

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
Lisbon Remembrances WWII

War Experiences  
O.H. 1248

Richard D. Kennedy  
Interviewed  
By  
Gene Krotky  
on  
July 18, 1989

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INTERVIEWEE: RICHARD D. KENNEDY

INTERVIEWER: Gene Krotky

SUBJECT: Lisbon Remembrances

DATE: July 18, 1989

Kr: This is an interview with Richard D. Kennedy for the Youngstown State University Lisbon Remembrances World War II segments by Gene Krotky at Lisbon, Ohio in the Kennedy home on July 18 at approximately 8:30pm. Ok Mr. Kennedy will you tell me something about your family background?

K: Yes I was born in Alliance, Ohio in 1921. My father came from Leetonia Ohio and, my mother came from North Georgetown Ohio. My father joined the Pennsylvania railroad when he was sixteen and then he moved to Alliance with my mother. My father went to school until the third grade and my mother was a college graduate having graduated from Mount Union College in 1903. She taught my father arithmetic, English and all the other subjects. I went to Alliance High School and graduated from there in 1940. I then went to Capital University in 1941 and was there for three years. During the summer months I worked in a factory in which they made tank treads. I worked three summers to help pay my way through college. My deferment from college ended in September of 1943 the year I was drafted.

Kr: Now why would they do that? Why would they let you get so near the end?

K: Because they were getting close to D-Day. I think they were building up the forces.

Kr: That makes sense.

K: That's exactly what happened. All the college deferments or at least most of them ended about that time. As I say Capital University is a Lutheran College and they had a lot of seminary students and their deferments stuck, but most of the others ended. So I went into the service in October 1943. I went to Fort Hayes Columbus. In Fort Hayes they'd assign you to units. They assigned me to Fort Riley Kansas to the horse cavalry. Now I had never been on a horse in my life. Here I'd gone three years to college, was working on a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, and they assign me to the horse cavalry. I went out to Fort Riley Kansas, in the fall of 1943 for basic training. Basic training in the horse cavalry was one of the toughest basic training in the army. Our cadre, that is those who trained us how to ride horses and shoot from horses were all from Arizona, Montana and Colorado and they were excellent horsemen. They couldn't get over that fact that some guy from a mid west city came and was going to learn to ride a horse. I'll admit I had a very difficult time with basic training. Winters were so cold out in Fort Riley Kansas. It was so cold when we'd go out on maneuvers that they took the horses in because all of the water froze and they didn't have anything to drink. The horses got to go back into the stalls over in the city but they left us outside.

Kr: What did they intend to do with you after they had you trained?

K: At the time there were several troops of horse cavalry and they were stationed in the Philippines most of them were stationed in California but they had some in the Philippines. They had planned initially to use them maybe in Burma, China somewhere in there. The cavalry is a reconnaissance part of the army so these horsemen go ahead to scout. They were to go ahead and spread out that was their job. Incidentally, even in modern warfare they still have the cavalry, only they're the armored cavalry. During World War II they had the highest casualty rate because they'd send them out ahead and they'd often get shot from behind. After I finished basic training in February of 1944 I was assigned my horse and riding outfit and was sent to California. They issued us summer uniforms and then we headed for the Pacific. They didn't tell us where exactly so we thought we were either going to New Zealand or Australia. On D-Day June 6<sup>th</sup> all the orders were changed, our horses were taken away and we were sent back to Fort Campbell Kentucky and put in an armored cavalry outfit. That was the last horse cavalry troop I think that the United States Army had. We had in that troop I'd say roughly fifteen hundred men and horses. We learned to shoot a forty-five from a horse while riding. We also carried a side arm or a short weapon (a knife). We were responsible for caring for the horses you know feeding them, washing them, we lived with them. Since that time I've never been on a horse.

Kr: Do you still remember the name of the horse you were assigned?

K: Al. Anyway, I was in the thirty-third armored cavalry troop. It consisted of two jeeps, two lead jeeps, an M-8 tank and two 6x6. We were trained in Fort Campbell Kentucky. On May 30, 1944 we were sent to New York City and

placed on a troop ship headed for Europe. There were eight thousand soldiers total on that ship! On June 6<sup>th</sup> we arrived in English waters outside the British Isles. When we turned on the radio Eisenhower came on and said “the troops have just landed and the invasion is on.” We thought for sure we were going in right away fortunately we didn’t land in Liverpool England on D-Day. They were just bringing back the remnants of the eighty-second air born division who had parachuted into Normandy. Boy were they a ragtag outfit. They really got beat up. When we were getting off the ship they were lined up and the bottom and all they could say was “you’ll be sorry.” During the time we were over in England the German’s were sending over the buzz bombs and rockets and we were deathly afraid of those things at that time. Then I was sent to an American school. I guess because I had some college they decided to put me in secretarial school and I learned to type.

