

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War 1939-1945

Personal Experience

O H. 1158

PAUL MALLIN

Interviewed

by

John Demetra

on

November 29, 1988

## PAUL MALLIN

Paul Mallin spent his boyhood growing up in the steel town of Monesson, Pennsylvania in the 1930's. He joined the paratroopers in 1943 and saw combat in the Pacific Theater of World War II. After the war, he moved to the Youngstown area and worked for the B & O and Y & N Railroads for a short time. Then he landed a position with the Tri-County Distributing Company and continued to work there until retirement in early 1988.

Paul and his wife, Gayle, have a son and a daughter. They reside in Boardman. Mr. Mallin belongs to the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, D A V, and confesses to an addiction to golf.

D This is an interview with Paul Mallin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on World War II Veterans, by John Demetra, on November 29, 1988

What can you tell me about growing up in the Depression? You said you grew up in Monessen, Pennsylvania

M Well, Monessen is a small steel town Everybody worked at the Pittsburgh Steel Company Growing up in Monessen was tough We had ten in the family My father had lost his leg, as I told you He did not work for a year or so after that, so we had it pretty tough I used to go out and get kindling wood and pick up boxes and sell it to the black people up there to start their fire for just ten cents a bushel There would be coal on the railroad tracks where it had fallen off the trains We would pick it up, put it into bushels, take it home and use it for that. I worked -- I was seven, eight or nine years old -- delivering the groceries They paid me by giving me groceries They give me a chicken on the weekend that my mother would cook We always wore hand-me-down clothes My father fixed our shoes with old tires He would take a tire, cut a piece of sole off and nail it on your shoe

D [You] Put some miles on those shoes, huh?

M Yes And to go to school, I never -- although we were very proud people -- had enough clothes While all the other kids had fancy-type clothes, we would come to school with hand-me-downs and rags It is an experience that kind of sticks with you

D How did your father lose his leg?

M Well, he was getting wood off the riverbank, picking up a railroad tie And he was climbing up a bank that was used for these steel mills with porter cinder over the bank It was rather loose and about three-fourths of the way up, he stepped on a cinder, lost his balance, and slipped It got loose and he fell down, and the railroad tie fell on his ankle My father was a big man He was a strong man, but he did not take the railroad track accident well He stepped on the ankle, apparently, and he got some dirt and dust in his bone Gangrene took off the leg right below the knee

D And he was off work for about a year?

M I think for about a year

D What year was that?

- M I cannot say, exactly. My mother and I went to the hospital. She took the leg out to the cemetery where he had the lot and buried it there. When he died, we buried him in the same lot where the leg was. Somehow, she got the leg and she put it in. I helped her carry that leg back. We had it wrapped up in newspapers and a bag, and we carried it back to the cemetery.
- D What do you remember about high school?
- M High school? [I] played football in junior high. It was fun.
- D Did you have a car?
- M No, we did not have a car. I was going into the tenth grade when I joined the C C C [Civilian Conservation Corps], and I forged my birth certificate to make myself 16. I was only 15. They paid 30 bucks a month. They sent 15 home and they would give me seven and put some in the bank for me. I had twelve times seven.
- D The rest of the money would go to your parents?
- M All to my parents, yes. At that time, 15 dollars a month was good money to buy groceries with.
- D Where did you go in the C C C camps?
- M Pennsylvania. What we did, we surveyed farms for strip farming. Also, we worked in the limestone quarry. We would dig the lime and dynamite the lime off and put it through a crusher, which makes it finer.
- D For fertilizer?
- M Yes. They put lime in it to sweeten the soil.
- D You did that for a year?
- M One year. Actually, I was there just after the war broke out -- the Japanese war -- in 1941 to 1947. I took a job working in the glass factory in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. I was working there for a little bit at that. When I got to be 18 -- on my 18th birthday -- I joined the Army. February 17, 1943.
- D What prompted you to join the Army?

