

103d Infantry Division

Recorded Interview

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Torrence L. Riggs, Co. L,

I was born November 7, 1921 in Coffeyville, Kansas. Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor we were in the process of moving from a large house located in Cella, Washington, that we shared with another couple, to a smaller house that we were going to rent in Seattle, Washington.

We were married June of 1941; my wife was seventeen and I was nineteen. She passed away three years ago, two days after our sixty-seventh anniversary. We met at a roller rink in Independence, Kansas and it was love at first sight. They said it would not last, but it did.

I was working at a tile factory in Coffeyville that produced Spanish tile just like we see here in the city of New Orleans. I was only making \$.55 an hour. Four of us got into a '35 Ford and drove to Seattle to see an uncle of one of my coworkers who worked for Boeing. I left in August about a month after we were married. We got out there and they were not hiring. I found work with an outfit that was cutting new trucks and stretching drive shafts and so forth and making school buses out of them. My wife came out to Washington near the end of August. Another couple had rented a big house and my wife and I were living there for awhile. Later we rented a

smaller house closer to Arilla, Washington which put me closer to Renton, Washington.

I remember being very happy when I heard about Pearl Harbor because I had bought two new tires the day before and after hearing that news I was able to immediately freeze the sale. I certainly did not like the idea of leaving home and family but I did not hate the idea nor did I get morbid about it. Other men ran down to sign up; I didn't do that. It was three years after war was declared before I took my physical and passed. By that time we were getting a little homesick so I sold what little we had, including the old Model A, and went back to Kansas in March or April of that year. I had to change draft boards. We rode home on an old steam engine train. In about four months I was called up. I went to take some tests in Leavenworth, Kansas and I passed all of them. Since I had worked for Boeing Aircraft I was told that I would be a sure bet for the Navy. It did not turn out that way. The day I went to register they were just stamping Infantry!

I went to Camp Fannin, Texas. I knew guys who were on the same train. We even had a kitchen on the train. When we got to El Reno in Oklahoma, I believe they said, "If you go home you will go south, otherwise you are going to end up in Texas at Camp Fannin for eleven weeks." We took Camp Fannin Highway down to Camp Fannin. (Camp Fannin was a U.S. Army Infantry Replacement Training Center and POW Camp located near Tyler, TX. It was opened in 1943.) Some men were going to Texas or California and we were going on south. When we got down there we took it easy.

My brother was in the Air Force. When I completed my eleven weeks at Camp Fannin I was scheduled to go home on *delay in route*. The night before I was to leave I got word that my only brother, who was in the Air Force, had been shot down over Burma. This was the night before I was to go to Fort Meade, Maryland. My brother was a year and a half younger than I. I went to the Red Cross and they gave me a three day extension on my leave. I caught the train and went down to see my folks. From Vancouver, Washington I went back to Kansas City, down to Coffeyville, Kansas, back up to Kansas City and from there to Fort Meade, Maryland. I road those trains until I was sick of them.

I put on some weight when I was away from camp. I took that weight off at Fort Meade. The doctor gave me a training program which I followed to lose the extra weight. He told me to come in at 5 a.m. every morning and run 10 miles. It wasn't bad and I survived. I was not issued a gun while I was at Camp Fannin. I was issued a blouse type uniform.

I went to see my Aunt in Philadelphia. I got on a train to New York. She wanted me to go to the Red Cross and let them know that I was the only brother living now and I wanted to make an appeal for an honorable discharge. I felt that I had gone this far and I was going to go on.

I got on the fifth largest British ship, the *Aquitania*, and it took me across to Europe. I was not assigned to any group at that time. I ended up in Glasgow, Scotland as a replacement. The *Queen Elizabeth* went out after we did, and later passed us on the sea. The crew of the *Queen Elizabeth* was unloading when we got to Glasgow, Scotland. We had to wait on them to finish unloading. They unloaded us there, put us on a train and took us

to Liverpool, England. The soldiers on the large ships had their large duffle bags with them. If I didn't have my own smaller duffle bag, I would not have had anything.

The men who went to Marseilles had all their equipment with them. I had one duffle bag. The trip over was fine if you liked boiled potatoes and boiled meat. They did not fry anything on the ship. Unlike the other men, I was not assigned any duties on board. Before we left New York, I remember hearing ice rubbing up against the ship. It was around February of 1945 close to Valentines Day when we went over. They put us on a truck and I played dice with the men to pass the time. I would stand up and side bet. I won about forty dollars once. When we got to Le Havre they put us on forty and eight train cars. There was a guy there who was from Las Vegas, or so he said. I got into a game with him. I remember that he had a crooked finger and he had my forty dollars in about fifteen minutes. We got on a train and traveled to a location where we boarded trucks. This was about late February of '45. We went over to LeHarve in small fishing boats; it was rainy, nasty and muddy. The boats could not carry very many men. I remember they had a squad tent and I stayed a day or two there. We filled out some more paperwork and then we boarded the train once more.

