

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU World War II Project

World War II Experience

O. H. 854

ROBERT MCCOY

Interviewed

by

David Powell

on

December 10, 1986

Bob McCoy and his wife moved into our neighborhood about four years ago. They moved into a ranch style home (one floor) because his wife was having trouble with her hip--since corrected by surgery.

When they moved here we knew they were retired (at least sixty-five years old), but it is hard to believe that Bob is seventy-nine years old. He is a white haired gentleman who is always working around his home--including climbing onto the roof to clean the eaves. During a winter snowstorm he is the first person out, and with his big snowblower he cleans all the sidewalks on both sides of our street for one block. He enjoys stopping and talking to his neighbors while working, or just taking a walk. He has an excellent memory and can talk intelligently on most subjects.

Bob's interview was interesting for two reasons. First, he worked at Mullins Manufacturing of Warren. During the war they made shells for the Army and the Navy. He was proud of the way his company had helped the war effort. He told about the time when he was in Europe and saw shells with a Mullins' label being used.

My dad worked part-time at Mullins also during the war. He split a shift (after he had worked his regular job) with another man to help out the war effort. My dad has always told about the poor slip-shod production of the shells at Mullins. Two men, same company, two very different views of Mullins' war effort.

The second reason was the old adage--"Old men start wars,

but young men fight them!" I have heard this many times. I have often thought, "How true!" Now I understand why better. Bob was drafted into the Army when he was thirty-five years old, and was called "Gramps" by the other men in his unit. Before he left our country, the training had already put him into the hospital. Later he was in the hospital two other times before being sent back home. Maybe only the young can take the rigors of war.

David Powell

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT MCCOY

INTERVIEWER: David Powell

SUBJECT: World War II experience at home and overseas

DATE: December 10, 1986

P: This is an interview with Robert McCoy for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by David Powell, on the Homefront during World War II, at 605 Adelaide NE, on December 10, 1986, at about 7:45 in the evening.

Can you remember what happened when Pearl Harbor was bombed? What were you doing, how old you were, and things like that?

M: Of course, when Pearl Harbor was bombed we were all taken by surprise. I remember the night that it was bombed. We were visiting my wife's parents in Rock Creek, Ohio. We didn't have tv at that time, and our normal radio listening had been neglected. On that particular occasion we hadn't had the radio on all day. On the way home that night, we always stopped at a farmhouse up near Orwell, Ohio and picked up several pints of whipping cream that we brought back to our friends. When we stopped to get that cream that night, the lady of the house says, "Isn't it terrible?" We thought she was speaking about the weather. Then she remarked that she wasn't speaking about the weather, she was speaking about Pearl Harbor. I said, "What about Pearl Harbor?" She said, "Well, the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor and practically destroyed the American fleet which was tied up in the harbor there." We immediately called my wife's folks back in Rock Creek, and told them the news, and told her to turn on the radio. That was our first introduction into the fact that we were at war with Japan.

Later on the company that I worked for, which was the Youngstown Kitchens at the time, got into war work and we manufactured steel shells for the Army, brass shells for the Navy, and also made eighty-one millimeter shells for the Army. They were not eighty-one millimeter artillery shells, they were. . .

P: Mortars?

M: Mortars. They were mortar shells. My job was in the .50 caliber five inch Navy shells, now those are made of brass. They were drawn in a press, extruded, and then machined to size. The steel shells were extruded from a solid block of steel. They were lacquered after they were finished so that they wouldn't rust, and then shipped over to the arsenal at Ravenna to be loaded, and then shipped to wherever they were needed. Later on when I was in the Army, I ran into a pile of them that was about as big as a normal house. Manufactured by the Mullins Manufacturing Company, or by the Youngstown Press Steel Company, I should say. They were 105 millimeter steel shells. We also made seventy-five millimeter steel shells. It was a surprise to me to see how the shells that I might have seen on the floor of the manufacturing company piled up in a pile over there in Italy. I don't know just where in Italy, but I did identify them as shells that I might have helped make.

Eventually, I was drafted. I don't know what took place in the factory after I left, except that they stayed in business until after the Armistice was signed. We won several citations there for our production, our war work. It felt kind of good to know, by seeing the evidence, that those shells were being put to good use overseas. I was always glad that we were fighting away from home. I didn't need to worry about my loved ones being shot up, our cities and towns being blown to bits by artillery or bombs. I was always glad that my loved ones were home safe. Maybe it doesn't seem very interesting or exciting to someone else, but to me it is.

