

Leroy Jonsson Interview

Company G, 317th Inf Reg

(Library of Congress: Veterans History Project; interviewed by Jeffrey L. Meek)

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

00:00:09 Speaker 1

Well, today is July 11th, 2014 and we're in my home today with Mr. Leroy Johnson and we're here in Hot Springs Village, AR to do an oral history of his time.

00:00:23 Speaker 1

In service during World War 2 with the 80th Infantry Division.

00:00:27 Speaker 1

Leroy was a Rifleman in Europe, spent three years in the army, and we're going to do his story for he and his family and the Veterans History project.

00:00:36 Speaker 1

And we run. First of all, I want to thank you for coming over and.

00:00:39 Speaker 1

Doing.

00:00:39 Speaker 1

This and let's just start simply with what's your birth date?

00:00:43 Speaker 1

And where were you born?

00:00:45 Speaker 2

Ohh my birth date is February 1st 1924 and I was born in Chicago.

00:00:51 Speaker 1

Illinois.

00:00:51 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:00:52 Speaker 1

Born and raised there.

00:00:54 Speaker 2

Yeah, up until the time I went in then I was entirely different.

00:00:58 Speaker 1

OK. Leroy, do you remember where you were when you first heard about Pearl Harbor?

00:01:06 Speaker 2

Yeah, we're going up to a pool hall up on Damon Ave.

00:01:13 Speaker 2

And we heard about it then.

00:01:15 Speaker 1

Do you remember any reaction of you or your friends and?

00:01:18 Speaker 1

Family.

00:01:19 Speaker 2

No, we were young then. We were 17 and 18 years old, so we weren't too concerned about it. And it was something that happened over there, you know, far away.

00:01:23 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:01:28

MHM.

00:01:31 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:01:32 Speaker 1

Turned out to be a pretty big deal, didn't it?

00:01:35 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:01:36 Speaker 1

World War.

00:01:37 Speaker 2

Yeah, it was turned out to be a big deal as right?

00:01:40 Speaker 1

Did.

00:01:40 Speaker 1

If you'd end up.

00:01:41 Speaker 1

In the military, because of Pearl Harbor.

00:01:44 Speaker 2

Yes and no, because we were at that time they were starting to adopt.

00:01:49 Speaker 2

Not adopt.

00:01:52 Speaker 1

Draft.

00:01:53 Speaker 2

Draft kids, yes.

00:01:54

OK. All right.

00:01:56 Speaker 1

How is it then that you got into the army?

00:01:59 Speaker 2

Well, we would know that we were going to be drafted with my buddy and I. We knew we were going to be drafted within three or four months. So we decided to volunteer.

00:02:09 Speaker 2

So we volunteered for the infantry, we volunteered for the Air Force and we got into the.

00:02:14 Speaker 1

Infantry volunteer for the Air Force Army Air Force. Tell us how that happened. Tell us about joining the military.

00:02:22 Speaker 2

Well, with nothing to it, you've got an A streetcar and Damon Ave. and you went down to the South to the ceremony of swearing in and then you got your got onto a bus and you went down to camp.

00:02:35 Speaker 2

Sorry, Camp camp camp. What?

00:02:41 Speaker 2

Oh Lord, I don't know. Camp camp something.

00:02:45 Speaker 2

I don't know. It was such a long time ago. I don't remember the names.

00:02:49 Speaker 1

Where is the camp in Illinois?

00:02:51 Speaker 2

Or goes in Illinois.

00:02:52 Speaker 1

Was it camp Sheridan?

00:02:54 Speaker 2

Or ohh no Sheridan was up the door by the middle of the by the Navy.

00:02:56 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:02:58 Speaker 1

Uh-huh.

00:03:00 Speaker 1

But it was a camp in Illinois. It wasn't camp Grant.

00:03:04

That was out.

00:03:04 Speaker 2

Might have been might have been pampered.

00:03:05 Speaker 1

That was out by Rockford.

00:03:07 Speaker 2

Yeah, that could have been.

00:03:09 Speaker 1

So you think it was camp?

00:03:10 Speaker 1

Grant yeah.

00:03:12

OK.

00:03:13 Speaker 1

So is that where you had your basic training then, was it?

00:03:16 Speaker 2

Camp grand. No, we we were shipped down to good old Arkansas. Whereabouts.

00:03:23 Speaker 2

At Camp Robinson.

00:03:25 Speaker 1

How are?

00:03:26 Speaker 1

We went to campgrounds and.

00:03:28 Speaker 2

Yeah, that's where we learned that most of Arkansas was rock.

00:03:33 Speaker 2

And when it?

00:03:34 Speaker 2

Came to digging foxholes. You couldn't dig a foxhole.

00:03:38 Speaker 1

So when you got to Camp Robinson, is that when you found out you'd be in the infantry rather than in the Air Force or was it still just basic training?

00:03:44 Speaker 2

Oh yeah, we knew.

00:03:46 Speaker 2

No, we knew right away. We're going to be any.

00:03:48 Speaker 2

Infantry.

00:03:49 Speaker 1

OK.

