

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

World War II Quartermaster

O. H. 122

WILLIAM H. GWYNN

Interviewed

by

Steven Ard

on

June 20, 1980

WILLIAM HENRY GWYNN

William Henry Gwynn was born in Patton, Pennsylvania on April 11, 1916, the son of William and Ellen Gwynn. His father worked for the local coal mining company. Gwynn graduated from Patton High School. The summer he was seventeen he worked in one of the Civilian Conservation Corps camps.

Drafted into the army on November 24, 1942, Gwynn was first in the infantry. When he was given the opportunity, he joined the quartermasters. His unit supplied clothing and food to the 5th Army in Italy and France.

Today Gwynn is retired from Commercial Shearing of Youngstown, Ohio. He worked there thirty-eight years. He married his wife Elsie on February 22, 1941, and they have a daughter Christine. They live in Liberty, Ohio and attend St. Edward's Church. Gwynn belongs to the American Legion Walter McCoy Post in Patton. He enjoys fishing and helping his neighbors.

Steven Ard

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM H. GWYNN
INTERVIEWER: Steven Ard
SUBJECT: World War II Quartermaster
DATE: June 20, 1980

A: This is an interview with William Henry Gwynn for the Youngstown State University World War II project by Steven R. Ard at 3440 Hadley Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio on June 20, 1980 at approximately 10:20 a.m.

First Bill, when and where were you born?

G: Patton, Pennsylvania, April 11, 1916.

A: Okay and what was your childhood in Patton like?

G: Well, Patton was a coal mining town and it's a small town, approximately maybe four thousand people at that time. And I went to school, Second Ward School. I went there through high school. That's where I graduated from.

A: Was your dad a coal miner?

G: He had been there a number of years and then he went into the shops. He still worked for the same company, the Pennsylvania Coal and Coke, but the last, oh I'd say the last twenty years I imagine, he was rewinding armatures and motors, putting new bearings and that around the mines.

A: As a kid growing up in Patton, what did you do for fun?

G: Oh, I did a lot of fishing and we played ball, picked berries. Anything that grew, mother canned. Oh I did

a lot of swimming.

A: Do you recall the Depression era in town?

G: Yes, I do.

A: Can you tell me about that a little bit?

G: Well, I tell the kids today that I remember the days that we used to go out and pick potatoes when the farmers had the potatoes. We got one meal and one year we'd get two bushel of potatoes for the day. Another year we'd get one meal and we'd get fifty cents for the day. Things were rough.

A: Which was more valuable to you, the potatoes or the fifty cents?

G: Well, that I don't know because I turned it over to my mother. (Laughter) I turned it over to my mother and she'd give us what she could afford.

A: Was your dad working during the Depression or was he laid off?

G: Well, he worked most of the time.

A: How about the people in Patton, did most of them have jobs or were they hit pretty bad?

G: They were hit hard. Anywhere that you could find a job why, pick up a few cents, that's where you went out.

A: When did things start getting better?

G: Well, let me see, in 1933 I believe, I went to the Three C Camps [Civilian Conservation Corps Camps] for, what was it, about a year.

A: What did you do in the camps?

G: In the Three C Camps? Mostly it was over near Slate Run, Pennsylvania and what we did was cut fire lines, build roads and stuff like that in the Three C Camps.

A: And did you get paid for that?

G: No, that was the Government, the Government had the Three C's Civilian Conservation Corps.

A: But I mean you didn't get paid for doing this?

G: Oh yes. Yes, we got thirty dollars a month.

A: Thirty dollars a month.

G: We got thirty dollars a month and our board.

A: About how old were you then?

G: Oh, seventeen.

A: Did you work hard?

G: Oh yes, we had our jobs to do. You started to work at about eight o'clock in the morning. You worked till twelve. Then you got an hour off for lunch and you worked on up from one till four, four-thirty and then the trucks brought you back into camp.

A: What kind of camp was it? Can you describe it to me?

G: Well, it was all tents, all tents it was and a mess hall and it was way back in the hills. That's what we done then.

A: Okay, now were you drafted or did you volunteer for the service?

G: No, I was drafted.

A: And what year is this now?

G: 1942.

A: Where did you do your training?