We stopped at one point and the Sergeant took some of us to the outer post. It seemed funny later but our own tanks started shooting over our heads. Another soldier who was behind me must have had battle fatigue or something. He stopped and started backing away while the rest of us rushed to the ditch in front of us. Once we realized who was firing

we got up and went on with what we were doing. The Sergeant tried to get the soldier I just mentioned to stop and come back but it didn't do any good. The soldier just kept backing up. I saw that man several times after that; I don't believe he ever got involved in anything.

I will never forget the first night. It must have been raining a lot in the area. They might have had snow as well. There were tarpaulins at the bottom of the foxhole we were to occupy. I was awake most of the night. Did you ever see trees move? I remember watching a tree in the distance and pretty soon I saw it move. I never did shoot at it but I would swear it was moving. When daylight came I could see that nothing had been going on in the area that would have concerned me. I had a BAR. We received the bayonet and everything that went with it later. I had a couple of bandoliers (A belt with loops or small pockets for storing cartridges, worn over the shoulder and across the chest.), as well. At Camp Fannin we went out to the firing range and fired automatic weapons and rifles. But they also expected us to learn to use what they gave us in the field. We stayed two more nights out there in standby before we were replaced. At night when the air was still you could hear the Germans laughing or talking. There may have been only two or three city blocks between us but nothing ever happened. We probably sent out patrols but I was never on one.

I remember an incident involving a Sergeant, a heavy set guy. He took some men and went out over a hill on March 15<sup>th</sup>. I was just about at the end of the list of names. They went single file over a hill. This was part of my story about God. (This was the same guy who dropped back before.)

We went out single file. The big old heavysset Sergeant called him every name he could think of, but he just kept dropping back.

I had a cousin overseas in the 103d who was an engineer and I did not know it. I met him one day and we were able to talk for awhile. I mailed a letter to him from overseas to his home address. It made it all the way back to him in Europe. I don't know how long that took. One time I was watching a movie, "On the Sea," with the other men and my name was called over the PA, announcing that I had a visitor. It was my first cousin from Kansas and that is the way I found out that he was overseas. He was the same cousin that was part of our "double" wedding ceremony. I continued to write letters to my wife. The Army issued us letter paper. My wife was a "trooper." She wrote back often. It took about a full week and sometimes more to receive her letters. My wife lost an older brother and a younger brother in the war. Her younger brother was killed on Iwo Jima in February, I believe. I forgot how long it was before I knew of his death; she mailed me a letter telling me about it. I was never injured but I was cold at times. I know the men really suffered with the cold temperatures in November and December. I don't remember seeing any snow.

Later, when we were moving up, my squad came across a German dome shaped building with portholes all around it. We were in the Siegfried Line and were pinned down in it for a couple of hours. They brought in artillery that would hit the trees causing us injuries and casualties.

We could hear the Germans firing a rocket type of artillery; it was just like someone was setting off firecrackers. We could hear the

screeching noise and the fizzle, even when we were in Manching, Germany which was pretty close to Munich. I saw my first jet airplane in Manching, Germany. It was upside down because it had something wrong with it. I got a picture of a guy on the wing of that plane. We were there killing time when I found out about VE Day, May 8, 1945. As soon as the war with Germany was winding down, those of us in Austria started to prepare to go to Japan. I was sure glad that we did not go. We were on a German airbase and one of the guys must have had a German radio. We heard about the dropping of the bomb. We were reassigned to the 36<sup>th</sup>. I did not have enough points to go home and the 103d was pretty broken up by then.

When we had time we played some football. We were in the barracks around the airfield until it was time for all 120 of us to get on a train to go to Berlin. A Staff Sergeant was the highest rank we had on the train with us. We were headed for Berlin. We rode the train until we got to the Russian checkpoint. We were held up for quite awhile. We finally got off the train and boarded trucks to go on into Berlin. Once in Berlin, we were held up somewhat but eventually were allowed through that checkpoint.

We were replacing a Signal Service Battalion that had been in Berlin. I got the impression that they had not been following orders on curfew too well. We were sent up there to straighten them out. The Signal Service outfit had not seen combat in Paris until after they went to Berlin. I felt they were mighty lucky.

I thought the Russian soldiers were mighty lucky because the United States was financially supporting them in the war. They had our

equipment. We were walking in the Russian part of Berlin one time and a Russian, carrying a briefcase, approached us. He wanted to buy some PX watches and he opened his little case which was full of money. (It was all war money.) The Russians claimed that they did not have any paydays for a year and one half. You can pick a watch up for about \$18.00, our money. We did not sell him our watches. When we got to Austria we were going up a hill in trucks. There were German soldiers everywhere with guns wanting to know where they should go. We told them to go back down the road.

