

00:28:14

Speaker 1

It was.

00:28:14

Speaker 2

No, I I have no idea. Overall, I don't think we're. I don't think I my unit was in the place over two hours, but I want to assure you that was long enough.

00:28:16

Speaker 1

But it was large.

00:28:25

Speaker 2

Because I I saw one, one thing I saw was these these furnaces or ovens, whatever. Whatever you want to call them. The crematorium? Yes, and.

00:28:35

Speaker 1

Clean material.

00:28:37

Speaker 2

For the sake of me, I can't remember how many there was, but there was.

00:28:42

Speaker 2

A row of them of about. I'm just guessing four or five, maybe. But but they they seem to be built like in a bunker, in, in, in a, A. A little hill like.

00:28:55

Speaker 2

Mounds of dirt and and there was an opening in front and it looked like that opening was about, oh, about 10 feet high.

00:29:04

Speaker 2

And then the you could see the steel door to the to the oven or furnace, whatever.

00:29:10

Speaker 2

Now.

00:29:11

Speaker 2

I don't remember. I I didn't see anybody put in them. I don't know anything about that.

00:29:17

Speaker 2

But the thing that got me when we first went into.

00:29:20

Speaker 2

Camp was the older.

00:29:22

Speaker 2

I can't. I can't find the words to describe that order. There's only one time in my lifetime that I have run into anything that come anywhere near that order. And that's the fertilizer plant down at Plymouth IN.

00:29:37

Speaker 2

Where they use dead animal carcasses.

00:29:41

Speaker 2

To manufacture the fertilizer it is is one of the most horrible, sickening smells that you have ever smelled, so this is an indication to me that they burnt more than just firewood.

00:29:53

Speaker 2

In these furnaces or ovens, whatever you want to call them, but the next thing I did and and this is unbelievable, I went into one of those barracks I just got in the door and.

00:30:05

Speaker 2

That.

00:30:06

Speaker 2

The fumes older just come up there.

00:30:10

Speaker 2

And what I've seen in there, I cannot find words to describe how horrible it was. I walked over to one of the one of the bunks there was, I think 3 bunks high.

00:30:20

Speaker 2

And there was bodies laying in these bunks on on just plain boards. Now there was a few straws around where at one time they they evidently had straw for for used for. Bedding is the only thing I know. And there was bodies laying in there that was nothing but skin and bones.

00:30:38

Speaker 2

And I walked up to this one body.

00:30:40

Speaker 2

And all he had on was a was a shabby pair of pants laying in his own filth.

00:30:47

Speaker 2

He had just a few hairs in his head.

00:30:50

Speaker 2

And I'm not too sure the man could see me. I don't think he could blink his eyes because his eyes were eyeballs were full of dust.

00:30:59

Speaker 2

And you had to look real close. It seemed like it was.

00:31:03

Speaker 2

Minutes, but it was just a matter of seconds you seized his chest, just moved just a little bit up and down and ended to be a pause and up and down. That was the only indication that this person was alive except.

00:31:15

Speaker 2

It looked like he wanted to say something. His lips would quiver.

00:31:20

Speaker 2

And.

00:31:21

Speaker 2

I.

00:31:23

Speaker 2

I just couldn't stay in there.

00:31:25

Speaker 2

I come back out and there was two or three other fellows come out and they screw up their guts. I mean, it was. It was just that horrible.

00:31:34

Speaker 2

But another thing is stuck in my mind so much.

00:31:38

Speaker 2

Is when we were ready to move out of the camp, we got it the other end.

00:31:41

Speaker 2

Of the.

00:31:41

Speaker 2

Camp here was a flat bottom truck bed. It looked like one of these here flat bottom semi truck beds. Like they haul steel in here in in the states.

00:31:56

Speaker 2

I saw a body stacked up on there like cord wood.

00:32:01

Speaker 2

And there was two men up on on there. One would grab their arms and one would grab their their feet and swing them back and forth, clear out into a big.

00:32:11

Speaker 2

Pit.

00:32:13

Speaker 2

Now I don't know who these people were, where.

00:32:15

Speaker 2

They were were.

00:32:17

Speaker 2

Prisoners that were was just doing this to to get rid of the bodies. I have no idea, but I have no idea how many they must have been 100 bodies on that one that I saw.

00:32:31

Speaker 2

And that that was really the story of of, of, of Buck and Wall it. It's something that will live with me forever and ever. I just.

00:32:41

Speaker 2

I just I can't find the words to describe how horrible it was.

00:32:45

Speaker 1

You were there. And would you hear stories from some people today that deny that it ever happened? What do you say to people like that? I.

00:32:52

Speaker 2

Mean I said it at the VFW meeting and then at the joint meeting with the VFW in the Kiwanas just last month.