G: Camp Wheeler, Georgia.

A: Tell me what Camp Wheeler was like?

G: It was an infantry training camp. And oh, you had calisthenics. You went on twenty-five mile hikes. You learned all the rifle, all about the rifle, machine guns, mortars. And it was hot.

A: How long did you spend there?

G: Well, we had thirteen weeks training there.

A: And where did you go from there?

G: From there I went to Camp Reynolds and I didn't go out

with the first shipment because I had my teeth pulled and I was held up there about four or five weeks I imagine. From there I went to Patrick Henry, from Patrick Henry we went to Casablanca [Morocco] and I was there for oh, maybe a week at Fort Laudey. And I drove one of these, oh, amphibious trucks from there on up to Oran [Algiers]. I was in a replacement depot there and I worked about five, oh I wouldn't know just how long, maybe a month or so at MBS Headquarters.

A: What is that?

G: That's Mediterranean Base Headquarters.

A: And what did you do at the Headquarters?

G: Clerical work. It has been so long ago that I can't remember on that. From there I went up to Bizerts, [Tunisia] and we shipped out of Philippeville. Well, at that time I was in the infantry. I was assigned to the 9th Division, 60th Infantry, Company M. That was the heavy weapons outfit.

A: Now what do you mean by heavy weapons?

G: Well that's your mortars, your machine guns. And we left there, we went into Gela, Sicily on either D-2 or D-3, the third day after the invasion. We went through Sicily. The 9th Division moved back to Africa and they took just the cadre. I was a private then. They just took the cadre and they moved them around to England to prepare for the invasion of France. And they left all the people there, all the rest of the people, in the replacement depot.

A: What do you mean cadre?

G: Well your noncom officers, your noncommissioned officers.

And then while I happened to be in this replacement depot, I met a young lad here from Youngstown and he was with the headquarters outfit. And when he learned I was from Youngstown we got pretty friendly. He asked me if I ever done any typing or any office work and I told him yes, that I had. And he told me then that there was a good outfit that was going to open up and he asked me if I'd be interested in joining. I said, "Hey, anything to get out of the infantry I'm interested in." And that is how I ended up in the Quartermaster outfit.

A: Okay, can you tell me about the Quartermasters?

G: When I first went to them they were just organizing it and we came over to Italy and we started to set up a depot there. The field artillery was still behind us. Well, then we started to set up a foods depot up near a little town they call Marchinese. And we were up there for a couple weeks starting to get hit then we moved back into Naples. Then I was stationed in Naples for oh, the best part of two years, maybe, pretty close to two years anyhow.

Then the Quartermaster outfit, well like I say, it was the headquarters in headquarters company. We had all the different outfits that pertained to quartermaster below us. We had a T.O. and E. [Total officers and Enlisted men] That was what they called the number of men. There was 118 enlisted men and there must have been, oh, probably 40 some officers headed by a lieutenant colonel and so many majors, so many captains, so many second lieutenants, and so many first lieutenants, and two warrant officers.

A: What rank did you hold?

G: T. sergeant, technical sergeant. I could have went up to master sergeant, but at the time, I had enough time in to come home on rotation, if you know what I mean there. You spent so much time overseas, you were eligible to come home on rotation. Well, I had enough points to get home as a tech sergeant, but I didn't have enough points to come as a master sergeant because it was all brought down so many points. That is the reason I turned down the master sergeant.

A: Tell me a little bit about what Naples was like.

G: Well, at that time it was pretty dirty because it was well bombed. There were ships laying over in the harbor. And we got a lot of air raids.

A: What did you do during an air raid?

G: Went down to el recover all. [underground bomb shelter]
(Laughter)

A: What's that now?

G: Well, they had, oh, way underground, almost all the buildings in what you call it, it was just like tunnels all underground. Maybe you were down there forty or

fifty feet, when there was an air raid.

A: Like a bomb shelter?

G: Yes.

A: When were these built? Were they built before you got there?

G: Oh they were built before we ever got there. I think the Italian people, when the Germans were in there, they had built them.

A: Okay, can you describe how large they were underground?