00:03:50 Speaker 1

Did they say why you weren't going to be considered for?

00:03:53 Speaker 1

The Air Force.

00:03:54 Speaker 2

Well, first of all the IT score.

00:03:58

Mm-hmm.

00:03:58 Speaker 2

Was just a point or two below what I they would do is to accept and then in the meantime, why they had they had fulfilled their requirements and they had. They didn't want any more money, any more men into the.

00:04:02 Speaker 1

OK.

00:04:12 Speaker 2

Air Force at the time, and so they sent us into the infantry.

00:04:14 Speaker 1

Uh-huh.

00:04:18 Speaker 1

Do you remember what year it was that you volunteered?

00:04:23

Ohh Lord.

00:04:31 Speaker 2

41413940404040 in.

00:04:35 Speaker 2

There.

00:04:36 Speaker 2

Because it was in the end of the year.

00:04:38 Speaker 1

OK, so it.

00:04:38 Speaker 1

Was before Pearl Harbor.

00:04:41 Speaker 2

No, Pearl Harbor wasn't 41. That's right.

00:04:43 Speaker 1

We have December 41.

00:04:45 Speaker 2

44.

00:04:48 Speaker 2

44 I guess 4 no 40434242 or 442 or 43 one or two.

00:05:02 Speaker 1

43 Do you have your discharge papers?

00:05:06 Speaker 2

I have them here. I don't have them with me, no.

00:05:10 Speaker 1

We'll have to take a look at that and get the dates here for to fill out the paperwork for the Veterans History project.

00:05:16 Speaker 2

I got a picture here that shows me in full full full field uniform in 43.

00:05:21 Speaker 1

OK.

00:05:23

OK.

00:05:24 Speaker 2

But that was where it was taken. I don't.

00:05:27 Speaker 2

Know.

00:05:27 Speaker 1

All right.

00:05:28 Speaker 1

So you learn to dig fox holes in the rocks of Arkansas and Camp Robinson.

00:05:33 Speaker 2

Yeah, that's where I. That's where I wound up for a.

00:05:36 Speaker 2

While.

00:05:36 Speaker 1

OK.

00:05:37 Speaker 2

That's where I took my basic right.

00:05:40 Speaker 1

And.

00:05:41 Speaker 1

At that point, you learned what about weaponry and marching and all that?

00:05:45 Speaker 2

Stuff all, all that good stuff, yes.

00:05:45

So.

00:05:47

Yeah.

00:05:50 Speaker 1

So what happened next after?

00:05:52 Speaker 2

Well, I joined a a three 17th Infantry training battalion.

00:05:58 Speaker 1

317th.

00:06:00 Speaker 1

Infantry training battalion.

00:06:02 Speaker 2

And with that battalion, I trained down in.

00:06:06 Speaker 2

Virginia.

00:06:08 Speaker 2

And we also spent some time up in the lakes up in northern Wisconsin and Michigan.

00:06:15 Speaker 2

That was in the winter time.

00:06:19 Speaker 1

So the 317th was in Virginia and Wisconsin, huh?

00:06:22 Speaker 2

Oh yeah.

00:06:24 Speaker 1

Did they take you to those different places for different kinds of training? Talk about what you remember of the training, Leroy?

00:06:27

Yeah.

00:06:33 Speaker 2

I remember we were camped out on a lake that was frozen.

00:06:36

MHM.

00:06:37 Speaker 2

And we of course were addressed for it, but we still were cold.

00:06:41 Speaker 1

I bet.

00:06:44 Speaker 2

And.

00:06:47 Speaker 2

Oh, that's about all.

00:06:49 Speaker 2

I don't think there was anything else I got.

00:06:53 Speaker 2

Let's see, I got up.

00:07:04

Huh.

00:07:05 Speaker 2

Anyway, I got I got finished with the the 317th and that's when I was transferred into the 80th Infantry as a replacement.

00:07:14 Speaker 1

Was that still here in the US? Yes.

00:07:18 Speaker 1

As a replacement.

00:07:20 Speaker 1

OK.

00:07:25 Speaker 1

When you joined the 80th, do you remember what regiment you were in in the 80th Infantry Division, 373-1717?

00:07:35 Speaker 2

Company G.

00:07:38 Speaker 1

Company G OK.

00:07:41 Speaker 2

As a matter of fact, there was a article in the 80th Division newspaper that showed this Abe, Abe, Baron, whoever he was, was also in company G, but he was at that time being given the Legion of Honor.

00:07:57 Speaker 2

For the French.

00:07:58

MHM.

00:07:59 Speaker 2

Uh.

00:08:00 Speaker 2

The French army, which I could have, I could have been in there, but I just didn't feel like filling out the paperwork because it was. It was just a matter of you being there. You.

00:08:01 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:08:07 Speaker 1

OK.

00:08:10 Speaker 2

Know.

00:08:11 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:08:11 Speaker 2

And so you got all it in in in Washington, DC is when they when they finally filled it out.

00:08:19 Speaker 1

So you're put with G Company 300 and 17th Regiment, 80th Infantry Division. And then what happened from there?