Kr: It’s a long way from the horse cavalry to the typewriter isn’t it?

K: Yeah! I was there about the last part of June. Then one night they took us out of our barracks, about two thousand of us and put us on a ship in a replacement depot and the next morning we were headed for Omaha Beach. We landed on Omaha Beach on August 21<sup>st</sup> two months after D-Day. They didn’t have any docks over there yet so we crawled down the side of the ship on rope ladders with a full pack and we headed inland. We headed into what they called a big replacement depot outside of Shoeborn and at that time we joined the fourteenth armored division. Since I’d been a cavalryman I was put in a reconnaissance outfit in the fourteenth armored division. The fourteenth armored division was

with the first army and we headed towards Paris. We went through St. Lo, which was utterly destroyed, and a place called Caen on the way to Paris. We got to Fontenblew which is outside the suburbs of Paris and we were looking up at the sky at the dog fights going on up there and the crew sergeant came along and said “get up, get your gear together you’re moving out.” Apparently the allies had just taken Paris, which was about fifteen miles from Fontenblew. They were moving Shaef Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces from London to Paris. On August 21<sup>st</sup> Paris fell. On August 23<sup>rd</sup> I with about fifty other guys entered Paris and the next night we were loaded onto trucks that took us into the heart of Paris. There wasn’t a civilian vehicle in Paris all you saw were army vehicles. What I didn’t know was that I was assigned to the Public Division of Shaefs. That was Eisenhower’s Headquarters. I spent the rest of the war at Eisenhower Headquarters. As a matter of fact I remember writing home to Anne and they just got a little dog and they hadn’t named it yet so they named it Ike after Eisenhower.

Kr: Did you ever guess then or have any inkling that he’d be president of the United States?

K: No not at all. Of course politics at that time was far from my mind.

Kr: Yes, probably his too for that matter.

K: Our job was taking war correspondents and VIP’s like congressmen, senators, and so forth to the front lines. We provided them with shelter, sustenance and the ability to send their stories back to the United States. This was a pretty big job at wartime. Some of the correspondents that I can remember by name and I’m sure

there were a lot more of them were Ernie Pyle, Walter Cronkite, Eric Severied, Margaret Birk-White and many others.

Kr: Well I think you've hit the big four.

K: The interesting thing about Ernie Pyle was that he would come up to the office and talk to everybody. Two years ago we were in Honolulu Hawaii and Anne was in the hotel reading and I said I'm going out to the national cemetery. I went out (it's a beautiful chunk of land) and was walking up a big hill and as I got halfway up the hill there was a bench so I sat down to rest and when I looked down to my left there was tombstone that read Ernie Pyle. I had known that Ernie Pyle was killed in the Pacific and buried in Hawaii but I didn't know where and there it was.

Kr: It was kind of an eerie feeling after you'd known him huh?

K: Yeah! It was quite shocking to me.

Kr: Which of the correspondents did you like best as a person?

K: Eric Severied. He spent most of his time in England particularly before the invasion then came over to Paris. I really didn't get to know Walter Cronkite that well. There weren't too many women but I remember Margaret Birch-White I guess because of the triple name. I don't know if she's still living or not.

Kr: I don't either.

K: When the VIP's would come we were able to take good care of them because we had access to transportation.

Kr: Anybody that stands out in your mind?

K: Eleanor Roosevelt came over. That was after the war of course. We took her on a tour of where the fighting had been. I also remember Churchill quite well. He came over quite a lot. The building we were in housed Shaeff Headquarters so all the bigwigs came and went pretty frequently.

Kr: What building did they take over?

K: In Paris?

Kr: Yes.

K: One of them was right across from the opera. It was the American Express Building. We were in Paris; another of the big offices was in Versailles. That's where a lot of them were. Between Paris and Versailles was the IG Farben Building.

Kr: Is that building still standing?