G: Well, I'll tell you, we were billeted up on, what was it, Corso Umberto I believe, and we could walk underground from there all the way up to where our main building was downtown. I can't tell you the name of the street it was. It was about a mile and a half. I know we could go that far just underground, walking. But there were just big rooms in there just for people to go whenever there was an air raid.

A: Did you ever feel the bombs hitting on top?

G: No, not once you were down in the air raid shelter you couldn't.

A: You never saw any damage down there from bombing either?

G: No not from there.

A: Then they were pretty solid.

G: Their mostly bombings, whenever they came, were down at the port. Well we wasn't very far from the harbor. They were bombing those quite a bit. Oh you had glass and that was broken and a few times you were jarred out of your bed at night whenever the air raid came and you wasn't expecting it just then. That happened a few times, but not too often. The sky would be lit up.

A: How did you find the people around Naples?

G: Friendly, friendly, very friendly. And of course, where we were billeted we always had garbage cans out and they were always going through the garbage. They were hard hit.

A: Did you ever talk to any of the civilian population?

G: Oh yes, yes.

A: What did you talk about?

G: Most anything, most anything. I never saw so many people that could talk with their hands to try to make you understand because I didn't know that much Italian. And of course, you would run into a few that did speak the English language. There was a lot of them over there then that they'd tell you, oh yes, they had been to this country, Bridgeport, Pittsburg, mostly in the steel mining places. Then they'd picked up and went back to Italy. Found a number of those people. Yes.

A: Do you remember discussing with the population the war itself? What did they think about Mussolini? About Hitler? Did you ever talk about that?

G: They were all happy when Mussolini was killed. I happened to be up in . . . Turin? Oh where was Mussolini hung up at, him and his girlfriend? I was there two days after they cut the body down. You could still see the blood and that. The people they were just. . . well, just like a bunch of kids. They seemed to be awful happy about it, but I still think that Mussolini done a lot of good for Italy in places that I had seen.

A: What do you mean?

G: Well, up in the swamp-lands where he had irrigated all them and made them into farms. That was through Mussolini's regime. He had done that. I believe that was good for the people there, but he just happened to get mixed in with Hitler and from there down, why, well there wasn't much there.

A: All right, let's go back to the quartermaster corps and tell me a little bit about what you did there.

G: I was a good paper shuffler. I worked with a Colonel Brown. He sat on that side of the desk and I sat on this side of the desk. And I got all the reports that came from the message center over. He used to tell me, what you thought needed attention, why, make sure he seen them and things that weren't that important, why, I could file them away. But we had reports, oh my God, more reports to make out than you could shake a stick at.

A: And what kind of reports was he interested in and what kind of reports did he leave to you?

- G: Well, I had to make out a lot of reports on the amount of stuff that came in and then of course, I got reports what ship was coming into the harbor, what material was on those ships pertaining to the Quartermaster. And then we had to make the reports on all the different companies below us, their VD reports. Every month I had to do that.
- A: Was that high?
- G: Very high. High among the colored units. It was high.
- A: Can you estimate a percent?
- G: Yes, yes, it was high. Believe me it was.
- A: 50 percent?
- G: Well, I wouldn't say it was 50 percent. Different outfits were more hit than others. The service units, they were the highest. They'd run 20, 25 percent which is high.
- A: What do you mean service units?
- G: Well the service units was the outfits that got the stuff ready and put them on the trucks. In other words, they worked the depots. We had class two and four depot which handled nothing but clothing. Then we had the class one that handled nothing but food. We had refrigeration outfits. We had graves registration outfits. We had salvage and reclamation outfits and we had an outfit that did nothing but handle captured enemy material. Of course all those reports, they came through our office. And then I had to keep up to date on the history of the outfit. There's all kinds of reports. I don't know where I put that book, but I cannot find it right now for love nor money. It would give you all the information of just about anything and everything that went into Italy and anything that ever went out.
- A: What kind of material did the captain let you handle?
- G: I didn't handle any of the material.
- A: No, but I mean in terms of the reports that he said, "You can file these," and he wants to see certain other ones. What kind of stuff did he let you take care of without even showing it to him?
- G: Well, we used to get these here articles of war and I'd read them over then he would read them over and they'd file them away. But oh there was a lot of papers that

didn't mean a damn as far as the war was going on. Because this outfit that I was in, we weren't like an infantry outfit or anything else that had to get up and had to take their calisthenics and had to do this. What they were interested in most is that we got our job done. In other words, it was just like you going to work here at a company. They wasn't interested in what you did on your spare time as long as you were there and got your job done and do your work, that the 5th Army was taken care of and everything like that, and everything went as smooth as possible.