- M A movie I went to the movies and saw *The Pride of the Marines* and watched the Japanese bayonetting babies and bayonetting ladies My buddy Nicky was down there He would say, "We are going to get those bastards, boy " So we joined I walked out of the movies, walked down [the street] and enlisted in the Army Danny and I passed the physical and Nicky, he failed
- D Then you joined the paratroopers?
- M I joined the airborne
- D What was the induction like?
- M Well, really, it was not too much of a problem for me because I was pretty well conditioned to it I spent a year in the military, so to speak, with the C C C [It] was run by the military. It had a lieutenant and a sergeant, G I. Joe We marched and we made beds We ate with a bunch of guys in a P X , a cafeteria It was no different to me In fact, I was in the Army for about a month when they made me a P F C for about a day
- D What was your basic training like? Was it tough?
- M To me, it was beautiful I loved it I always did like to do physical things I always was a good runner I could run, I was strong, I was thin Basic, for me was just super What they did in some squads, whole squads would make a force that marched five or ten miles The whole squad would get a pass on the weekend We had a kid named Hertz, who was not very strong He would be falling out after about halfway through, and we would start carrying him to make sure the squad would make it, we would get back in time to get our pass We would carry him -- literally pick him up and carry him
- D Where was your basic training?
- M At Camp Macala in North Carolina The Airborne paid 15 bucks a month extra because you were a paratrooper They were paying it because you are the best this country has got They boosted up the action. This is what it is all about You would come out and you would feel like you were ten feet tall, and you were just a kid You would go out of town and find anybody that wanted to get into fights and we would get into fights If you got into a fight somewhere, pretty soon there would be every troop at your side helping you out It was an experience It was like a football team That was how they made you feel It was like a football team, like you were playing that But you had to have somebody Better have some friends along side of you because the enemy, they are all around you I never had that experience with the jumping, so that is what I assume

D What was the jump training like?

M Well, with jump training, you had to be in shape. The lieutenant would stop you, you had to do 50 pushups. You had to do 150 pushups. Give him 100 if he wanted. We were strong. You had to keep your shape strong. In fact, you had these wires in between your shoulders, and if they snap up there, if you did not have good strong muscles up there, it could break your shoulder bone. Those wires go right up against your shoulders when you jump out of the airplane, and you have two buckles that move up past your ears and keep your head down. You want to tuck down into your chest because when that wrap snaps open, if your head is straight up and down, those buckles will catch your ears and knock your ears off. You keep it down, those buckles go right up and they push each other by the sack and shoot you up. They always open up.

They kind of frighten you when you make your first jump or when your pack is going to shoot. You get a special walk through with an officer of some kind. He will look at the pack and he will say, "How old are you, son? What is your mother's name? What is the matter, your pack will not shoot?" "Yes, it will not shoot," and he walks away from you. And you would say, "Oh my God! What the hell!" I mean, you are scared. You get up and -- I do not know what makes you go, but you go -- and it opens up, and then you are real happy. You do that, I think, because if you ever get into a combat area you have a certain drop zone that is only so many seconds from the front to the end. And you have got the 12 men. They have got to get out of that plane, and they have got to get out of there in a hurry. If one man takes a lot of time, that means the last two men are going to fall out of range or fall in the ocean. So you have got to get out of there. They do that in case you are going to freeze, they want to wash you out before you make your flight that qualifies you.

I would be ringing my eyes out because Danny, if he goes, that means I have got to go. And if I am in front of him and I go, he has got to go, because we are both a couple of guys that just are not going to be chicken shit. It is as simple as that. That is the only reason why I would have backed out of there so quick. But if I did it, he did it. We would get done and drink a beer after it was over and that would fire you up and we would ask each other, "How come you jumped?" "Because you jumped. How come you jumped?" "Because you jumped." And we would laugh.

D How did you end up going over seas?