00:33:00

Speaker 2

I said if there's any of you people out there, any of you have any doubts?

00:33:05

Speaker 2

Of the Holocaust, I said. Get it out of.

00:33:07

Speaker 2

Your.

00:33:07

Speaker 2

Mind, I said I was there. I seen it.

00:33:13

Speaker 2

It happened.

00:33:16

Speaker 2

It happened.

00:33:18

Speaker 2

Well, from the bucket, sure.

00:33:21

Speaker 1

What date do you recall the approximate date of the liberation?

00:33:24

Speaker 2

The only thing I remember is is the middle of the middle of April, right? Right. It it right? It happened to be. It had to be. It had to be.

00:33:32

Speaker 2

Right around the.

00:33:32

Speaker 2

Middle.

00:33:32

Speaker 1

I know what we know the exact date. I think based on other documentary records, but that's close.

00:33:39

Speaker 2

I think.

00:33:41

Speaker 2

It runs in my mind that that it's kind of coincidental, but I think it was on the 11th of April, the day that I was, I was inducted into the service. I was, I was inducted in the service on 11th of April 44 and this happened on on the 11th of April of 45. Now I think that's the right date, but I I'm not sure, but.

00:34:01

Speaker 1

One thing I asked Mr. Clark and I'm talking about Ray Clark, who my previously interviewed was in Company B, that also aided in the liberation of Company B of the 80th Infantry Division, which and you're in a company which also was involved in the liberation of book.

00:34:15

Speaker 1

And wall.

00:34:16

Speaker 1

Did you?

00:34:18

Speaker 1

Have any advance notice or advance warning of the enormity of this thing, or what you were going to be liberating it at the time you got out of Weimar and we're heading towards the camp itself, which as I understand, was out in the country, away from the city of Weimar. Did you have any kind of that? Any officer come up to you say, boys, brace yourself, this is going to be.

00:34:38

Speaker 1

Is there anything like that happen?

00:34:39

Speaker 2

No, we we we had no no idea that we that we we we would even be entering this this camp we we had no we had no idea no advance notice at all.

00:34:50

Speaker 2

And the only the only thing I like. I say my unit wasn't the first unit in there. It couldn't.

00:34:54

Speaker 2

Have.

00:34:55

Speaker 2

Been and and I was told that the s s had taken off.

00:35:00

Speaker 2

Even prior to the initial attack or the the initial unit that went in there and the only.

00:35:12

Speaker 2

Signs of of any kind of a battle or anything. We heard some small arms fire out in the wooded area and I was told that the that this first unit that went in was in pursuit of the s s out there trying to catch up with them. Now I that's the only action I know of.

00:35:29

Speaker 1

There. Did you see any dead German guards?

00:35:31

Speaker 1

On the ground.

00:35:32

Speaker 2

No, I didn't. I didn't see any.

00:35:36

Speaker 2

All I saw was horrible pictures of.

00:35:40

Speaker 2

Tortured are human beings. That's all I see. And I mean it. It was horrible.

00:35:45

Speaker 2

It was horrible.

00:35:48

Speaker 1

Did it give you nightmares after the war or visions?

00:35:51

Speaker 2

Of not not not so much, not so much.

00:35:52

Speaker 1

What? What happened?

00:35:56

Speaker 2

I I.

00:35:58

Speaker 2

Well, I I never talked much about it until I've gotten older and I there's no reason to keep all this to yourself. I mean, you know.

00:36:08

Speaker 2

And then and then I think The thing is that's caused me to.

00:36:11

Speaker 2

To even talk to school groups and and, well, even even our other organizational groups.

00:36:19

Speaker 2

Is.

00:36:20

Speaker 2

The.

00:36:22

Speaker 2

The fact that the.

00:36:24

Speaker 2

We should never let anything like this happen again. Never, never.

00:36:30

Speaker 1

Have you contacted the US Holocaust Museum to make sure that your story had been put on videotape or tape recorded for posterity? I don't know if you've been in contact with them. They're they're seeking out people.

00:36:38

Speaker

No.

00:36:42

Speaker 2

Well, I know, but anything I've said here, you've got my permission to transfer it to them.

00:36:49

Speaker 2

Or or anybody else that could use it, but.

00:36:54

Speaker 2

It is. It's a horrible story.

00:36:59

Speaker 1

Or anything else that you recall that day. Did any of the.

00:37:04

Speaker 1

The people in the concentration camp did any one of them try to talk to.

00:37:08

Speaker 2

You in English. Now. That's. No, no, no. You couldn't understand any of them.

00:37:15

Speaker 2

I didn't run into one person could speak English in there as far as the prisoner and I were told I was told that the majority of these, these prisoners, right at that time were Polish.

