

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 760

FORREST ROUSE

Interviewed

by

Eurad Rouse

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: FORREST ROUSE

INTERVIEWER: Eurad Rouse

SUBJECT: missions, strafings, heroic experiences

DATE: April 12, 1986

ER: This is an interview with Mr. Forrest C. Rouse for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Mr. E. R. Rouse, in Struthers, Ohio, on April 12, 1986, at 10:25 a.m.

Do you remember about your parents and family?

FR: Yes.

ER: Go ahead, tell me all about them, who they were, how many brothers and sisters you had.

FR: I have my mother and father and two brothers and four sisters--two are deceased. We lived in . . .

ER: In Hazelton?

FR: In Hazelton.

ER: On Blaine Avenue?

FR: On Blaine Avenue. We lived there for a long time, for years.

ER: What grade school did you go to?

FR: I went to Hazelton School and from there I went to East High. Then I got married in 1933 to a girl in Struthers, Quincy Morgan. We had four children, two boys and two girls. We lived in Struthers for years, from 1933 to now. I had a call to service in 1944. I was inducted into the armed forces services. I took my basic training in Camp Lee, Virginia. From Camp Lee, Virginia, I was sent overseas, but first I went to Camp Shanks in New York. From there we went overseas. We went over there on the Queen Mary.

ER: Just tell all what happened.

FR: We landed in Scotland. From there we went to England. We were there only a few days. Then we were put on a troop train through Belgium, through the middle of Belgium. We were on that troop train . . . But first we stopped in France for a while to eat. We never got anything to eat because they had the black soldiers in the center of the troop train and the white soldiers on one end and the other white soldiers on the other end. So when they stopped to feed us, they fed them from one end and the other whites on the other end, and the blacks didn't get anything to eat. We didn't get anything to eat. Then we had to get back on the train. The guys were swearing and everything calling them all kinds of names.

Then we were going to Belgium. This was when all the action set in. We were going along in the troop train. It was at night. It was January 1, 1945; I will never forget it. It was around 12:00. The train stopped. We were going through a tunnel, but he stopped and backed in the tunnel. We didn't know . . . We stayed there, I guess, maybe an hour. Then when we pulled out after we got down the road about a couple of miles, here came the German plane.

The first thing he did was knock off the engine, killed the engineer. He knocked that out and stopped the train. Then he started strafing the train. He started from the engine and strafed. Then he would go around and he would start from the other end and he would strafe the other side, go up and come around. The fellows in the train that I was in, they started hollering that they didn't want to die. They were all tumbling around everything.

I don't know why I did it; I still can't figure it out yet, but I started hollering. I told them, "Keep quiet! I want to watch that plane. When I tell you guys to get out of here, you guys get the heck out of here." I stood in the doorway and watched how that plane would do it. When he would make his dive, he would have to go way around and come back around and then make another dive. I watched. I guess he made about two or three dives or one more than that. I told them, "Now when he makes this dive, you guys get the heck out of here!" When he came by and made that dive, he had to go way out around to come in to try to get it from the other end. I told them, "Let's go!" That was when I dove out there. I cut both of my hands all up; it was all cut all up.

Then we ran to a low bridge. There were all black and white soldiers on that low bridge there. One of them started smoking. I said, "Don't you know they can see that cigarette." Then it was kind of quiet.

Then we started going back toward the train. Here came that plane again. Always in orientation you were told to hit the ground, not to go in the grass or anything, just hit the ground. You weren't to go in any ditches or anything like that. That was where they strafed. The guy in the plane dropped flares where you were lying still. He came to just about three or four feet from me with the machine gun fire. I don't know how many they shot up.

After that I just lay there until I guess he must have run out of ammunition. If he had been on a bombing mission, he could have bombed the place, the train, but he didn't have any bombs. We stayed there until the next morning. I was all bleeding. They took me to a medic. The medic bandaged both of my hands up and then we had to wait for another train to go where we were going.

After that we went to where they were going to put the soldiers, what outfit, and that's where it was. I went all through Germany and saw soldiers and horses and people all over the streets. We would go through towns there still on fire. I couldn't figure it out. They were still on fire and we were going through towns. Then we would look around. We would have to pull off to the side because here came the tanks.

After we got settled in place there in Belgium we ran into some British tankers. They stopped there. Boy, it was cold. We gave them some coffee, what we had and everything like that. After that, we just went all through that place.