M We went to Camp Polk in Louisiana for what they call jungle maneuvers down in the swamps. We were down there for about three or four weeks. They put us on a train and took us up to a camp up in New York where we trained. And we stayed on the train, lived on the train a day, plus back on the train in one night, and it took us straight back across the country. It took us eight days to

Pittsburgh, California, and they put us on a boat and shipped us out to the Pacific. They paid us but yet we never had a job. We got the wages. That was the end of my career.

D: What was it like going across the Pacific in a boat?

M: Oh my. It took us 45 days, zig-zagging and dipping. There were cockroaches as big as rats. I am serious. You never got out of line. You got out of line to eat and you would never get back in line to eat again. You would just stay gone. You go on over, as you would walk down. You would open your mouth and they would throw a vitamin in your mouth. They had vitamins to keep the malaria from getting all over. If you were yellow in color, it would be time for you to take a vitamin. Every day you had to take a vitamin. It was because of what they call the "not believes" mosquito. They thought, "Enough of these mosquitoes. You have to take the vitamin."

D: What kind of boat was it?

M: It was a regular. I do not know.

D: Like a Liberty boat?

M: Probably. It had a stack up and down in the holes, like four high. There were four or five of them. They were stacked up like sardines, one on top of each other. It was nothing. You would get up and you would get in line. When it got dark, you had to stay underneath. You could not be on deck, you know. They would just zigzag.

D: Was it a convoy?

M: There were some ships around there. It was not a big convoy. We could not see very much. We had a guy get seasick before the boat even moved out of the docks. It was sick. The guy was throwing up all over the place and the boat had not even moved.

D: So you took four or five weeks to get to New Guinea?

M: I would say in that area. About 35 to 45 days. I do not know exactly. It was a long time on the road.

D: You ended up in New Guinea?

M: Ended up in New Guinea. Oral Bay.

D Oral Bay?

M Yes

D What did you do there?

M We set up camp. The 37th Division had taken Oral Bay. They went through that area and had taken it over from the Japanese people. They built our camp on the air strips. They had no air strips. We were there for about two or three months, I imagine, just training. We made some practice jumps. Then they brought a WAC [Women's Air Corp] camp in off the beach. They put some WAC's in there. If you wanted to go to the WAC Camp dances, you had to sign up and be a good boy. And if you were lucky, they let you go to the dance. I signed up, and I got to go to the WAC Camp dance. They watch you like you are a couple of kids, but you would sneak around and do what you wanted to do. We had some fun.

D So, that was just a training area then?

M The whole thing was, actually. They were probably getting us ready for the invasion of the Philippines.

D When was the invasion of Leyte?

M I cannot tell you exactly what day that was.

D Well, what month?

M It had to be in August. Maybe July. I do not know. It could have been earlier because I spent some time in the hospital. I was in the hospital in San Francisco. And I was in, I think, the General Hospital. I was in rehabilitation in Fort Worth, Georgia. Then, I got discharged. I cannot really say when.

D What can you remember about the attack on Leyte?

M Well, it was quite scary. We hit the beach and we went in.

D Did you go in on those landing craft?

M Yes. We took the beach pretty easily. I remember one thing about it. We were pretty well secured. We had a lot of chicken. We had a Filipino lady that made cooked chicken. We had the cooked chicken. She would say, "I cook it! I cook! You come down!" She gave me the chicken and the chicken stunk. I said,



"What the hell did you cook this chicken in?" She said, "They give me good grease I cook it in good grease " "Let me see " She got out a can of shoe polish I said, "I cannot eat this chicken You eat this chicken "

D And so you landed on the beach?