A: What type of things did you supply to the 5th Army?

G: All their clothing, all their food, that was the biggest item, all their food and all their clothing.

A: Did you run into any problems in terms of supply.

G: Not too much. Oh, there's trucks that maybe they'd lose a few trucks or something like that, but we didn't have anything to do with that. That was different outfits that were hauling it there. We would hear about it, but I didn't have any reports like that to make out, no, no.

A: Okay, some of these other companies you mentioned like grave registration, what is their function?

G: Graves registration, they were an outfit that buried a lot of the soldiers that were killed in action. They had to identify them and after they got that information there, it was sent back to our office and we had a special office there that had to write up the report on each and every one of them, their positive identification. And if they couldn't identify them that way, why they'd have tooth charts and everything else made from them. That would have to come back. They'd make their reports out. And I didn't see their reports that they had made out. I know what they made out. I've seen them already, but I mean they didn't come through my office. They were sent back to Washington and then I guess Washington notified the next of kin tell them exactly what had happened, when it happened and where they were buried. They had a number of graves registration graves, I mean the graves up around Natona, large cemeteries that they took care of, that was graves registration,

A: Now you talked about if you couldn't identify them you said they used these teeth, or they made teeth charts?

G: Yes.

A: What did they compare them with?

G: Well when you were inducted into the Army they took teeth charts or if you had your teeth fixed, or fingerprints if there was anything left to take fingerprints with. Then maybe there would be four or five that happened to be in a airplane crash mostly, but they were pretty badly burned up and they would bury them and they would list one of the following. Maybe if there was four or five, they knew who they were but they couldn't identify any of those bodies.

A: I see, can you tell me the function of some of the other groups?

G: Well class two and four was all your clothing, all your bedding, that was their biggest items were mostly their clothing and their bedding and stuff like that. But there was always need for them in the 5th Army and everywhere else. We supplied all the clothing for all the outfits, shoes. And they had a big replacement depot on up near Aversa.

And salvage and reclamation, anything that was possibly salvaged, we had companies there that did nothing than repair salvage, salvaged equipment that could be repaired.

A: Now is this enemy or our equipment?

G: Our equipment mostly.

A: Did we pick up enemy equipment?

G: Oh yes.

A: And what did we do with that?

G: Well, that was in a big storehouse. I couldn't tell you what all they did with it.

Then we had a remount outfit that had mules and horses that were used to pack stuff up the mountains. That outfit was under us.

A: Couldn't it be gotten up by motorized vehicle? You mean mule was the only way to transfer?

G: Oh some of it, some it, yes, mule was the only way. Let me see what else was under us, oh, railheads, Railheads, that is, the people that operated the trains, shipping their stuff north out of Naples. We were there for oh,

a few years and then they put an advanced outfit when the fighting went way up above Rome. They opened up another part of our outfit. They split us up and half of them went up there at Leghorn and opened up the same kind of dumps, the food and clothing and everything else. But I happened to stay behind up until, oh within six months I believe. The last six months I was in the service I was moved on up there,

A: Can you think of any interesting stories that you may have been involved in or your commander involved in?

G: Not that I know of, not right off hand. Oh, little things happened but nothing exciting.

A: Well, in terms of little things.

G: When we were in Naples I did see Vesuvius when it was erupting. We could go up on top of the building that we were billeted in and we could watch that at night. And of course, I did get a chance to go out to Pompeii and visit all that.

I met my brother when we were overseas. I met him in Africa first, then I kept in touch with him and then whenever he went to Anzio, . . . He was with the A-17th Signal. They were in Naples for a short period then they went on up to Anzio and I kept in touch with him. My brother-in-law came there just a couple weeks before the war was over in eastern, in Germany and Italy, before they surrendered. I met him over there. Then after the war was over there, why, I did make a trip to Switzerland which I enjoyed very much.