Anyway, we were in Belgium. We had moved all through Germany and everything like that. We had gone all the way through Germany. Before then we were in Liege, somewhere around there. All of a sudden we were in a university; I remember that. All of a sudden they told us early in the morning that we had to move out. That was during that breakthrough. That is where I remember all that. It was a breakthrough. I don't know, we were about twelve or thirteen kilometers from the breakthrough. We moved back.

Then we went through a lot of German cities. They had white flags out surrendering. Some were all torn up. We went through a lot of German cities and things like that.

Here is another thing that happened. They had me attached to the medics. I was the guard for the medics around where they placed them. We were in a little city. Up in the woods there was an SS soldier and a regular Army guy. SS is a colonel or something like that. They came out to give up because they were starving. They brought them down to the medics and they told me to search them. The captain there told me to search them. I said, "What if they have a hand grenade?" He said, "Shoot them." They had those knapsacks on their backs. He said, "No,

let them take the stuff out." I told them to take it out.

After I did that and searched and saw everything was clear-- nothing was on them--they got someone else, a white soldier, to put them in the car. He was their hero, and he took them to where they were going to interrogate them and everything like that while I did all kinds of stuff right there.

When we were down there in Germany, I ran into some black soldiers who had an Indian patch on their shoulder.

ER: 97th Division?

FR: No, that was when President Truman . . .

ER: Eagles?

FR: He had that Indian head patch on there. I don't know what it was, but anyway, I ran into them. We were sitting down there by Mahogan Bridge. We would sit there for I don't know how long.

ER: Right after they had taken you?

FR: Yes. Finally that bridge had gotten blown up, but that is where we went across. When the 99th Armored went across, then we went behind them after.

Here is another thing. They were talking about that Holocaust. That was the truth. We were in Weimer, Germany in German barracks sitting down in barracks. It was just like if you were downtown and the South Side Hospital up on the hill, that was all . . . Some of the guys went up there. I saw those people and I never wanted to see them again. I took sick and I could hardly eat for about two or three days from how bad those people were.

Then later on I went right up to that airfield. There was an airfield not far from there. We went there. It looked like thousands and thousands of prisoners. At that place up there it looked like people were burned in those ovens and all stacked on top of each other. The only way you could tell was if you looked, sometimes you saw the eye move. You would think all of them were dead; they were just like bones, and that was the truth about that. You don't know how people can do that to people like that.

While we were up at that airfield, a German pilot, flyer, gave himself up. He came down on that field; he gave himself up. He gave his gun and everything. They took him away.

We would go through those woods and everything in Germany. Dead Germans were all around there. Everywhere I went I was running into dead people. That was what I ran into. I remember all of those people, but one thing about it, when you are out there as soldiers, everybody is the same. I had this

southern boy. He had me; I was with him guarding. He would look way down the street and see something down there. He would tell you, "Soldier, cover me." That was in Germany, but I could cover him. He would go down there and see what it was. He was pretty brave, yes.

Here is one thing. It got so bad. My nerves got real bad over there because of all that action and stuff like that. That was when later on they flew me to Paris to a hospital. I stayed in that hospital, I guess, about eight or nine months. It was at least six months, I guess. I don't know how long it was. I was in that hospital.

Here was a funny thing. In the hospital one fellow, he was nice. I forget his name, but anyway, he was messed up really bad. He couldn't shave. I used to shave him all the time, but he was real nice.

Here is one thing I hated. When I was in the hospital, they would show movies where the black guy who they could find was in a white outfit and chasing white chickens. We got up and left from there. That was the only thing I hated about stuff like that.

All in all the soldiers were pretty nice. Going all through Germany like that we were mostly attached to white soldiers most of the time. They would put us with headquarters. We guarded them. During that second breakthrough, what I thought was a breakthrough, that was when I went and knocked on the doors of where the officers were staying and I told them that I thought it was another breakthrough. The officers came out to us soldiers and said, "That's all right; don't worry about it. Everything is okay."

What I could never figure out, after I stood in that door I said to myself, "You know, I could have gotten killed!" I was crazy. I didn't get scared. Everyone I knew was hiding and I was standing in the door watching. I never even got a purple heart for my hands, both of them, and I still carry the marks, all of them, on my hands yet. One of them said that he was supposed to get a purple heart. I never got anything. There should have been some sort of medal for standing in that door watching and protecting the soldiers lying there scared to death. I never got a thing.

I got discharged out of that Camp Adeberry, Indiana.

I went all through that Germany. I would see the French catching German soldiers on the street who were walking. Then I guess they killed them. I guess they did. They beat them all up.

We had to go way back to get mail. When I was in Germany, I guarded the places we were sleeping. Here came Germans. They

threw away their guns and they were coming down the street at night. I would holler at them. They would take off down the road. I would never shoot at them, but I would go in the building and tell them that the German soldiers were out there and that those guys were shooting at them. There was plenty of action.