P: How old were you when the war started?

M: When the war started I was thirty-five or thirty-six years old. I was born in 1907 and the war started in 1941. I was in the Army with men that were half my age. I was in basic training with men that were half my age. The outfit that I finally ended up with in combat was the 88th Division, Company A, 350th Regiment of the 88th Division. The guys called me "Gramps". I was the oldest one in the outfit, that particular part of it. I don't know about the headquarters. Some of the senior officers, of course, I suppose were older

than I was. I was thirty-eight years old. Well, they called me "Gramps", I was the oldest one in the outfit. I never dropped out of a hike in basic training. I finished with the rest of them and went overseas with the rest of them. I was in basic training for sixteen weeks. I was in the Army for twenty-six months, twenty-one of them were overseas.

I went over as a replacement and eventually assigned to the 88th Division, which was known as the Blue Devils. Our insignia was like a crossed figure eight. Berlin Biddy, as we called her, called us the Blue Devils. She is the one that named us the Blue Devils because we fought like devils. We were an entirely draftee outfit. We took very few prisoners. We were known as a non prisoner taking outfit. When we pulled into the line, we let them know right away who we were, what we were, and we built up quite a reputation. I have always been proud of that fact. I think that anybody that reads the history of World War II, especially the Italian campaign, will find out that the 88th Division had quite a reputation. I know that this hasn't got anything to do with the Homefront, but it is relevant in this respect; that our outfit used some of the shells that were made right here in Warren. I saw evidence of that with my own eyes. That makes me especially proud.

P: Let's go back to before you were drafted. When you were working, how many hours would you work, was there overtime, and things like that?

M: Well, there were three eight hour turns. We worked seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. The shop was running twenty-four hours a day. We had some people there that only worked four hours because they were working at another full-time job. Then after they got through at their full-time job, they would come up to where we were making shells and work a half a turn. We had quite a few people that were doing that. We would usually get two people working together, one would work half the turn and the other person would work the other half of the turn. Some would work from 4:00 to 12:00, and the other would work from 12:00 to 8:00 in the morning. So that way they filled out the full twenty-four hours that we were working, seven days a week.

P: Did they pay overtime and things like that?

M: No, we didn't pay overtime.

P: No overtime?

M: No, not at that time. Because most of us didn't work

overtime. They had an agreement that they would work twenty-four hours a day. Now if they worked seven days a week, they got overtime, but not each day. Because they had people coming in. . . Unless we had something unusual take place. If they would have a breakdown and there were only certain people that knew how to repair it, then they would work overtime. They got time and a half from eight hours to ten hours, double time from over ten hours. Most of the time we didn't need to work overtime. We had people coming in on the next shift that would take over for us. So there was no need for it.

P: Did they start hiring women then?

M: Oh, yes. Well, they hired women before, but they transferred them from the departments that we had been working for civilian. When they started this new department, they were just transferred to this other job. They were already on the payroll. Because before that we were making steel wall cabinets, kitchen cabinets, and washtubs, and sinks, and so on and so forth. They were already on the payroll, they just put them in a different department. Although they didn't always dismantle the old department, they just put the new department in what had been storage space before.

At one time before I got started in the five inch line, I worked where we made shell casings. They were steel casings to store five inch Naval shells to keep them away from the salt air. So that they wouldn't become damaged by corrosion from the salt air so that they wouldn't operate. Because they have to fit tight into the gun, and they also had to be able to slide in and out easily. Otherwise they would jamb and then cause a misfire. The casing itself was stored in these shell casings, which was an outer cover for the brass casing that contained the propellant for the projectile. Now the five inch line with the .50 caliber, the projectile was put in first, then the brass casing that contained the propellant was slid in behind the projectile. It was really two pieces. With the seventy-fives and the eighty-ones, those are all made in one. The projectile was fitted into the propellant casing, and so it was all in one piece. The whole thing was slid into the breech of the gun. But with a five inch .50 caliber it was a two piece operation. The projectiles slid into the breech of the gun, then the casing which contained the propellant was slid in behind it. Then the gate was slammed shut, and when they got the signal to fire they pulled a lanyard or trigger and boom! Away went the projectile. Then as it came back the bridge opened up, the casing dropped off, ready for another one.