K: Yes, it's still standing. In fact when I left I left a bicycle down the basement and when I went down there to look it wasn't there. Then we moved Shaeff forward and went up to the American Express Building. Anyway, after the allies went into Germany and we got to Frankfurt Germany they moved Shaeff from Paris to Frankfurt Germany. The IG Farben Building was one of the largest complexes in Europe and it was Germany's big armor plant. Everything in Frankfurt was bombed out except the IG Farben Company. The rumor was that allies did not bomb it because we wanted it for a headquarters and that's exactly what they used it for.

Kr: Were we that precise with the bombing that we could have left it standing?

K: Apparently so.

Kr: That's something!

K: So basically we had our big offices in the IG Farben Building in Frankfurt Germany and we lived in Wiesbaden, which is about twenty to thirty miles from Frankfurt. We also had offices in Park Hotel. We met some friends in Paris. After the war our daughters Mary and Karen went over and stayed with them and their kids came over and stayed with us.

Kr: The French people were that happy to see the Americans weren't they?

K: Yes, they were very happy. So after the war was over I was in Paris during VJ Day.

Kr: VJ Day probably didn't mean that much in Germany did it?

K: Not a whole lot. It's meant a lot to the soldiers. They were happy because after VJ Day most of the soldiers were sitting around over there waiting to go to Japan.

Kr: Weren't they afraid to go to Japan?

K: Yeah! I didn't have enough army points. I was over seas two years but for every battle star you got so many points. I only had one battle star. Anyway I didn't have enough points so I was in the Army of Occupation. The war was over August 20, 1945 but I didn't get home until April of 1946.

Kr: We read today of all the congressmen who take junkets at taxpayers expense and all. Were there very many congressmen who repeatedly came back to France?

K: Yes we had a lot of congressmen.

Kr: Anybody whose name we might recognize?

K: I really don't. After the war while I was in Weisbaden the Nuremberg Trial was on. I'd only had three years in college but I was interested in law so I made an

application for a seven-day pass to go to Nuremberg and it was granted. They gave me an army jeep and I drove to Nuremberg and sat in on the trial. I just came across a picture I had drawn of the courtroom. Jackson who was one of our Supreme Court Justices was a prosecutor for the United States and I had his name sitting at the table along with all the defenders. I wrote down Garring and Geville each of them where they were sitting.

Kr: Wow.

K: That was part of the thrill to see all those people on trial.

Kr: Did you know then that you eventually wanted to be a judge?

K: No. I knew then that I wanted to be a lawyer. I never thought about being a judge. I came home on a rickety ship and arrived on Easter Sunday 1946. (Wife "tell Gene about the victory ships")

Kr: What are victory ships?

K: Victory ships were made by the Kaiser, the same guy that made Kaiser automobiles. He was in the steel plants too. They made hundreds of these things. They were fast and didn't require being in a convoy. When I went over to Europe I went over on the USS Wakefield, which incidentally was a merchant marine ship that later went down in the Pacific with eight thousand men on it. I think the victory ship coming back only had about two thousand. One of the big thrills I remember on the victory ship happened the morning we arrived in New York. A voice came over the radio saying, "if you want to see the Statue of Liberty go out on board." So I hustled out and boy the sun was just coming up and there was the Statue of Liberty!

Kr: That's what it was all about!

K: Yes. Two days before I arrived home we stopped at Camp Aderberry where I was separated out in Indiana. My father was still working, he was a conductor on the Broadway Limited and he heard that there were troops that had just arrived from Europe. He knew I was on my way and I'll be a son of a gun if he didn't find the troop train I was on in Pittsburgh and come on my train. After I arrived home we were married on June 1<sup>st</sup>. Talk about shortages. I had to go to Columbus to find a suit to get married in. When we first got married and lived in Columbus there wasn't any meat only synthetic pork chops and stuff. I don't know why the meat was so short. We had to wait in line at the Big Bear. That was the name of the store in Columbus. You couldn't even buy a car! We didn't have a car for a couple of years. After the war was over the Shaef was disbanded and they had what they called an USFET. United States Forces in European Theatre. This is the patch. It has a flaming sword of liberation in a field of black. It's going to free that blackness and the sun's going to shine and we're going to have blue skies. (Wife: "very few people have this particular patch. Every once in a while we'll see it in an army show or a movie and we'll get all excited because you don't see it very often").

Kr: So you had two years overseas?

K: Yes.

Kr: Approximately how many men were assigned to Shaef Headquarters?

