

Taped Interview

Dallas Reunion 2006

C Raymond Milwaukee, Battery C, 384FA 155mm

My original hometown was Beckenmar, Illinois. Currently, I am from Murphysboro, Illinois. I was in Battery C, 384th Field Artillery Battalion. I entered the Army in March 1943 for Basic in California. I was in until 1945. I never did finish Basic. After about 5 or 6 weeks, I was transferred into the ASTP program. I am not sure how I got into ASTP. Some said they took an exam. I don't remember taking an exam. I took an IQ exam when I went in. I thought that's what the ASTP used. First, we spent a month in Pasadena Junior College. We were one of the first ones to come there because they did not have the bunks set up in the gym yet. We were there about a month and then went to University of Oklahoma. We were there for 3 quarters. I was studying acoustics and optics. Studies were heavy in physics. There were nine hours of physics a week. It was a good opportunity. I earned 33 college credits; most of the men had been to college. I had never been. Most of them had attended at least their freshman year. It was almost like going to college except twice a week you had a close order drill. We lived in a dormitory that was a fraternity house. I think the thing was they did not

have the space because they were turning men out of the training camps faster than they could send them overseas. Then you had these colleges with empty dorms and faculty members with not too much to do. So then they decided on this program. Once they needed replacements they ended the program and shipped everyone into some units.

They abandoned the program in March of 1944. I joined the 103rd in Camp Howze. I was assigned to an infantry company but after a month or so I was transferred to a field artillery company. I had the opportunity to take a furlough. I also knew that it was possible that I would be transferred to the artillery. The Company clerk said if you go on your furlough, you may not get your transfer to the artillery. It was a hard choice for me to make. I decided to go on the furlough and the transfer was still available when I got back. So, I was transferred to the artillery. I never really applied for it. That happened to many people; they were in the infantry first. In the artillery, I was a regular cannonier. In basic training, it was with the 105 howitzers but then in the 384th I was using 155 howitzers. I really didn't have much basic training. I guess I was ill prepared. Everyone was supposed to be able to operate all positions. They have an artillery song where the men sounded off their numbers. To start, you were supposed to line up and count off. The number you counted would be your position.

There were seven positions to serve but usually three men could do it. At night, you would fire intermittent firing (at random). You would target in on a cross-section or road intersection and just about every 15 - 20 minutes you fired off a round. (They weren't exactly timed.) Trucks would bring up ammo. You had to load it up every time. The shells weighed 94 lbs. I only weighed about 140 lbs at the time. I would have to cradle them in my arms because I could not lift them up on my shoulders like the other men. You had a little cradle to set them in. One or two men were on the end of the ramrod. You would ram it up into the breach. A gunner set the range and the azimuth. That was really the most skilled job there. For constant firing or firing rapidly, you had to have 5 to 6 men to do it. You needed someone to pick out the fuse and someone to put on the fuse. There were different types of fuses. One would explode within a certain distance from the ground (air burst) and one would explode on impact. There were to my knowledge, only two types of fuses. They made a big deal about the fact that you had to attach the fuse. You screwed the fuse into the lead edge of the shell. You had to have someone on the phone who would get the fire mission. They had to call out the type of shell and all the details on how to fire the gun. The forward observer was a Lieutenant up in front with glasses and a phone. We used all wire, no radios. Slow planes like the Piper Cub

were observer planes. They had radios. Sometimes they had to use those instead of a forward observer on the ground. The gun had tracks. It had a bench on each side of it. Earlier in the war, a truck pulled them. A tractor was better for traction. I guess it had to be a big tractor. We had to have a tractor driver. I stayed with that outfit the whole time.

On Jan 1, 1945, New Year's Day, there was a rumor that some German tanks were in front of our tanks (behind our lines). Another fellow and I were sent out to look for these tanks with a bazooka and about three rounds. So, fortunately, we did not see any because the Bazooka was not very accurate. I am not sure we had enough shells. I am not sure we had ever fired one. They are good if you are trying to hit the side of a barn.

One time we had just pulled into a position and we could see that there were small hills or mountains in front of us. Then an enemy round came in behind our guns and in a few seconds, a round came in in front of our guns. Then a third round came in and hit right on a gun. But then they stopped firing. But they often did that. They would come into a location, fire a few rounds and move. But they had us zeroed this time. There was shrapnel, torn tarpaulin and other evidence of shrapnel. It ruined the gun. Nobody got hit. The men were lying all around it. But nobody got hit.