M On the beach, when we landed, we had some pretty good rainstorms We went in and we took it and we were going through this one rice patty By that time the Japs were pretty well whipped We had young kids -- 16, 17 years young, just kids -- and we were going through this rice patty and finding Japs jumping up and putting their hands up And the lieutenant said, "Shoot him " I was not going to shoot him And he told the young guy, "Shoot him " The kid put the gun down and -- he was shaking -- he shot the poor guy He killed him, in the mouth I never saw anybody that close, never wanted to, never did If I shot anybody it was because he got in the way of the bullet I just shot straight ahead anytime You would see people and just aim and shoot

I had a kid get hit in a foxhole Funny thing, the first thing that comes to your mind is you are glad that it is not you Then you feel bad because you feel that way, but it is the first thing you think You do not think that it is subconscious It is a good feeling that passes through you My biggest fear, I think, was I did not want to die because my mother would cry We were all my mother had, and she was a sweet thing I did not want to hurt her If I got hurt, she got hurt

D You said that the Japs would really get fanatical?

M The Japs, when they would attack, would really start hollering at you

D What were they hollering?

M To let you die

D Did they have a P A system?

M Yes You could hear them Tokyo Rose would be on the radio She would tell you where your outfit was, what you have been doing, how many people you had, what was on your left flank, what was on your right flank They would tell you they would definitely be over at 11 o'clock to bomb you, and sure in hell they would The Japanese motors sounded like the motor of a washing machine They would come over and bomb you and she would tell you, well, your right flank is on way down and they will be coming to get you Then, she would play some music It would scare the hell out of you

D Really?

M Oh, yeah, because she told you so much truth. She would say the planes are coming and it would be true. Then, the left would not be on, but she would say that and scare you. We had a sergeant -- he was older, probably in his thirties at the time -- he got a letter from his wife, a Dear John letter. He was in New Guinea. He was in his tent, and she was playing a song. It was called Tokyo Rose. And that sergeant, he said it was his song. And he said, "Here you are, out here fighting for this country, and your wife is out on some floor right now, dancing to this song. And here you are, out here fighting, and your wife is fooling around back in the states." This guy blew his head off. He put the gun to his mouth and pulled the trigger. [He] blew his brains all over the five-man tent.

D The Japs would attack at night a lot?

M The Japs, oh yes, they were all at night. They would do that all of the time. They would come at you at night.

D You really could not see a whole lot -- just shoot, huh?

M By the perimeter. If anything moved, you would just shoot at it. Shoot straight at it.

D Did they do those bonzai charged, like you see in the movies?

M Not that way.

D How did you get wounded?'

M I was running and the bullet hit me up in my hand, went down through my leg and stuck in this hand, my left hand. I did not know I was hit. I thought a bee had stung me until I saw blood. I was scared. I did not know what was going on. They put me on the back of the tank. The medic came and they put me up on the tank and then they took me to the hospital. I woke up and they had a banjo splint on me. I was just running, going from one area to another area. They were shooting us. It was a 25-caliber slug that had hit me. If it was a 35, it would have blown half my hand off.

D Do you remember seeing any of the top military leaders, like MacArthur?

M No, I never saw any of them. They said that he had come in to Leyte, but I only saw movies of it. I did not see him. He had come in with a whole entourage of people and he walked up on the water, but I did not see him. The guy that I

thought was the main guy, in general, was Matthew B Kreuger. He was the general that was really a match for General MacArthur. He was a good strategist. I know that he was supposed to come in to Leyte, but I never saw him. I know when I was in the hospital -- three days in the hospital -- he walked up and, after the orderly ordered attention, he said, "At ease, men." He walked up and talked to you. He was a big, old officer.

D What do you remember about the weather or the terrain there?

M Oh, it was hot. Holy Christ, it was hot. We were on Repu, and it was wet [Everything was] White, snow white. You could not touch your helmet. You had to shake your head, that was how hot it was. It was hot. Your head just smelled all the time.

D Was the jungle dense?

M The jungles were dense, yes. The New Guinea jungles were dense. The Philippines were not that bad, though, because of civilization. Up in the mountains they were quite dense.

D Did you ever run across any of the local people, like the natives?

M The who?

D The native people.

