

Taped Interview

Dallas Reunion 2006

Merlin Metzler, HD 3rd BN 411th

My name is Merlin Metzler. My hometown was Saginaw, Michigan. Right now, I live in Ventura, California. I joined the Army in December of 1942. I was going to be up for the draft. A bunch of my buddies was going, and so I said why should I stick around here if my buddies were going anyway. So, I went with a group of them. We went into Fort Custer down in Grand Rapids where we were inducted. We got our training at Camp Claiborne in '42. We were one of the first ones. Just the cadre was there when we went in. None of my buddies went with me. They ended up in other places. So, I didn't end up with any of them anyway. I was assigned to the 103rd, the 411th Infantry, Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion as a buck private. I was green. I was in the Radio section Communications Platoon. I was a Staff Sgt. in the Radio Section eventually. I went through everything the 103rd did in Claiborne except for part of the maneuvers because during the maneuvers, when we first started, they pulled me out and sent me to Fort Benning to Radio School. And so I went to Fort Benning. When I came back, the maneuvers were just about over. I finally got back

with my unit and as you know, shortly after that we went on that motorcade to Marysville and up into Camp Howze.

There was a kid in Communications and I took him under my wing. He wasn't completely with it. His name was Hendershot. The kid was always getting into trouble. We were supposed to go to the firing range. We could not find him anywhere. Come to find out he was over in I company helping them in the kitchen. They were thrilled to have him over there. He was doing KP and everything else over there with I company. But, he should have been in Headquarters Company on the rifle range. I don't know how he come out, but eventually he went overseas with us. I still took him under my wing. They probably put him with me. I tried to watch after him. I know the one time I had to drag him out of a gully. What happened was, he had his rifle there. He was awful careless. His rifle went off and almost shot our Captain, Captain Mosley. As I recall when the war was over, we were on a train coming back to Texas. We had our Sergeants follow us there. This Hendershot and Captain Mosley were in the same car. I recall Hendershot saying to the Captain, "Captain, remember the time I shot at you and missed?"

When I got home, my wife had a son. Hendershot did not live too far from me, so I saw that he got a cab and found the right way to go home. He

was kind of out of everything. I remember him saying to me, "Sarge is your son a boy or a girl?" After he almost shot the Captain, they gave him a rifle but took the shells out. So he was carrying a rifle but he didn't have any ammunition. It was a crazy situation. He got in a wash area and was pinned down by machinegun fire. This was at the Siegfried Line near Climbach. He was under fire there and I had an awful time getting him out of there. I finally got him out of that situation. After that, they put him in graves registration. He was not combat ready.

In St. Die, they put the driver for our communications in with me. They put us in the Mayor's house in St. Die. They put us in a bedroom. We were billeted in a bedroom upstairs. There was a bedroom and a closet and down below was the roof to a little front porch. We were so tired because, I'll tell you, we had been marching all day. Of course, he had the jeep. I don't know how he got around there. During the night, they dropped some mortars on us. When we got up in the morning, the front porch was gone. The only thing between that mortar and us was that closet. It did not even wake us up. That was another one of the funny incidents.

I made PFC, Corporal then Sergeant in the States. When I went overseas, they made me Staff Sergeant. I stayed with the Radio Section all the way through. We carried the big "48" radio. It had a generator. We

also had walkie-talkies. Then we got the backpack (the 300). Our job was mainly staying with the troops with communications for the Colonel. That was my job mainly whenever we were mobile. I was right behind him.

And, when we weren't I had to be right up there with him or have one of the guys up there with him with the radio. But, that was our job. The guy in our Company who was head of the wire section was named Wilkinson. He was from Iowa. That was a rough job.

The Vosges Mt. thing was a trip. I had frozen feet. They sent me back to a hospital there in France. It was a house converted to a hospital. I think I was back there about ten days. Then they put me into a repple depot. Fortunately, my Commander said that when I came out of the hospital he wanted me back. So, I went right back to my unit again. Anyway, I got through that. That is all that happened to me. Thank God for that. Frozen feet were bad enough.

They had us up in the Vosges this one time I was on the radio. We were mobile then. We were sitting up on the hill and they were jamming our radios something fierce. Down below I could hear them chopping wood. The Germans were down just below us putting up roadblocks. There was a group of them down there. One of our men from the anti-tank platoon was assigned to go down and remove the roadblock. I went back around the next

morning and one of my good friends was laying there. They had booby-trapped the roadblock. When they went to move that tree out of the way, he was located right over top of where the blast was. His name was Elmo Gross (KIA). His name is in that booklet (Casualty List) on the very bottom of page 2 or 3. He was a sweet guy. Such a shame. But, casualties of war. We just got chummy. He was a quiet sort of guy. It seems a shame. You know it was strange. Probably everyone said the same story, but all the people have these villages and all. And all their farmland is outside of the village. The village is their center. They had a Methodist group here and Lutheran somewhere else. I was tickled to death if I would get a hayloft and go to sleep for the night. Every one of these farms had a crock with brine in it where they kept the eggs fresh. That is where we got fresh eggs every once in a while instead of the K-rations. We got smart. The first thing you do when you hit a town is to take out the church steeple (snipers).

Of course, you see a lot of horrible things. One of the horrible sad things, I guess you would say, happened as we got mobile there at the end when we were going through Bavaria. Capt. Wise was head of our M Company, Heavy Weapons Company. We had a tank in front of Colonel Mueller and I was supposed to be behind him with the radio. Capt. Wise cut in front of us. He wanted to be behind the Colonel. We didn't go too far.

They had that tank, I understand, to make sure if there were any land mines. And, there was one. The tank went over it. Colonel Mueller went over it. Capt. Wise was ahead of me. It went off under his jeep. I heard the bang and looked up and there was the hood of his jeep about 30 feet in the air. It blew both of his legs off. They say he died before he ever got to the hospital. That was a horrible thing. I was right behind him in the jeep. So, I would have been next. That is just fate. Here he had gone through this whole war up to this point where we were meeting these Germans on the road. They were giving themselves up. They didn't try to do anything with them. Right at the end, this happened to Capt. Wise.

We had a Major at first in Camp Claiborne but they moved Mueller in. Colonel Mueller was a swell guy. He was a Light Colonel. He was a Battalion Commander. We had an aggressive Regimental Commander. Also, the Captain of K Company was aggressive. They were a fighting bunch. They were really tough. Their Captain was rough on them. He was really strict. Some of them just hated him. But, I'll tell you if anyone got passes, his men did. They didn't even look at that factor. He was great for giving his men passes. When they got overseas someone said, "I am going to get the Captain." And they got overseas and they found out that everything he had done was for their advantage. Boy were they ever a

fighting group. When they got overseas, he really took over. There is a picture in the *Stars and Stripes* with Captain Hemming. I think that was his name. A picture of him being the first one of our group on German territory was in *Stars and Stripes*. In December, K Company, 411th was the first into Germany. The second time, March 18, it was I Company, 411th. There is a picture of them crossing the border at a creek.