

John H. Bloedorn Interview

Company L, 318th Inf Reg

(Library of Congress: Veterans History Project; interviewed by Andrew Vawter)

(MS Word Audio Transcript [NOT edited, just transcribed])

00:00:07 Speaker 1

Today is Tuesday, October 21st, 2003, and this is the beginning of an interview with Mr. John Bladon at his home at 700 Welsh Rd. in Watertown, WI.

00:00:20 Speaker 1

Mr. Blaydon is 80 years old, having been born on February 6th, 1923. My name is Andrew Water and I'll be conducting the interview.

00:00:30 Speaker 1

Mr. Braydon, could you state for the recording what war and branch of service you served?

00:00:36 Speaker 2

OK. When I first entered service, I wanted to training at an add the aircraft.

00:00:45 Speaker 2

Training camp.

00:00:47 Speaker 2

And stay in there for about a year and a half and eventually they had so much on the aircraft cruise personnel.

00:00:57 Speaker 2

That they needed more inventory than it did for their replacements of servicemen in combat.

00:01:08 Speaker 2

So they just broke up our aircraft training and I was sent to our infantry training and I trained there for about 3 months and then I was shipped overseas and became a member of the 80th Division of the third.

00:01:30 Speaker 1

Were you drafted or did you enlist in the army?

00:01:34 Speaker 2

Well, I I tried to miss but.

00:01:40 Speaker 2

It didn't. I was trying to get in the Navy because my brother was in the Navy, but it didn't work out, so I was eventually drafted into the the Army.

00:01:52 Speaker 1

Where were you living at the time?

00:01:54 Speaker 2

OK, in Watertown, WI.

00:01:57 Speaker 2

Had to go into Milwaukee with a bunch of guys to be inducted. Some were turned down and others were accepted and they were told to report to our camp.

00:02:13 Speaker 2

For induction, Med campground, Illinois, do you recall?

00:02:18 Speaker 1

The first days of service.

00:02:20 Speaker 2

When when you first, when in period, it was my first time away from home and reside. Diane just being away from home.

00:02:33 Speaker 2

But the real Shockers come is when you finally made it overseas and joint combat.

00:02:42 Speaker 2

My first day of combat I experienced some.

00:02:47 Speaker 2

Situations that will provide to handle the 80th Division company. All that I was supposed to join as it cut off on the other side of the Mazer River in France and I.

00:03:03 Speaker 2

Couldn't even join.

00:03:04 Speaker 2

It so I had to stay with the engineers until they were.

00:03:08 Speaker 2

Uh.

00:03:10 Speaker 2

I'm brought back to the rights of the the river in France that I could join.

00:03:15 Speaker 2

It.

00:03:17 Speaker 1

What was your job assignment there?

00:03:21 Speaker 2

I mean, I knew for Truman, The Rifleman, and was in combat from September 19th is the first day of 44 and eventually.

00:03:40 Speaker 2

On November 26th of 44.

00:03:44 Speaker 2

I was captured by the Germans when you said our our company had just taken a town. We we we renewed the German border and had there was a town called Kleine Dale in France that we were catching. We just had taken this town and we.

00:04:03 Speaker 2

Digging in to secure the.

00:04:10 Speaker 2

Our holdings and.

00:04:13 Speaker 2

On December was a counterattack, and then now the guys were killed and I and another guy were taken prisoner.

00:04:23 Speaker 1

Would you mind telling me of a couple of your experiences that you had?

00:04:27 Speaker 2

As I mentioned that the general of this company was patting, and I remembered.

00:04:34 Speaker 2

When he gave the field Commission to a non commissioned officer because you let our our company so good our.

00:04:43 Speaker 2

Officer had been killed and so this non commissioned officer took charge and got us out of a lot of scrapes and so he was given the field Commission general patent. There was one time where our.

00:05:03 Speaker 2

True.

00:05:06 Speaker 2

We were on a mission and we got caught somewhere and couldn't get out of it and we just had to hide out during the night in a wooded area and.

00:05:22 Speaker 2

We didn't know how to get out of there, and this officer and this person I'm talking about from the group came in and got us out of this mess in the dark. Probably been sitting there yet.

