

Taped Interview

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I was assigned to the A & P Platoon (Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon) in Hq. Company. Pioneer refers to Minor Engineer work such as laying mines and deactivating mines, clearing mine fields, building small bridges (foot bridges mostly), operating the battalion ammunition dump, issuing ammo to the rifle companies. On the defensive lines we were pressed in to dig a Battalion OP at night. We prepared it in one position, and an S-3 or Officer in charge was dissatisfied with it. He thought it was in the wrong location; we had to go back the following night and dig the same OP again.

I was a civilian living in Toccoa, Georgia, employed with a lumber company when Pearl Harbor happened. I was born in Cordele, Georgia and raised in Toccoa. My parents moved from Cordele when I was four years old. I was raised in Toccoa and went to school there. When I was seventeen years old I went into the Civilian Conservation Camp (CCC). I was there for two years from age 17 to age 19 in Suches, GA, in the mountains, two miles from Appalachian Trail. Appalachian Trail runs from Maine into Jasper, Georgia through Blue Ridge Mountains. We did the Forest service work in the CCC, Civilian Conservation Camp. I was there for two years. We worked for the Forest Service; the Army just housed us. The Army personnel included a

First Lieutenant and an Executive Officer who was a Second Lieutenant. We also had one First Sergeant, Company Clerk, Canteen Steward and Supply Sergeant similar to the Army. We lived in barracks and ate in a mess hall. We worked on the Appalachian Trail, planted pine trees, and worked on recreational areas. I used a jack hammer in a rock quarry; hard and dirty work.

Later in 1940, after the CCC, I went to work for a lumber company working until 1942, when I was drafted. I was inducted just outside of Atlanta at Fort MacPherson, processed and loaded on a train; all they could tell us was that we were going west. It was rumored that we were going to California or Oregon or some other places. Our final destination was Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. I came when the 103d Division had just been activated. A Cadre from Mississippi, Camp Shelby from the 84th Division also was there. They were mostly sergeants; there might have been a few officers. I was assigned to Hq. Co. 3rd Bn. 409th Infantry. The Commanding Officer of Hdqts. Company was Captain Laper. Major Therrell was a Captain at that time. They made him the Bn. Executive Officer. After he was promoted to Major he became the Bn. Commander. Later on Major Therrell went to the 1st Battalion.

We took Basic Training at Claiborne. In 1943 we went on Louisiana maneuvers for three months. I was in the A & P Platoon all the time. Lt. Thompson was our first Platoon Leader. He went to B Co. The Second one

was Lt. Erberker he was there for just a little while and they transferred him somewhere else. Then we had Lt. Kure who was with us all during Louisiana maneuvers. We moved to Camp Howze, TX. We had normal training at Howze.

We got on a train for our two or three day trip from Texas to Camp Shanks, New York. The train would stop at least once a day and I led calisthenics at the railroad yards. We were quartered in Camp Shanks, New York for about two weeks during which time I got to go to West Point to a football game; Army vs. NC State. It was sort of a one-side game; Army did not have much competition. They had drafted so many people out of college at that time. I boarded the USS Monticello, a capture Italian luxury liner converted into a troop ship. My bunk was below the surface. We got three meals a day; in addition there was a boy, named R. C. Mealar from my home town that was a sailor on that boat. We had worked together for a short period of time and he spotted me right away. He would bring us ice cream etc. at night. We would drink together some, too. He really got to know Johnny Rickert, too. John is still living in California and I talked to him about a month ago. He and I both came to the reunion in '04 and that is the last time I saw him. I did not get seasick because I stayed on deck just as long as I could. The bunks were four high and I had the second or third bunk; in addition we had our duffle bag in the bunk with us.

I carried an M-1 and it was a squad leader's only weapon. The rest of the squad was ammo bearers and they carried carbines. I carried an M-1 because the squad leader acted as the security while the men were doing the work; they based it on that fact.

There were three squads in the A & P Platoon. Originally one buck Sergeant that was the Platoon Sergeant. Three Corporals were the Squad Leaders. That changed later. The buck Sergeant became a Technical Sergeant. All three Corporals became Sergeants. Alkonis was the Platoon Sergeant. I was a Sergeant.