Those casings had to be perfect. They couldn't have

any scratches in them. They couldn't have any overlapping, it had to be solid brass from the inside to the outside. If we had had anything in the brass that wasn't supposed to be there, when they fired it it would expand and cause the propellant casing to stick in the breech. They didn't want any of that happening because it would jamb the gun, and the casing itself would have to be pried out. They don't want that because when they are in a fight they want those shells to act the way they are supposed to be, the way they are engineered to act. So we had to make sure that there were no flaws in the shell casing. If we saw any, they were scraped off by hand.

P: Did they have a pretty good inspection department there?

M: We had Navy inspectors in the five inch line. We had Army inspectors in the seventy-five, and eighty-one, and 105 steel lines. Those weren't our inspectors. The final inspection was Army and Navy. After they passed our inspection, then they had to pass the Navy inspection. So they were pretty well inspected. That went for the shell casings as well as the eighty-one millimeter mortars. They were more than doubly inspected, but they were inspected by our inspectors and the regular government inspectors.

P: Then the empty shells would be sent up to Ravenna to have the powder and stuff put in?

M: Yes, they were loaded up there.

P: What did they do out at Lordstown? I know they had a plant out there. What was that for? Not Mullins, but they had a plant out there for doing something. It had a bunch of railroad yards and stuff I can remember from a kid.

M: Yes, that is where the space center is now.

P: Yes. What was that for?

M: That was a depot for storage of military vehicles.

P: Oh. I thought maybe it had something to do with shells.

M: No, those are for vehicles. They stored tanks and trucks of all shapes and sizes out there because of the railroad facilities. That is what they stored out there was military vehicles. They didn't manufacture anything out there, strictly a storage house.

P: See, as I was growing up I saw they had a . . . I knew

it was something, and I never knew what. I was just wondering. I thought it had something to do with shells.

M: No, that was strictly a storage depot for military vehicles. Everything from jeeps up to tanks. The arsenal was between Warren and Ravenna on the other side of the road, the right side going west.

P: It is on the other side of the road, but Newton Falls is close to it. It is just on the other side of route 5.

M: Now they built Windham up there to house workers at the Ravenna arsenal.

P: I had heard a teeny bit about that because my dad had been in Scouts. They had a scout camp up there somewhere. I don't remember it because I was too young. I know he said they came in and said that, I don't know, they had a week or two to get out of there. I guess that's all the time they gave the farmers too. They moved in and just put fencing around everything.

M: There is around 6,000 and 7,000 acres in that Ravenna arsenal. They have got a fence around the whole works. One of the reasons they built it there was because of the railroad facilities. See, the main line of the Erie goes right along side of it. Of course back in those days, the railroad played a pretty important part in hauling heavy ordnance like that. With less manpower they could haul a great deal more material than they could by trucks. Each truck has to have its own driver. Where with a train you have an engineer, a conductor, and maybe a couple of crew men, and a fireman. Maybe that would be all the crew that you would have on a train, and you might have 170 cars on a train. That released 170 truck drivers to serve in the Army.

P: All right, now on your job, other people have told me that places they worked at always tried to get people encouraged to buy liberty bonds or victory bonds. What did Mullins do?

M: We did the same thing.

P: Was it through a payroll deduction type thing?

M: Yes, yes, payroll deduction. They would take out any amount that you want. You could buy a whole bond or you could buy any amount that you wanted, breaking it down into even increments. If you bought a \$12 bond, you could have it taken out all at once, in two payments, in three payments, or four payments. As long as they were even increments, not odd cents here and

there. That entailed a great deal of clerical work to do that.

P: Yes, it would.

M: So that is the way they worked it. You could have it in any one of several different methods of taking that out. A great many of the people that worked there had other full-time jobs, and then part-time jobs up at Mullins. Put their whole pay on government bonds because they figured that they would get by on the money from their full-time job, and this was a way of storing up savings and helping the government out at the same time. So they would take their whole pay in government bonds. I know several people that did that.

P: So most people tried to buy bonds if they could?

M: Oh, yes. We got several citations because we had 100 percent participation. They did that to encourage it. They would give you a citation. We even got the proud buttons and different things like that. We would wear them to work and somebody that just started there, they would ask what the button was for, and we would tell them, and try to get them to sign up too. Like I say, we got several citations for 100 percent participation.

P: Can you tell me a little bit about rationing then?

