

Taped Interview
Nashville 2009

Dennis O'Rourke, Hq Co, 1st Bn, 409th

I was born in Chicago, Illinois and I was a senior in high school when I heard about Pearl Harbor. I finished high school, was drafted and went to Camp Barkley in Abilene, Texas for Basic Training. I entered the ASTP Program at Bradley College in Peoria, Illinois. The ASTP was falling apart so after three months I decided to join the Air Force, took an exam, passed it and was admitted to the program. After two or three months that program went under and I found myself in the Army.

I remember the "five bunk high" sleeping arrangements on the ship going to France. We landed in Marseilles, walked off the ship and continued walking for five miles up a hill to our temporary camp location. It rained everyday, compromising any comfort our pup tents would have given us. Eventually, we were taken by truck in the direction of the Front and the Vosges Mountains. Our Lieutenant was Kelly Fite, a very nice guy; unfortunately, when he was moved to another company, he was killed. Our Headquarters Company was a close knit group.

In the field, I never had to dig a foxhole because there were German foxholes available. Some of them were pretty elaborate, complete with roofs! I was in a gun crew of 10 men who operated a 57mm anti-tank gun. One day I was guarding a prisoner, waiting for someone to come and pick him up, and a shell came in; we both hit the deck. For a second I had considered whether to watch him or protect myself; but in the end, it was a minor incident and did not amount to anything. I was lucky because a month before the war ended in April of '45 the Army decided, since the war

was going to end, to send the men on furlough. They took one man from each company and sent them off to Paris or London.

If we liberated an area we were suppose to remain apart from the townspeople. When we were invited to enjoy their freedom celebrations, we joined the festivities anyway. One of our jobs after the war was in Hall, Austria. I was in the Army of Occupation and a woman who owned a brewery in her house wanted us to protect her because there were many displaced people around. We went to the brewery and drank up all her liquor while she sang and played the piano. The job was over in a couple of weeks because by then there was nothing left to protect; we had a wonderful time.

On a sadder note, in January of '45, we were stationed in Dachau before we came home. We had the duty to escort some displaced Russians to a train that would take them back to their home area and out from under our protection. They were afraid that they would be murdered for their association with the "enemy." They were so afraid some of them hung themselves in the barracks where they were staying. Tragically, one man slit his throat as we walked him toward the train. He had reached for a knife so quickly we could not stop him. We were told to keep this quiet by our Headquarters Co.

When I came home I looked forward to getting together with old friends who also served in WW II though our paths had never crossed. I also researched unemployment benefits which happened to be twenty dollars a month. Eventually, the Postal Service hired me and I worked for them until I retired after forty years of service. I married in 1955 and had one daughter. We take trips together and she is here with me in Dallas. I regret not going to the Las Vegas Reunion but hope to visit that area in the future.