They assigned me and three or four other men to stay back and take care of loading the duffle bags. We loaded the duffle bags the morning after we landed. We were directed to go the same route to the bivouac area as the rest of the men who marched the night we landed. I was glad I got out of that. We got a code number for the route from the ship to the bivouac area before we started out; the code number was 6299F. We finally found the bivouac area the following day and pitched a pup tent. We remained there until we got orders to go on line. A squad was made up of nine enlisted OT men plus the squad leader. We went up the Rhone Valley by truck. We went through Dijon, France and then into a town near Taintrux. I remember walking past a dead German on the road. If we found a mine sometimes we would take a stick of dynamite and explode it. We had to draw dynamite from the regiment; we were not authorized to carry it.

We relieved the 3d Division on the top of a mountain overlooking Taintrux Valley. We slept in back of a building in the Battalion CP (Command Post). We would go up there everyday and help carry rations and ammo down to the rifle companies. On the first day of combat Lt. Colonel Synder was wounded in the hand; they evacuated him and Major Reynolds was made Battalion Commander until the war was over. He was a good man. He was promoted to Lt. Col. My Platoon leader was Lt. Flynn one of the Flynn twins. He was our platoon leader all during the war. His twin was a Platoon Leader in A Co. 409th.

I remember seeing the glow from the attack on St. Die on November 15. The Germans did the same thing in WW I to St. Die. Those positions that the 103d was first assigned were the last positions held in WW I on November 11, 1918. Thirty-six years later, we came and filled those same positions. In WW I that was as far as the Americans got in the Vosges Mts., just above St. Die. The Germans did not even try to defend the Maginot Line. They really defended the Siegfried Line. We did not have to clear any mine fields in the Siegfried Line.

We had K rations but mostly we had C rations in a can: two choices were beanie weenies and hash (meat and potatoes mixed up). Regiment had a ration breakdown and they would issue the rations to the battalions. Then the battalions would issue it to the companies. When we were ordered we

would deliver the rations to the line companies if they did not have men to pick them up. Sometimes we would go close to the rifle companies CP.

Before we got to the Siegfried Line, the battle with the most casualties was Selestat. B Co. was practically wiped out in Selestat and many were taken prisoner. The Germans had reinforced the night before with an armored unit (tanks and 88s). They had to reconstitute the company and a lot of replacements went in there. Selestat was to the left of Weissenberg and we had shellings after shellings close to Weissenberg. That was the first time we got to the Siegfried Line. We were fortunate that we did not have even more casualties. Weissenberg was near the German border. The first unit of the Seventh Army and the Sixth Army group which was the Seventh Army and the French 1st to cross into Germany through the mountains was K Co. of the 409th. Then we were ordered to go 100 miles or so to the west. At that time nobody knew why we were moving; that is when Bastogne was surrounded. They had to move some armored divisions from the 3d Army that were in that area to Bastogne in the Province of Lorraine and we had to replace them and set up defensive positions. We distributed all the tools we had in the A and P Platoon to the rifle companies and let them dig their own defensive positions. We had 150 shovels and 75 pick mattocks (entrenching tool that could be strapped to your belt). When we dug a CP or OP we used those tools. I dealt more with the ammunition but I had experience with both areas of the A & P Platoon.

On Jan 20th the German Offensive in Alsace (Nordwind) started and we were told to retreat. We were ordered to start withdrawing at 2 o'clock (1400) in the afternoon. We moved out all the way to Pfaffenhofen and set up the CP just south of Pfaffenhofen and they put us all in houses. We were ordered to send our ammunition and pioneer truck back to the old CP to pick up our men that we left behind. Lt. Flynn directed me to go with Strobe that night. We got back to the old CP about 11 o'clock at night. Major Yow, the Executive Officer of the Battalion, had stayed behind. I reported to him and told him I was there to pick up the men (A & P men, cooks and others) we had left behind for lack of room. I remember old Peterson, one of the head cooks, saying, "Lord have mercy, they left us behind; the German's have cars and they will probably overtake us." Major Yow, ordered me to take I Co.'s bedrolls which just about loaded the truck. I could just barely get our men in there. I think there was about four of us in the cab. I don't know why I Co.'s bedrolls were with the Battalion CP. Yow was about half drunk, probably with Schnapps, [There was a red liquor ration for officers. They got a bottle every week or so. I remember that when Lt. Flynn got his ration, he would share it with us.] We had a trailer but we dropped it at Pfaffenhofen before we returned to the L Company. Major Yow's men had their own jeeps and were to stay there until the rear guard was pulling out of position. We were quartered in houses just below Pfaffenhofen where the Battalion CP was set up; it stayed there until we moved out. That was around January 22 because

the Germans were trying to cut off several divisions including ours. We were on a point and trying to go from the north and from the east. They crossed the Rhine and established a bridgehead. They were supposed to break out from there. That was called Operation Nordwind. The bridge at Pfaffenhofen had been blown up. You could still crawl over the concrete and get to the other side after the withdrawal had been completed.

