

Gerald Myers Interview

Company G, 317th Inf Reg

(Library of Congress: Veterans History Project; interviewed by Krystal C. Bemman, Amy Topol)

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

00:00:00 Speaker 2

This is a part of the Library of Congress Veterans Oral history project organized by Congress Congressman Adam Putnam's office today is October 19th, 2004. The interviewer subject is Mr. Virgil Myers. We are at Lake Region High School in Winter Haven, FL. The interviewer is Crystal Beaman.

00:00:21 Speaker 2

Mr. Myers, I would like to thank you for participating in our project. Before we begin, please state your full name.

00:00:28 Speaker 1

Gerald Virgil Myers.

00:00:32 Speaker 2

Mr. Myers, where were you on December 7?

00:00:34 Speaker 2

1941, The day of on the attack of Pearl Harbor.

00:00:38 Speaker 1

I was visiting my parents at St. Joseph, MO with my wife and little daughter.

00:00:47 Speaker 1

And they lived on a farm. And I can still remember hearing the radio announced.

00:00:54 Speaker 1

That Pearl Harbor had been struck by the Japanese.

00:01:00 Speaker 2

So where exactly were you living at?

00:01:03 Speaker 1

I was out on my parents farm.

00:01:07 Speaker 2

So were you enlisted or drafted?

00:01:10 Speaker 1

I was drafted.

00:01:12 Speaker 2

And how did you feel about being drafted?

00:01:16 Speaker 1

Well, I had been deferred twice because I had the job that I had with the Quaker Oats Company was declared as essential and so they deferred me twice. And the third time why? I told them that I wanted to go because.

00:01:32 Speaker 1

It's a strange thing when all of your friends have been drafted or volunteered to go into service and you would be walking around and people would say my, you look like you're really healthy. How come you aren't in the service and that gets to you?

00:01:52 Speaker 1

And so I finally.

00:01:55 Speaker 1

Went with the draft.

00:01:58 Speaker 2

What branch of service were you in?

00:02:00 Speaker 1

Army.

00:02:02 Speaker 2

And then why did you choose the army?

00:02:04 Speaker 1

Because they chose it for me.

00:02:08 Speaker 2

Tell me about your first day.

00:02:11 Speaker 1

Well, I was sent to Fort Leavenworth, KS, and the first day I was kind of taken over by the old First Sergeant who was a Polish man. That was an army.

00:02:27 Speaker 1

Veteran.

00:02:28 Speaker 1

And I was about six or seven years older than most of the fellows that were in there with me. And when I came in, he said, will you help me here in the office? I said sure, I'll help you. He said don't volunteer for anything in the army.

00:02:50 Speaker 1

He, he said, let them tell you what you need to do because he said that is one of the things that you don't do when you're in the army is to volunteer, he said. You just take it. If they give it to.

00:03:07 Speaker 2

So what kind of jobs were you assigned?

00:03:09 Speaker 1

I was assigned at the first job I had was an acting non com and that was to be in charge of a squad of young fellows that were as naive and dumb as I was about what was happening in the service.

00:03:29 Speaker 2

So.

00:03:31 Speaker 2

Combat.

00:03:33 Speaker 1

Well, I had. I entered combat on the 18th of October and I had 210 days of combat with the 80th Infantry Division, 317th Regiment.

00:03:52 Speaker 1

And I was with that regiment from the day I went in until the war ended and was never off line at anytime during that entire period. And when the war was over, I was the first Sergeant of that company company G.

00:04:12 Speaker 1

And the company clerk and I went through all of the records from the 18th of October and there were only four fellows in the company still.

00:04:27 Speaker 1

Captain damped Howitz, Adam Heiser, Ross Loma and myself were the only four guys still with the company that started out with it. That had never been off the line for one day even.

00:04:44

How old were?

00:04:45 Speaker 1

26 I was married and had a three-year old daughter.

00:04:52 Speaker 2

And.

00:04:54 Speaker 2

Did you have any memorable experiences?

00:04:58 Speaker 1

Yes, I had a lot of memorable experiences. Because when you're in an infantry company and you are close to combat, were that the enemy many times were within 300 yards of where we were and they were firing at you.

00:05:18 Speaker 1

And the like during the Battle of the balls, the fog was so thick that you couldn't see 150 yards in front of you. Yet the.

00:05:31 Speaker 1

The explosions from mortars, artillery and firing from their weapons was still coming in, even though you couldn't see the enemy. Why? That will leave a lasting experience or vision in your mind that you will never forget.

00:05:52 Speaker 2

What kind of food did you?

00:05:56 Speaker 1

We had basically when you were in combat, you have to remember that your kitchen can't follow you into combat, so consequently you they would give you sea rations, which was a meal in a little tin can or K rations, which was in a cardboard box.

00:06:17 Speaker 1

And there was a can of like scrambled eggs or weenies and beans or hash that was in there, along with crackers, along with enough cocoa to make a drink or lemonade to make a drink.

00:06:37 Speaker 1

And that's what you would have. And you many times couldn't use heat.

00:06:46 Speaker 1

Or a fire to heat it, because if you did, the smoke would draw enemy fire and so you would eat it cold. And sometimes in, especially during the December January period, it would be frozen so hard that it would be like eating and ice.

00:07:08 Speaker 1

Ice cube. I remember on the.

00:07:13 Speaker 1

Eve of Christmas. We were near Wilts just South of Wilts, Luxembourg, and they told us that we were going to have a hot meal. Well, as the kitchen came up, we were so close to.

00:07:33 Speaker 1

The enemy, which was just on the other side of this valley. Excuse me. They wouldn't let us use our eating gear because it was.

