

Taped Interview

Cincinnati 2008

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I live in Coffeyville, Kansas. I was born April 7, 1923. I was about eighteen years old and I had just graduated from high school when I heard about Pearl Harbor. I was living at home and working for my father. He had trucks that hauled in milk from farms to what they called condenseries in those days. I was doing that at the time. In '42 I had joined a construction crew on the Coffeyville airbase that they were building in my hometown. I was just a rough worker, no specialty; somebody who saw a chance to make more money than he was making. I was drafted. It got to where you couldn't get a job because everybody you knew was going. So--- four boys and I took what they called voluntary induction. It might have speeded up things by a few days but I don't know. They were friends of mine, the same age; we all knew where we were going. We just didn't know the day. One of the boys went with me and we went into medical training in Camp Robinson, Arkansas. I saw him once overseas. We were not in related groups but I managed to meet up with him. I went directly from Basic into ASTP training at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge,

Louisiana. I was in ASTP for about nine months. We were taking a college semester each three months. I got through three semesters. I was training in Basic Engineering. We took everything but military subjects. We did have one military hour a week. It was basic military knowledge. That is where I heard a little phrase: “We didn’t win WWI with the Springfield rifle; we won WWI in spite of the Springfield rifle.” It was a strange term but I do remember that. I am one of the people that figures whatever life hands me that is what I am going to do. So, I didn’t think that much about it. That was my attitude when I heard that ASTP was going to be disbanded. I was sent to a Replacement Training Center at Camp Barkeley, Texas. I stayed there until I got orders to report to the 103d Division in Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. There were a lot of ASTP fellows there in the Replacement Training Center from all branches of the service. It was sort of a “holding ground” until they could get a place for us. They tried to send you back to the branch of service you had come from; if you were a medic they tried to send you back to the medics. I didn’t have any medical training before the service. I had my Basic Training. I had gone directly to ASTP. I didn’t have any chance to go to any medical training like at Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver or anything like that. They put me in the 328th Medical Battalion. I went to Camp Claiborne and their (103d) soldiers were out on maneuvers.

So, I took a little narrow gauge railroad that ran out to the maneuver area. They were actually in the field when I joined them. Nothing big happened to me there because if you remember, it wasn't too long until we made the motor march from Claiborne out to Camp Howze. I joined at Claiborne originally. I went directly into the 328th Medical Bn. At Howze I was in the Hdqts. Platoon of Co. B, 328th Medical Battalion. They were short several different designations of people. I worked some in the Motor Pool having been around vehicles all my life doing that. I worked in Supply occasionally. I went to a lot of classes on actual medical type training along with everybody else. I went to Signal Corp School for a couple of weeks when we dumped the radios and went into the telephone system. The Battalion went to wire because the radios were so undependable. All the companies went from the radio to the wire type communication. The Infantry left a half mile of that little wire trailing behind them. They taught us how to hook onto that and get some communication.

When we got overseas I wound up being the liaison man between our Company and the Battalion Aid Station. Very shortly they discontinued that. It was kind of a double duty job that we didn't need. Then I went to work pretty much full time in the Aid Station. We had a Litter Bearer Platoon, Ambulance Platoon (those guys did nothing but ambulances), then

the Headquarters Section filled in a lot of the gaps. Everybody was eligible to be called for litter bearers no matter who you were. I hardly ever had that happen. Each infantry company had either one or two medics directly assigned to them--they lived with the infantry. They were part of their infantry unit rather than part of our unit. We called them Company Aid Men. I met a lot of them. From Howze we took a train trip to New York. I had not been around much of the United States so it was an eye opener for me. While we were at Camp Shanks, New York, our Company Clerk was from New York City. I was a friend of his and he took me home with him one night. I met his family and stayed all night. I was surprised to see Italian prisoners of war working all over the place. They were using a lot of POWs to man the camps there.

The night came to board the ship, the Monticello. It was about 8:30 PM or 9:30 PM. The bunks were about five high. It was kind of chaos. I was in about C Hold or D. To see out you had to find a porthole and look through it. I woke up feeling kind of uneasy; I thought I was seasick. I went to the porthole and looked out and we are still tied up at the dock! It is "all in my head!" It took us 17 days to go from the Port of New York to Marseilles. I talked to a man last night, before this interview, who asked me if I remembered marching the twenty miles out in the hills from Marseilles.