La Walck was the town on the other side of the Moder River; across the river from Pfaffenhofen. Obermodern was to the west, which was still our battalion. We were there a couple of months, Jan 22 to March 15. I remember mortar shelling from the Germans on the other side of the river and screaming meemies. The noise they made was tremendous. Our kitchen was set up a couple of houses up from us. We had two head cooks, Peterson and Russell. Our men had to serve as KP also. Some men would volunteer to get more food!

March 15th was the Big Push. I remember that as if it was yesterday. We ended up again at the Siegfried Line. That was a big battle. I remember Climbach where our A & P Platoon picked up some mules that were never used as well as the Black anti-tank unit that was attached to our battalion. The tankers were way ahead of us on the way to Klingenstein; we were in the rear. I remember the dead horses and Germans, on our route. We were not authorized any radios like some units.

Some of us rode in German vehicles when we went through Bavaria into Austria and into the Brenner Pass. Willie Williams drove one and my

whole squad was in a vehicle. We halted in Garmisch, Germany. We went into a home there and thought we could have it made for a while. We just got settled there and we got orders to move out. We got about halfway up that mountain and we got orders and were held up. It was very cold; we had already turned in our overcoats and winter clothing. I was wearing a German overcoat because it was cold in the mountains; someone warned me that I might get shot. I remember the Germans had blown up the road in the area and left a huge gap. I remember the crowds cheering like a celebration not liberation.

We didn't hardly slow down going through Innsbruck. I remember the crowd of people out cheering. The trains were going in and out there. Willie Williams was driving the car we picked up somewhere; we got held up there; cross bars had come down stopping the traffic; a train came through and it was full of German soldiers. It was the section between Innsbruck and Hall. It passed on by and the cross bar raised up.

We were ordered to secure a bridge over the Inn River; they dropped my squad off there and the rest of the battalion went on east. It was about dark when Flynn directed me to keep my squad and defend that bridge. I got the guards organized and I stationed sentries at both ends of the bridge. Then I sent a few men to find a place to sleep at a monastery about a hundred yards away. They went up there but did not return in a reasonable

amount of time. I took two or three men with me and when we got there, we found the place full of Germans; women (probably in the army) and soldiers. It could have been a medical unit. There was a German Colonel (German army) in charge. We communicated through an interpreter. (I could speak German enough to get by). The Colonel said he was willing to surrender and wanted to surrender to an officer. I told him there wasn't an officer and that I was a sergeant. He surrendered to me. I directed him to keep his people there overnight. I told him to put them in a column of twos with a white flag in the lead and go to Innsbruck the next morning.

Following that, Breeze was pulling sentry duty at one end of the bridge over the Inn River, and he was test firing a burp gun (light weight submachine gun) in the water. He spotted four Germans under that bridge with demolitions. We ordered them to leave the demolitions there and come out. When we got them out on the road we were going to send them on to Innsbruck to surrender to the POW camp. About that time Strobe and Flynn came up in the truck. Flynn came back to see what was going on and recommended putting the Germans on a truck and transporting them because they could be dangerous. I think Strobe and a guard took them into Innsbruck to a POW camp.

When we got rid of the dynamite we were ordered to leave the bridge and rejoin the platoon in Schwaz. That was our last mission before the war

was over. I heard about VE Day when I was in Schwaz. We moved up to a hotel named Seehof. Some of us were transferred from the 103d Division to the 9th Division. We had to go to the 47th Regiment, replacement center. I was in the same position. The replacement center was at Dachau, a concentration camp. They quartered us inside that concentration camp for a week close to the furnace and the gas chamber. The odor was still there.

After Dachau we went to Mooseburg, 9th Division, 37th Infantry, Hq. Co. 3rd Bn. to guard and operate the stalag where prisoners of war were held. I was promoted to platoon sergeant in the A & P Platoon. I really didn't have to do anything but work the prisoners around in the prison areas. We would send a guard up to get the prisoners and bring them back for work detail, which I would supervise. We would have a German in charge usually an officer.

Eventually I was transferred to an engineer battalion to prepare to rotate to the states. We went to Bremerhaven until March of 1946 when we were shipped to the States, ten months after the war. We went to Camp Kilmer and were processed; they sent us to the closest separation center to our home. Mine was at Fort Gordon, GA; about six of us from that engineer battalion went on that troop train. We arrived at Fort Gordon on Friday and discharged on Sunday. I went home and stayed out about six weeks.

My employer at the lumber yard went out of business. I decided I was going back into the Army. I almost reenlisted before I was discharged, but I wanted to try civilian life. The job search experience helped me realize that I really wanted to return to the Army. I re-entered with the rank of staff sergeant. The pay was probably better than it would have been in civilian life. My father tried to talk me out of it but he left it up to me to decide. I stayed in until I retired in 1963 as Sergeant First Class. I met my wife at Fort Jackson while I was stationed there in 1947; we married in 1949. She was a motor officer's secretary. I was in a Station Compliment Unit. I changed my MOS to Supply after I got discharged. They assigned me to a Quarter Master clothing warehouse; my MOS did not cover that so they changed my MOS to a Supply MOS. We stayed at Fort Jackson; we had quarters on Post. May of 1950 I got orders to go to Japan; we could not get coordinated travel. I got checked at Fort Lawton in Washington. I was shipped to Kisarazoo, Japan (across the Tokyo Bay from Yokahoma) and assigned to an engineer outfit.

To get there you had to go by train all the way around by Chiba. I was assigned to the 14th Engineer Combat Bn. As Bn. Supply Sgt. our mission was to build an airport. On the 25th of June 1950 the Korean War started. About 10 days later my Bn. was alerted to go to Korea. On or about July 20, 1950, our Bn. was sent to Korea. We landed at Pohang Dong on the east coast. We could not land at Pusan due to heavy traffic there. After we

landed and got organized, we were attached to the 24th Inf. Div. The 24th Div. was not the only organization we supported while I was there. I was rotated back to the States in Aug '51. After a 30 day leave, I was assigned to Ft. Benning, GA. I was stationed there for nine and one-half years. My wife Margaret worked there, also. We got family quarters eventually. Later, I was assigned new quarters. It was the first set of quarters to get Central Air Conditioning on a base and was named in honor of Senator Capehart. At that time there were Sergeants who had there 30 years. They were there during WWI and stayed through Korea. I didn't feel bad about staying there for nine and one-half years. Then, I got orders to go to Panama. Then, I got a call from Fort McPherson and they asked if I had spent any money for the possible change. I said I had not. They had a man, my rank and MOS and said they would just send him instead of me.

Then I got orders for Japan again but was deleted once more without a reason. Finally I got orders to go back to Germany, assigned to the 24th Division in Munich. My mother got ill and I took emergency leave back to the states. We got coordinated travel to Europe. We both rode a transport from New York to Bremerhaven and onto Munich. We got quarters immediately in Munich; we did not have to live in the economy. I stayed for a little over two years and I decided to retire in '63. We flew back to the states was retired at Fort Hamilton, New York. We were there about three weeks to a month.

I recall one humorous incident that happens when we were going into Provencheres. I went ahead to find a place to stay and I noticed they had not cleared the town. The infantry was searching the buildings with fixed bayonets. A tank guy asked me if the town had been cleared. I said, "No." I asked him if he saw the infantrymen searching those houses with fixed bayonet. He said, "I hope there are no Jerries there, I don't even have a handkerchief to surrender with!" I don't know where he went but he did not go into town. We did not have one man in the A and P Platoon that was killed. One man in my squad named Burroughs had injuries that required transport back to the States, but he survived.

When I retired I went to work for a liquor wholesale distributing company for awhile in Columbia, South Carolina. I left there and went to work for the State of South Carolina at the Department of Mental Health. I worked there fourteen years in the Supply Dept. We eventually retired and went to Cudjoe Key in the Florida Keys. We had purchased a lot before I retired and put a mobile home on it. We lost it in '98. We lived there from '83 to '98. Hurricane George went through an area about ten miles wide and our park was right in the middle of it. There were 659 units in the park and ours was damaged beyond repair. We bought another unit. My wife and I raised two boys (the children of a relative) in the Keys. They were elementary school age when the came to us. They are both in the roofing business now. David, the oldest, went in the Army, finished Basic, but was hurt and took a

discharge. My wife passed away in '03. Currently, I am at the Soldier's Home in DC. The one in Gulfport, MS is practically finished. I have been back to where we fought in WW II. (I am currently in Washington D.C. at the Armed Forces Retirement Home.)