We had another incident. In the morning, sometimes we would get some bread and some grease from the cooks to make a variety of French toast. Someone had gotten a cast iron skillet. We were standing around a fire making this French toast when we got a fire mission. I got the position then of preparing the powder. You had seven separate charges and you could vary the amount of powder. They were all in one. The ones you did not use, you could discard. You couldn't use them again. They all came with seven; that was the maximum. I prepared the charge, whatever they had said. I was standing there holding them against my left hip. Someone said, "Hey, Milwaukee, your coat is on fire." My pocket on the other side was on fire. If I had held the charge on my right side, the results would not have been very good. I had some waste cloth to clean the guns with and to keep our hands clean. I had used some when I was at that fire. Somehow, a spark got into my pocket at the fire and started burning the "waste". It never did flame up. It did burn a hole in the coat.

We would have to wipe out the gun after every round so that there were no sparks left. That way when you did put the powder in, it would not ignite. Somebody took a rag and water and wiped it out. You had to make sure there weren't any sparks in the breech also. It was a ticklish situation when the gun did not go off as planned. You did not know if it was a

delayed fuse or if it was just waiting to go off. If you would wait, sometimes it would go off. If it did not go off you had to remove it. Usually when those did fire, they made a lot of concussion. There was a primer you had to put in the gun at the end to set off the powder. You had to take that out first of all. Usually it was the primer that did not go off. The primer was just like a small shell that would send out the flame when you were shooting the gun or any other powder activated device. When you pulled the lanyard, it was like a striker of a gun. That ignited the powder behind the shell. The guy who was doing it had to reach over gingerly and unwind it and take it out. Then he would open up the breach and hope it would not go off. I do not know of any accidents where it did go off.

A Sergeant and a Corporal were in charge of the gun crew. A Captain was in charge of a battery. A battery is about 110 men. Beyond that, there were PFCs. Each battery had four guns. There were 3 batteries and 12 guns. That was the full number of 155's in a division. The other three artillery units of 105's were assigned to each regiment.

We were like a company. We had our own mess, trucks, truck drivers, track drivers, communications men that laid wire, and a maintenance section for the vehicles. I ended up going through Innsbruck, Austria. We pulled into Innsbruck early in May 1945. The Germans had pretty well quit.

A German company watched us pull in. There was a slave labor camp there. The guards had gone but the inmates in the camp had not come out until we got there. They came pouring out of their enclosure. There was this bar in sight of the labor camp. The first place they went to was this bar. They came out of the bar with armloads of whiskey and wine. They just raided it. I guess they were watching it all the time they were there. I remember that night we were standing around a fire. One of the people from the slave labor camp pulled out a “not too clean” glass and poured me a drink. It did not seem too appetizing but I thought I had better drink it. It was not fatal. Of course, we were on our way to Japan. We were in a Brenner Pass resort area. We stayed there until we shipped out sometime later. That was a waiting time. Everyone was just bidding time.

We got home early in August. We were home on VJ Day. Then I was sent down to camp Campbell with the 5th division. I was in there until February 1946. After the war, I applied to the University of Illinois, Urbana. The semester was postponed a week. I was late applying by a week after the semester started. I was way behind, but I caught up. Housing was pretty critical. A couple of my buddies drove me up there. My buddies and I looked for a place to stay. Finally, at one boarding house a student had withdrawn from school, so I took that slot. I graduated with a Civil

Engineering Degree. I worked in St. Louis with McDonnell Aircraft but it wasn't too close to Civil Engineering. So, after about a year I started working for a steel fabricator, designing steel structures, which was more a Civil Engineering type of work. I got laid off there. I looked around. Things were kind of bad in 1953. Eventually, I got an offer for a job in Springfield, Missouri with the Frisco Railway. I took that job about two weeks before we married. I said I would start, but I asked if I could take two weeks off for my honeymoon. They said it was OK.

Rosemary and I loaded up all of our possessions in one car and took them along on our honeymoon. All our possessions fit in one car. I started working for the Frisco Railway. I eventually got into education at the University of Missouri at Rolla. It was the Missouri School of Mines and Metal at that time. I stayed there for five years and taught Civil Engineering. Then I got a National Science Foundation Scholarship and went back to UI to get a PhD. I went there in 1961 and was there for two years. Then I went down to Southern Illinois University and taught there for thirty years. I retired in '93. If I had not been in the ASTP, I am not sure I would have tried going to college. I ended up a college professor. Going to college was very rare in those days. Only geniuses or rich kids went to

college. The GI Bill changed the idea of going to college – in fact it changed our whole society for the better.