00:37:24

Speaker 2

Polish prisoners.

00:37:26

Speaker 2

And other than that, I don't they they really didn't have to speak to let you know how, how, how.

00:37:35

Speaker 2

How glad they were, how thankful they were that the Americans showed up to liberate them. But it's.

00:37:44

Speaker 2

It's it's, it's, it's something that's it's unbelievable that it could ever happen.

00:37:51

Speaker 2

But the thing probably.

00:37:53

Speaker 2

Still sickly, mostly as that odor coming from there. I.

00:37:57

Speaker 2

And like I say, you know, no, I don't know. I didn't see no gas chambers in there. Now they, they this is a big place. I don't know how many rolls of these wooden barracks there was.

00:38:08

Speaker 2

But I I didn't see no gas chambers. But I'll tell you one thing. The people I saw laying in those barracks.

00:38:14

Speaker 2

Would have been a lot better off if they'd have been gassed on day one and taken all their misery rather than have to go through this terrible torture that they went.

00:38:22

Speaker 2

Through.

00:38:24

Speaker 1

And many of that you saw there, they probably subsequently died then.

00:38:27

Speaker 2

Oh, absolutely. I tell you about this one man laying there. He was naked from his waist up. He didn't have no shoes.

00:38:36

Speaker 2

And I I don't believe a man could see because it was just like dust in his eyes. I don't think he closed his eyes even.

00:38:44

Speaker 2

The only movement I see him, I see his lips kind of quiver like he like he was trying to.

00:38:48

Speaker

Talk.

00:38:50

Speaker 2

And then, like I say, his breast about every soft in his chest. But you just see a little raise and lowering, and it seemed like it was quite a pause and then up and down and all it was. I I just can't.

00:39:04

Speaker 2

His hair was gone, he laying in his own filth. So you can imagine you ordered. This is just one you got as far as you could see down through this barracks of it. Just hundreds and hundreds of people.

00:39:13

Speaker 2

Well, land knows, but I couldn't stand.

00:39:15

Speaker 1

It did. You see, women and children also.

00:39:18

Speaker 2

I couldn't. I now that's another thing you couldn't hardly distinguish whether it was a a man or a teenage boy or or or even a small kid, really.

00:39:31

Speaker 2

And I'm not too sure they might have been women in there. I don't know. I I really don't know.

00:39:37

Speaker 2

But it it the older and and just the sight of things was just so sickening. Like I say something I didn't. I didn't throw up but but a couple of the other guys, they just got outside and they just.

00:39:49

Speaker 2

Let it all out. I mean it just.

00:39:52

Speaker 1

Imagine you were relieved to say the least when the order came to leave the.

00:39:56

Speaker 2

Camp I couldn't wait to get out of there, but like I say then then to to top the whole thing off, seeing these bodies, laying there on that flat bottom trailer bed just like.

00:39:58

Speaker

Right.

00:40:09

Speaker 2

You'd put cord wood on there.

00:40:12

Speaker 2

Hundreds of them. I I don't. I don't know how many was on that. Wait. It's a big like a semi trailer bed and you could stack a lot of bites and especially no bigger. Those bodies were all it was was just, you know, skin and bones.

00:40:26

Speaker 2

But then.

00:40:28

Speaker 2

I don't know. We left there then and continued on.

00:40:32

Speaker 2

And.

00:40:33

Speaker 2

I finally we finally ended up down. We crossed the into the Austrian border.

00:40:40

Speaker 2

And down close to the Inns River.

00:40:44

Speaker 2

And there's where we met the Russians.

00:40:47

Speaker 2

And I remember being there a few days and we.

00:40:52

Speaker 2

The Russians was on one side of the river and we were on.

00:40:55

Speaker 2

The.

00:40:55

Speaker 2

Other side and I mean we run a river patrol on the one side and and we run it by horseback.

00:41:05

Speaker 2

And I'm not much of A horseman. And I I was sort of off a horse one night about midnight.

00:41:11

Speaker 2

Into a mud puddle and the horse stayed there luckily, and I get up and crawl back on her and find out the next day. The reason I was throwing off the horse was blind and it stepped into this hole so I couldn't blame the horse too much, but but that that some of these things are humorous things, but not it wasn't so funny either.

00:41:30

Speaker 1

At the time, at any rate.

00:41:31

Speaker 2

The time and.

00:41:33

Speaker 2

Then like I say.

00:41:36

Speaker 2

When when the war ended, then and then they they sent us down into Bavaria, Germany, down around Garmisch Partenkirchen and there we was starting maneuvers.

00:41:50

Speaker 2

Because we were going to be.

00:41:52

Speaker 2

Sent to the Pacific eventually.