A: How did you find Switzerland?

G: Beautiful, beautiful country. As a matter of fact, any part of the world that I've been which isn't too much, if I had a chance to take my family there, would be to Switzerland. It is beautiful. And I was surprised then that the temperature in the cities very seldom gets down to zero in the wintertime. And the kids are all healthy looking.

A: Did you notice the different nationalities in Switzerland?

G: Well half of them I believe, speak German and this other half, most of them speak Italian. Of course there's a number of them that speak English too, but not too many of them. But it is beautiful country, believe me it is, and it's a healthy looking country too.

- A: Now when the war comes to an end, what happened to the Quartermaster Corps then?
- G: Well, they were still there whenever I left them that was for sure because you had a group there that had to stay there after. And I was offered a field office as a second lieutenant if I would sign up for six more months and stay there but I said, "No, I've been away from home long enough." I turned it down too, that was a field grade to be an officer. I'd been away from home long enough. I was anxious to get back home.
- A: Going back before you went over to Italy and that area, do you remember your crossing? Did you go by convoy? Did you go on a troop ship?
- G: I went over on the Mariposa and it was a large luxury liner. I believe it used to run the Pacific. And we had no convoy, no, we didn't go in a convoy. As a matter of fact we went over in about six days.
- A: How come? Why didn't you have a convoy?
- G: I couldn't tell you, I don't know.
- A: Did you run straight over?
- G: Yes. I think it took us six days.
- A: Did you see any enemy?
- G: No, we didn't see any enemy planes or anything because the war in Africa at that time was just about to a close or it was. If I'm not mistaken, the war in Africa ended in June 10, I believe, I'm not sure. And it was June . . . oh it was just a short time after the war ended in Africa that I got there. I can't figure right now. We got there June 25. That's when I landed in Africa, Casablanca.
- A: Let's go back to some of the types of reports that came across your desk. Can you tell me some more about some of the other things that you had to fill out? For instance, was all this information, could it be released to anybody?
- G: Well, I imagine now it could, but at that time it couldn't, it couldn't be because all our reports were either marked confidential, secret, or top secret.
- A: What's the difference between those three classifications?

- G: Well, that was up to Colonel Brown. (Laughter) That was up to Colonel Brown. Of course we had, how much stuff that arrived, how much food and all that, how many tons of it went to the 5th Army and oh there was just all kinds of reports.
- A: What did confidential mean? Who could find out about that if they wanted some information?
- G: It wasn't as important as some of the other papers that would come in. And of course we received a lot of papers from what was it? MBS Headquarters, that's the Mediterranean base, or no, PBS Headquarters. Mediterranean base was the one that was located over in Africa and they call the Peninsula Base section anything that was in Italy. Well they had all the big, big wheels there. 5th Army Headquarters, General Clark and them, they were all based up at Bizerte.
- A: And would his information that he sent through you, would that be secret or top secret?
- G: Well it all depends exactly what it was. I can't recall anymore because some, I thought, that they over did anyhow. They had them marked confidential but it didn't mean that much.
- A: When something was marked top secret or secret, who got to see it?
- G: Well, generally, Lieutenant Colonel Brown got to see it. And of course, a lot of the reports that I had written up, they were marked top secret. Well I imagine they were sent on back into Washington. That is, the amount of food and the amount of this and that and everything else that was supplied to the 5th Army in a matter of tons. In other words, something that, if it got into the enemy's hands in any way it could be advantageous to them.
- A: In what way, in a sense if you knew the amount of tons of food, what would you know?
- G: Well that I couldn't tell you because just like I said, Colonel Brown used to sign his name to them and he'd stamp them. While the reports that came in, why, he would give them to me to file. And the top secret, I generally kept those in one file, but the secret or confidential I generally read them. Then the history of the outfit, I don't know why it was marked confidential but it was. We had to send that report back to Washington.

A: How were these reports sent into Washington?

G: I couldn't tell you that.

A: Who did you give them to?

G: I sent them to PBS Headquarters.

A: Yes, and then they took care of it from there?

G: Yes.

A: Did you send them down to the Headquarters by courier?