M: Well, yes. Because we were engaged in war work, we were given extra rationing in gasoline. If we had to drive a certain distance to work we got extra gasoline so that we could get to and from work. We got extra rations in food stuff because they had to pack lunches for us to take to work. So we got some relief through rationing.

P: What were some of the things that were rationed?

M: Well, sugar, and butter, coffee, and meat. Of course, fuel, especially gasoline. I don't remember the whole list of things. I know that they would give us a little thing about the size of a penny that were made out of some kind of a fiber thing, you could spend them like you could money. Then we would have coupons for certain other things. Mostly the food, we would get these things that were made out of some type of fiber. I don't know what they were, but they were stamped out. They were embossed on one side saying what they were for. You would spend it like money. You had to buy them. I mean they weren't given to you as part of your pay, you had to buy them. You were allowed so many of them per month. We used those in addition to money to buy whatever it was that was right.

P: When the rationing was going on were you ever really short of anything?

M: No, I don't think we were. Not if you knew somebody.

P: What do you mean by know somebody?

M: Somebody that had access to the ration list, you might say. Well, some people knew how to buy candy. Candy was rationed, I mean sugar, the ingredients of candy were rationed. Consequently there was not a great deal of it on the open market, but if you knew somebody that was a dealer, a wholesaler, or something like that, you could get extra sugar. If you had somebody in the armed services that you wanted to send them homemade candy, you could go to the ration board and explain what you wanted it for. You might get it. Not always, but depending on how much there was available and how the person that you were talking to felt about it. There were ways and means of getting around some of those things.

I know when I was overseas every once in awhile I would get a package from home that had homemade candy or something like that. Well, some of it was homemade and some of it wasn't. Mother sent me some divinity fudge that I knew she didn't buy, she had to make it. Things like that. There were ways and means of getting around some of those things if you were in the know. It's like anything else.

P: I was wondering because you are the ninth person I have talked to, truthfully. I thought rationing was a little tighter than it was because everyone I have talked to has pretty well said, "Well, if. . ." They had ways of getting around it. It sounded to me as if there really wasn't a tremendous shortage of things.

M: It wasn't. There wasn't all that much of a shortage, but they didn't want it to get to be that short. So they started this rationing so that they would have a cushion. They didn't know how long the war was going to last when they started out. There just isn't an unending supply of those things sold. Rather than wait until you run out, they started the rationing to save that cushion. I think that is one of the reasons they started rationing. When a serviceman was home on leave, he would go to the rationing board and he could get gasoline to visit relatives that lived at a distance. It was available if you had the means of getting it. Either by going to the rationing board or through other ways. It was available. That's how we got by.

P: I was so young I don't remember that much about it.

My mother had to worry about it, not me. I don't remember being hungry or anything, but I was just a kid growing up. The next thing I would like to talk about, did you do anything with victory gardens? Some people said, "Yes," some said, "No." I was wondering.

M: We personally didn't. Her dad (referring to wife) had a garden and would give us vegetables and so on. We didn't have any place for it, and besides, I was in the Army most of the time. I couldn't work it and my wife couldn't work it by herself, so we didn't have a victory garden. That's the way we got by with that. A great many people did have gardens, but we didn't personally.

P: I know when I have been talking to different people; if they had the room they usually had a garden, and if they didn't have the room, they didn't.

M: That's right.

P: That's about the same answer I have gotten from other people. Now, tell me a little bit about the stars that used to hang in the window. What do you know about them?

M: Well, that was if you had somebody that was in the service. I don't know a whole lot about it because I didn't see them. That meant that somebody in the family was in the service. One star, I think, for each person in the family that was in the service. I don't know whether that was in the service in this country or whether they had to be overseas. I remember that they had service stars for members of the family that were in the service. That's about all I remember about it.

P: Okay. My dad was telling me that he doesn't remember too much about it, but they had some kind of air raid patrols at the beginning of the war. Do you know about those?

M: Well, yes. They had Civilian Defense Corps. They had these wardens that were trained to assume authority if we had an air raid. They would direct traffic, they would conduct patrols, they acted like auxiliary police to a certain extent. We had certain air raid shelters just in case we were bombed. We had sirens that would notify us of an air raid. If we had an air raid, the lights were supposed to go out and we were supposed to go to a certain designated shelter. Of course, we weren't subjected to any air raids. Consequently, I don't know just what would happen actually. We knew what we were supposed to do theoretically, but actually we didn't have any air raids. I know up at the shop there where I was working before I went into the Army,

we had an air raid drill every so often. They shut off all the lights, except auxiliary lights--flashlights and so on, electric lanterns--and we would all go to a certain designated place where we were supposed to be safer there than we would on the job. That's about all I know of that.