K: I'd say probably five hundred.

Kr: That's at any one-time right? Did you ever see Patton?

K: Yes, I did. These are my riding britches. (Wife “I’m not thrilled about the color, the yellow”).

Kr: I can’t imagine you getting in these.

K: I couldn’t row. (Wife: “the first Memorial Day Parade when we were back in Lisbon all the soldiers wore their own army uniforms and Rich was the only one in the cavalry uniform and he had leather high boots and the big hat you know like the Mounties wear with the yellow cord on it”). This is an Eisenhower jacket have you ever seen one of these?

Kr: Yes.

K: The yellow on the braid is for the cavalry. You can always tell a soldier by what outfit he belongs to or what branch he is in the army by what color of trim is on his hat.

Kr: What was Eleanor Roosevelt doing taking a tour?

K: I think she was just sight seeing after the war. (Wife: “She wrote a column called My Day. So she traveled after the war to different places where the soldiers were and where munitions plants were disbanding. After a long time I saved her columns. She was probably our most traveled first lady ever in Washington. She wrote the column even as first lady”). We did a lot of traveling too with war correspondents in what they called the old C-47 airplane. It’s a two-engine Dakota and we would go up to the frontlines as close as possible.

Kr: What did you do for recreation? Since you were in Paris in some of the livelier cities does anything in particular stand out in your mind?

K: Let's see, we had basketball games oh and also I met this family in Paris. In our office the mail came in through my desk and there were often times invitations from different families. One I opened was from Mr. Parisonne inviting three soldiers to his home for Christmas dinner. Instead of putting it up on the bulletin board I stuck it in my pocket. I thought it sounded like a pretty good deal and it was written in English. There were two other soldiers that went with me. They worked for the Sheaf also. The gentleman that invited us was an architect in Paris and had two daughters one was a year older and the other was four years younger. They were a very cultured family. My wife and I got to know them and our friendship continued. We wrote letters when I came back and Anne kept up the correspondence. I went to the oldest girls wedding when I was still in Paris. Her husband was in the French Underground and had just been released. The three of us that went out to the dinner were all named Richard so she named her first son Richard after us. Also their first daughter they named after my wife Anne because of all their correspondence. Our daughter Mary spent the summer, six weeks over there before her sophomore year in high school and then our other daughter Karen went over. Later their daughter Martine came over as well. When our daughter Karen got married we sent the whole family an invitation. The night before the wedding we got a phone call from Martine and her husband Tony saying they had arrived in Pittsburgh. So you can see we've been real close.

Kr: So this one fellow was in the French Underground? Did you know many people that were in the French Underground?

K: He's the only one I ever knew. Shortly after the war was over I came back to Paris probably to visit our friends on my leave. I remember so vividly seeing down by the railroad station French soldiers who were prisoners being brought back. They were very poorly dressed. There was one I knew named John. He owned the only ancient document shop in Paris. When people would die he would go through the estates for old documents and things like that. Well anyway he was waiting for me to come and ran upstairs and got me this document I have here. The document is an application made by James Monroe for a passport to come back to France.

Kr: Isn't that something. May 30<sup>th</sup> 1796.

K: John died a year ago and passed the business on to his son. Now they are tearing down these old ancient building over there so he has to sort through them and find anything of value and put a date on it. They chemically test the paper and all that and then they sell them. They are very wealthy people.

Kr: Oh I'm sure. This still has the wax seal and everything on it.

K: (Wife) "So that's my important document."

Kr: I guess. That may make you a very wealthy woman one of these days.

K: (Wife) "We look back on the war now as being a wonderful experience. It was also very hard too not knowing much of those four years where he was and not hearing from him." I was fortunate in my army career. I only had two or three years.

Kr: Was your mail subject to the same kind of censorship?

K: Yeah it was all the same. (Wife) “The funny thing about it was we got word he arrived in England on D-Day not France and then he started sending letters and they cut out these little strips. You’ve probably seen them, I have one someplace.

Kr: Yes, I have.