00:05:38 Speaker 1

With the many casualties in your unit.

00:05:41 Speaker 2

The first two combat, though there was more German casualties that I first saw, which was kind of weird because this was my first time even practicing somebody and.

00:05:58 Speaker 2

There, as it was named, there was a pin number.

00:06:04 Speaker 2

Were you prisoner of war, where I had mentioned on November 26 of 44, when we had Thanksgiving was supposed to come along and we were supposed to get a big meal?

00:06:19 Speaker 2

The next day and I was captured in the evening.

00:06:25 Speaker 2

And is.

00:06:28 Speaker 2

Put on the retribute into the area where they were. They took us and held for two days.

00:06:39 Speaker 2

With no food, and when they put us, me and another guy in the truck and we went to, I suppose the people.

00:06:53 Speaker 2

And a guy came along and handed us a loaf of bread.

00:06:57 Speaker 2

And that was the first food I had, and I ate it, by the way.

00:07:03 Speaker 2

Down the line, there was supposed to be my food for the entire trip.

00:07:08 Speaker 2

Put us in box cars and there was the prisoners from other areas that showed up and we got into this box car.

00:07:17 Speaker 2

And it was full. I don't know how many were on it, but you could sit and sit down and the other stand up. This is.

00:07:27 Speaker 2

Compared the worst one of the worst winters in and it was snow. Snow had fall falling yet, but then the temperatures were dropping.

00:07:41 Speaker 2

And we spent three days on this in this cattle.

00:07:46 Speaker 2

Boxcar and one day we heard a train, an airplane come down and we assumed the results and he was straight from the cars.

00:08:06 Speaker 2

What happened was that he must have been on a mission like this before. He didn't destroy the entire box cars, he just scratched the engine and knocked it out. So everybody thought the whole thing was going to be straight.

00:08:25 Speaker 2

Well.

00:08:27 Speaker 2

Finally, we got to a place called Melberg and they unloaded this. This is after a three day trip and this was that one piece of bread that we had for the entire area.

00:08:42 Speaker 2

And.

00:08:43 Speaker 2

The took us into the area.

00:08:47 Speaker 2

Where we stripped the deloused this we had to put the same clothes back on we had and then we were.

00:08:57 Speaker 2

Assigned to different buildings where we were housed and.

00:09:08 Speaker 2

It was a country run by the British, by the British, was in the war way before the Americans, and so some of these guys have been there for about 3 years and they had organized this particular compartment building so that.

00:09:27 Speaker 2

It was.

00:09:29 Speaker 2

A lot better in there than if you would have got stuck anywhere. You know it wasn't.

00:09:34 Speaker 2

Too well organized.

00:09:37 Speaker 2

I don't know if I'm forgetting anything here. The rashes that the Germans gave us was practically nothing. It was mostly soup and it was very light potato soup with new potatoes in it.

00:09:54 Speaker 2

And.

00:09:55 Speaker 2

The Red Cross usually had parcels that they would send, and if you had one of those a week, you couldn't survive on it. But they never came through too late at times when they did show up, they would.

00:10:13 Speaker 2

So they had one parcel assigned to seven guys.

00:10:18 Speaker 2

So rather than spirit 10 of choose up seven, they would take everything out of this package.

00:10:27 Speaker 2

And put cards on it like 12345 and then they if you got A5 you got them. What? What was over on that page? Follow me.

00:10:38 Speaker 2

And there were cigarettes in these curtains, too. Now somebody smoked them. But if you had any sense, you would the collateral and the cap.

00:10:51 Speaker 2

And.

00:10:52 Speaker 2

You could buy other guys rushes if you kept your cigarettes.

00:11:00 Speaker 2

So I was in this came for about 6 months and then we eventually we even knew how the war was going because they had hidden maybe was in the camp that they would take apart and put together at night and they would invite different sections come in to listen to the.

00:11:19 Speaker 2

BBC News.

00:11:21 Speaker 2

And we had a fair idea about how the war was going and the Russians were closer to this camp river reading than the Americans. It was on near the Elk River in Germany.

00:11:37 Speaker 2

And the American forces and Russian forces that first made contact with at the turn, not too many on their own.

00:11:50 Speaker 2

And the Russian outfit was the same outfit that met with American they liberated our camp the day before.

00:12:00 Speaker 2

In this camp, there were some police prisoners of war when they heard the Russians were coming could liberate this camp. They took off. They didn't want to be liberated by the Russians because if they thought if they were.

00:12:17 Speaker 2

They had fought against them, so they were scared of being exterminated, so they took off the day before.

00:12:26 Speaker 1

Could you go back and tell me the details about how you?

00:12:28 Speaker 2

Were captured. OK, just had captured this town trying to climb down France.

00:12:37 Speaker 2

And the first thing you do after now is taken and try to secure it and they come to that I was in was set up on the hill and we were digging in because we had just taken the place and it was kind of a out push. And as we were digging in.

00:12:57 Speaker 2

There is a counter attack by the German army, so you don't even know what outfit it was. He hit. Hit this our company and it was such a strong attack that it worked out this in the company and it was just.

00:13:17 Speaker 2

Myself, I've got a piece of paper that shows me casually. So from the there's no historian.

00:13:29 Speaker 2

And how many survived? And it was just myself and another one that survived this attack.

00:13:35 Speaker 1

How did you feel about that?

00:13:37 Speaker 2

At the time.

00:13:40 Speaker 2

You didn't say nothing. There was a guy standing beside you that had a what I call a book gun. If he decided to, he could have kept me right in half.

00:13:51 Speaker 1

What happened after that? Well.

00:13:57 Speaker 2

After the Russians liberated the camp.

00:14:01 Speaker 2

They put us in what I think was a German officers quarters until they would turn this over to American control and we had this for three weeks and we all wondered why.

00:14:21 Speaker 2

And the story goes that.

00:14:24 Speaker 2

A lot of the prisoners are Russian prisoners of the liberated by the Americans did not go back to Russia. So the only way they thought they could get back was to.

00:14:37 Speaker 2

Trade. Trade off American for Russian. You know what I'm saying. And that's what they wanted to do. Well, eventually they they didn't want to work, so they had to turn his back to American control as we were swimming out to be returned.

00:14:57 Speaker 2

To.

00:14:59 Speaker 2

American control.

00:15:02 Speaker 2

And we learned this kind of around in German school or something that it got off the boy and staying in there and killing time.

00:15:14 Speaker 2

We said we got and we scanned the neighbor, the countryside, and so we we went out and we might shout to a.

00:15:26 Speaker 2

My find area and in this fine area.

00:15:32 Speaker 1

Hmm.

00:15:33 Speaker 2

Got there and there was a family of German people. There would comprise of old men, women, little kids.

00:15:54 Speaker 2

Look here.

00:16:12 Speaker 2

Thought that James did a lot this, but he really.

00:16:20 Speaker 2

What he did to people.

00:16:46 Speaker 2

And then the reading room.

00:17:02 Speaker 2

100 stores were.

00:17:05 Speaker 2

Before you're liberated about families committing suicide, they want to be liberated by the Russians.

00:17:17 Speaker 2

Nope.

00:17:19 Speaker 2

People who receive suicide, what have you.

00:17:34 Speaker 2

There's a lot of things that were really tough, but when you look back at it, you just wonder why you're you're here today.

00:17:53 Speaker 1

And you just stay in touch with your family during this time.

00:17:57 Speaker 2

Actually didn't have with family except as they have it today. I was a single guy. My parents didn't even know I.

00:18:07 Speaker 2

The name got me reported missing in action.

00:18:12 Speaker 2

Until I was liberated and we were informed by the Red Cross, they didn't know where there was a dead or alive or what have you. When they got home, it was quite a celebration and got back.

00:18:31 Speaker 2

Into Watertown late at night and two-bedroom guys pick me up, pick me up from the railroad station.

00:18:38 Speaker 2

And then there's people all riding around.

00:18:43 Speaker 2

With your back.

00:18:46 Speaker 1

How did you and the rest of the guys over there entertain yourselves?

00:18:51 Speaker 2

Well, courage was a big thing. There is every nationality you could think of in this camp because they said they were won by the British because they.

00:19:02 Speaker 2

Headed probably pretty well organized.

00:19:06 Speaker 2

So that when the rashes did show up, there would be distributed decently. All this stuff like pee and everything was collected so they could do it together rather than waste any of it.

00:19:19 Speaker 2

Ohh here's something.

00:19:22 Speaker 2

People. Everyone who like stealing food from your people around you, there was being captive with you and one time.

00:19:38 Speaker 2

A big soldier steal some food from another companion and this was the third time he was caught.

00:19:50 Speaker 2

So they got into a big steam room and five big guys that were really big and strong life on and really.

00:20:06 Speaker 2

And to watch it, to make sure and maybe do the same thing.

00:20:11 Speaker 1

What did you do in the days and weeks after?

00:20:13 Speaker 2

You came back from the war. I was about maybe homes. When I got out of this camp.

00:20:24 Speaker 2

And I have a book that my sister kept from me while I was gone. It shows pictures of different matter me but other guys that were liberated, the condition they were in.

00:20:40 Speaker 2

That I can show you.

00:20:43 Speaker 2

So I was flying out of Germany from hell in Germany to rooms, rooms, France, where we were held for 10.

00:21:00 Speaker 2

And there were so many guys going back to the streets after the war that it was kind of limited how fast you could get back. You were held in different camps.

00:21:14 Speaker 2

Two, your time is coming to really go back and they were named after cigarettes. Kids left the strike.

00:21:22 Speaker 2

And while I was staying there and said anybody that was couldn't go home can go anywhere they wanted to. When my mother had come from Scotland.

00:21:34 Speaker 2

And I saw an opportunity to take a leave, and then I went up to Scotland to see your birth place, which is a story in itself. But it's really neat. And since I've been.

00:21:53 Speaker 2

Where is the family? My wife and I and my one daughter went back to the visit that town and checked the area out.

00:22:02 Speaker 1

Did you have any friends while you?

00:22:03 Speaker 1

Were.

00:22:03 Speaker 2

Over there? Not really because.

00:22:08 Speaker 2

The turnover was so great I joined as a replacement. That was a new guy. These guys trained as a division and we were together for a long time.

00:22:19 Speaker 2

And then he went into combat, and that came as a replacement. And when I joined it, we were.

00:22:29 Speaker 2

That didn't leave him alone.

00:22:31 Speaker 2

So there's a big turnover of people there where you never got to know anybody from your length of time. And then when they came for POW camp.

00:22:43 Speaker 2

That was given vibrating in the Armstrong remark and couldn't remember the name, but there was no follow up for anything later on. Now I do belong to a.

00:22:56 Speaker 2

Because they're large group that meets once a year and they get together with some guys that never knew before until we went through these meetings. Did you keep any kind of personal diary?

00:23:10 Speaker 2

With you, I mentioned that my sister kept a scrapbook. It's so steep and it's got all the stuff in there that happened to me when I was in service.

00:23:24 Speaker 2

I've got letters that were sent to my parents.

00:23:29 Speaker 2

Ah.

00:23:32 Speaker 2

During my missing I can't even read these letters, but they sound to me.

00:23:40 Speaker 2

It's kind of strange. And then the the public, the newspaper of how I was reported missing in action.

00:23:55 Speaker 2

I was liberated. Newspaper articles and stories that she kept about would would have were not actually happened to me, but it was about reports.

00:24:13 Speaker 1

What did you go on to?

00:24:14 Speaker 1

Do as a career after the.

00:24:15 Speaker 2

War. When I worked for men's clothing store and.

00:24:27 Speaker 2

I've got a write up in the paper that I can give you and it gives you a lot of things that are not giving you now, but it tells you how I got into business and.

00:24:46 Speaker 2

I was in, went to work for this transmit shop in Watertown eventually became a partner and then eventually my wife and I became so owners.

00:24:58 Speaker 2

And that was over a span of 48 years on men's clothing, and it was involved.

00:25:06 Speaker 1

Could your military experience influence the way that you thought about the war?

00:25:11 Speaker 2

The two years of my life, over a period of two years.

00:25:18 Speaker 2

In World War 2.

00:25:21 Speaker 2

And so we really had a really strong sense of.

00:25:26 Speaker 2

How I think and how I live my life in Hawaii, there's my family.