

Taped Interview

Cincinnati 2008

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Arthur R. Currin, E Co. 410<sup>th</sup>

[Mr. Currin brought a scrapbook with him and he told his remembrances as we looked through the scrapbook. The scrapbook contained cards; pictures etc. that he sent home to his wife during the war as well as mementos from trips back to WWII sites. He had a picture taken just after the war in Traunstein, Germany, near Munich.] I sent some things home to my wife, Marie, and she kept them. If she hadn't I wouldn't have these memories. I sent a "Happy Easter" card from France. This is a picture of my Company, Second Battalion E Company taken in Heidelberg, Germany. It was taken the same week that President Roosevelt died. We were held back for about a week in the city of Heidelberg which was taken without much resistance. Then we moved on again and never stopped moving until we got through Austria. It just happened that we got the word that President Roosevelt died. I remember that was my first experience with the German people. We ran into a lady the week that President Roosevelt died who evidently was a member of the Nazi Party. She seemed to be overjoyed that the President had died. We had to explain to her that his

death didn't change anything. We were billeted in a home that had some ordinary German people that were not party members. We could see the contrast between the two: the lady that was the Nazi official and the ordinary people. Here is a little item that was handed to me and I guess to a lot of 7<sup>th</sup> Army soldiers. It is titled "Foxhole Russian". It didn't mean a lot to me because I could not pronounce it. But I kept it in case we might run into Russian soldiers. This card contained greetings and questions in both English and Russian. Here is a picture of two of my buddies and myself at the Brenner Pass, which was the Italian-Austria border in 1945 at the end of the war. Frank Dixon is in this picture. He is from my hometown. He is no longer with us. This is a clipping from the *Beachhead News* (a newspaper published overseas) depicting the Division going into Innsbruck, Austria in 1945. This is a postcard of the "Tall Man of Obermoden." I bought this card from Georges Kieffer as my Company passed through his home town of Obermoden, France (on foot) headed for the Rhine River. He was riding a bicycle and pedaling postcards. This was a prewar postcard. He was rather ragged that day. He didn't look like this. I bought this postcard from him and he signed his name on the back. He was eight feet, six inches tall. These are two boys (Marian Cutts and Frank Dixon) who are from my hometown. This truck is a wood burner. The Germans had a way of

converting vehicles. They had a stoker they built on the backend where the fire was. They would covert the wood or wood chips into gas. It ran through the carburetor. The few German families that had vehicles had taken their trunk lid off the back and had a stoker in the back. They did this because they could not get fuel. The gas was made as they drove along and it would run through the carburetor. Of course they would have to stop and take out the old wood and re-stoke it. The marker I am leaning against in this picture is on the Inn River in Innsbruck. I have been back on several trips and it is not there any longer. After the war was over they issued us ration cards for the PX. (This is my Postwar Ration Card). This is what my squad looked like at the end of the war. There are nine of us in that picture. A squad was originally twelve men but most squads operated with far less than twelve men during the war. When the war was over we were a few days in Innsbruck, Austria. Then they moved my Company out into the mountains out from Innsbruck to a little town in the Austrian Tyrol that had a big hunting lodge complex. There were about seven building in this old hunting lodge that dated back to the sixteen hundreds (1600s). We were there for awhile. In one of these rooms, Von Ribbentrop, the German general, stored his “war loot”. He had stolen it as he went across Europe. It was all moved out and gotten back to the right place. Von Ribbentrop was

one of the men that were on trial later at Nuremberg. After the war, while I was still over there, I had the opportunity to go to Nuremberg. I had a ticket to go to two sessions of the Nuremberg trials. I was always glad I took advantage of that. That was a short time after the war was over. I got a chance to see Goring, Hess, Von Ribbentrop and others. At the trial they had a section for the public. Each seat had a headset. You could dial the language you wanted. They would bring in the defendants twice a day. They would be seated right in front of you in two rows. They would be facing the bar which had the four judges; American, English, French and Russian. They had a battery of prosecutors and a battery of interpreters. It was easy to handle because of the headset. I attended the morning session and the afternoon session. Tickets were hard to get. I was always glad that I took advantage of the opportunity to see the trial. After the war was over I got out of the rifle company and into the motor pool. I drove a jeep that pulled two trailers. At a certain time I was transferred from the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division to 9<sup>th</sup> Division. Some of us were transferred to other divisions. The 103<sup>rd</sup> came home. Some of us did not have enough points to come home so we were transferred to other units. I was transferred to the 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division. Some of the men went to the 45<sup>th</sup> Division; some went to the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. This is a picture of a Nineteen Thirties Model

