

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War 1939-1945 - Germany

Personal Experience

O H 882

KARL FLUEGGE

Interviewed

by

Elizabeth Clark

on

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C: This is an interview with Karl Fluegge for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Germany during World War II, by Elizabeth Clark, on December 3, 1986.

Back in the days when you were in the youth group, what were some of the things that you did? What types of things did you do in the Navy Hitler Youth?

F: We made all the Navy knots Everything that the Boy Scouts do here, too They do the same thing here, but it was more Navy oriented in that group

C: How many men were on the ship you were on?

F: One hundred fifty

C: You said were a submarine tender?

F: Yes. This was just here for a certain amount of mines We had to bring them out and bring them back in

C: You said you were on the west coast of France?

F: Yes.

C: And then, you went up through the English Channel, the North Sea, and then, up around Denmark. Is that how you went?

F: No, not around Denmark

C: You did not?

F: Because of the English Channel

C: That is right. How were you treated? Did you ever go on shore in Holland?

F: We were in Holland for quite a while I am sure because Holland is clean. It is a very clean country. But I have to say while I was over there, yes, more people from the U.S. got killed than any other place from underground. You were not allowed to go without the Gameland on land right. You had to have your hands up.

C: The Dutch were varied?

F: Yes, they were friendly during the day, but at night, they were not The next morning, they found dead German soldiers here

- C: Did you stop in Belgium at all?
- F: No, in Belgium, I was just going through with a train several times.
- C: How about France? When you were on shore leave or in France? How did the French treat you? Did you have to worry like you do with the people of the Netherlands?
- F: No, actually not. In France we did not worry that much. Not at all.
- C: Did the French people more than likely welcome you?
- F: No, not welcome. Certain people, yes. The French people live from one day to another. They are more or less happy people. Everyday there is some French person, maybe it was a bum, who came with a big two-gallon can. He got his can of food. Then, he left with it again, but it was always shiny the next day. It was polished again, and he got his food. Before we threw it overboard, we gave it away. There was always some left. If you were on sea, you threw it overboard.
- C: Going back to the Dutch, then. In Holland, even though they were nice with you during the day, did you fear the Dutch? How did you feel about it when you were in Holland?
- F: You were more careful.
- C: Why do you think they did that? Because of the occupation?
- F: Yes, I think so. Then, you had the language barrier anyway. So, we could not talk much. Actually, it was a nice, clean country.
- C: I heard the Dutch opened the dikes and flooded some of the land because they did not want the Germans to get her. Are you familiar with that?
- F: I do not think so. If they did, there was not very much.
- C: There was not very much?
- F: No, because it was their life.
- C: True. Where were you at the time of the Normandy invasion?
- F: I was already back in Germany. I was in a hospital then. I had an accident in Brest, coming in the harbor. I almost lost my leg there. I was in a hospital in Brest for seven weeks and then, almost half a year in a Paris hospital.

- C What happened to your leg?
- F: I got a rope around it Eight hundred tons was hanging on it.
- C Oh, my
- F It was during the time tying up on shore I stepped right in some low pier, and the ship was pulling
- C: And the rope?
- F: Yes, I almost lost it I have a little less movement here on my one foot
- C: You were in the hospital a long time saving that leg?
- F Yes, I took my time All the tissues inside were destroyed
- C: So, you were in the hospital during the Normandy invasion?
- F: Yes, then, I was back in Germany Then, I was not on board ship anymore Yes, it was more or less hospital attendants We got your dead people from war to your sick people from war that came in. Some of us even cleaned them, put them in the coffin, and stuff like that. Then, we put mines on the beaches Beach mines, stuff like that. Then, later on, I came in that other outfit that I was talking about before It was about company where we were working in the trade I cleaned sign paint
- C You were the sign painter. Going back a little bit in this, what do you remember about the inflation? When your parents told you about the terrible inflation that occurred after World War I and how they had such a bad time Can you talk a little bit more about what the inflation was like?
- F He got paid everyday. Every evening he either got paid, or he went next door. He talked to my mother the night before or the morning before he went about what to get. And he bought it because the next day the money was not worth anything anymore. It was shooting up that fast.
- C: Do you ever remember him saying how much money it took to buy a particular item?
- F No, I do not remember anymore But it must go in the millions. A box of matches, I remember he said one time, did cost a million mark
- C We fear inflation

