

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Veterans Project

World War II Veteran

O. H. 550

ANDREW PASTRICK

Interviewed

by

Stephen Evanson

on

March 4, 1981

ANDREW PASTRICK

Andrew J. Pastrick was born December 1, 1920 in New Castle, Pennsylvania, the son of John and Ann (Platko) Pastrick. He attended a variety of schools including St. Michael's, Ben Franklin Junior High School, and graduated from New Castle High School.

After graduation, Pastrick received a job with the Frank C. Doudes Company and worked there up to his induction into the service March 29, 1944. Pastrick received his basic training at Camp Croft in South Carolina. Later on Pastrick was sent to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin. There he joined up with the 76th division which was made up of Maryland National Guardsman.

Upon completing his basic training, the division departed for England. After a short time in England they continually remained on the move. Pastrick had gotten his first taste of battle which took place crossing the river at Echternach. Reluctantly, he was unhurt, but he foresaw the danger ahead of him. An unfortunate accident happened to Pastrick and two other Americans, on February 14, 1945, while on a routine patrol a land mine was set off killing one and wounding Pastrick and his lieutenant. As a result of the blast Pastrick lost his right leg. On April 19, 1946 he was officially discharged from the service and returned home.

Formerly employed with the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co., Andrew and his wife have two children, Ron and Greg. Now retired, Andrew and his family reside in Struthers.

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INTERVIEWEE: ANDREW PASTRICK
INTERVIEWER: Stephen Evanson
SUBJECT: 417th Regiment, Employment, Benefits,
Injury
DATE: March 4, 1981

E: This is an interview with Andrew J. Pastrick for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the World War II Veterans Project, by Steve Evanson, on March 4, 1981, at 3:30 p.m.

Mr. Pastrick, what do you remember about your parents and family? Do you remember what type of work your father did? Did your mother work part-time?

P: My parents were of Slovak descent. My dad died in 1926 of perintinitis. At that time I was five and a half years old. Due to economic conditions my mother did have to go to work. She worked for United States Steel as an inspector in the assorting department up until 1937 or 1938 when the plant closed.

E: Growing up in that time did you have gardens or eat regularly?

P: At that time in the neighborhood almost everybody had chickens or a cow. Almost every yard had a garden, grape vines, fruit trees. Everybody at that time did a lot of canning.

E: Where did you actually grow up?

P: I was born in New Castle, Pennsylvania and lived there until going into the service and after the service. I moved to Struthers in 1947.

E: Can you tell us something about your childhood, maybe particular activities you got involved in or sports and

social gatherings?

P: From my early childhood I can recall that we stayed close to home. Sports were all empty neighborhood lots where you could play ball using makeshift toys. As a bat you used a stick and a bunch of old rags put together was a baseball or football. You put bikes together from parts you found in the trash somewhere. I went to Catholic school almost across the street from us.

E: What was the name of it?

P: St. Michael's.

E: Is it still there?

P: Yes.

E: Do you remember what school was like, perhaps any particular teacher?

P: We had nuns for teachers up until the sixth grade. After the sixth grade I went to public school at Franklin Junior High. That was a three year school. They only had three years of high school then.

E: Being in school what was your favorite subject?

P: I would say that biology and salesmanship were the two most interesting courses. I also like mathematics besides.

E: Did you graduate from high school?

P: Yes, I graduated from New Castle High School. I went to school until 1938. When the mills closed in New Castle due to economic conditions I got a job through my track coach, Bill Klee, who was also my home-study teacher. He got me a job at Haney Furniture as a stock boy. We went out and set up displays. When the mills closed I had the choice of keeping the job and dropping out of school, or quitting my job. At that time jobs weren't easy to find so I stayed on the job. Unfortunately, by Thanksgiving, the rest of the mills shut down and I got laid off. This was in 1938.

E: It wasn't a strike, it was just completely closed?

P: It was just like what happened with Sheet & Tube; the mills just shut down. Everybody was out of work so naturally I was laid off. I decided to go back to school since there was no work available. I graduated in January of 1939. After graduation there was nothing to do so I stayed on for post-graduate work until the summer

of 1939.

E: What particular styles were prominent then, what trends like fancy cars?