Mercedes Benz Limousine. It was confiscated and put in the motor pool with our jeeps. It was a diesel burning vehicle. It had evidently been an old taxi cab. It had sliding glass behind the front seat. When I first got into the 9<sup>th</sup> Division we were down in the high country. You see in these pictures that we had horses in the motor pool. We had a young Polish boy who looked after our horses. We rode these horses out to the high mountain posts for guard duty right at the end of the war. I thought that was unusual. I came from the farm so I was comfortable on a horse. I am still on the farm. In this picture, taken at the end of the war, I am with my two buddies. This is a picture of German soldiers cutting wood with American soldiers as guards right at the end of the war. This is a picture of the Konigssee Lake (meaning: “kings lake”) down by Berchtesgaden. Again, these are prewar postcards that I sent home. The 103<sup>rd</sup> had a Protestant service and a Catholic service in Innsbruck, Austria at the end of the war on Memorial Day, May 30<sup>th</sup>. This is a printed program of these services.

These are prewar postcards from Hitler’s bombed out home at the Berghoff overlooking Berchtesgaden that I found and sent home. The foundation of the home can be seen today. I found them while we were occupying the area. Only the foundation is there now. But this was Hitler’s home called the “Eagles’ Nest”. “The Eagles’ Nest” was high up on the

mountain. The dining hall was nearby. The Third Division fixed the dining hall up and was using it. They were occupying the Berchtesgaden area and my unit was nearby.

My parents knew we all had to do our duty. My oldest brother went in the service first. He was in the Navy. My second oldest brother joined next and ended up in the combat engineers. He was involved in the Battle of the Bulge. He came back home. So, three of us were in the service. We were raised on a tobacco farm and we also ran a big country store. That was a great experience.

These are postwar pictures of the Kern family from the Moder River Valley in France; a mother, father and two girls. They are visiting in our home. We had visited in their home. We still stay in touch. We met them on a visit in 1989 when a total of about 150 103<sup>rd</sup> Division veterans and wives visited Pfaffehoffen and the Moder River Valley. We met them then and we have stayed in touch ever since. We have been back as a group of veterans to Alsace and the Moder River Valley five times. The last trip was in 2001 and our son and daughter-in-law went with us. We took these pictures of the official marker at the Brenner Pass between Italy and Austria. Just below this point the 103<sup>rd</sup> met up with the 5<sup>th</sup> Army coming up through Italy on May 4<sup>th</sup> 1945. I got a chance to take my son and daughter-in-law

over some of the territory and back down to the Brenner Pass and the Italian border with Austria. This was the end of the war for the 103<sup>rd</sup> Division.

I remember hearing about Pearl Harbor from a big old radio in our country store. We kept the radio on most of the time. I remember hearing it in detail from that. My first memory, though, was on a Sunday, in the late afternoon, driving the family car, a 1941 Studebaker. I was getting out of the car at a girlfriend's house when I heard a little something about it on the car radio. But I didn't put it together.

I was first sent to Fort Bragg and then got my training in Georgia. I was twenty when I was drafted. I was trained at Camp Wheeler in Georgia. I was trained as an Army Rifleman and was later placed in a Rifle Company. I was shipped out of Camp Shanks, New York on the Aquitania. The Aquitania was the old British Liner that had carried troops in WWI. There were huge hand railings outside that had WWI soldiers' names carved in them. The Aquitania was the biggest British ship afloat until they built the first two Queen ships, the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth. The Aquitania was fast. I did not go with the Division. I did not land in Marseilles. I joined the Division in Alsace, France later. When I was shipped over on the Aquitania it took less than five days to cross the Atlantic. That is how fast it was. I came back on one of those little Victory

Ships and it took ten days tossing around. It took twice as long to come back. We could mill around a little bit but the ship was crowded. We did have a PX where we could buy candy etc. Some of the boys got sea sick. I did not. Some of them got sick enough to die and wished they could. I am sure that sea sickness is a terrible thing. This luxury liner had been twice converted to a troop ship. On all of the decks they had bunks about four and five deep. I landed on floating docks in Le Havre. The city had been leveled. We were sent right into the area where the 7<sup>th</sup> Army was located. I went into the 410<sup>th</sup> E Company as a replacement. I went into a Company that had been shot up. They had one man left in the squad that I was placed in. They put me and my hometown buddy in this squad. They borrowed some men from other squads and got us up to seven. That was about as many as we had from then on. That placed me in the 7<sup>th</sup> Army for the spring offensive. Later on, in March of 1945, we pushed through the rest of France and across the Rhine River. Then we turned south and pushed through Germany and Austria down to the Innsbruck area. I was there for the big spring offensive in early 1945 but not for the winter experiences the Division had in 1944-45. We carried K ration on our belt. A lot of times after we got into Germany we would be taking one little town after another we would scrounge around in the cellars looking for pickled eggs and for