- F. Yes, it was going up here just like that
- C. Unbelievable. Let's go back to your schooling for just a little bit. What were your instructors like? Were they harsh? What did they make you do to perform well, and why did you perform well in school?
- F. Actually, we did not give any of them problems like what is going on there now. Maybe, it is still thought that authority is authority. It has to be that way. That is what we thought you just learned. When I was in business school, I had in mind to make my Master's degree later on. After the war, I went to some college for a semester. Paint college. In Germany, if you want to go in business, you have to have your Master's Degree. Otherwise, you do not get permission to go into business.
- C: Would it be the same with a master craftsman or something like that?
- F. Yes. They say if you are not here, then, you cannot have any apprentices on your boundary of apprentice. If you are in business then to get time, twenty-four years, to have an apprentice or two. You could go in business, and then, employee must be some guy with muscle, a hitman in the shop.
- C: You said you went to art school. Was it a specific school for painting or landscaping?
- F. Yes, landscaping. But here in school room itself, we did still lives. Figure drawing. Day and night is for always figure drawing. Here are life models.
- C: Were you encouraged to continue in your art form from your instructor or what did they do? That is a beautiful picture. This is just a beautiful still barn scene. That is a beautiful one.
- F: Yes, but the cows did not want to stand still.
- C. Oh, you have the cows moving around? That is a beautiful farm scene.
- F. It did not want to stand still. That was the trouble. There was nothing you can do here. I made my Master's Degree after that. After that, school I went to, and I got married.
- C. When you came to the United States, you came directly to Warren. How long were you here before your family came?
- F: Half a year. I was living there with my brother-in-law and my sister on Roosevelt Street. He was going fishing every night, and there, I painted. I painted him every night. Made up from Mosquito Lake, sundown, stuff like that.
- C. Did you keep those?

- F: I have still some left
- C: Do you feel that your growing up in Germany during this time had any really adverse affect on your life as far as the growing up during the time of Hitler?
- F: No. Actually, I cannot complain about Hitler. One thing, he made when he came was to make this four year plan. Nobody is supposed to hang out into threes for four years. He built it like Roosevelt did here, but since I do not know how, he called them. He got this working. Working for the government, building roads, and stuff like that. Hitler did the same thing in Germany.
- C: Did he build the Autobahn?
- F: Yes.
- C: At that time?
- F: Autobahn was built. Then, in middle 1930's, he started building the West Wall against French.
- C: What was that?
- F: That was one side of the Maginot Line and on other side was West Line. He had thousands of people working there. But before, in the first place, he put swamps/dry. He built farms and all that stuff. So, I cannot complain. Then, he had his vacation plan. For cheap money, you could make weeks vacation, days vacation, or what you wanted. He even had some ships built for big ocean cruises just for vacation. But everybody could afford it.
- C: So, it looked pretty good, did it not?
- F: It did look pretty good.
- C: You had been through the terrible World War I, and then, you had the inflation and depression, right?
- F: Actually, we would not have had Hitler if he did not have the contract from Versailles, that is for sure.
- C: Why do you think Hitler started attacking the Jews?
- F: Actually, what the Jews were in Germany, they were the loan sharks. They were what you have here as loan sharks. They lent money out, took farms, and anything they could get. This here is what I think I know.