P: So they did have some type of plans?

M: Oh, yes. Yes, we had a plan there just in case. It was all practice and theoretical because we didn't actually have any air raids. But we were prepared for it in case we did.

P: How long did they go on?

M: Do you mean the program or each raid?

P: The program. Well, I realize each raid was probably a short time. The program, how long it was.

M: It was on until a couple of years after the war was over.

P: Oh, you mean it went clear through the war then?

M: Oh, yes.

P: I thought maybe they tried it for a couple years and then realized there wouldn't be raids.

M: No, because you never knew. They might just have a suicide mission. Some of these kamikaze planes might come across and get by all the anti-aircraft positions that we had and drop a bomb or so. Of course, after the war there was still a lot of strife going on in different parts of the world. We didn't know whether we might have to fight the Russians right after the war. Things were in such turmoil. So we had that program going on for, I would say, at least a couple of years after the war.

P: Now I didn't realize that. I thought that it just lasted during the war and they dropped it. See, that's something new I have just learned.

M: The reason I say that is because a couple of friends of mine were air raid wardens. In fact, they were foremen out at the plant. After the war they were air raid wardens. They were foremen out there before they were drafted, and then after they came back they were air raid wardens because we didn't know what was going to happen. Everything was in turmoil at that time and you just weren't sure.

P: Can you tell me a little bit about what you remember about basic training and things like that?

M: Well, basic training was really something. I was in basic training at Fort McClellan in Alabama. I was drafted. I first went to Fort Hayes in Columbus. I was down there for a few weeks and then I went to Fort McClellan in Alabama. Now when I left Fort Hayes it was in September and it was chilly. We got to Fort McClellan in Alabama and it was 101 degrees. They got us off the train, we went down by train. It took us three days to get there. They were in no hurry to get us there because we were not prime stuff, we were expendable. It was a single lined railroad, and every so many miles they would have a passing space there to let trains that were carrying urgent stuff to go straight through. So they would pull us off to the side. Every time we came to one of those we would pull off to the side and let a couple of trains go by, then we would pull back on the main line and continue on our way down to Fort McClellan in Alabama. Those trains were just old railroad cars. They weren't Pullmans or anything. The seats were covered with this. . . It was like plush, only it was about that thick and it stood straight up full of ashes and soot. They had been sitting on the side for twenty-five years, I guess. When we got off of those trains we were black. Like I say, it was 101 degrees.

They lined us all up and we stood at attention for about half an hour, and the fellows began dropping like flies. You stand at attention for about so long and you do that. If they had given us at ease or something like that, it would have been different, so we could move around a little bit. When you stand at attention, your body just refuses to cooperate. The first thing you know you start dropping, and that's what they did. Well, they finally got around to asking us who we were. So we gave our name and our serial number, we didn't have any outfit to go to because we hadn't been assigned. So we gave them our name and our serial number. Then they told us, "You go here. You go there," when we gave our name. They had a list where we were supposed to go. So we went and lined up over there.

Now this was the first day, in the afternoon. Then we picked up our duffel bags and started marching to the assigned area. I was assigned to Company A. I don't remember what section it was, but anyhow I was in Company A. They took us over there. We had barracks that were one story high. They were built with a crawl space underneath, no insulation. They had room for about four squads of men, with a potbelly stove in the middle, and lines of cots on each side. We were as-

signed a certain cot. Then we had to go over to the quarter masters and pick up our mattress and blankets. My mattress was so soft that I could fold it in half without a crease. When we made our beds we were supposed to have that blanket so tight that they could flip a \$.25 and it would bounce. No way would a \$.25 bounce on my cot because, as I say, that mattress was so soft you could fold it without a bulge on each side. It just folded. That was my first introduction to basic training.

