

Henry Mack Erford Interview

Anti-Tank Company, 317th Inf Reg

(Library of Congress: Veterans History Project; interviewed by Bryan Verhoff, Kevin J. Niese, Brock Verhoff)

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

00:00:05 Speaker 1

Could you please state your name and date of birth?

00:00:10 Speaker 2

Henry McPherson.

00:00:13 Speaker 2

Born.

00:00:15 Speaker 2

1920 December the 18th.

00:00:23 Speaker 1

What war and branch of service did you serve in?

00:00:26 Speaker 2

I was in.

00:00:28 Speaker 2

European theater in World War 2.

00:00:33 Speaker 1

What was your rank?

00:00:35 Speaker 2

As T5 technician 5th grade.

00:00:40 Speaker 1

And where did you serve?

00:00:43 Speaker 2

In Europe.

00:00:46 Speaker 2

All through France and.

00:00:49 Speaker 2

Germany and.

00:00:53 Speaker 2

Belgium and all that place.

00:00:57 Speaker 2

Was in five major battles.

00:01:02 Speaker 1

Where did you have your training?

00:01:05 Speaker 2

In Camp Forest, Tennessee.

00:01:09 Speaker 1

What was it like and how tough was it?

00:01:12 Speaker 2

It was.

00:01:14 Speaker 2

A lot of work and.

00:01:16 Speaker 2

A lot of different things.

00:01:18 Speaker 2

Learn to do everything.

00:01:22 Speaker 1

What was your job in? What did it consist of?

00:01:25 Speaker 2

I was.

00:01:27 Speaker 2

Mechanic and.

00:01:30 Speaker 2

In part time.

00:01:32 Speaker 2

Mechanic and truck driver.

00:01:39 Speaker 2

That's.

00:01:40 Speaker 2

Only two things are done.

00:01:43 Speaker 1

Was combat and everyday activity.

00:01:46 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:01:48 Speaker 1

Was were there a lot of casualties in your unit?

00:01:53 Speaker 2

Yeah then.

00:01:54 Speaker 2

We had.

00:01:57 Speaker 2

Better than 30,000 casualties.

00:02:00 Speaker 2

In our division.

00:02:03 Speaker 2

During World War 2.

00:02:05 Speaker 2

And.

00:02:07 Speaker 2

We only had 15,000 men.

00:02:10 Speaker 2

So that everybody got.

00:02:12 Speaker 2

Killed or wounded?

00:02:14 Speaker 2

Twice. You know with me.

00:02:18 Speaker 1

What medals and citations did you receive?

00:02:22 Speaker 2

I got a Purple Heart and I'm.

00:02:27 Speaker 2

For getting wounded one time.

00:02:33 Speaker 2

I got medals for.

00:02:39 Speaker 2

Rifleman and.

00:02:42 Speaker 2

Combat instrument.

00:02:47 Speaker 1

How did you stay in touch with your family?

00:02:50 Speaker 2

Wrote letters.

00:02:53 Speaker 2

Once in a while.

00:02:54 Speaker 2

When we had a chance to mail them.

00:02:58 Speaker 1

What were the living conditions like?

00:03:01 Speaker 2

Living outside.

00:03:03 Speaker 2

All during your.

00:03:05 Speaker 2

Like I.

00:03:07 Speaker 2

For about 3 months and never seen a kitchen.

00:03:12 Speaker 2

Where they cooked.

00:03:15 Speaker 2

That eat out of.

00:03:17 Speaker 2

Tin cans.

00:03:19 Speaker 2

Key rations.

00:03:22 Speaker 1

What did you do for entertainment?

00:03:27 Speaker 2

Didn't have nothing to do.

00:03:32 Speaker 1

Do you recall when and where you were when your service ended?

00:03:37 Speaker 2

I was in Czechoslovakia.

00:03:40 Speaker 2

The war ended.

00:03:42 Speaker 2

And.

00:03:45 Speaker 2

Took me about.

00:03:48 Speaker 2

Four or five months to get home.

00:03:48

Yes.

00:03:50 Speaker 2

After the war ended.

00:03:53 Speaker 1

What were your plans after the?

00:03:54 Speaker 1

War.

00:03:56 Speaker 2

Plans.

00:03:59 Speaker 2

Is that what?

00:03:59 Speaker 2

You said.

00:04:00 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:04:02 Speaker 2

Well.

00:04:04 Speaker 2

I went back to work in Toledo where I worked before I went in.

00:04:10 Speaker 2

And then got married and.

00:04:15 Speaker 2

After.

00:04:18 Speaker 2

We had one.

00:04:21 Speaker 2

Kid, one child.

00:04:24 Speaker 2

And.

00:04:25 Speaker 2

I didn't like it in Toledo, so we moved out.

00:04:30 Speaker 2

Moved out of Toledo.