- C What you experienced?
- F I do not want to say that all the Jews were bad I remember hearing somebody tell me after the war that Salamander Shoehouse, his name was Bier, was a Jew. But he had iron cross here for the First World War fighting for Germany So, actually he could not been a bad man They still chased him out. This is what I could not understand
- C Do you think just some of his men got overzealous, right?
- F: No, not that You know how it is here in the United States You see some guy, and he wanted some uprising and something, or some march to Washington Yet, for some reason, if it is nuclear or it anything else, he get a few people, and then, they start marching. You know the same thing is there
- C Mob psychology
- F: Yes Out to influence people your way You do not need very many from them, just a few and the rest follows
- C But he made life a lot better, though, did he not, than what it had been?
- F Yes, sure
- C: Did he improve the schools?
- F Yes Actually, schools here were fine Then, the apprentice programs and stuff like that. Everything was just fine My parents were here since my father did not want to go in the party He was working for government Normally, they like to see them in the party, only he never went He never got promoted, either Then, finally, he went here in some Zeit organization here from a party Winterhelpfe to help collect for needy people and stuff like that He went into that
- C: He felt safer there?
- F: Yes, and he just did not want to go into the party and they wanted him to
- C: Did any of his friends go in?
- F Oh, yes
- C: Did that change their friendship at all?
- F No

- C: Well, the very fact that he was involved with the telephone and the communication, and that would be an important position to be in
- F: Yes, but you still could not open your mouth. You could not talk against Hitler over there.
- C: Did you ever know anybody that did?
- F: No, actually not
- C: No, we kept pretty quiet, and I think that if somebody talked against him, they would have been in a concentration camp. But actually, what was going on in the concentration camps here, we never knew too much about it. My mother's cousin was in one, and he never talked about it. He came out after the war.
- C: Why? Do you have any idea why he went in?
- F: As a young boy, that was the time Hitler took over, he was laid off and got a job at a newspaper. It was a common newspaper.
- C: That was the end of that?
- F: That was the end of that.
- C: What could you do at a very young age?
- F: Actually, he just wanted to make money, nothing else.
- C: That took care of that. Were you in any of the bombing raids at all? Were you ever when you were aboard the ship in the Navy?
- F: Yes, in the Brest one time. I came out of hospital, was released, and boarded ship again. One night, I was walking on the cane, and there was a raid over there. There was a bombing raid, and then, I walked from one house entry to another in order to get to that shelter. Because on the ship itself, you are not safe laying in the harbor. They are the targets. The stones from the street and the plaster stones were flying around. Yes, but I made it into the shelter. But, at that time, it was over already again.
- C: Did you have any attacks while you were on ship board?
- F: A few times. We never had any casualties at all.
- C: Did any of your subs that you took care of have problems with the mines?



F: No We had to take care that they did not We brought them out to a certain point.

C: You would drag them out?

F: No, no, they followed us We were on air support and even mine.

C How big was your sub-tender? About how big would it be?

F It was eight hundred tons It was about four hundred feet long.

C That is pretty big Can you think of any other good stories now that you can remember? Some happening to different people in your family?

F No Sad story

C: Any story

F: When I came back from the war, our street where our seven houses were, in four houses people never came back Friends, kids that I went to school with got killed in the war.

C: That hurts

F· Yes

C. All you boys growing up, all your friends

F Yes, it was true we were going in there from out in certain houses.

C: You say you still get a pension like from the German government because you were still in the service.

F: No.

C: Because of your leg?

F· Yes

C: Oh, disability or some kind of injury

F. Yes, thirty percent disability

C: And you still get paid for that?

- F: I still get paid for that. As long I am a German citizen That is why I never became American citizen
- C: But your wife, is she an American citizen? Oh, so you are in charge of him
- F: I tell her what to vote
- C: You tell her how to vote Well sure, I would think that is nice that you are still getting that compensation from the German government
- F: It is to compare to American It is in German mark. It is a 160 mark now every month. We used it for awhile when we went to Germany as spending money over there.
- C: Do you feel that the fact you went in to become a painter and your training, and you went in to become a painter and your apprenticeship I have heard of others who said that they were absolutely respect perfection, is that?
- F: I was working a few days ago as a less weekend, more or less in Youngstown. He wanted some steel doors grained, and there was here some She said her mother was a German, some lady It was an insurance company  
When I started out, she start talking to me That was on Friday. On Saturday, I grained the door, and she was not there When I was yesterday, last night, I was back here and gave it a final varnish coat She said that they look absolutely beautiful. "How did you do that?" Before she told her, her mother always said, "What comes from Germany is good." I said, "Just think about your mother, what she said."
- C: That is a real compliment Do you remember at Christmas? What did you do on the Christmas holidays when you were a kid? What did your folks do?
- F: Looking through the keyhole In there, everything was closed up The Christmas tree was put on Christmas Eve or maybe a day before but behind locked doors. There was nothing packed Everything was open So, you did not need any packaging paper. Everything was under the tree, open We had live candles as long I know in Germany. We never had electric There even electric was there But nobody liked them, they had to flicker a little bit, just a little bit We still had less house fires over there than they have ere with their electric
- C: Must have been very careful
- F: Yes Our houses are built different, too. They do not burn that easy. What can burn in a house that is all brick, concrete floor? You burn your curtains, your furniture, maybe windows We were careful We did not leave it burning. How long burns a candle? It is maybe an hour, an hour and a half, and it is out anyway. You lit it when you wanted to sit