P: Dress was more or less conservative. We wore blue jeans after we took off our good clothes. Today everybody wears blue jeans to be in style. Cars were flashy, especially the convertibles.

E: Do you remember your first car?

P: It was a 1937 Ford. They called them puddle jumpers. It was a six cylinder car.

E: What did you pay for it?

P: I think \$150.

E: Before entering the service, besides Haney Furniture what other places were you employed at?

P: After I went back to school a friend of mine got me a job at a restaurant. It was called George's Restaurant. It was a hot dog and hamburger shop more or less, although he did serve hot meals. He had special customers that would come in. The theater was next door and after the movie they would all come in and eat hot dogs. We sold them then three for a dime. I worked for \$1.50 a week, and that was six days a week.

E: After that did you go into any type of mill work?

P: I did get a job at Shenango-Penn Mold in Neville Island. I worked there for about a year. Then I came back and got a job with Frank C. Doudes Machine Shop Company in New Castle. I worked there about two years before I went into the service.

E: Do you remember your boss?

P: My boss was Kenneth C. Bowman.

E: Do you recall any type of training or was there some kind of apprenticeship?

P: No, it wasn't an apprenticeship. Mostly you started out by having some other fellow showing you or teaching you. After they decided that you were qualified enough to operate the machinery and equipment you just went ahead and were on your own.

E: Did you still live at home at this time?

P: Yes, I was living at home.

E: So you dropped out of school because you felt work was more important then?

P: Yes. I had a brother four years older than me and he got a job in a bakery. My sister stayed at home until she got a job.

E: In other words it was a group effort?

P: If you could find a job you were lucky. If you got a job at least you made enough to keep a home going.

E: Around that time prior to the 1940's was the atmosphere among your friends that the war was brewing and the Americans might be in it? This was before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Did you have that feeling that the U.S. might be building up?

P: I think the general feeling was that the United States was invincible. Even though the war did break out most of the people that you talked to felt that nobody hardly dare attack the United States. We were starting to get mechanized then and produced a lot of durable goods.

E: Were you drafted or inspired to go?

P: The job I was on at the time the war broke out was at that machine company which was manufacturing bomb parts for the government, both for the U.S. Navy and Army. As the draft was going on, people who were working on vital defense programs were deferred. I did get called up and the company got me a deferment.

E: What were your feelings, happy?

P: Most of my friends were going into the service. There were three of us that palled around together. We all decided that since there was no work we were going to join the services. Each one of us wanted a different branch of the service. None of us agreed. The one went into the Navy; he wanted to go into the Marines. The other one wanted to be in the Navy; he went into the Army. The third one did go into the Navy because he wanted the Navy; he ended up in the submarine corps. I kept seeing all of my friends and neighbors go and it was a feeling like being left alone. My older brother had gone; my brother-in-law had gone; even my younger brother enlisted and left. Since I was the only one at home they wanted me to stay. I could have probably got hardship deferment. At that time one male member of the family was allowed to stay as a sole

survivor in case anybody in the family got killed. When everybody was going and my deferment came through I stayed another three months. I told them [family] that if my deferment ends or when it ends that I had thoughts of entering the service, not to request a second deferment.

E: When you were working at that plant did the orders start to increase? Could you tell that the United States might be building themselves up?

P: Actually that work came at the time of Pearl Harbor. After we got into the war then they really switched. The company really made steam injector valves. When the war broke out they switched to defense materials. They got government contracts and started to manufacture PT boat stabilizers for the Navy and we made 500 lb. bomb detonators. The switch came about due to the war. There was no build-up in the plant. At that time the government gave subsidies or loans to companies that would manufacture parts for the government.

E: What branch of the service did you go into?

P: I went into the infantry.

E: Was that what you desired?

P: No. I had applied to the quartermaster corps due to the fact that I worked in a machine shop and was familiar with mechanical tools and stuff. I did go to a school at Camp Croft for twelve or sixteen weeks. It was an armor artificer school, which was the repair and maintenance of weapons. However, evidently there were no openings at that time.

E: What year was this?

P: I was inducted on March 29, 1944. After basic training at Camp Croft, South Carolina I was transferred to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin on October 1, 1944. That was the 76th Division, which was made up primarily of Maryland National Guardsmen.