We walked every step of the way, carrying all our gear. Out of about 100 men and 5 officers only about 20 of us made it all the way. They were falling out like flies. Captain Rominger was our Company Commander. He was a doctor. He was a good Company Commander and an excellent doctor. I worked part of the time with him. We had two Aid Stations, one on each weapons carrier. We didn't have them for that march from Marseille!!!!

We got organized when we got out and had one Aid Station operating all the time. We were in the Hdqts. Platoon. Lieutenant Aguilar was the Second Officer down. He basically ran that particular platoon. He was a Medical Administrative Officer. There are two different designations there. One is the actual doctor, Medical Corps. The other was the Medical Administrative Officer. He was a First Lieutenant. We also had two other doctors in the Company. One of them was from Pennsylvania. We had three genuine doctors and two Administrative Officers. The Licensed Doctors ran the Aid Stations. Five men made up an Aid Station. There would also be a Tech Sergeant or a T-5. A Staff Sergeant would be a T-4. Those guys all had Medical Ratings. They had trained in hospitals. How I wound up there I do not know. I had Medical and Surgical Designation at one time with a T-5 rating (same as Corporal). I had never gone to a hospital for training. Most of the guys had that training. They were doing

those things at the same time I was in ASTP. So I never got that opportunity. I was on the Monticello and landed in Marseilles and did the march. We went up the Rhone River Valley. We went in trucks. With our ten ambulances, two jeeps and three weapons carriers, we could transport one hundred people. We were in the foothills. It was a hilly country. From the minute we landed we had an Aid Station in operation. It was chaos that first night. After that, one Aid Station was always open. One Aid Station was loaded in a weapons carrier ready to go with a team. On the march any medical needs were attended to by whoever was in charge at that time. At this time we didn't have any medical equipment or supplies, just the basics. We had little medical kits with bandages, scissors, tourniquets, maybe a couple of rolls of tape; nothing to do anything serious. We were just like everybody else, totally disorganized. We relieved the 3d Division and by then we had received supplies and had everything ready to go. We had several days before we put it into operation. We never had both Aid Stations operating at once.

We started receiving wounded after the jump off on November 16th. One Aid Station always has to be ready to go, with one in operation. It was pretty light at first. One interesting little thing that happened was almost unbelievable to the guys in the Aid Station. A young man came in and we

couldn't see much wrong with him. He isn't bleeding. He has a hole in the side of his steel helmet. I know this sounds impossible but evidently that bullet had traveled so far that by the time it penetrated the steel it was able to stay between the headliner and the steel; it followed the headliner and came out around on the side. He was actually unharmed but he was scared to death. We just laughed after he left. He had good reason to be scared. We were all scared and concerned. We got in on a few tree bursts. Not many because we were just far enough off the front to be a lot safer. The Company Aid Man Medic was the person who took the brunt. He was side by side with the infantry whatever they were doing. I talked to several people since I started coming to these reunions, about guys they could remember calling "Medic, Medic," for the Company Aid Man. They were supporting the 409th because they were attacking. We were supporting the 410th. The 410th was in reserve that first day. We were in reserve at various times; we all were. During that time we usually just tried to get our stuff backed up, making sure everything is ready to go whenever it is time to go again. (We went towards the Maginot and Siegfried Lines.) Sometimes we would have one or a few wounded; you might not have any at other times. It depended on what came in. Other times you were covered up with wounded. That was the only time that all three doctors worked at once. We

did set up the second Aid Station but they moved over with the doctor on duty at the Aid Station that was on duty. So you had three of them instead of two. The Company Commander and everybody that was genuine medical personnel were in the Aid Station at all times. We got hold of a generator for lights, which was not in our table of operation. I drove the Aid Station truck and pulled the generator behind it on a half ton trailer. We had enough help that my first job, when we stopped, was to get some lights and the field phone operating. I had on occasion given plasma and bandaged. I had some buddies, Charlie Lamb and Pete Turner. One was an ambulance driver and one was a litter bearer person. The five of us that were in each Aid Station got real close. We ranged from a PFC to a Captain. Part of them were doctors and part were officers, but you would have never known that by their treatment of us. For instance, when I was a T-5 you would have thought that I was one of them by the way they treated me. We had this one doctor that was a super guy. His entire thoughts were about who he could help. The kind of person you would like to have working on you. He later got killed after he got out of the Army in a motorcycle accident. His name was Dr. Woodcock. I met his daughter from Little Rock, a few years back. She had a question for me.