Those American soldiers, we saw just oodles of them where they have them lined up in baskets out there in Germany. The guys would say, "Come on, I want to show you something." That was when they were stacking German soldiers like wood up on trucks or something. I saw a mess of stuff.

On that troop train there was nothing but action after that, yes sir. The tank would go through and we got behind them. They wanted to know what the heck us guys were doing there. Somehow I just didn't get scared; I don't know why I wasn't scared. After a while when I thought about it I would get scared.

In the daytime they were bad. When nighttime came, the German plane would come. We were in Badnuman, Germany. That wasn't far from Mahogan Bridge. Every evening at about 5:00 or 5:30 that plane . . . You better not be on the street because they sure were going to strafe that street. They kept us in the house. Right around 5:00 or 5:30, here he came. He would never shoot up the houses; he just shot up the streets, that's all.

We would go all over in this town walking around it. When we had a captain, he was a southerner. He was a nice captain; he was. He would let us go. He just said to the soldiers, "Don't get into any trouble; just don't get into any trouble. If you want to go out, go ahead out." Some of the places you would go they didn't allow you to go. You had to stay right in the camp, but he was nice. He would tell you, "Just don't get into any trouble, and you go ahead." I forget his name. Barney, Officer Barney, that was his name. He was a lieutenant, that's it, Lieutenant Barney. He was a nice fellow, officer. I thought he would be tight on us since he was a southerner, but he was really nice. He let us go.

I came back here and got discharged out of Camp Adeberry, Indiana.

During the Army in the winter was fighting and everything, we were going through the towns just like we were infantrymen. I don't know why. I thought he was trying to get us killed. I didn't get a medal or anything. All I have are these big, ugly battle scars. We went all through those towns.

ER: Do you remember your unit's name and everything?

FR: 3105 Quartermaster.

so that we couldn't go into an area where they had mines. When we were in this town, they would shell the other town at night. In the morning we were moved. That was what they were doing. They would shell the town and then they would move forward, and we would come on behind like that. That was the way it was, like that. That was why I just couldn't understand why we stayed so close.

ER: You were the quartermaster?

FR: Yes. We stayed close.

Most of these towns . . . It would be just like you were eating and they would come. I would want to throw it away and they would want to take it off me and eat it. That was the way it was. There were little kids and that. You would feel sorry for them. I don't care if they were the enemy.

ER: Did you feed the kids?

FR: Oh yes. We were practically handing it to them. Anything I had, I would give to them.

One time a German soldier wanted to come to you to give up. He told me, "Go ahead, you won't be bothered with."

I know we were down in Germany. My stomach got bad from seeing a lot of junk. I had to go to the aide station. I had to walk and the war was going on. Here I was at the aide station. When I got there, they all got mad at me because I didn't bring any rifle. They scared me then and I had to go back. I walked back, no rifle or anything. I ran into the MP's (Military Police) on duty. They asked, "Where is your rifle at soldier?" I told them that I forgot it. He said, "You could be court-martialed for that." I ran into a lot of stuff. People wouldn't believe it, and you wonder why my nerves are so bad now. I just can't help it. It is still bad, still real bad.

ER: Did you go back to work after you got home here?

FR: Yes. I was off for a week or two. They gave you time to be off. Then I went back to work, yes, that's right.

ER: Actually you were only off for about a year and a half.

FR: Yes.

I saw plenty of action the whole time I was over there. When they talk about that Mahogan Bridge and all that, they didn't know that I was sitting right down there waiting at the cross because the Germans were on the other side. We were sitting right there. All of us guys were right there waiting for them to go across. After they went across then we came from

behind. They had pontoon bridges. That place was all messed up, yes sir.

Where we were sitting at the Mahogan Bridge, I had to go to an aide station back up the street up there. They had a big, high fence. You couldn't go in there. Only I could go into it. That was where they had the American soldier hospital. All of those soldiers were all shot up and they were working on them there. There was nothing but German women in that big place. It has a big, high fence, a wall with two, big doors, and that was where they worked on American soldiers. I saw the building and everything. I looked at all that blood.

But that Buchenwald, ooh, I don't want to hear about that. A lot of those guys liked to go up there and see that stuff, not me, no.

I know when I was in the hospital that sometimes I would start hollering. When I saw all of that stuff, I would start to holler. I was glad I got back from that place. That's all I remember.

ER: Okay. Then we will just stop there. Thank you very much.

FR: Yes.

END OF INTERVIEW