E: At the time did you think of the military as a career?

P: Unemployment being what it was, most of the fellows at that time, which were in the 18-21 age group, there was no work and there were a lot of volunteers that enlisted. Guys went and signed up because there was no work. I did think of the Army of a career, and I had almost hoped to stay in the service.

- E: Do you remember who your boot camp instructor was?
- P: Sergeant Bahme and Sergeant Carlucci. We got to be really good friends. I was in his [Carlucci's] company and a couple of months later I moved to another company. We played a lot of softball and I happened to manage a team opposing Sergeant Carlucci and we got to be pretty good friends in rivalry. He did try to get me to stay on as an instructor at the basic camp.
- E: Did you increase in rank?
- P: In training nobody got promoted.
- E: You said you did receive some kind of training while in the service, or you wanted to?
- P: Yes, there was training. The only other opportunity was volunteering for parachute corps or officer candidate school. You could apply, but if there was no need or quotas were filled you stayed in the infantry.
- E: How did your family feel?
- P: My mother took it real hard. Nobody was left at home. My sister was pregnant and had lost her baby. I think my brother-in-law was already overseas and there was nobody at home to manage the house and take care of things around the house that had to be done.
- E: Was your mother still working?
- P: No. When the mills closed she was out of a job. That was before Social Security came in to give any kind of compensation or any kind of help. I know it hurt her more so.
- E: Before the war how did you feel about taking another man's life? In camp did they inflict it upon you that when it came down to it it was your life or his?
- P: Originally it didn't seem to bother me. I know that when we went overseas there were two or three fellows that refused to go into combat because they didn't want to shoot or kill anybody. Of course, whenever it gets down to the point where it's either your life or his, you're going to pull the trigger.
- E: After boot camp what was your next destination?
- P: After we left Camp Croft we were sent to the 76th Division, which was stationed at Camp McCoy to fill their complement. The division was to be a reserve division. Primarily we didn't know where we were going due to the fact that one

day they would issue us summer clothing, and two or three weeks later they would issue us winter clothing. They kept you guessing as to where you were going to go.

E: When did you get papers?

P: After we got put on the alert at Camp McCoy we got sent aboard a troop train and didn't know where we were going. We did travel east and ended up at Camp Miles Standish in Massachusetts.

E: What were the thoughts going through your mind then?

P: I think most of the guys felt that they wanted to stay stateside. The division was hastily put together. As the war was escalating the United States and allies were getting pushed around Europe and the Pacific. Although it was inevitable that we were going to go there were still hopes of staying stateside. Nobody was that eager to jump into it right then.

E: After Massachusetts where did you go?

P: The point of debarkation was Boston. We left there Thanksgiving Day.

E: Do you remember the name of the ship that took you over?

P: Yes. I went across on the U.S.S. Marine Raven, which was an oil tanker originally, converted to a troop transport. The ride I'll never forget, because we were like a cork bobbing in the water due to the ship not having a regular ballast on it.

E: Where did you arrive?

P: In Southampton, England.

E: Who was your commander then? Who overlooked your division?

P: Division commander was Major General Wm. R. Schmidt. Captain Fetzer was the leader of our company. My lieutenant was a fellow from Akron by the name of Culbertson. Our platoon sergeant was Pete Helthaler from New York.

E: After arriving at Southampton did you proceed to go straight into action?

P: No. We stayed at Southampton approximately three weeks. Evidently they were waiting to see what division we would replace, but the Battle of the Bulge in December sort of changed tactics. That was in December of 1944.