We had a pretty good mess. Every so often we were called for KP duty. KP means kitchen police in case you weren't aware of it. Every so often you were assigned to KP duty. That was the best duty there as far as I was concerned. Because you always got plenty to eat, you could take your time eating, you had to wash dishes, but what's that. You had to peel potatoes, but what's that. You didn't have to do any marching while you were on KP, you didn't have to go to the firing line. You got out of a lot of stuff on KP that you didn't. . . Just didn't have to do. I kind of enjoyed it. A lot of them hated it. They just hated KP. They thought that was the lowest duty you could have. Well, about the only one that was lower than that was latrine duty. I never had that.

But anyhow, the buddy that lined up right beside me should never have been in the Army. In the first place, he was almost blind in one eye. He was half deaf in one ear because of an injury when he was just a boy. His dad had taken him to a baseball game, and when the fellow got up to bat he swung at the ball, let go of the bat, and the bat hit the fellow in the side of his head. That injury practically destroyed his sight in one eye and his hearing in that one ear, but he was drafted. He was from West Virginia and I guess they were low in their quota, so they drafted him regardless. The poor guy couldn't help it, but when we started off the march, instead of starting off with his left foot like everybody is supposed to start, he started off with his right foot. I would step on that left heel with my left foot every time. I felt sorry for the guy, but there wasn't anything I could do about it. That is one of the things that I have never forgotten about basic training. I don't really remember the fellow's name. I think it was Moore, but I am not sure. Anyhow, that is one of the things that I remember about basic training, and the fact that I never dropped out of a twenty mile march even though I was in there with fellows half my age.

Three different times they called me in from the field, whatever I was doing, twice I was firing for record on the practice range. Told me to pack all of my duds, I

was going to OCS. Well, I came in, packed all my gear, got ready to go to OCS, and the order came through canceling it. So, I never did get to OCS. I'm not sorry. It's just the way the Army works. There were three of us fellows in that outfit they did the same thing to. Three times they called us in, told us to get ready to go to OCS, three times they canceled it. When I finally got overseas I found out that one of the sergeants in the outfit that I always admired had gone to OCS. Two days before they were to graduate from OCS the order came through canceling the whole class. That kind of teed him off a little bit, which I don't blame him. They tried to give him a field commission when we were under fire, and he told them to take it and put it where it hurt the most. He never accepted it. You don't have to, and he didn't. He said he worked hard to get it, and they didn't see fit to give it to him, he didn't want it anymore. So that's the way it goes. I don't blame him. I think maybe I would have done the same thing. I say maybe, I don't know. You don't know about those things until they actually take place. I believe if the thing had happened to me the way it did to him, I would have told them the same thing.

I didn't mind basic training. I knew that we had to be taught how to behave ourselves to a certain extent. Otherwise, we would have gone over there, and gotten into combat, and wouldn't have known the first thing about it. But, one of the first things they did when I went in as a replacement, the sergeant told us, "Forget all about basic training. In basic training those rules are because they fight by the rules. Over here in combat they don't fight by the rules." Common sense does you a lot more good than basic training. "Don't get curious sticking your head up over the top of a foxhole to see what's going on. If you get the order to advance, climb out of your foxhole and advance. There will be somebody else looking to see whether it's safe or not. The law of self preservation will do you a whole lot more good than basic training. Now, forget about basic training. We will tell you that, we don't tell them back there because they wouldn't believe us anyhow."

The reason I can say that is because after a battle when we lost all of our officers. We had a shavetail, that's a second lieutenant, came up. . . He spent two and a half years in basic training as a cadre officer, came up there as a replacement, asked how many casualties we had. I said, "Well, our casualties are pretty heavy." He said, "There is something wrong having that many casualties. We are going to change that right away." Well, I never saw him after the first battle. I don't know what happened to him. He came up there in the afternoon, the next morning at roll call he said,

"All of you men will be clean shaven tomorrow morning." Well, we went to the old man, that's the company commander, and told him what he had said. He said, "Don't pay any attention to him. He doesn't know what he is talking about anyhow. Keep on just as you have been doing. You are doing a good job. We are not worried about whether you are clean shaven or not. The Army regulations say that you can wear a mustache or a beard as long as it is trimmed. Keep up the good work." So we did. Like I say, I don't know what ever happened to that second lieutenant, but I never saw him after the first battle. I don't know why.

P: All right. Now, I have talked to a couple different people, and the one person said that when they would go into town in basic training they were really welcome. Then I talked to another person that said they weren't welcome.

M: It depends on where they were.

P: Oh. What was your experience?