M Oh, yes. Yes, sure. We got to be friendly with them. We had a kid that came into our camp, into our platoon. He was like a runner. He would go get things for us. He was a young kid. He did not know where he was, but he would get us things. He did not even know where to go. He would get what you asked for. He was probably working both sides.

D What kind of weapon did you use?

M I had one rifle. I also had a VAR. I was a VAR man. It was okay, but they always put you up in areas where you were exposed more. Then you got rid of that. It jammed on you. I did not want to be up in front.

D What did you think about the Japanese weapons? Did you ever run across anything?

M They had 24, 25 caliber. They said that used more bullets. I have a samurai sword. I brought back a samurai sword.

D Were you fed pretty good?

M Yes We had J rations

D What would the J rations be?

M They had butter, powdered milk, dried up, old crackers One day we did not have anything to eat, and we did not have any water to fix our powdered milk with, so we just ate that stuff with a spoon Jesus, I thought I had to be dying I went to the hospital and the doctor said, "What the hell is the matter?" I said, "I have not eaten "

D Did you ever run across any Negro troops, Negro combat troops?

M Not at that time At one time, in New Guinea, they were all at the pier Lieutenant Barker, he was a pretty good guy He stopped by just to check on his load and everything Finally, we went back and we stole about ten cases of beer We stole it and took it back to the outfit He had an MP [military police] band on his arm He stopped this guy -- I do not know what he was talking about -- but he got his credentials back

A buddy of mine -- we had a Catholic church and he was forced to serve communion. He stole the wine He got wine all the time and we did not have any left for communion He stole a whole box of wine! [Laughter]

D Did you do a lot of gambling or black market activities, things like that?

M We did gamble a lot, but no black market. You could not buy anything over there A guy would give you six beers a week You could buy it off of him He used to bring in quarts of beer, strong beer, and we would buy it off of him Money was nothing. Money was not good Money was not worth a dime You could only spend so much They figured you had to gamble We would bet in pounds like you bet quarters here And a pound at that time would be all of 40 cents So that would cost you a lot of money We used to bet those things Money was no good there They would tell you over there what to buy The Philippines would tell you what to buy We had the PX and the rations You could only buy so many cigarettes

D Were you aware of the way the Japanese treated the American prisoners?

M I think that was the same as us. We treated their prisoners pretty bad, too We were not too perfect to speak of We were just as vicious as they were We never had many prisoners We took this one kid, he put his hands up to be taken as a prisoner, and we shot him

- D You mentioned earlier that there was an American G I killed by one of the natives
- M Yes That was in New Guinea They took all the natives into the village They just hung them, all seven
- D They said next time it would be 14?
- M They said next time it would be 14, and the time after that it would be double And they were no more trouble after that They natives would not bother anybody, I do not think, unless you bothered them I understand -- I never had it happen to me -- they tell me you could buy a marriage, marry a woman You would go over to the natives and buy your woman, like a slave, but then you had to keep her You had to take her back to your tent and keep her She would spend all day taking care of your tent there I never had one
- D Do you remember where you were on VJ Day?
- M I was in New Jersey, in the hotel
- D Was there a big party?
- M Oh, man, there was a party from the time I got there to the time I left I just stayed and drank beer every day and had a party I stayed there
- D Do you remember anything about the trip home from the Pacific?
- M It was on a boat A plane part of the way, but the rest was boat They put you in the hospital boat and took you back to the hospital in San Francisco, the General Hospital I was there for a very short time From there, we went to Oglethorpe, Georgia Oglethorpe was good duty It was a WAC camp About 28,000 WAC's and about 2,000 GI's You would go downtown and the WAC's would say, "Hey soldier, I got a bottle in my room " And I would say, "What kind of whiskey do you have? All I drink is scotch, sweetheart " And there would be the guys out chasing the broads saying, "Hey, I have got a bottle for you " We were in a place called The Brown Derby We would go down and celebrate, me and this kid And there was this good looking WAC and she was such a pretty thing She was with some big dude, a big man I made a pass at her and she knocked me cold on my butt She was a nice looking girl, but she knocked me cold I woke up and said, "Tell me who did that " They said, "She did it." I said, "Holy shit " I was up to 160 pounds and she had to weigh 150 pounds She knocked me upside the head and just knocked me totally out

D When you got back to Monessen after you were let out, what did you do then?

M. I took a job working in the mill I worked about three or four months I did not like it, so I quit and took a job selling fuller brushes. And my father said to me, "What are you doing?" I said, "Hey, I am making some money How much money are you making?" He said, "Well, how much are you making?" He made 70 bucks a week I made 140 dollars selling fuller brushes I worked my ass off Mrs Rushitai, Mrs Yavanski, all the old Slovak people, they would say, "What is the matter, Paul? How come a big boy like you never worked for the mill and makes lots of money?" "Well, I am doing what I should be I am not going to die I am not sick " "Oh, come on Paul Regardless, what you got? What you got?" "Everything I am making 44 percent commission selling Fuller brushes. I am making a hell of a lot of money " When I got into a dark section, everything these people saw, they wanted to buy "I want one of these, one of these, one of these " Well, when you do that business, you have to buy these things I had to buy, then I would get the money I got the stuff and brought it in And they say, "How much do I owe you?" I would say, "\$1 50" "Well, I have not got that much I only have 75 cents right now " I would say, "Well, I cannot leave unless you pay." "I will give you 75 cents Then, you come back here next week, and I will give you 75 cents more " And you would leave the stuff Everything they see they buy They ain't got no money to pay I got out of that business I took a job as a bartender at a country club I tended bar until 1948 or 1949 Then I came to Ohio, into the Warren area

D What brought you into Ohio?

M I got a job with the Youngstown B & O Railroad Then, in 1958, I got a job working in the beer business, which I liked I always did like to be in that business I came back I went down to South High and I got my diploma I took a couple of courses in public speaking and things of that nature, just to get into the sales world That is where I belong I could not have done any better I got into a field that I liked with the type of people I like You have got to be with the people I spent enough time in bars and the people are nice in the bar business They give everybody a break You cannot get it all in the bar business, but you will get a break if you are decent enough

D. What did you do for the railroad?

M Break man Then I got to be a conductor

D You did not like it?

M I liked it but the railroad was never steady In the railroad, you were always off a

couple of months a year. You were working night turn, working extra. You were working all kind of extra turns. During lay-off period, I took a job -- I had just gotten laid off -- I took a job selling for Mike Dixon in some distributing company. I worked for about six months, and then they called me back on the railroad. So I went in and I talked to Mike. I said, "Mike, what do you think?" He said, "Look, you have been here for six months and never even once showed an increase. So if you want to go back, go back. It is your business. When you want to do business, you can bring your business here." The results were super. I could not have been happier, because the railroads were a lot 15 years ago. I retired and got a pension from the Teamsters. I got a pension from Social Security. These are the golden years. These are the best years of my life. They are just great. Just great.

D Is there anything else that you want to say about the war, anything at all?

M No, no. The war was a drag. I think the war should be fought by the presidents and whoever runs the country, like the Congressmen. Let them go fight the goddamn war. Let the kids alone. I think the Japanese people, the Russian people, all the people are the same all around. They bleed when they get cut, they cry when they are hurt, and they laugh when they are happy. I tell you, this crap with all the big bombers, you are not going to defend yourself like some other people. Your politicians have the economy in this condition. Capitalism is what makes the difference. That is what you need. Some years you read Communism, Socialism, you read in the paper, they still believe in cows and things of that nature. They have that some of them -- well, the blacks in the south. A country like this, you are like Russia and even Japan, you do not need a so-called -ism. Let the people read. Give them jobs. They will work.

D Thank you very much.

End of Interview