The war was nearly over and we are already in Austria. One morning the litter bearers hauled in a guy, an infantryman. There is a foot lying beside him on the litter. He had stepped on a mine. It just blew the leg off. There was about an inch-wide strip of skin still attached to the leg and to his foot. Dr. Woodcock said there isn't anything we can do for this and he grabbed a pair of bandage scissors and cut that skin. I used the phrase later "that he cut off a man's leg with a pair of bandage scissors!" It was not a messy operation because a traumatic amputation, like this mine blowing up, sears everything. It destroyed everything except that strip of skin. There is no blood. It is just a cold black stump below the knee and right above the ankle. Later, this same guy was sitting up on the litter and smoking a cigarette. He said, "Boy, I feel sorry for you guys." We looked around at each other and said, "Why do you feel sorry for us?" "Because this is my ticket home!" No doubt he was in shock. The next ambulance that left he was going to be on it.

We only had ten ambulances. So you can see that we had soldiers who only stayed fifteen or twenty minutes when we were very busy. We sorted the wounded using the triage system. We treated the worst hurt first. Regarding the least hurt people, we went down the line and sorted them out. The POWs were the last ones. We had wounded German prisoners of all

ages—12 years to 40 years. It was into winter before things got rough. We had opened up an Aid Station in an old barroom. We were there several days; I can't remember how many, maybe six or eight. One of the daughters of the family who owned the bar was ready to have a baby. We took army blankets and held them up as we stood around the doctor. She had her baby with ten to fifteen GI's standing around in the same room. War does strange things. Nature keeps on going, and humans will always be humans.

The triage we used is the same technique used today: the process of prioritizing sick or injured people for medical treatment according to the seriousness of the condition or injury. When they say triage it is like sorting; "the soldiers that can't go five minutes without seeing a doctor" are seen first; "the ones who can go ten to fifteen minutes without attention" go in a different area, etc. There was a big airplane accident out in California a couple of years back and they set up a triage system on the runway around that plane. I thought to myself, we were doing that sixty years ago!

[After we went to defense in Lorraine and came back to Alsace, we broke through the Vosges Mountains, crossed the Rhine and were in Occupation for awhile then we were told to go south in convoys (we had enough transport for our whole outfit.)]

We ended up in Innsbruck, Austria. I got to the Brenner Pass in Italy unofficially but Innsbruck is where we basically stopped. We were in a little task force with a tank and a few infantrymen, a truck or two. We weren't taking prisoners; we were just driving. At the time I wondered what were we doing? There is nobody behind us! I read in a history book the other day that the task force was trying to meet up with Mark Clark at the Brenner Pass. (World War I ended in the Brenner Pass). We made it but none of us knew exactly what was going on. We just kept driving. All we knew is what we had done.

[That has come out in several interviews--that the lieutenant was told "go this way, round that mountain and up this hill, take that village" and most of the time they did not know where they were.]

This is something that happened to us. We were driving along at about 9 o'clock at night. This task force had been on the road all day for several days. We were tired and wore out. We stopped for some reason. The first thing I remember after that is somebody beating me on the arm and shouting my name. I had gone to sleep. This person said, "We got a kilometer down the road and you weren't behind us." I had gone to sleep while we were stopped. I had about three or four vehicles behind me so they didn't go any place either. I said, Oh God, thinking of the Company Commander (Capt.

Rominger)! What was he going to say to me with me asleep behind the wheel in the middle of the war; what was he going to do? Then I remembered my assistant driver when we moved was Captain Woodcock. I told him, "You know if anything is ever said about this, I am going to tell them you were the driver." He said, "Well Junior (my nickname), I was asleep too!" We were just so tired and wore out. It was night and we were driving without lights. I was driving a weapons carrier with one Aid Station. I felt a little better after I realized that Captain Woodcock was asleep also.