- E: From what I understand of the Bulge they were coming in from the south of France and there were two strikes actually.
- P: They pinched the Americans there. I was not in that. My brother was in the 26th Infantry Division in the field artillery and he was in it. After the Battle of the Bulge they took our outfit in it, but sent us to Luxembourg.
- E: Arriving in Europe, tell us about the type of people that you encountered, the citizens?
- P: From the time we arrived at Le Havre we were sort of kept on the move. Our contact with the people was very little except whenever we would be moved by truck. We would stay at farms or farmhouses then and people still lived there. The only people we had contact with really were other soldiers or other government people from the United States.
- E: Can you tell us some of the experiences you encountered over there? Did you see actual combat?
- P: We didn't see or get involved with any actual combat until we got within ten or fifteen miles of the front lines. At that time we were in Luxembourg. Our first real engagement with enemy was crossing the Sauer River at Echternach. At that time the allies started a counter-offensive on the Siegfried line in Germany. Before we did get down to Echternach we were marching into the town and the enemy did start shelling us. At that time the Keystone Division, the 28th Infantry Division Commander, General Cota, came up to give us a pep talk going into battle. That was the first taste of enemy action until we crossed the Sauer River.
- E: This was 1945 when you were in Europe?
- P: Right. We left about two days after Christmas; that's when we left Southampton. This was in January of 1945 that we did get into the combat area.
- E: During the war can you tell us what kind of hazards you had, what you actually had to look out for while marching and stuff?
- P: As you advanced on foot you were told to be careful, to watch for land mines and booby traps, which were set by the enemy. Very seldom did we travel by truck, but they would have an advance group go through and check the roads and make sure they were clear of mines. Most of our advancing was on foot. Naturally the infantry is the

foot soldier.

E: How many people would be in a group while you were over there?

P: Your squads were twelve men. You had about 50 to 60 in a platoon. The company ran about 120, 150 men.

E: In other words, you were never separated from your platoon or your company?

P: The smallest would ordinarily be a squad, unless you went on reconaissance, which at that time I was first scout. We had two scouts leading the rest of the squad or platoon.

E: When was your first encounter with the enemy?

P: My first encounter with the enemy was when three men jumped out in the road, German soldiers, among them a lietenant, who were trying to surrender. The lieutenant had given me his luger. The other two were evidently enlisted men. As we were advancing they were taken captives and taken back to the rear area for questioning.

E: You never experienced one-on-one combat where your life was in danger?

P: At night we would be at an outpost on top of a hill and we would sit there and just keep watching across the valley to see where the Germans were. One of the most tragic things at the outpost was that our artillery observers had been up there and they said not to worry because they would never hit the top of the hill; all the German 88's were hitting the side of the cliff. One day we were just about to be relieved and a Lieutenant Bell happened to come up--whether the Germans moved up their guns or what--and there were three shells that blew around us. One of them, the shrapnel, hit Lieutenant Bell and cut his jugular vein. Myself and two others carried him back to our post and he died. It was my first death experience.

E: At that point did you feel--When I see the next German I'm going to . . .

P: That's when it made you sort of shaky. You knew then that you were actually in combat with the enemy.

E: From what I understand you had an accident during the war. Is that correct?

P: Yes. After we had dug in we went to replace the 5th Infantry Division. After we had dug in we were to be relieved in two days I think. On our trip back to the rest area we were

told that we had to take another objective. It was approximately 4:00 or 5:00 in the evening, just before dusk. It was February 14, 1945. We crossed the road and our lieutenant decided to take us through the field around the wooded area, which was presumed to have enemy outposts there. We were getting sniper fire from there and we were to surround the area. The lieutenant decided to take us through the field. We started to cross the field and noticed a sign reading mine field. After a few probes the lieutenant thought there were no mines there and we started to go on. As we got in further the barbed wire was strung across the field. Every man was told to make sure that as he stepped over the wire not to trip the wire. The lieutenant started to backtrack and as he got toward me he told me, "Where you step, one false move and you're a dead . . ." as he was to say duck a land mine exploded. At that time I was the assistant squad leader so I had all the rest of the men out of the field ahead of me. The second squad was behind me. The lieutenant, myself, and the sergeant all got him at the same time.

E: Were they severely injured?

P: The sergeant died. The lieutenant had received some shrapnel wounds, but only sustained minor injuries. I got hit around the foot, the ankle. My boot was just about blown off of my foot. Due to the fact that they realized we were in a mine field, there was nobody anxious to come in and get us. By that time it had gotten dark, and everybody was afraid to come in the mine field. We sat there until our medic had come up. Our medic was Greg Kirchner and he volunteered to come in the mine field and get me out.

E: Were you completely unconscious?

P: I was semi-conscious. I didn't recall how long I had laid in the mine field, but I do know when they got me out it was getting daylight. We sat at the edge of the road and had to wait for the ambulances to take us to the field hospital on the front lines.