M: I think I went into town only one time when I was in basic training. The nearest town to Fort McClellan was Gadsden, Alabama. To the best of my recollection I only went in one time. I think that was on a Saturday. About the only thing I did was go into a store where they sold brass buckles and things like that. I got a brass buckle with an Army insignia on it for my belt to my pants. I think that was the only thing I ever bought. Some fellows would go into town, and I guess they thought because they were away from home nobody would know who they were or care. They would start kicking up their heels and raising a rumpus and so on and so forth. Naturally, the townspeople didn't like it. So, one person can give the whole outfit a bad name like that. I don't think they had very much trouble with the troops there at Fort McClellan, at least we didn't hear about it in our company.

P: I was just curious because I had both sides of the story. I was just wondering if this was common or what. Before you were shipped out, did you get to come back home?

M: Yes, seven days leave. What they called seven days en route.

P: In other words, you knew you were going somewhere afterwards?

M: Oh, yes. We came home and then we went to Fort Patrick Henry in Maryland, which is close to Baltimore. We shipped out from Newport News. We were seven days

delay en route, and then we got there at Patrick Henry. We were there for two or three weeks. Well, I got home in February, and got to Patrick Henry in February, and around the first part of March we shipped out on the General Meade. It was a comparatively new ship. It was only the second trip. It had been built especially to haul troops, 4,500 and they had 6,000 on it. We went from Newport News to Casablanca unescorted because it was a fast ship. We didn't go in a convoy or anything, we just went by ourselves. Two days out and they picked up a signal from an enemy sub. So they immediately started evasive tactics, zigzagging back and forth, and poured the coal to it. . . It wasn't coal, it was oil, full speed and ran away from it. They were fast enough to outrun the sub. So we went the rest of the way then without any trouble at all, landed in Casablanca.

On the trip over I contracted what they called cat fever. That was the Navy name for it. Out of the seven days it took us to get across, I spent five of them in the sick bay. They hauled me directly from sick bay to the Sixth General Hospital in Casablanca. I was there for three weeks. Then they sent me out to Camp. . . Anyhow, it was a camp there for replacements. I spent several weeks there. Then they sent me by rail to Oran in Algeria, and I was there for about three weeks. Then we got on a ship and went from Oran to Naples. The night that we landed in Naples, we had gotten off the ship and gone into a replacement depot.

That night they had an air raid, and I slept through the whole thing. The next morning they asked me where in the heck I was the night before. I asked them, "Why?" They said, "Well, you didn't answer roll call." I said, "What for? What was the roll call for?" He said, "We had an air raid." I said, "I'm sorry I didn't know about it. I slept right through it. If you had gone into the tent you would have found me, because I didn't leave the tent." Well, that was my first experience in Naples, were the German air raids. I went from there to a replacement depot, what they called the "Racetrack" outside of Naples. There I got pneumonia and spent a month or so in the pneumonia ward. Then I went to a replacement depot, and from there I went to the 88th Division. That's where my combat time was spent, in the 88th Division.

P: Is that when they were trying to take Rome?

M: The 88th Division was the first division in Rome.

P: Oh, yes.

M: Not my particular part of it. I was in the 350th Regi-

ment. The 351st and the 349th beat us into Rome, but the 88th Division was the first division into Rome. I went into combat where that monastery was at Monte Casino, above Anzio.

P: I have read enough war bibles. . . I didn't know what happened back here, but over there I knew. They said that was really bad there.

M: It was. That monastery was more impregnable after it had been bombed than it was before. Because they dropped all that rubble and stuff on top of it and made it just impregnable. They just bombed it, and it didn't do any more damage because it couldn't get through to where the German troops were. They were driven out, actually, by Polish troops under the British command.

P: I have read a little bit about the battles.

M: I visited later after they wore me out in the infantry and reassigned me to the signal corps, I visited the place and saw where they had rooted them out man to man, just hand to hand combat.

P: When you wrote back home was it possible to tell your wife where you were?

M: No.

P: If you tried to, what would they do?