00:08:28 Speaker 2

Well, let's see.

00:08:30

We.

00:08:32 Speaker 2

We sailed on to Queen Mary.

00:08:35 Speaker 2

And we, oh, first of all, it was very hush hush because everything was very quiet. You weren't supposed to let anybody know you were no telephone calls, no letters, no nothing. So you got on the you got on the boat in the morning and you got on to on your on your to hold. The vision was on one.

00:08:57 Speaker 2

Boat.

00:08:58 Speaker 1

I'm the Queen Mary, yeah.

00:09:00 Speaker 2

And so we say a lot.

00:09:01 Speaker 2

Of the harbor and all the.

00:09:02 Speaker 1

Which which harbor out in New York.

00:09:04 Speaker 1

Or where?

00:09:05 Speaker 2

Of New York, yeah.

00:09:06 Speaker 2

And all the bells and whistles in the world were where I I don't know if it was, it was around the 4th of July, so it could have been the 4th of July. I don't know. But all the bells and whistles were blowing. All the fire boats were shooting streams. And well in the air. And I thought, boy, if I was a captain in the.

00:09:26 Speaker 2

On the uh.

00:09:28 Speaker 2

Submarine Corps and the Germans. I'd be whistling by my best too, because there was a big show boat coming at me.

00:09:36 Speaker 1

Wow.

00:09:37 Speaker 2

But they took it. They they took the.

00:09:40 Speaker 2

We sailed all by ourselves. We didn't have any escort or anything like that.

00:09:46 Speaker 1

Uh-huh.

00:09:46 Speaker 2

Because the the sub that could run out outrun any sub that the Germans had. And so we were. We're we're we landed I think at five days it took us to get across the ocean and we landed in Scotland then.

00:09:51 Speaker 1

I see.

00:10:00

OK.

00:10:01 Speaker 2

In it was in July.

00:10:05 Speaker 2

July, yeah.

00:10:08 Speaker 2

And then in.

00:10:11 Speaker 2

August, I think it was.

00:10:13 Speaker 2

We let we we left England and went to France.

00:10:19 Speaker 1

When you when you were over there in Scotland and England, did you continue doing training? Did you get additional training?

00:10:28 Speaker 2

Well, you got, you got, you got new training.

00:10:32 Speaker 2

You were just. They did it to keep you occupied.

00:10:36 Speaker 1

OK.

00:10:37 Speaker 1

Now was this before or after D-Day?

00:10:42 Speaker 2

That was during D-Day.

00:10:44 Speaker 1

OK.

00:10:45 Speaker 2

Because today was in June, June and this is in August.

00:10:47 Speaker 1

6th.

00:10:51 Speaker 2

So we landed, we landed in Freddy's on the day that the Saint Little breaker was going on.

00:10:57 Speaker 1

Oh, you did.

00:10:59 Speaker 1

OK, that would have. I think that was in July, so July, yeah.

00:11:06 Speaker 1

See, we might be able to get.

00:11:09 Speaker 1

Better dates of your discharge paper.

00:11:13 Speaker 1

So where did you land in France? Was it Lahore or?

00:11:17 Speaker 2

No, we landed at a beach.

00:11:20 Speaker 1

OK.

00:11:21 Speaker 2

We landed at a beach. I don't know where it wasn't that high, though, because that was already that wasn't operating yet at that time.

00:11:29 Speaker 1

OK.

00:11:31 Speaker 1

So you landed on a beach in France. And what happened next?

00:11:35 Speaker 2

Well, we went into the.

00:11:39 Speaker 2

We went into the breach that was left by for our our company or our division, whatever it was, and we closed up the gap, the fillet fillet gap was open at that point and we.

00:11:52 Speaker 2

Closed it up.

00:11:53 Speaker 1

So you close the fillets gap.

00:11:57 Speaker 1

Now you're a Rifleman. You're an infantry guy.

00:12:02 Speaker 1

Talk about the experience of what you remember of.

00:12:07 Speaker 1

Landing in a war zone.

00:12:08 Speaker 1

And.

00:12:09 Speaker 2

Well, one of the things that we had was when we're at the gap or where there, there was a battle between the.

00:12:18 Speaker 2

German tanks and the American tanks.

00:12:20

MHM.

00:12:21 Speaker 2

And the German tank had swung.

00:12:25 Speaker 2

Swing the swing to swivel the the top of the tank over to shoot at the American tank.

00:12:30 Speaker 2

But before it could.

00:12:31 Speaker 2

Fire the American tank fired and hit him in the side, which is a soft spot, and that was it. And so the Germans were forced out of the tank and they were shot as they came out of the tank.

00:12:45 Speaker 1

So you were there in the combat at the fillets gap? Yeah.

00:12:51 Speaker 1

And saw these tanks battling away.

00:12:54 Speaker 2

Huh.

00:12:55 Speaker 1

How about you and your unit? Were you guys under heavy fire or talk about your experience?

00:13:00 Speaker 2

Well, we were under fire all the time. You were, you were. You were. You were advancing under fire that.