00:41:54

Speaker 2

And General Patton came down and.

00:41:57

Speaker 2

And reviewed our our maneuvers down there.

00:42:01

Speaker 2

Here and another one of the mysteries in my service. The first one was is why I was held out down at Camp Wheeler and not sent to the Pacific.

00:42:11

Speaker 2

And 12 or 15. The other mystery in in in my service was.

00:42:16

Speaker 2

During these maneuver days, I think it was about the last of July at 45, the company runner came down one day and he says that judge your wanted up at the company office. So I went up to the office.

00:42:31

Speaker 2

And here there was a.

00:42:34

Speaker 2

Runner's messenger from the regimental headquarters came down and said would would you like to go on special duty up with regiment?

00:42:43

Speaker 2

I said, what do you mean? He said. Well, he.

00:42:45

Speaker 2

Said.

00:42:47

Speaker 2

We need somebody like you up there and I thought somebody like me, you know?

00:42:51

Speaker 2

And I said, well, I said, I don't know. I hate to leave my company, you know, and my own men.

00:42:56

Speaker 2

And.

00:42:56

Speaker 2

He said well, he said, why don't you come up and and try us for a while and.

00:43:02

Speaker 2

And if you like it, OK, if you don't why you can going back with your company.

00:43:08

Speaker 2

And evidently and and to this day, I have no idea.

00:43:12

Speaker 2

Who recommended me to go up to Reginald headquarters.

00:43:17

Speaker 2

But I went up there and I on special duty I.

00:43:20

Speaker 2

You, you you won't believe this, but my first duty was to gather data from from the various company medics or sick call office or whatever.

00:43:33

Speaker 2

On their BD's.

00:43:35

Speaker 2

Venereal disease.

00:43:37

Speaker 2

And every day I can remember calling.

00:43:41

Speaker 2

Major bone at the division headquarters and giving him the the Daily DVD report. How many? How many men were brought in with venereal disease and how many was discharged? And but that was my one of my first duties, you know? And I thought I got. What am I doing this up here, you know? But I got the liking.

00:43:59

Speaker 2

It and so finally.

00:44:02

Speaker 2

I was. I even put in charge of the of the.

00:44:06

Speaker 2

Yours.

00:44:07

Speaker 2

At that time, we had the three tours. One went to the UK.

00:44:12

Speaker 2

12 men and and and an officer would be in charge of the 12 men and going on this tour to the UK or down to Riviera.

00:44:21

Speaker 1

Will the UK be the United Kingdom or as our?

00:44:22

Speaker 2

Yeah, UK, United Kingdom or down to Riviera? Yeah. Boy, this is that hour to Switzerland. There was three different tours.

00:44:32

Speaker 2

So I would make arrangements, you know, for to get these people off to these various tours, so that. And then finally, I got into the to the whole operation.

00:44:44

Speaker 2

Of the of the of the regiment. And you're talking about better than 3000 men.

00:44:51

Speaker 2

And I finally came to me. Maybe why I was being set up for this.

00:44:58

Speaker 2

Uh.

00:44:59

Speaker 2

That's when the the point system, when they started sending people back to the states on the point system.

00:45:04

Speaker 2

Well, the regimental Sergeant major at that time, Sergeant palettes.

00:45:10

Speaker 2

Oh, he had over 100 points, so he was eligible to leave.

00:45:14

Speaker 1

How would you spell his name, Sir? Remember Alexis?

00:45:18

Speaker 2

I can. I can get. I can get it for you. OK, I'll. I'll give you his name and address in a little bit. Not his address, but I can give you his name.

00:45:27

Speaker 2

And then.

00:45:32

Speaker 2

It wasn't too long after that till and then Sergeant.

00:45:39

Speaker 2

Godec.

00:45:41

Speaker 2

Was made regimental Sergeant Major.

00:45:44

Speaker 2

And incidentally, the the regimental adjutant.

00:45:48

Speaker 2

Actually runs a regiment and one of another one of.

00:45:52

Speaker 2

Between him and Captain, Woodside is 2 of.

00:45:55

Speaker 2

The.

00:45:55

Speaker 2

Greatest officers I ever knew. Emerson Jones.

00:45:59

Speaker 2

And he he was a wonderful fellow.

00:46:04

Speaker 2

And it was while I was up there, regiment, incidentally.

00:46:08

Speaker 2

My brother, that's a he's a he's a renowned animal pathologist at the University of Kentucky. Now he was he was with the Veterinary Corps, but he was.

00:46:21

Speaker 2

Within the army, and was a stationed at Frankfurt, Germany.

00:46:25

Speaker 2

And orders came through that we had one of our men that went a wall during during the the action during the war and was being held at the disciplinary barracks.

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