E: Do you remember what it was like being in that field hospital?

P: The first hospital I went to was more or less like a camp. It was a hospital where they gave you emergency treatment. From there they took us by ambulance to the 35th Field Evac. That hospital was in an old German bunker. On the concourse there were about eighteen or twenty steps and you would walk down one flight and there would be eighteen or twenty more. It was a gigantic tunnel underground. It

almost resembled a city. There were so many rooms and buildings. It was well-lit. This is where they amputated my foot.

E: Where is this located?

P: I don't know the town.

E: Where was your mind at when this happened? Did you say to yourself--My life is over--or did you have to learn to adapt to it?

P: No, my first thought were that . . . I didn't know that my leg was as bad as it was. Sensation was a phantom feeling that it was still there. When I did get to the hospital and did finally know that my foot was cut off it did make me feel real bad. As a soldier I was through. I said that my life was over. I felt bad because I did not get to my objective. At one time I had thought that we were going to go through Europe and the route that we were taking would take me through Czechoslovakia, but I never made it. I didn't care whether I lived or died at that point.

E: Did they give you the Purple Heart?

P: Anybody that gets wounded in action or due to enemy action gets wounded in a combat area is awarded the Purple Heart. I wasn't awarded the medal itself until I was in a hospital in Atlantic City.

E: In the camp hospital did you have the feeling of blaming somebody, maybe that lieutenant.

P: Originally, yes. I still do think that it was the lieutenant's fault. He knew that the field was mined and the wire was tripped by the lieutenant. He was a glory man. He had been to fortune tellers and they had told him that he was going to meet his wife in Tokyo. He felt that whatever we did in Europe, nothing was going to happen to him. That sort of did get me mad. Anytime there were any volunteers asked for by the company commander, Lieutenant Culbertson wanted to volunteer. I would say he was looking for the glory. He thought that nothing was going to happen to him. He would volunteer and he picked Pastrick and Ostendorf to lead his night reconaissance. I wasn't too happy because he picked me. Ostendorf was a young kid from Minnesota. Eventually in one of the letters I'd received I found out Ostendorf was killed.

E: I suppose there were a lot of young kids.

- P: At that time I would say the kids in my squad were all eighteen, nineteen years old, maybe as old as twenty. I was twenty-four. I considered myself old at that time.
- E: After you left the field hospital you went back home to the States?
- P: No, after leaving the field evac hospital I traveled quite a distance to get back home. They took me from the field evac by ambulance and then by train, and by ship to England. We stayed in England at a hospital. Then by ambulance they took us to Wales. We stayed there until they decided to fly us back home. We made the trip back by ambulance and then by plane. From England they flew us back to Paris.
- E: They were bringing a whole group?
- P: A whole group of wounded. At Orly Field in Paris we were among the first air evacuees to be flown back to the States. Originally, they were all sent home aboard hospital ships. We were one of the first flights to fly from Europe back to the States.
- E: What kind of medical treatment did you receive? Did they give you any kind of therapy?
- P: Not in Europe. In Europe all they did was treat the wound and replace bandages. It wasn't until I was back in the States where I had a second operation on my leg. They cut the leg to fit the artificial limb. There I had received therapy.
- E: After coming home what were your intentions? Did you set your goals straight?
- P: At that time, being in Atlantic City, New Jersey life was too good down there to have anything in mind. As a matter of fact, I was offered a couple of jobs in Atlantic City, which I'm sorry today I didn't take knowing what has happened to Atlantic City now.
- E: After arriving home can you tell us the type of benefits you received where you could go to school or they would line you up a job or anything like that?
- P: At that time they had what they called the 52-20 Club. Veterans that were discharged from the service and couldn't find work could collect unemployment. That was \$20 a week for 52 weeks; that's how it got its name. This was the unemployment that you could collect. Jobs weren't the easiest, even right after the war. On a radio station,

WKST in New Castle, you would give a brief biography of yourself, your ethnic background, your experiences before the war, and what you were qualified to do as to work. They tried to help place you. I happened to be called for one of those interviews and did have a radio broadcast.

E: What type of employment did you receive, the first job you did take right after the war? First, though, when did you get discharged officially?