00:13:08 Speaker 2

Not heavy fire. It wasn't heavy, but you were being harassed by a German fire.

00:13:14 Speaker 1

OK.

00:13:15 Speaker 1

And did you have an M1 or what was your weapon? You had an M1, OK.

00:13:18 Speaker 2

Have one, yeah.

00:13:22 Speaker 1

I mean, what did you think?

00:13:25 Speaker 1

There's people out here shooting at.

00:13:26 Speaker 2

Me, I was scared to.

00:13:27 Speaker 2

Death.

00:13:28 Speaker 1

Yeah. Talk about that if you can.

00:13:31 Speaker 2

Nothing but to talk about. I was scared. Period. That well, when we when we got to the Moselle river, that was our first battle that we got into really heavy.

00:13:42 Speaker 2

And we got across the river and the Germans had lined up their from Pontus on on top. They had lined up all their infant, the.

00:13:59 Speaker 2

They're.

00:14:01 Speaker 2

Artillery.

00:14:02 Speaker 1

OK.

00:14:03 Speaker 2

To lined up so they were probably the the the tanks were there when the tanks started to cross and then they had it all zeroed in. But so we had got across, but the tanks were not. So we went, kept on going and we.

00:14:17 Speaker 2

Took to town.

00:14:19 Speaker 2

And we moved on.

00:14:22 Speaker 2

We moved on the other side of the town and we set up our our little old machine gun.

00:14:29 Speaker 2

And so here comes at 3:00 in the morning. Here comes a German tank.

00:14:36 Speaker 2

And it came up that it came up and the the SARS and said just give him a burst. So we pulled the trigger in a little bit and boom, this the tank shot at us at the sound and he shot over our heads. But the source says that's enough. Let's go. So we quick grabbed our guns and we started to run.

00:14:57 Speaker 2

Well, as we started to run we, I ran up one way into the squad, ran another and I ran into a.

00:15:05 Speaker 2

Orchard.

00:15:07 Speaker 2

And there was two other guys that were that were running with me and they were.

00:15:12 Speaker 2

Being shot at, they were they were being harassed by fire, so we got any orchard here, was surrounded by a.

00:15:21 Speaker 2

Fence.

00:15:22

Mm-hmm.

00:15:23 Speaker 2

So as we got in there, the German came came at us with the.

00:15:29 Speaker 2

Machine guns and with the with the tank and the tank shot of clarity air well, I was taught.

00:15:37 Speaker 2

From my training.

00:15:39 Speaker 2

Then when they shot a flare in the air, you hit the ground and so I hit the ground, but the two guys that were with me were still trying to get over the fence, and so they shot him.

00:15:50 Speaker 2

They they killed, they shot the two guys and then when they when the two guys dropped, then I got over the fence.

00:15:57 Speaker 2

And I beat it.

00:16:01 Speaker 1

So these two other guys with you, they got, they got shot, huh?

00:16:05 Speaker 2

Yeah, they, they, I don't know who they were. They were a company, you know.

00:16:07 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:16:12 Speaker 1

These guys in your outfit? Yeah.

00:16:13 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:16:16 Speaker 1

Well, that had to be pretty scary situation there.

00:16:18 Speaker 2

It was you. Your heart was beating so hard that you didn't.

00:16:25 Speaker 2

You couldn't know anything different than fear.

00:16:31 Speaker 1

Just fight for survival, huh?

00:16:35 Speaker 2

Yes, it was.

00:16:37 Speaker 2

It was a survival of.

00:16:40 Speaker 2

Object.

00:16:41

Mm-hmm.

00:16:42 Speaker 2

That you you made a point of getting. I was fortunate in that I didn't try to climb that fence because they would have gotten me all three of us at 1:00.

00:16:51 Speaker 2

Time.

00:16:52 Speaker 2

But I hit the ground and I stayed on the ground and the Germans shot the two guys up on the to, climbing over the fence and that was it.

00:17:01

Wow.

00:17:02 Speaker 2

But then later on we went back and we took the town with the with the help of the tanks and our tanks got across and they were all right.

00:17:14 Speaker 1

Do you remember the name of the town?

00:17:21 Speaker 2

Saint Genevieve starts in my mind, but I don't know if that's true or not.

00:17:27

OK.

00:17:28 Speaker 1

Well, we can probably look that up.

00:17:30 Speaker 1

So you crossed the Moselle. There did.

00:17:32 Speaker 2

You yeah.

00:17:34 Speaker 2

We crossed the Moselle and we.

00:17:35 Speaker 1

What did they put up for a?

00:17:36 Speaker 1

Bridge.

00:17:36 Speaker 2

Or we had pontoon boats, pontoon bridge every time they put the pontoon bridge up. Why the Germans destroyed with the fire.

00:17:39

Time.

00:17:50 Speaker 1

When they were building that bridge where you guys just.

00:17:52 Speaker 1

Hunkered down in foxholes while they were.

00:17:54 Speaker 2

Well, we were up in, we were up. See, we had we had crossed over on boats.

00:17:59 Speaker 1

OK, so you were already across.