00:04:32 Speaker 2

And I worked in a Creamery.

00:04:35 Speaker 2

For eight years before.

00:04:37 Speaker 2

Bought the barn, Miller city.

00:04:41 Speaker 1

Did you meet any close friends in the service?

00:04:45 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:04:46 Speaker 2

Still.

00:04:50 Speaker 2

Not one that.

00:04:52 Speaker 2

From Iowa, Bob Mann.

00:04:54 Speaker 2

Here.

00:04:57 Speaker 2

He was in my company overseas.

00:05:01 Speaker 2

And he's still out there.

00:05:04 Speaker 2

We.

00:05:06 Speaker 2

We've been out there four or five times and he's been here four or five times since war.

00:05:15 Speaker 2

But.

00:05:16 Speaker 2

Now I can't get no person.

00:05:20 Speaker 1

Did you join a veterans organization?

00:05:23 Speaker 2

Yeah, I belong to.

00:05:25 Speaker 2

American Legion here and.

00:05:28 Speaker 2

Veterans of foreign wars.

00:05:30 Speaker 2

In new Bavaria.

00:05:34 Speaker 2

That's all I belong to, I guess.

00:05:41 Speaker 1

Did your military experience influence your thinking about war, or about the military in general?

00:05:52 Speaker 1

Did you?

00:05:52 Speaker 2

I know one thing.

00:05:55 Speaker 2

If anybody goes into the military.

00:05:58 Speaker 2

Or make sure they don't get in the infantry.

00:06:02 Speaker 2

Because that is the front line.

00:06:07 Speaker 1

How did your service experience affect your life?

00:06:12 Speaker 2

I just lost about four years old.

00:06:19 Speaker 1

You said you were in five major battles.

00:06:22 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:06:25 Speaker 2

Omaha beach.

00:06:27 Speaker 2

Was the first one.

00:06:29 Speaker 2

And then we.

00:06:31 Speaker 2

Broke through there after.

00:06:34 Speaker 2

Couple weeks of hard fighting.

00:06:37 Speaker 2

And then I was in the.

00:06:39 Speaker 2

3rd army.

00:06:40 Speaker 2

Patton's army.

00:06:43 Speaker 2

And we.

00:06:45 Speaker 2

Headed out for Paris?

00:06:48 Speaker 2

And we got to Paris and then?

00:06:51 Speaker 2

We went around it because.

00:06:55 Speaker 2

They didn't want us to.

00:06:57 Speaker 2

Ruined it.

00:06:59 Speaker 2

They figured the Germans would burn it down if if we went in there. So we left the French take it.

00:07:06 Speaker 2

The French army.

00:07:09 Speaker 2

Come and took to Paris.

00:07:12 Speaker 2

They was in England.

00:07:14 Speaker 2

Make them over and.

00:07:16 Speaker 2

And then we left them take Paris. And we went around it.

00:07:21 Speaker 2

And want to.

00:07:24 Speaker 2

We marched for.

00:07:28 Speaker 2

80 some miles in about 3 days.

00:07:33 Speaker 2

Into the German territory.

00:07:35 Speaker 2

And we got to where?

00:07:38 Speaker 2

World War 1 ended.

00:07:40 Speaker 2

Then we went from there.

00:07:43 Speaker 2

Down the southern part of France.

00:07:46 Speaker 2

Where?

00:07:49 Speaker 2

We crossed the Masala River and when we crossed the Masala River we took three hills.

00:07:58 Speaker 2

And.

00:08:01 Speaker 2

Every night.

00:08:03 Speaker 2

The Germans took two of them back.

00:08:06 Speaker 2

For six days.

00:08:09 Speaker 2

And we.

00:08:10 Speaker 2

Got 500 replacements every day for six days.

00:08:16 Speaker 2

And.

00:08:18 Speaker 2

For our division and then.

00:08:21 Speaker 2

After six days.

00:08:24 Speaker 2

We.

00:08:26 Speaker 2

Broke through.

00:08:28 Speaker 2

And.

00:08:30 Speaker 2

But we.

00:08:32 Speaker 2

We lost a lot of people there.

00:08:35 Speaker 2

And the.

00:08:37 Speaker 2

The 4th Armored Division.

00:08:40 Speaker 2

Got ahead of.

00:08:41 Speaker 2

Us.

00:08:42 Speaker 2

Went across the river where we we have crossed.

00:08:46 Speaker 2

And they went across the river.

00:08:50 Speaker 2

320 tanks.

00:08:52 Speaker 2

And they started out.

00:08:55 Speaker 2

And when he and.

00:08:57 Speaker 2

Two days later, they came back with 20 and lost the rest.

00:09:02 Speaker 2

And the Germans knocked them out when they got.

00:09:07 Speaker 2

Out in their head of the infantry.