P: Officially, I got discharged on April 19, 1946. I was discharged in Atlantic City, right from the hospital.

E: Was there a lapse where you didn't go to work?

P: The \$20 gave you spending money and you didn't have to worry about other necessities being single and not having family obligations.

E: After you arrived home how did your family treat you? Were they happy that you at least made it?

P: To my mother it was a hard pill. My neighbor was the medical officer at Atlantic City Hospital, Colonel Joe Colby. He was coming home and brought me home. When he came up to the house he laid on the horn and all the neighbors came running outside to see what was going on. I was on crutches and my mother cried. It hurt her to see the neighbors peeking through their curtains and coming out on their porches to peek at me. I knew it was a fact I had to accept, and by that time I had realized that what I was going to get out of life was what I was going to make out of it, injury or not. You know you have a handicap, but that doesn't stop you from doing the things you want to do.

E: Since you were a veteran during World War II, when you would walk into a bar would people buy you drinks and make you feel--we were glad you were over there fighting for us?

P: Not after the war, but during the war if you came home, like I did on furlough, they threw a party for me at the machine shop I worked at. I extended my furlough and stayed in town to have a war bond drive. People during the war were friendly and felt that you were doing something for the country and for them. After the war ended there were so many veterans home it got to be common and nobody cared.

E: Did you get employed after you got home?

P: At that time my brother was discharged and living in Lowellville while he was married. We were more or less looking at

Youngstown for jobs. It happened that my brother and his wife found a home in Struthers that was for sale. The family looked at it and decided that we would buy it, so we moved to the Youngstown district of Struthers to be near someplace to work. I did work in Youngstown at my first job back from the war running an auto driver training school.

E: Were the cars standard shift?

P: Most of the cars at that time were still standard shift.

E: Were you able to drive?

P: They didn't have the gadgets in them that they have now. I took over the school and I had to drive for two years. I would hire guys with their cars and paid them about \$5 an hour to take out people. I had the office downtown at the Purple Heart Club. I had a phone in the office and I would teach people who came downtown to drive.

E: Did you get employment at the mill?

P: In 1947 I put in an application at Sheet & Tube. My brother-in-law was working at Sheet & Tube and my younger brother had already gotten a job there. I got called to the Briar Hill Works for a clerking job in the electric weld shipping.

E: Did you remain with that company for a while?

P: I stayed with Youngstown Sheet & Tube for approximately 30 years. I was two weeks short of 30 years in 1977 when they put me on pension.

E: Did your injury affect the way you worked or did you simply overcome it?

P: At work it was simple. I didn't do too much walking. I walked about a quarter of a mile from the office down to the mill two or three times a day. I was tally check clerk and would go down and pick up the tallies or somebody would bring them up to us. If they brought them up we didn't have to go down. We made at least two trips to make sure that we had all of the tallies from the previous turn. You made sure you had them all from your turn so that you could get them in for the day's business.

E: Did you receive some sort of governmental benefits for the injury?

P: Yes. For the injury I went to Cleveland Veterans Hospital. They gave me a complete physical exam and evaluated me.

They placed a rate of disability. The pension was called disability compensation. It isn't a pension, it is a disability compensation for your injury.

E: There is such a contrast between the benefits you received and the benefits the Vietnam veterans received.

P: It is a shame because I would advise any veteran that has come back and has his discharge to take advantage of the veterans benefits that he can get. I'm sorry today that I didn't take up the GI bill of rights for education. At the time that I came back I was 26 years old. I felt I was too old. A lot of guys did go to college because they had the opportunity. Some of them didn't use it, but most of them did. You had government loans for education, for housing. There were advantages in World War II on benefits like these Vietnam veterans aren't getting.

E: Do you have anything to day that you think is important to add?

P: No.

E: One last question. How do you feel about the draft now? Do you want your children to go? Do you feel it's right?

P: Deep down inside I feel that if they are called and if there is a direct confrontation between the United States and some foreign power, I wouldn't feel bad if they went. However, if it would be just to show might or to fall into some other fiasco like we did in Vietnam, I wouldn't want to see them go. I wouldn't encourage them to go, but I would not stop them if they wanted to go. I think it's an honor and privilege for them to serve the country.

E: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW