

Recorded Interview
San Antonio 2010

Robert Pulsifer, Co. A 411th

I live in Muskegon, MI. I flew from Grand Rapids, Michigan into Denver and from Denver to San Antonio. Several of my reunions have been here. Last year we did not make it because our company did not have many people coming. I enjoy coming to see my old buddies but they are getting few and far between. I understand that in the 103d Division there are 26,000 of us dying per month.

I was drafted in 1944 when I was eighteen years old and I spent my nineteenth birthday in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean on “Columbus’s ship” the SS *Santa Maria*. We landed in Marseilles, France on October 20, 1944. We went into combat on November 22, 1944 with Co. A 411th. I was a replacement so I did not get to know the men very well at Camp Howze. We shipped out as soon as I got there.

On my first day of combat, I was wounded in action and was out of the war. It was about 2 o’clock in the afternoon and there were three of us at a hedge row. We had a WWI cemetery on our right side. We were all in a row and were hit with an airburst. We laid there until way after dark before they came up, got us, and carried us out on stretchers. The next morning the engineers had put a rope bridge over the Muerthe River so we could go across. As they were carrying me across the bridge they dumped me, feet first, in the cold November river. I had a broken arm among other things. They got me back up on the rope bridge and dragged me across on my belly. When they got me on the stretcher again, they carried me to the First Aid Station. It was quite an experience.

I ended up in a local field hospital; the building was a converted hotel. They woke me up and gave me a shot of penicillin every three hours, 3, 6, 9 and 12. The wounded spent time in several hospitals run by Americans. I spent one night in a hospital in Paris, France on my way by hospital train to a hospital in Glasgow, Scotland.

My last hospital stay was in Tauntun, England in early 1945 where my fellow patients and I spent Christmas. I still have the Christmas menu they gave us. The singer Georgia Gibbs came and sang to us at the hospital. All the nurses were very nice. I remember Lieutenant Walker, who was an especially nice nurse. She called me *Pulsifier* instead Pulsifer. She was just great.

An English girl about fourteen or fifteen years old would come to sing to us. She had a beautiful voice. I often wondered if she was able to sing professionally. I don't know what her name was. There was a cemetery beside the hospital just out the back door. One night a soldier threw a sheet over his head, held a flashlight under his chin and came in the back door from the cemetery. This young African American soldier saw him and charged out the back door.

I was in Tauntun, England until early 1945 when I came back on the Queen Elizabeth to Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island. From there we went to Billings General Hospital which was part of Fort Benjamin Harrison in the Indianapolis area. I was there most of the summer until I transferred to Percy Jones Convalescent Hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan. We had light duty there until I was given a medical discharge in October of 1945.

I don't remember many of the guys from our company because I arrived at Camp Howze as a replacement. We all left for Camp Shanks in New York not long after I got to Camp Howze. We boarded our transport soon after that. Then I was wounded the first day of combat. I remember Sergeant Evans who was from Michigan. I was one of the younger men; I was eighteen when I got on the ship to go overseas. I spent my nineteen birthday in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

I was seasick like many of the other soldiers. We ran into a big storm in the Atlantic Ocean. Most of them that ate breakfast regretted eating anything. Some did not make it to the deck before they lost their meal in the stairwell. I was seasick before I got out of the New York Harbor. I had never been on the ocean before. It was quite an experience; you were fed twice a day. We were sick because of the storms and the fact that we were in a small ship, a reconverted freighter. We bobbed around like a cork. When you went down into the wave you could look up twenty or thirty feet up and see the top of the wave. I had been out in the water fishing over the years, but never in the ocean. When we got close to the Straits of Gibraltar the water was calmer.

We landed in Marseilles, France. The port was pretty torn up and there were many sunken ships. To keep enemy aircraft from coming in low and strafing we had hundreds of balloons on cables up in the air. The balloons looked like small Zeppelins.

It was a month and two days before we went into combat. We were bivouacked on a plateau above the city. We were trucked down to the dock during the night to unload food supplies and ammunition from the boxcars and put them on trucks. The supplies were then taken up to the plateau.

I was able to get into town which had suffered a lot of damage. I bought a vile of Channel #5 perfume for my mother. Unfortunately, it never got home because the vile broke and spilled in my backpack along the way. The guys would say, "What on earth is that smell?" It was the perfume I had in my backpack. I finally got rid of it.

I went for a blood test in October '43 and then left for the Service February 5, 1944. I took my seventeen weeks of Basic Training at Camp Walters, Texas. They put you through the grill with twenty mile hikes, practice on the rifle range, calisthenics, parades, and guard duty. The Army tried to get you ready for combat but I think I "grew up" in a hurry after being shot at once or twice. Before that I could not foresee what was going to happen. I didn't know what it would feel like to be shot. Nothing prepares you for that experience and I was shot several times in several places. I was shot and the bullet exited through my mouth. My arm was injured and I was also hit in the lung. I was shot in my left ankle and in my left leg. A piece of shrapnel still protrudes from the darkened wound on my left leg. The doctor just left it in there. I feel fortunate that I got out of the war when I did. Three of the guys that were with me were hit pretty badly also and sadly eight men in company were killed that day. I think the Good Lord was looking after me that day. I feel very fortunate that I came through the war with just my wounds compared to many other veterans who experienced more difficult circumstances. My injuries have caused painful arthritis in my shoulders and my knees. I like to take things with a grain of salt and try to live well with what blessings I have. I was out of the war my first day in combat, shot and gone. It still amazes me that some men in our company went through the war and came out without a scratch. I wondered how anyone could survive considering how much the enemy threw at us. I lay where I was shot from two o'clock in the afternoon to six or seven o'clock at night before help arrived. Every time we moved they dropped in a mortar shell. I lay on my back and watched the mortar shells coming through the air; then I could hear the 88s. They would shoot them off in a distance and then they would come whistling through and lay on the ground. Some

would not explode because they were duds. I think the French people who worked in some of the munitions factories had a lot to do with that. They altered the mortar shells so they would not explode. There are stories and movies that indicate that this really happened. *Schindler's List* is one movie that indicated that the workers did all they could to cause the munitions to fail. We may have experienced some of their work. I have not been back to the area where I was hit. I thought often of going back but have never been able to. My age prohibits going back now.

I feel I am one of the fortunate ones; the cemeteries are full of the less fortunate. War footage on TV brings tears to my eyes; it is too hard to watch. When I was younger, it did not seem to bother me so much; as I get older it bothers me more and more. I am one of the younger men; most of the men I knew are three to four years older than I am. I am eighty-four going on eighty-five. Most of the men are 90 years old or close to it. I feel fortunate that I can still get around quite well and work in my yard. I have to thank the Good Lord for that.

I went back home to Muskegon, Michigan. I went back to my work at Continental Motors and retired from there in February of 1988. I enjoy coming to the reunions and will continue to come as long as I can.

Mr. Pulsifer,

Would you share a copy of the Christmas menu that they gave you in the hospital? We would put it in the album with your interview.