00:09:11 Speaker 2

And then one night, way.

00:09:15 Speaker 2

That 6th day after the 6th day there.

00:09:20 Speaker 2

I was on our artillery outpost.

00:09:27 Speaker 2

The Germans are getting ready to attack.

00:09:30 Speaker 2

And they got him out. And they was out in the open.

00:09:33 Speaker 2

And they had about 20 battalions artillery.

00:09:37 Speaker 2

That was supporting us.

00:09:40 Speaker 2

They cut loose on them.

00:09:42 Speaker 2

And they.

00:09:44 Speaker 2

And they got them all.

00:09:47 Speaker 2

And then when we went through there the next day.

00:09:51 Speaker 2

Went on further.

00:09:53 Speaker 2

By.

00:09:55 Speaker 2

They had picked all them Germans up, took them on the other side of the hill and had them piled up there about 5 high.

00:10:04 Speaker 2

For as long as you can see.

00:10:07 Speaker 2

That was dead. That's how many got killed there.

00:10:10 Speaker 2

And.

00:10:12 Speaker 2

Then.

00:10:14 Speaker 2

We went on.

00:10:15 Speaker 2

Ask that.

00:10:18 Speaker 2

And then.

00:10:21 Speaker 2

We got it.

00:10:24 Speaker 2

We that ended the Germans counterattacked on us.

00:10:29 Speaker 2

Then we got up close to the German border.

00:10:33 Speaker 2

And then.

00:10:38 Speaker 2

The Battle of the Bulge started.

00:10:41 Speaker 2

And they.

00:10:42 Speaker 2

Then I got wounded.

00:10:44 Speaker 2

And I was in the hospital. They moved out.

00:10:48 Speaker 2

Our whole army up to stop the Germans.

00:10:52 Speaker 2

Of the Battle of the balls.

00:10:55 Speaker 2

I got out of the hospital. I got up there.

00:10:58 Speaker 2

And then.

00:11:00 Speaker 2

After that I was in the regimental Tiger patrol for the rest of the war.

00:11:06 Speaker 2

We the battle the balls. Then we went back down South again. Then we crossed the Rhine.

00:11:14 Speaker 2

Where we crossed the Rhine down there.

00:11:17 Speaker 2

Who was the Maines Germany?

00:11:20 Speaker 2

And.

00:11:22 Speaker 2

Our Air Force would knock out all the bridges on the Rhine every night.

00:11:29 Speaker 2

And.

00:11:31 Speaker 2

But one.

00:11:33 Speaker 2

And that main bridge, their mains. They left it go. They didn't. They didn't knock it out.

00:11:39 Speaker 2

And then.

00:11:42 Speaker 2

The Germans is heading back for.

00:11:45 Speaker 2

To try to get back across the Rhine.

00:11:48 Speaker 2

And they went to mains to go across that bridge and then the Air Force.

00:11:53 Speaker 2

Knocked it out.

00:11:55 Speaker 2

And they had.

00:11:57 Speaker 2

All their tanks and guns and trucks and all their equipment.

00:12:03 Speaker 2

And everything on at all the roads blocked for about a mile going into.

00:12:09 Speaker 2

Mains and.

00:12:13 Speaker 2

Then when it got daylight, they airplanes.

00:12:17 Speaker 2

Strafed them and burned that mall up.

00:12:21 Speaker 2

All that equipment and everything is on the road.

00:12:24 Speaker 2

They just burned them right there.

00:12:27 Speaker 2

Started on fire.

00:12:30 Speaker 2

Burn them and then.

00:12:32 Speaker 2

Had to push him off of the road after.

00:12:35 Speaker 2

Or so we could get through.

00:12:39 Speaker 2

And we went into mains.

00:12:41 Speaker 2

And then we.

00:12:43 Speaker 2

Cross the Rhine on a boat.

00:12:46 Speaker 2

On a boat.

00:12:49 Speaker 2

And.

00:12:52 Speaker 2

We had.

00:12:56 Speaker 2

A lot of.

00:12:57 Speaker 2

Things that we drag across there at a.

00:13:01 Speaker 2

Old Ford truck that the.

00:13:05 Speaker 2

The Germans had we had that and we've filled that careful.

00:13:10 Speaker 2

Booze and.

00:13:13 Speaker 2

And.

00:13:14 Speaker 2

Cognac and.

00:13:17 Speaker 2

Wine and and.

00:13:22 Speaker 2

That bubbly stuff. What's that called?

00:13:30 Speaker 1

Campaign.

00:13:31 Speaker 2

Champagne we had that. Careful, that kind of stuff and we.

00:13:36 Speaker 2

Took extra field packs from soldiers that had got wounded and stuff like that and covered it up with blankets, and they took it across the.

00:13:46 Speaker 2

River on the boat.

00:13:49 Speaker 2

Then we had.