We got to Berlin about the first of September after the Atomic bomb had been dropped in August. I was up at Manching, Germany when that happened. We didn't know anything about the Atomic Bomb. We went by train through to Danzig to the sea. It took 120 of us four or five days to get there. I didn't understand it. When we came to a big yard we would try to run and find something to eat. One guy was killed because he tried to go over an electric fence. That is the way they got us up to Berlin.

After Berlin I was headed home supposedly because the war was over. I don't know how many points I had but I did not have very many. We went out into an ice covered sea in the harbor in Bremen, Germany. From there we went into the English Chanel. We ran into some terrible storms coming back. The water was so rough that if you stood in the middle of the ship you could see water threatening the ship and the next moment you could not see water at all. We came back the southern route from Europe. We went down and back down in the warm water. It took us ten days or more coming home. I arrived home just about, if not on, Valentines Day. It seemed like I had been away on vacation.

While in combat, I had to deal with the mules. I can't find anybody who would say anything about this and I know there is a staff sergeant taken prisoner out of the deal. There was a quantity of ammunition where I was and one of the other Regiments, 409th or 410th, was running out of ammunition. We put the needed ammunition and lots of cigarettes on the mules. There were ten or twelve mules and I happened to be one of the men they picked to take care of them. It was in the hill country in Germany. From our location at the crossroads below it was a narrow trail uphill. You would need to have a jeep to go up it. They had a pretty good fight over there someplace. We had ammunition and lots of cigarettes strapped to the mules. We were going up this road. When we were nearly to the top of the road the Army stopped for some reason. I had the last mule. I just leaned against the ditch back near some oak trees, holding my mule. I heard somebody walking in the oak leaves behind me. I knew whoever it was they were not with us. Two other soldiers and I went across the road and down the slope of the hill about fifty yards or so and stopped. One of the men was dying for a cigarette. So we covered him up with a poncho or raincoat so he could have his cigarette while we were standing guard. We could hear them jabbering and talking and carrying on. The three of us went back to where we started from. The next morning they told us to go up and get the mules. We went up there and found out that the Germans had taken knives and cut the bands that we had strapped onto the mules. It looked like they just wanted the cigarettes more than the ammunition. The mules were still there milling around. We took the mules back with us and surprisingly, a day or two later someone came and

got them. We thought we were supposed to stay there with the mules. I had a horrible thought that since I was not with the mules, I might be reported as lost in battle and they would send word to my wife to that effect.

Except for the vegetables from the garden and the soup we fixed one day, there would be no evidence in that area to alert someone that we probably were still alive. From our location on that hill we could see the body of a German that had been shot. One of his legs seemed to be caught in a root and he was hanging with his head down. We had that to look at everyday when we got up.

We were pinned down in a grape vineyard, with lots of shrapnel flying. One of our men came running out howling for a medic. His left arm was bleeding. Shrapnel had cut thru his coat from his right arm to his left. If the shrapnel had been 4 inches closer he would have died. He had big old baggy pockets that were cut half in two. That is how close he came to being a casualty.

When we got back to the edge of the vineyard, they really set it on us. They had a German .88 gun and they could almost shoot it like a rifle. That shrapnel was so bad that I and the guy next to me both hit the ground and were digging down for safety. I was not sure where I was going. Every few minutes he would say, "Is that ours or theirs?" About the third time he said it, I said, "What in the hell difference does it make?" He never asked me again. It didn't make any difference; they just did not hit the right place. We got up to leave and one of our men was dead, lying face down. I

will never forget it. He had a big boot on and his boot was up at his knee and he was dead. I never got a scratch.

I remember being so struck by the devastation in Berlin. When I was there I could look across at a ten story building and count ten bathtubs one on each floor from top to bottom hanging by the pipe. The outer building had fallen.

I was able to walk into the Russian zone. I was at the Reichstadt, the place that Hitler was supposed to have committed suicide. I also saw the Brandenburg Gate after Russians blew up the Swastika on the gate. We stayed in apartments accessed by a stairway. We stayed next door to a boy who worked for the Signal Service. If his outfit didn't show up at a certain time (10 o'clock) we could go get him. They had curfew. We were not very popular.

I went over to a bar and saw a guy with his dog tags. He had that chain strung with rings; some were diamond rings. We were like MPs. Those guys did not like us. We enforced the rules about women in their rooms.

My wife was pregnant when I went into the service and she had our little boy on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October. When I knocked on the door, she came to answer it and I saw him for the first time, running around at fourteen months old. He had a patch on his eye where he fell and hit the door.

It did not take long to get back into the groove again. I tried to use some of the support the government offered because I could not find a job. There was a 54/20 plan you could use. I finally got a job at the Ozark smelter in Coffeerville. Then an outfit came into Coffeerville that made some

assembly parts for Boeing in Wichita. I went out there and worked three years. They began to starve me out so I returned to being a smelter. I got to the point that I would do anything to scrape a dollar together. Another job had me putting in driveways for people. It was tough.