G: Yes, they were sent over. We had a lad that just went from office to office picking up these different things and then they'd come to the message center and at the message center, he would sort them out and then they'd take them over to PBS Headquarters.

A: Did he have a guard with him or just all by himself. In other words, he's carried top secret--what is it--stamped top secret?

G: We could go from where our offices were right into PBS, or Headquarters without going outside, as far as that goes.

A: Do you recall anything else about this information?

G: If I could find the book, yes, I could because I have copies of them.

A: Did you ever run into spies?

G: No.

A: No. Was there ever any threat of spies?

G: No, no.

A: Did you take any precautions just in case?

G: Well we had men in our office. You had to pull guard duty there and there was always somebody in the office, one or two men there at all times day and night. And everybody had to pull guard duty every now and then, but there was somebody there all the time. And all your information was always under lock and key.

A: Did you ever move through any sections of special food for, let's say officers?

G: Well, that I couldn't tell you. I know that there were times whenever somebody would want a little extra something that they would get it, especially maybe in the meat line for an officer who is holding some kind of a little party or so, why, they would probably get it. Of course I didn't have anything to do with that.

A: How about, did they ever capture any of the Italian wines and other alcohol?

G: If they did, I never saw any of it. Towards the end of the war we had a lot, an awful lot of Italian prisoners that worked around these camps. They were prisoners of war, but they did work around all the different depots and that.

A: What did they do? Laboring jobs?

G: Laboring jobs, yes.

A: Did they load and unload the food, the clothing?

G: Well, I imagine so, I never went out to check on them or anything on that. I know that we had them.

Think of any more questions I can answer, I'll answer them.

We could get a good picture of what was happening just by our reports that we had there. Even though we were based in Naples, you could get a good picture just about how the war was going by the reports we'd get into the outfit. How many in the grave registration.

As a matter of fact, there's a good friend of mine I met during the service there. I expect to go up and see him here this fall, but ever since we got out of the service, one year he'll come down to visit and the next year I go up to visit him. He's a mortician now up in Greenfield, Massachusetts. That's the only one in our whole outfit that I really kept in touch with since I got out of the service.

A: What was his job in the . . .

G: He was in grave registration.

A: Was his family in the mortician business before he went into the service?

G: Yes he was, but whenever he was drafted, he was drafted as a cook and a baker. He cooked in baker's school is

what they sent him to. He was a cook and baker in Africa and once they set up this outfit--like I said, it was set up as the 6698 Provisional Outfit at first to try to find out an easier way to get the stuff to the 5th Army and everything else, so they put all these different outfits together and that's where I met him. And we've been friends ever since.

A: What problems were you having getting material to the 5th?

G: Mostly to see that it got there on time. We had a time schedule, whenever it should leave and it should get there.

A: And why wasn't that time schedule functioning?

G: It generally always did.

A: But by consolidating you made it more efficient is that what you're saying?

G: By consolidating we knew exactly where everything was at any certain time, supposedly, supposedly.

But like I say, myself, I had nothing more to do with it than to make out reports, information that I got from all the different outfits that was under us. The biggest job was just consolidating. We had reports coming in well just about everyday, well everyday, from all the different places that were there, all the different units that were under us. And we would have to consolidate all these reports.

A: Just off hand, this book that you haven't been able to find, what is in that?

G: All the reports that I'd made out.

A: In other words, you kept a duplicate set?

G: Yes, whenever I typed them up and that I made a duplicate set.

A: Is that book pretty thick?

G: Oh, I'd say it's about . . .

A: Two inches?

G: Oh it must be in the neighborhood of that anyhow. I had weighed a lot of things out of there that I figured

that didn't amount to a damn as far as I was concerned. A lot of reports like with the VD reports, I figured, hell I weighed a lot of them out of there. But if I ever get a chance, if I ever run across it, I'll let you know.

A: Okay, that would be interesting.

G: But I put it someplace and I'll be doggoned if I know wherever I put it. I know there's a lot of different reports in there that I had to make out. I made duplicate copies. I didn't make duplicate copies out of everything though. No, a lot of them was top secret in that day. Those reports, I wasn't going to have no part of them, that is, keeping an extra set of them.

END OF INTERVIEW