After the war ended in Europe they had big plans for me. I didn't know what they were. I was made Company Motor Sergeant while we were in Innsbruck. But immediately they shipped me home. By September I was back in the United States. I was low point man, no wife, no kids, 52 points. They had sent us to the States to have further training and go to the South Pacific. I was also in Paris the day that the Japanese capitulated. The thing was that all these plans, these long range plans were so well into them and I am already at port waiting for the ship to come in to go to the United States. They decided that they could not change so many things. I got on the ship going to New York City. This time it only took 8 days!! Then I got on a train to Fort Levinworth, Kansas. They put me on a train that night and put me on detached service at my home address of Coffeyville, Kansas. I stayed a

month and got another extension that said to stay on the same orders. At the end of the sixth weeks I got an order to report back to Fort Levinworth, Kansas where I had been inducted. I went in there one morning and in the middle of the afternoon I am on a train on my way to Brownsville, Texas. I got down there and there were about four guys who had come home with me there. We did not know what they were doing. There was no organization or anything. So, one of our lieutenants was there. He was kind of in charge of us. He said the camp Commander came down and told me that I need to send a jeep, a driver, and an NCO, and we will patrol the streets of Brownsville, Texas with the MPs tonight. We did that for four days. You felt like a dummy. We had not even been trained with guns. One morning we got up and the Lieutenant was there telling us we had to hustle that a bus will be there at such and such a point at Brownsville, Texas. We got on the bus but they were still not telling us anything. We are deep into Texas when you get to Brownsville. We ended up in Fort Sam Houston, Texas at the end of the day. That is a medical training installation. By six o'clock the next day I was out of the army. That was November 18, 1945. I am a little bit of a religious person and I often marvel at how many things had to come together to get me back to the United States early for a horrible job and actually it turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me. I was

out before half the guys ever left Europe. I left my brother in Le Harve, France. My brother was shot down in the Air Force and was part of the group running those cigarette camps. I talked to him there. I had been in the army longer than he had. But he was overseas and got shot down before we ever got there. He was wounded so he had an easy duty thing. So I got home and he didn't get home until about six months later. My life has been a series of interrelated incidents which each one really didn't mean a thing but it brought me home and out of the army.

After the army, I didn't go to school which is what I should have done. I should have gone to college. But I didn't. There was a milk factory in the town where I lived. They took raw milk from farms and made condensed milk and evaporated milk. Before the war my dad had done that and I had been working at home with him. I bought one of those routes and kept it to the early fifties. My sister thought I was a good enough carpenter to build a house so I moved to Colorado and did build a new house for them. I didn't do too bad of a job on that house. I was proud of it. I was discharged from the Army on November 18, 1945. My wife and I got engaged on February 18, 1946 and got married on the April 18, 1946. I have four kids, the oldest is sixty-one and the youngest is forty-three. I had a friend that got killed in the war and I said if I ever have a boy I would name

him James Richard after that friend. The first child was a girl and four years later another girl. Then, five years later another girl. Then ten or twelve years later the boy came and we named him James Richard. Early in my life I knew my friend Richard. He had a service station. He was a real young man then. His folks built this service station and gave it to him. He was their only son. He had owned it since he was 18 or 19. I went to work for him. He was just a super guy. He taught me a lot; when to keep my mouth shut; how to work for a living; just a lot of good things. He was in the South Pacific when he got killed. He enlisted in the infantry. He wasn't overseas too long before he got killed. Things were pretty rough in the early days.

Years later I went back to work for this milk company as a route supervisor for the trucks that delivered milk to stores. The last year I actually managed what was left of that plant. I was sixty-two years old and it was 1984. I didn't take Social Security because I thought I was too young for that. The Vo Tech Board, "I had been on the Board a number of times", approached me about teaching at the school. I taught auto body repair, painting, etc. there until 1989. I retired from there in 1989 but I had a night class going on at the Junior College one night a week. I kept that night class going until two years ago, 2006. I was getting ready to start Junior College

when I went into the Army and I wanted to be an Industrial Arts teacher. But I came home from the military and I did everything *but* go back to college. Now I realize that was what I should have done. But I always had the thought in my mind that I would love to teach. At my resignation I told them that you let me do something I had wanted to do my entire life. I just got delayed by that “all expense paid tour of Europe” called W.W.II.

“Life” has been good to me and I know it.