potatoes. Sometimes we would cook what we found and continued to keep our rations on our belt. We would eat that K-ration when we had to. My weapon was a BM1. I was on the BAR team. A BAR is a heavy automatic weapon. It was a three man team. You passed the BAR, Browning automatic rifle, around between the three men. All three carried ammunition for it. The first time of any heavy concentration of combat was in a town in Northern Germany called Erkenbrecktsweiler, about fifty miles south of Stuttgart. The Second Battalion of the 410<sup>th</sup> was surrounded in the Urach Pocket by three or four Battalions of Germans, including SS Troops. It was a three day siege before it was over. We lost men to heavy sniper fire. Out on the mountain side one day we were trying to get into town when we lost a Lieutenant I had just talked to at the foot of the hill. I guess for about three days there I lived a charmed life. Out on that mountain side while we were trying to clear the high ground right in front of me one morning as we were moving through the heavy undergrowth a German raised up with his hands up. I got to him as quick as I could. He had his weapon lying on his feet. He decided he would give up. I did not know he was there. He had the ups on me. He could have taken me out if he wanted to. He just didn't do it. If he had done it my buddies would have taken care of him. So he decided to surrender. I have told a few people that today, unless he has died of old age,

there is a German soldier walking around somewhere in Germany because he made a good decision. And there is an American soldier walking around because he made that decision. I sometimes wonder what happened to him. He had me dead to rights but he decided to surrender. We were just looking forward to the end of the war. I was thankful that I did not have to spend anymore time in Europe than I did. I felt a little guilty about not being with the Division all the way. My Company Commander was Lieutenant Doggett. We moved out of France into Germany and through Germany and Austria during the spring offensive. I was in Innsbruck on VE Day. The Austrians made out like they were glad to see us. Austria had been a German State for a long time. Nobody really knew how sincere they were but they were treating us like liberators. We saw a few Russian soldiers but we did not meet up directly with the Russians. In July of '45 I was moved to the 9<sup>th</sup> Division and we were stationed in Traunstien, a town near the Chemsee, south of Munich. Immediately after being transferred I was able to get out of the rifle company that I was in and got into the motor pool. In the motor pool we had several vehicles. We had one extra jeep that had been pulled out of the river and fixed up. It was not down on paper. We had this extra German limousine. Between the two extra vehicles we had, the drivers in the Company were all over Europe. We just had to make sure

there was someone there if the Battalion Commander or the Company Commander needed a vehicle. Then just before we left to come home they had a situation where they made us have a ticket for each trip. We got regimented a little bit right there at the end. Prior to that time we had a great time scouting all over. We went anywhere we wanted to with the extra vehicles in the Company because they were not accounted for. We all knew we were subject to going to the Pacific. We were offered a thirty day pass to come home. And then be ready to be shipped out to the Pacific. I elected not to take that option. I had a few friends that did do it and they came home and had their thirty days. By the time they did that they had dropped the bomb, the war was over, and they were home and I wasn't. So I had to stay awhile longer. We were grateful for the bomb. Until this day it is debatable with some people. If you ask a soldier that was subject to be sent to the Pacific he would say that was the right thing to do. I was glad our new President, Harry Truman was a World War I veteran and knew what to do.

I shipped out from Bremerhaven, Germany across from England on the English Channel. We landed in New York. I went home to the farm. My wife was teaching school. I started to work for my county, as a Deputy Sheriff. A few years later my county voted "wet" and we had liquor. I was appointed the ABC Chief to look after the liquor violations. Then in 1980

the Sheriff died in office and I was appointed Sheriff of my county. I finished my law enforcement as Sheriff of Granville County in North Carolina. I had three jobs with the county, all in law enforcement. My county was my only employer except being a farmer. I lived on the farm all this time. I am still on that farm and enjoying it. I can't walk around it much any more. I have a little John Deere Gator that I ride around on. I have four children and they are local. Two of them are attorneys and two of them are teachers. I have six grandchildren.

[Arthur Currin and his wife, Marie, have attended each of the last twenty-two Division Reunions starting with Denver in 1987. They plan to be in Nashville in 2009.]