00:18:00 Speaker 2

Yes. And then the engineers put the pontoon bridge up so the tanks could cross.

00:18:05 Speaker 1

I see.

00:18:05 Speaker 2

And then when they put the tent, put the pond pontoon bridge up, that's when they started shelling it and they knocked the tank out, knocked it out a couple of times.

00:18:15 Speaker 1

Did you do you remember going across the river?

00:18:20 Speaker 1

Were you being shot at? Were what kind of boats you were in?

00:18:22 Speaker 2

We weren't being we weren't being shot at that much on the we got crossing the river.

00:18:27 Speaker 1

Was it day or night?

00:18:29 Speaker 2

It was days.

00:18:29 Speaker 1

So you went in, you went across in the daylights.

00:18:31 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:18:33 Speaker 2

It was early. Ohh. Early morning. Like 5:00 in the morning. That type of thing.

00:18:38

OK.

00:18:40 Speaker 1

How many of you were in a boat? I mean, was it a big boat or?

00:18:43 Speaker 1

Were there a lot of small boats?

00:18:46 Speaker 2

I would say there's about maybe 20 in about something like that 12 to 20.

00:18:53

OK.

00:18:55 Speaker 1

And were all of you paddling, or were there others in there that would paddle?

00:19:00 Speaker 2

Remember, God, I don't remember.

00:19:03 Speaker 1

OK.

00:19:05 Speaker 1

Just curious.

00:19:07 Speaker 1

So you get across and were you told to dig in right away or?

00:19:11 Speaker 1

Did you advance?

00:19:11 Speaker 2

We just kept advancing up the hill towards the towards where the Germans were up on top of the hill and we drove them away.

00:19:20 Speaker 2

And then when we got, we got him got into position, that's when they started coming back at us again.

00:19:26

OK.

00:19:27 Speaker 1

When you were making that advance toward the hill to push the Germans back, do you have any more? I mean, you had this close call before. Did you have any more close calls?

00:19:37 Speaker 2

No, not that I remember. You were always. You were always being shot at, yeah.

00:19:38 Speaker 1

OK.

00:19:43 Speaker 2

You know, no matter where you went, you somebody was shooting at you.

00:19:51 Speaker 1

Well, you're lucky to have survived.

00:19:55 Speaker 2

Yes.

00:19:57 Speaker 2

I went all the way through to the war to the end of the war. We ended up in.

00:20:02 Speaker 2

Where was it Bavaria?

00:20:05 Speaker 1

After you advanced on this hill, after taking Moselle, the Germans were firing back and knocking out your pontoon bridge. What happened after that? Where'd you go? Where'd you advance to next?

00:20:17 Speaker 2

Let me think once.

00:20:30 Speaker 2

That party evades me.

00:20:31 Speaker 1

OK.

00:20:33 Speaker 1

But you kept moving it moving in.

00:20:34 Speaker 2

We kept moving forward all the time.

00:20:36 Speaker 1

OK.

00:20:38 Speaker 2

That was the slogan of the of the regiment that it always moves forward.

00:20:43 Speaker 1

OK.

00:20:44 Speaker 2

Or the division rather.

00:20:49 Speaker 1

Any other incidents that you remember as you guys were advancing?

00:20:55 Speaker 2

Let's see.

00:21:01 Speaker 2

There was one when we when the Germans had we had our, we had our cook, our cook, cook, cook.

00:21:11 Speaker 2

The cooks were back in the river and we're in a town that was on the edge of the Rhine River. I think it was a Rhine anyway.

00:21:21 Speaker 2

And they hit Germans had zeroed in on the crossroads so that when they heard a tank come or.

00:21:29 Speaker 2

A Jeep coming or anything with food. Why they would bomb Nets? That's that's.

00:21:37 Speaker 2

Etcetera. Center space, OK.

00:21:40 Speaker 2

So when what the journey, what our guys did was that they would push the Jeep and get her rolling and get her rolling down the hill. And then when they get near us near that cross boat, then they'd give it the gun.

00:21:53 Speaker 2

And they cross over that road and then determines they start shooting at it.

00:21:57 Speaker 1

I'll be there.

00:22:00 Speaker 1

So you guys were really playing a cat?

00:22:01 Speaker 1

And mouse game, there, weren't you?

00:22:02 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:22:04 Speaker 1

So this this Jeep would bring in supplies and food and so on for you guys.

00:22:07 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:22:08 Speaker 1

Talk about, talk about the conditions. What do you remember? Was it winter? Was it hot? Was it cold? Was it snowing?

00:22:15 Speaker 2

Well, most of the time it was.

00:22:18 Speaker 2

Well it it was, it was fall already and then it got into winter.

00:22:23 Speaker 2

And they got into the bad little boats.

00:22:27 Speaker 1

OK.

00:22:27 Speaker 2

And they they told us in in the picture that Patton, when he Patton was sitting with all these other generals, he was remarking they were remarking about they couldn't get enough.

00:22:42 Speaker 2

Reinforcements up there to get to the battle of the bodes and patent quite calmly stated, he said. I've already got men going up there and that was our. Our division was going up there from the southern end of Patton's army up to the northern end, which was in the.