K: (Wife) “You never knew exactly what city or where, we always got the maps out and tried to find out where they were located. We never could figure out where he was. One day he went to a concert and he sent me the program enclosed in a letter and on the back of the program in little white print it said printed by Swinden Press. They hadn’t cut it out. So I immediately went and got a map to see where Swinden was and I found Swinden. They didn’t censor our letters going in so I wrote him right away and I said I think we figured out where you are. Could it be Swinden England? Then the next letter he wrote back said yes you’re right you’ve located me! We went back to Swinden England to try to find out where I was. Where the school center was. We had a heck of a time finding it. Things change so rapidly over there. Finally we were going along and we saw an old guy walking along the road. We asked three or four people they never heard of the American School Center so we stopped the car and I went out and talked to him and asked him. Do you remember during the war where the Americans were? Oh yeah he said and showed us where it used to be.

Kr: So you found it then?

K: Yeah. We kept asking people and nobody knew. They’d forgotten or had never been there.

Kr: What impressions do you have of Eisenhower and Churchill and some of the people that you were able to observe on a daily basis?

K: I was very impressed with the higher ups in the army headquarters. They were all very capable men. Eisenhower was not only capable but also kind. I was very impressed with that. I thought we have a very fine organization.

Kr: I read a lot about the conflicts between Montgomery and Eisenhower. Did you ever see Montgomery?

K: Yes I saw him. Montgomery would come to Shaf's Supreme Headquarters on various occasions. I never had any encounter; you know contact other than to see him. There was a lot of conflict between them.

Kr: So those of you in headquarters were aware of the conflict at the time.

K: Yes we were aware. The Battle of the Buldge was in December of 1944. I was in Paris in December of 1944 and our standard army even when we were billed at a hotel was what they call a grease gun. It was an automatic gun about that long. It shot about sixteen thirty-two-caliber bullets. When they had the Battle of the Buldge there were a lot of rumors that they were dropping parachuters dressed in American uniforms on Paris trying to get to Supreme Headquarters. So we were alerted and were to be ready in case anything like that happened but nothing ever did. It was kind of funny though I had a very good friend of mine, a college roommate at Capital who was in the army and he ended up in the infantry division at the Battle of the Buldge. He was captured there. Somehow we got all the reports of the captured people and those who were released. After the war he came through and I saw that he was on a list and that he had been released from

Germany. They were bringing all of them, thousands of people in to Paris to the hospitals. With all the connections I had I found the hospital and we spent three days in Paris together. After the war he went on to Law school as I did at Ohio State. He turned out to be the General Counsel at Nationwide Insurance, which is a pretty important job.

Kr: How bad was life in the German camps?

K: John told me that the food was very scarce.

Kr: It was scarce in general for the German citizens by the end of the war.

K: Yeah. They weren't able to feed the prisoners very well. I think overall however that the Germans were humane to their prisoners. (Wife: Not at all like the Japanese were). John said that the people in the farm area around there would try to help the prisoners. They'd be working in the field and they'd work their way up to the fence where the prisoners were working and would give some sign, go over to the fence and hand them eggs and bread. Also the German people around the prison camp would slip food in any way they could because they knew these boys were Americans. Of course you heard about malady and all that where Germans killed some American prisoners but we did the same thing.

Kr: So obviously a lot of these Germans were not Nazi sympathizers at all?

K: No, there were a lot who were not. They taught us in the army quite frankly that the only good German was a dead German but I think the Japanese were much worse. My brother was in the Pacific six years and he didn't have much good to say about the Japs.

Kr: I guess we were probably more frightened of the Japanese than we were of the Germans in this country.

K: Yes we were. For many of us it's mostly German background anyway to begin with.

Kr: Especially around this area.

K: I had two brothers, I was the youngest. My oldest brother had pneumonic fever when he was a child so he was 4-f. He later got a Doctor's Degree in Education. He was principal at Mansfield and Malibar High School. My other brother was one of the first draftees. He went into the service just after he was eighteen. He was in there for five or six years. When their train came back from the Pacific it had a big sign on it reading "Follow Mac and you'll never get back."

Kr: Mac was McArthur?

K: Yeah. (Wife) The very first draft in Alliance his brother's number was in the first twenty numbers drawn. He's just a little fellow he isn't much taller than I am. Richard and his other brother are big fellows and they always kind of babied Bud. But there he was the one that had to go right off into the service. Your mother was never the same. Having two boys in the service was real tough for her.

Kr: Especially if you had one in the Pacific.

K: Yes, that really hurts. (Wife) We had a National Guard Division up there called the thirty-seventh division that was stationed in Alliance and almost all of those boys went with the first outfit that was drafted. So when we got word of the thirty-seventh division we kept hearing that this one and that one had been killed. Alliance was really hard hit because so many of them went.