00:07:44 Speaker 1

Metal.

00:07:46 Speaker 1

And they were afraid that if you made noise that it would draw enemy fire, so consequently you went up to get your pancakes and they put three pancakes on your hand. Then they put a tablespoon of orange marmalade on top of the pancakes.

00:08:07 Speaker 1

And they said we're sorry, you can't use your mess gear tonight because it makes too much noise and you ate your three pancakes with the Jelly running down through your hands.

00:08:21 Speaker 1

But you had plenty of snow that you could wash your hands with, because at that time it was about 8 below 0 with the wind blowing 20 miles an hour, and we had 15 inches of snow on the ground and we were living outside in a foxhole from the.

00:08:41 Speaker 1

Day that we reached Luxembourg, the 19th of December until the 26th day of January, no one lived inside of a house because all of the houses were destroyed. 97% of all the houses in northern Luxembourg at that time.

00:09:03 Speaker 1

Had been destroyed, so everybody that was in the Battle of the Bulge lived outside because there were no buildings to get into.

00:09:12 Speaker 2

And since it.

00:09:13 Speaker 2

So cold. What did you, what clothing?

00:09:16 Speaker 2

Do you have?

00:09:17 Speaker 1

You you had many of the fellows, did not have winter clothing to begin with because we had been moved up there and the clothing didn't catch up with us and we still were using khaki pants pants and you had long under.

00:09:36 Speaker 1

Or, but you didn't have the kind of clothing that you should have had for that kind until after the bulge was over with. Then the ordinance caught up with us or the people that that had the clothing caught up with us. And then.

00:09:56 Speaker 1

We were able to get it, but it was too late because the cold weather was over with.

00:10:02 Speaker 2

And how did you stay in touch?

00:10:04 Speaker 2

With loved ones at home.

00:10:06 Speaker 1

The only way that you stay in touch was by letter.

00:10:10 Speaker 1

As a strange thing that we had our female and justice letter ordinary letters, it was not uncommon from the time that you wrote a letter home until you got a letter back that three weeks would pass before you had any message.

00:10:30 Speaker 1

And if you were in combat and a battle might last anywhere from.

00:10:36 Speaker 1

Two days to two weeks you didn't get mail during that period of time. It was when you went back to rest that normally that you would get your letters. Now sometimes they would bring them up, but not very often. But that was the only way that you had to communicate in World War 2.

00:10:57 Speaker 1

Work today.

00:10:59 Speaker 1

It's unbelievable you have laptop computers, you have cell telephones and it's unbelievable how that they can keep.

00:11:11 Speaker 2

What lessons did you?

00:11:16 Speaker 1

Well, I suppose the main lesson was to listen to orders.

00:11:25 Speaker 1

And then to carry out those orders to the best of your ability in order to try to save lives.

00:11:38 Speaker 2

And.

00:11:40 Speaker 2

Do you recall the day you left service?

00:11:42 Speaker 1

Yes, I do. I was in with the day that I left. Service was in St. Louis, MO.

00:11:52 Speaker 1

We walked into this big hall where that we were to be given our separation papers and as we walked in.

00:12:05 Speaker 1

The national anthem was playing. They had an American flag on the stage with a big fan behind it, and it was blowing.

00:12:16 Speaker 1

And everybody and I can still see it today and I can't hardly keep from having tears come in my eyes because everybody in that room was crying.

00:12:31 Speaker 1

Because.

00:12:33 Speaker 1

Of justice seeing that flag flying and what it meant to us.

00:12:39 Speaker 1

At that time, and that's a sight that I will never ever forget.

00:12:47 Speaker 2

Did you make any friends?

00:12:48 Speaker 1

Yes, I did.

00:12:51 Speaker 1

I made a lot of friends in the the company I was in, but three particularly friends and we it was a strange thing. The 1st 20 years after the war.

00:13:07 Speaker 1

We would write a letter maybe once a year.

00:13:12 Speaker 1

20 years after that, it became important.

00:13:17 Speaker 1

That you keep in contact with those people. I don't know why, but it just seemed like that it was important that you kept them because you had lived with them for almost 2 years and that you were closer than even your brother because you were with them every minute and.

00:13:37 Speaker 1

We stayed friends. I still contact 1 fellow in New York and also my best friend, Adam Heiser, passed away two years ago and.

00:13:52 Speaker 1

But we still stay in contact with the ones that I've had since service.

00:14:00 Speaker 2

What was your career after the war?

00:14:03 Speaker 1

I went into with strange enough, I went into sales by chance and that's what I did for 35 years.

00:14:16 Speaker 2

How did your experiences contribute to your thinking about the war in your military service? Well.

00:14:24 Speaker 1

One of the one of the ways that probably had helped I was first Sergeant when I came out of service and 1st Sergeant, is that you? You really run.

00:14:38 Speaker 1

An infantry company, or any first Sergeant, is the person that runs the outfit.

00:14:45 Speaker 1

The officers are there to OK, what you say needs to be done. But the first Sergeant really runs it. And that helped me a lot in the business I was in because I became the general sales manager for the company I work for.

00:15:05 Speaker 1

Then.

00:15:08 Speaker 2

Are you a member of any veterans organizations related to your service?

00:15:12 Speaker 1

Yes, American Legion.

00:15:14 Speaker 1

Purple Heart organization.

00:15:19 Speaker 1

I was commander of the 80th Infantry Division Post 47 here in Florida and I'm President of the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge of Western Florida.

00:15:32 Speaker 2

Thank you, Mr. Myers, for allowing me to interview you today and thank you for your service in the United States.

00:15:38 Speaker 1

You're welcome.