00:22:50

Right.

00:23:00 Speaker 2

Battle of the Bulge area.

00:23:01 Speaker 1

In Belgium, there. Yeah. So you guys went to help in the battle of the Bulge. Talk about the bulge.

00:23:06

Ohh yeah.

00:23:08 Speaker 1

What? What do you remember about?

00:23:10 Speaker 2

I was drummer Snow. I remember walking through snow up to my hips.

00:23:16 Speaker 2

And my feet.

00:23:18 Speaker 2

Were cold all the time. Matter of fact, they got frostbite on my left foot.

00:23:23 Speaker 1

Did you?

00:23:24 Speaker 2

But.

00:23:26 Speaker 2

You're always you're always moving.

00:23:29 Speaker 2

And you were saying you were saying?

00:23:33 Speaker 2

In the hotel, in the Chiefs in the.

00:23:40 Speaker 2

The.

00:23:41 Speaker 2

Voxels that the Germans had built.

00:23:43

MHM.

00:23:44 Speaker 2

You moved up and moved the fact into the foxholes and the Germans moved out of the foxholes and.

00:23:48 Speaker 2

Moved to the next foxhole.

00:23:50 Speaker 1

So you, you, you guys use German foxholes?

00:23:53 Speaker 2

Oh yeah, sure, it was all Doug.

00:23:55

Mm-hmm.

00:23:55 Speaker 2

You don't waste any time.

00:23:56 Speaker 1

Digging. Did they dig him the same as you?

00:23:59 Speaker 1

Just a rectangular area to.

00:24:01 Speaker 2

Well, they had more time.

00:24:03 Speaker 2

They had dug these in the forest in the Hurtgen forest ahead of time, and they had covered them over with the logs on the top, and there were two were foxy over two men, and there was a foxhole where you could stand up and stand up to your waist. Up to here, you know. And then they would.

00:24:22 Speaker 1

OK.

00:24:24 Speaker 2

And the other guy had better sleeping.

00:24:27 Speaker 2

So it would be one guy would be on guard and.

00:24:28 Speaker 2

One guy be sleeping.

00:24:30 Speaker 1

Uh-huh.

00:24:31 Speaker 2

But uh.

00:24:32 Speaker 1

I've interviewed a few fellows who were in the battle Battle of the Bulge and they said the the cold was just.

00:24:39 Speaker 1

Just bitter cold and even on cold nights. For years later, it would make them think of it being there.

00:24:45 Speaker 2

Yeah. Yeah. You you never got warm.

00:24:49 Speaker 2

And they made us change our socks and we didn't have anything to change.

00:24:54 Speaker 2

Them.

00:24:54 Speaker 2

With so you just kept your same socks on.

00:24:58 Speaker 1

So you got frostbite.

00:25:00 Speaker 2

And the left foot? Yeah, that's a little bit, you know.

00:25:04 Speaker 1

I've read that almost as many men were taken out of the line for frostbite as as they were for gunshot injuries.

00:25:11 Speaker 2

Oh yeah.

00:25:15 Speaker 1

So anything else you remember about your time in?

00:25:19 Speaker 1

The Battle of the Bulge.

00:25:22 Speaker 2

No.

00:25:23 Speaker 2

There was, there was somebody again, somebody shooting at you all the time.

00:25:27

MHM.

00:25:28 Speaker 2

So there was no doubt in her mind you were being shot at.

00:25:31 Speaker 1

And you guys just kept pushing him back and shrunk that bulge back down. Yeah, yeah.

00:25:33 Speaker 2

You just kept pushing.

00:25:37 Speaker 1

So after the bulge which ended in January of 45.

00:25:42 Speaker 1

What happened to Leroy Johnson next?

00:25:46 Speaker 1

After the bulge.

00:25:48 Speaker 2

Well, we just joined up and we started moving forward and we kept moving forward and we were on the.

00:25:55 Speaker 2

So if we move back to the southern end of the southern edge of patents.

00:26:00 Speaker 1

OK.

00:26:00 Speaker 2

Army again.

00:26:03 Speaker 2

And then we just kept moving forward.

00:26:06 Speaker 2

And by that time, of course, the Germans were retreating up towards Berlin and we just kept down the southern end of them.

00:26:10

Mm-hmm.

00:26:13 Speaker 2

All the time.

00:26:13 Speaker 1

OK.

00:26:15 Speaker 1

What do you remember as the next battle or city or incident that you experienced?

00:26:25 Speaker 2

I guess done really.

00:26:28 Speaker 2

Small, small battles. You know, for villages and towns like that, but no big cities or anything.

00:26:37 Speaker 2

Nancy, I think was the biggest town.

00:26:39 Speaker 2

We took we, we we didn't. We didn't take it. Our division took it, but we didn't take.

00:26:44 Speaker 2

It.

00:26:45

OK.

00:26:45 Speaker 2

But there was one.

00:26:47 Speaker 2

There was one.

00:26:49 Speaker 2

1.

00:26:50 Speaker 2

Point where we found a champagne factory.