M: They censored it out. You could tell them about something that had happened quite some time before, but not just lately. Because by getting all the little bits of information and putting them together, they could gain information that would tell them what outfit was where and so on and so forth. We were always given instruction that if we were captured, the only information that we were supposed to give the enemy was our name, rank, and serial number. Not what outfit we were from or anything else. Now, when we were back in a rest area we could wear our shoulder patches and things that would identify us as to what outfit we were with. But when we were in combat, no shoulder patches, no nothing that would identify as to what outfit we were from. They found out somehow or another, they would always find out where the Blue Devils were. Evidently from civilians that got the word some way or another, and would get it through their means, whatever they were, that the 88th Division was in there. Their troops were always warned that the 88th Division was opposite them. This gal that did the broadcasting for the Germans, we called her the Berlin Biddy. She would let the Germans know, well she would broadcast it. We picked it

up on our radios, but she would say that the Blue Devils are in such and such a place. There we were.

P: Did it ever bother you that they knew where you were?

M: Well, no because we knew that they knew. Of course, they feared us more than we feared them. The only thing is, they were backing up over familiar territory and to us it was unfamiliar territory. We were driving them back all the time, and they knew just how many feet we were from them, how many yards. They could zero in on us a whole lot easier than we could on them. It would usually take us three shots; one as a trial, one over, and one under. The third one then we would try to get on the target. If it was under, we would raise it a little bit. If it was over, we would lower it a little bit. Almost always by the third shot we had them, if you get the third shot.

P: Yes, if you get the third shot.

M: We were always taught when we went in when we were making an attack; make the other guy duck, get his head down and then he is blind, he can't tell. We were taught to shoot from the hip first, make him duck, then aim your shots. When the bullets are flying over some guy's head, he isn't sticking it up to see where you are. As long as he has got his head down he's blind, he can't tell where you are. Shoot first to make him duck, and then if he sticks his head up you aim at him. Those were tactics that we learned on the firing line. They didn't teach us that back in basic training. We were supposed to aim all of our shots.

P: Not waste ammunition, huh?

M: We were shooting at targets in basic training.

P: Yes, they don't shoot back.

M: They didn't shoot back. When we were all in combat, we were shooting at somebody that could shoot back at you. The hard way we learned what to do. I mean somebody ahead of us had learned it and passed the word back to us.

P: When the war was over, how long did it take them to get you back home?

M: I was reclassified out of the 88th. They wore me out. I was in the infantry, the 88th was an infantry division. I was sent back to a replacement depot. I took tests, and because of my grade they gave me a choice of where I wanted to go. So I went to a signal school. I was told when I went into the signal school. . . Well,

I took a six weeks course that was a concentrated course corresponding to three years of college.

When I finished that course they asked me if I would like to be in cadre, a part of the staff. I was thirty-seven years old. They asked me if I would like to be in the cadre. I said, "Well, what does it offer?" He said, "Well, you have got a place to sleep at night. You don't have to dig yourself a foxhole. You have three square meals a day. We can't offer you a whole lot as far as rating is concerned because we are already top-heavy. But he says, "You will be working in school, you will have Saturday and Sunday off, and we would like to have you. We know that you are not going back into combat, that's already on your orders. No more combat. So rather than shove you someplace where you might not want to be, we would like to have you here. Would you like to come?" So I did, I joined the cadre-staff there. I was doing the work of a tech sergeant as a PFC (private first class), but I was in the storeroom there of that department.

Now when it came time to come home, they moved me out. . . Well, I had been given a chance to go for two weeks up to Switzerland. This was after the war was over. I took it, but when the word came down that there was chance of going home on points, I went to the first sergeant and asked him about it. He said, "Well, you know the way the Army works. It might be two or three months before you go home." But he says, "What the heck. Why don't you put your name in." So I did. I was supposed to have gone to Switzerland for two weeks. The following week, two days after I put my name in they had me on the list. In seven days from the time I put my name in, I was on a boat on the way home. So I never got to Switzerland. But that is how fast they can work when they want to.

P: Yes.

M: But after I got home I spent three weeks someplace out in Indiana. I don't remember the name of the place, before I finally got home. So that shows you. It took two weeks to get back across the Atlantic. I was on a type C ship which is a slow. . . It's not a passenger ship, it's a freight ship. So it took us two weeks to get back home. Got into Patrick Henry. They sent me from Patrick Henry to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Then I finally got my discharge, and got back into Cleveland, and went home. From the time I got on that ship until I got out of the Army was almost a month. More than a month, wasn't it? Yes, more than a month.

P: So hurry up to wait?

M: Yes, that's the Army. Hurry up and wait, hurry up and wait.

P: Let's stop at this point then.

END OF INTERVIEW