there

C: What kind of Christmas gifts did you get as a child? What were some of the ones? Do you remember?

F: One year when I was ten years old, I got a gun, a pellet gun. That gun is still here. My grandson has it now, but it is our house here and it is still shooting better than any one of new ones that they got here. It is fifty years old.

C: That is great, and they built that well, too, right?

F: Everything was built better. That is why kids never ruined their shoes. They grow out of shoes. Maybe even rough boys would grow out. They could not wear them anymore because they were getting too small.

C: Not today. These things fall apart, you do not want to put them on them. They disintegrate because they have a timer in them.

F: Yes, the quality was there. It is still mostly bad.

C: Now, when the war was over and you went back to your hometown, did you start in the rebuilding? Did you get involved in the rebuilding of your towns?

F: Like I said, there was not much in my hometown that was damaged. It was just the railroad area, more or less. It was near the troops march in, and then, they took houses over, moved the people, and went where you want to. The soldiers moved in. One whole town was nearly taken over, and they moved all of the people out. Then, after that, the soldiers moved out, but then, we came in and restored everything to normal again. But there was no paint there. You had a hard time getting that material there. At that time, it was getting bad, too, anyway with food. That was after the war. Then, the Marshall Plan came, and that is what I heard then later on when they asked Germany what you need most in food. And they said, "Corn for bread." Corn in Germany. German bread. Corn is a grain. But it was a translating mistake, and we got corn. And nobody of our bakers know how to bake with corn.

C: So you really got corn?

F: We got corn. Four big ship loads of corn. Whole Germany was flooded with corn. Cornmeal. They did not know how to bake with it, so we had rye bread or wheat bread. They know nothing of corn. The corn was feed for the geese. For us, it was so dry. First, when you pull it apart, it was like some string hanging to it like rubber. Then, later on, all of a sudden, they got a different formula. It was so dry.

C: Is that not pretty?

- F: It was a translating mistake. Actually, a Marshall plan was a good thing.
- C: It worked?-
- F: It worked
- C: It helped you get on your feet again
- F: We at least had some food
- C: Did you get involved with many Americans coming into your town, or were you aware or exposed to the British mostly?
- F: I was working then later on in the barracks a few times. Even on the airport where I was working before the war, I was a civilian. There, we built a movie theater for the English and for the British. So, actually, we got along pretty good. I was living for a couple weeks in my parents house, too. After the war, my parents had to move out and take everything.
- C: Where did they go?
- F: Some friends. They had some furniture in some barn, and they were living somewhere else. The only thing they could leave there was the pigs. They had a little stall with pigs. Then, in the evenings, they could go there and feed the pigs. That was a good gesture of them. Normally, they had to take them out, too.
- C: So, they were nice about letting you keep your pigs in your own place, huh?
- F: Yes. Can you bring pigs?
- C: No. You cannot take them to your neighbors. You cannot move them in with your relatives. Can you think of any other good stories here?
- F: No, actually not.
- C: I know as soon as we turn this off we will think of lots. Everybody does.
- F: It is always that way. I have some photo albums upstairs.
- C: Those old pictures are so priceless.

End of Interview