00:26:56 Speaker 2

And so every guy had two bottles of champagne and the Jeep was loaded with champagne and so on and so forth. And that the officers were had champagne and then patent found out about it.

00:27:10 Speaker 2

And he cut that out.

00:27:15 Speaker 2

So all our champagne was down the sewer.

00:27:18 Speaker 1

Oh gosh.

00:27:21 Speaker 1

Did you ever see Patton?

00:27:23 Speaker 2

No, he was never, never in our area.

00:27:25 Speaker 1

OK. But you guys are just under his command. Yeah, part of his command. 3rd Army I.

00:27:30 Speaker 2

Think 3rd army, right?

00:27:33 Speaker 1

So you just kept pushing on to you until the war ended. Do you remember when you heard the war was over?

00:27:39 Speaker 2

Yeah, there was a. There was a German plane that.

00:27:43 Speaker 2

That kept, I kept patrolling our area. Check back check.

00:27:50 Speaker 2

Checkmate, checkmate, checkmate, Charlie or something like.

00:27:53 Speaker 1

Checkpoint or check.

00:27:54

That.

00:27:54 Speaker 2

Checkpoint something. Checkmate. Checkmate. Charlie.

00:27:58 Speaker 2

And he was the next day, while we heard the war was over. And then we saw him. He was going back towards the yard lines in the back. And it was a three wing poker.

00:28:09 Speaker 1

OK.

00:28:10 Speaker 2

And it was was one of those very small.

00:28:13 Speaker 2

Planes, you know, they went very.

00:28:14 Speaker 1

Slow like an observation plane maybe? Yeah. OK.

00:28:18 Speaker 2

And he would he would patrol the area at night, you know.

00:28:23 Speaker 1

So he would fly over you guys a lot.

00:28:26 Speaker 2

Yeah, he was. He was found prior up, up, down the line, you know.

00:28:29

Mm-hmm.

00:28:31 Speaker 1

So when you do, you remember getting the word the war is over.

00:28:35 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think.

00:28:39 Speaker 2

I think at that time we were in a German, we were in a Bavarian Bavarian village.

00:28:45 Speaker 2

But there was a neighbor that.

00:28:51 Speaker 2

I don't know. I don't know offhand.

00:28:53 Speaker 1

OK. But you were.

00:28:54 Speaker 1

In Bavaria, when the war ended.

00:28:57 Speaker 2

Yeah, it was Bavaria. I think it was anyway, OK.

00:29:03 Speaker 1

Do you remember when you were there? Do you remember seeing the Alps? I've heard Bavaria is very beautiful area.

00:29:09 Speaker 2

Know that we weren't that were not in Bavaria.

00:29:13 Speaker 2

Where were you feeling then?

00:29:16 Speaker 2

Austria. It could have been Austria too.

00:29:19 Speaker 2

Because we met the Russians there. You your outfit did? Yeah, they had two.

00:29:26 Speaker 2

Two chiefs came up and they were driven by German, German or by Russian officers and men and they could congratulate each other, you know and everything else.

00:29:38 Speaker 1

So you met some Russians that pulled up in a Jeep.

00:29:41 Speaker 2

Huh. Yeah.

00:29:43 Speaker 1

Do you remember? Did your outfit do some celebrating or or are you too too busy to?

00:29:47 Speaker 2

Celebrate. We may have. I don't remember. That was so long ago, you know.

00:29:50

OK.

00:29:51 Speaker 1

Sure.

00:29:52 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:29:54 Speaker 1

So how long after that was it that they finally sent you home?

00:29:59 Speaker 2

Oh, I had enough points to be sent home.

00:30:03 Speaker 2

In.

00:30:05 Speaker 2

December of that year, whatever year it was.

00:30:09 Speaker 1

And the war ended in 45, so maybe December 45, yeah.

00:30:13 Speaker 2

And we went back on a ship called. We went over on up, Chris on the Queen Mary, went back on the ship, called the Little Blue Bird or something. Like the blue bird or something like that. But it was a victory ship.

00:30:26 Speaker 2

And when it was, it was.

00:30:26

Uh-huh.

00:30:30 Speaker 2

We had a German or they keep German, say in German we had a passing and then their other direction was part of a.

00:30:42 Speaker 2

What? What do they call that?

00:30:50 Speaker 2

Going by it was.

00:30:53

OK.

00:30:55 Speaker 2

What kind of a ship do they have? Carry airplanes on aircraft carrier? Yeah, it was going the other way because the bow had been smashed in by the waves and we're going with the wind to stay out of.

00:31:03 Speaker 1

Oh really?

00:31:06 Speaker 2

The.

00:31:06 Speaker 2

Stay out of the way of the waves and our little chip went up and down, and when it went down the screws were up in the air.

00:31:15 Speaker 2

And so you just heard the screws going and then went and got the next wave. Then it went up, then the screws were in. All they were dug in the water and they were all right, you know.

00:31:24 Speaker 1

So this damaged aircraft carrier really put out some waves, huh?

00:31:29 Speaker 2

Well, notice the storm itself had the waves.