00:13:51 Speaker 2

Had that to drink for men until the war ended.

00:13:59 Speaker 2

We went from error down.

00:14:01 Speaker 2

In the.

00:14:04 Speaker 2

Into.

00:14:06 Speaker 2

Went pretty close to Berlin.

00:14:08 Speaker 2

And then they stopped us. And then we went S down into Austria.

00:14:14 Speaker 2

And we was in a big castle at.

00:14:18 Speaker 2

I guess that had been Hitler's and when he was young.

00:14:23 Speaker 2

And there's a great Big Castle built on edge of the mountain down there.

00:14:29 Speaker 2

And.

00:14:31 Speaker 2

They have all kinds of dishes and everything in there.

00:14:34 Speaker 2

So we ended up with.

00:14:36 Speaker 2

Butchered a calf.

00:14:39 Speaker 2

Found a calf there and we butchered it and.

00:14:42 Speaker 2

And.

00:14:45 Speaker 2

Cook it up and.

00:14:47 Speaker 2

Eat it. There's about 15 of us in this.

00:14:51 Speaker 2

Regimental.

00:14:53 Speaker 2

Patrol.

00:14:55 Speaker 2

And we had that.

00:14:57 Speaker 2

Calf. We butchered and.

00:15:00 Speaker 2

Fried it up and it was really good eating and that's the first time we had anything to eat like that.

00:15:08 Speaker 2

From Malawi's in Europe.

00:15:15 Speaker 2

And then there's another place, one other place in Germany we had.

00:15:20 Speaker 2

We found a three gallon crack lard.

00:15:23 Speaker 2

And they all had potatoes. That's about all they had to eat.

00:15:27 Speaker 2

The Germans.

00:15:29 Speaker 2

And.

00:15:31 Speaker 2

We made French fries and stuff on them potatoes until we use that lard oil up.

00:15:37 Speaker 2

We were there for.

00:15:40 Speaker 2

Quite a few days.

00:15:42 Speaker 2

And.

00:15:51 Speaker 2

Then when the war ended, we.

00:15:55 Speaker 2

We was down in Czechoslovakia.

00:15:58 Speaker 2

And.

00:16:01 Speaker 2

The Germans is coming back from the Russian Front.

00:16:07 Speaker 2

Trying to give up and.

00:16:10 Speaker 2

Americans just left him Mark.

00:16:13 Speaker 2

It was marching. They had a path. Rd.

00:16:17 Speaker 2

Warren the grass.

00:16:19 Speaker 2

Right beside the highway, it looked like a double highway.

00:16:24 Speaker 2

And.

00:16:25 Speaker 2

And marches and big army boots.

00:16:30 Speaker 2

With teats on with they they used in the mountains and stuff.

00:16:35 Speaker 2

And.

00:16:37 Speaker 2

There was so many of them.

00:16:40 Speaker 2

And it takes a long time for.

00:16:44 Speaker 2

100,000 troops to March by it, even at about 6:00.

00:16:50 Speaker 2

6-8 feet wide. You know what I mean?

00:16:55 Speaker 2

Or 10 feet wide.

00:17:01 Speaker 2

And we got on trucks and we went back into.

00:17:05 Speaker 2

To Germany, we.

00:17:07 Speaker 2

Sat there for a couple months before we got to come home.

00:17:12 Speaker 2

And I had enough points to come home.

00:17:15 Speaker 2

But then we got into the heart of France.

00:17:19 Speaker 2

We had to wait about another 6.

00:17:22 Speaker 2

Weeks on the boat.

00:17:24 Speaker 2

So I never got home until October.

00:17:29 Speaker 2

And the war ended in.

00:17:31 Speaker 2

And ate the.

00:17:35 Speaker 2

May.

00:17:37 Speaker 2

I was just like last week.

00:17:42 Speaker 1

Is there anything else you'd?

00:17:43 Speaker 1

Like to add.

00:17:48 Speaker 2

Oh, that's all then.

00:17:51 Speaker 2

Then I come home.

00:17:57 Speaker 1

These are some of his medals. Right. Here's his dog tags.

00:18:03 Speaker 1

To combat infantry.

00:18:06 Speaker 2

Didn't find my dog tags did.

00:18:07

It.

00:18:09 Speaker 1

Us pain from uniform.

00:18:13

Yeah.

00:18:14 Speaker 1

An expert infantry.

00:18:19 Speaker 1

Expert Rifleman.

00:18:23 Speaker 1

This is for what branches in.

00:18:27 Speaker 1

Blue Ridge mountain.

00:18:29 Speaker 1

80th in the tree division. These are European theater.

00:18:37 Speaker 1

To good conductance.

00:18:42 Speaker 1

And he got this Purple Heart for when he was wounded.

00:18:45 Speaker 1

And then this one, when you got back home?