00:31:31 Speaker 1

Oh, storm did. Yeah.

00:31:36 Speaker 1

But you saw this aircraft carrier that had been.

00:31:38 Speaker 2

Damaged. Yeah, it was going the other way, you know, going with the wind.

00:31:43 Speaker 1

OK.

00:31:44 Speaker 2

So we went, we went all the way into.

00:31:46 Speaker 2

Into New York City.

00:31:49 Speaker 2

And.

00:31:51 Speaker 2

One of the guys was in.

00:31:52 Speaker 2

The.

00:31:53 Speaker 2

Power boat and he said, or the power. The boat. Yeah. Power boat. Geez, I can see my. He was from New York. He's. I can see my home from here. He said. And so he started climbing down the cable and when he got down to the bottom of the MP.

00:31:57

Yeah. OK.

00:32:08 Speaker 2

Said get back up.

00:32:10 Speaker 2

So he had to climb up.

00:32:11 Speaker 2

He didn't let him allow him to go around to the.

00:32:15 Speaker 2

Boats.

00:32:19 Speaker 1

On the gangplank or whatever.

00:32:20 Speaker 2

Gangplank. Yes, they had to climb up the climb up the the the thing there.

00:32:25 Speaker 1

The cable.

00:32:29 Speaker 1

So.

00:32:29 Speaker 2

But that was.

00:32:31 Speaker 1

Do you?

00:32:31 Speaker 1

Remember.

00:32:32 Speaker 1

I think you said was it December of 45 then when you?

00:32:35 Speaker 1

Got home, yeah.

00:32:36 Speaker 1

OK so.

00:32:38 Speaker 2

For 30454443 was when I went in.

00:32:40 Speaker 1

Before he's wrapped.

00:32:42

43.

00:32:43 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:32:46 Speaker 1

So then did they send you home for discharge?

00:32:49 Speaker 2

Yeah, we went down to Camp Grant.

00:32:53 Speaker 2

And and and then we got this charge there.

00:32:56 Speaker 2

And then we went to.

00:32:59 Speaker 2

We went to this train station and we got there about 11:00 at night and so a bunch of us were living on the north side. You know, we got in a cab and there was a civilian got into camp with us because that time they took as many as they quit in a cab.

00:33:15 Speaker 2

And he says, cabby, he said, you stopped at the first bar, he said, I want to buy these young men a drink, you know, and the cabby said, I'm sorry, he said, but these men are going to be dropped off where they want to be dropped off, what they do after it adds up to them.

00:33:29 Speaker 1

OK.

00:33:30 Speaker 2

And so he he kept us. He dropped me.

00:33:33 Speaker 2

Off the corner of.

00:33:35 Speaker 2

David Lincoln and Irving Park.

00:33:37 Speaker 2

And I walked home from there. It was two blocks of my house.

00:33:41 Speaker 1

Damon Lincoln and Irving Park? Yeah.

00:33:44 Speaker 1

Irving Park Rd.

00:33:47 Speaker 2

And I walked home from there 2-2 blocks that I was home.

00:33:52 Speaker 1

Were they expecting you or was it a surprise?

00:33:55 Speaker 2

Well, they were expecting me. They knew I was going to be in there sometime that night, but they didn't know what time it would be.

00:34:01 Speaker 1

Do you remember getting home and being with the family and their?

00:34:03 Speaker 2

Reaction. Yeah, was about with about 1:00 or 1:30. Something like that. When I finally rang the bell to go in.

00:34:14 Speaker 1

OK.

00:34:16 Speaker 1

Well, is there anything else you'd like to share? Share with us about your?

00:34:21 Speaker 1

Time in the army, Leroy, before we end our interview.

00:34:25 Speaker 2

No.

00:34:28 Speaker 1

We cover it pretty good.

00:34:31 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think I hit most of high.

00:34:32 Speaker 1

Spots. OK. Anything else you want to conclude with?

00:34:37 Speaker 2

War is hell.

00:34:42 Speaker 1

Especially for those who were like you, who were in actual combat because most were not, a lot of guys that I tried to interview, you know, they say, well, I really wasn't in combat. Well, most were not in combat.

00:34:44 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:34:53 Speaker 1

You know only one in about 8 or 9 I think was.

00:34:56 Speaker 1

In combat in world.

00:34:57 Speaker 1

War.

00:34:57 Speaker 2

Two, it seemed like everybody was well, everybody I was around was in combat.

00:35:01 Speaker 1

Yeah, but I mean, you know, there were truck drivers and so many.

00:35:05 Speaker 2

Other things, there were so many, we had the.

00:35:09 Speaker 2

The the the the truck drivers were what was the name of that outfit?

00:35:14 Speaker 2

Ball express. Yeah, they were all black.

00:35:18 Speaker 1

OK.

00:35:20 Speaker 1

Well, Laura, I want to thank you for taking the time to come over and Share your story and we thank you for your service to our country.

00:35:27 Speaker 2

It's OK. It was a long time ago.

00:35:29 Speaker 1

Yes, Sir. Thank you for coming over.

00:35:32 Speaker 2

OK.