

**Admiral Nimitz Historic Site
National Museum of the Pacific War**

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with
Mr. Thomas Young
Paratrooper, 101st Airborne
D-Day**

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Thomas Young

Mr. Cox Today is April 17, 2004 we are here in Marble Falls, Texas at the library to interview Mr. Thomas Young. Mr. Young has agreed to give us his story of his experiences during WWII. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, including European theatre, archives for the National Museum for the Pacific War, Texas Park and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Young, thank you for taking the time. As we know we have a time factor involved here, so I'll talk quickly. You were born in Texas?

Mr. Young Oh, yeah.

Mr. Cox Where at, and what year?

Mr. Young Cypress Mill, Texas, in 1921.

Mr. Cox What did your father do?

Mr. Young He was a rancher.

Mr. Cox And you were raised on the ranch?

Mr. Young Yeah, I was raised on the ranch.

Mr. Cox What year did you go into the service, and why did you go into the Army?

Mr. Young Well, my brother and I were breaking horses with my daddy, for \$30.00 a month, (laughter) which was top pay then. So we were riding along and we got talking "why don't we raise our wages, why don't we get into the paratroopers and we'd

make a \$150.00 a month". And he said, "I think we ought to do it", and I said, "well let's go". So that's why we went into the Army.

Mr. Cox Your brother went in with you at the same time?

Mr. Young Both of us at the same time.

Mr. Cox What was his name?

Mr. Young Herman. He was killed in Normandy. He's buried in Normandy.

Mr. Cox Was he killed on D Day or...?

Mr. Young He was killed 3 days after D Day.

Mr. Cox Well, at this time I'm going to skip how you went through training and so on. And let's get to the action you were involved in. Now you were in the 101st Airborne¹, that's correct?

Mr. Young Yeah, that's right.

Mr. Cox Recount for me if you will, the things that happened to you on June 6.

Mr. Young Well, we boarded airplanes about 10 o'clock, and ah... no a little earlier than that, yes it was a little earlier than that, and we pulled out for Normandy. Of course to confuse the enemy they had certain planes going this way, some going that way, some going straight in, and everything. But we all got there (laughter), without losing the planes. And I was on the ground at a quarter to twelve, according to my government watch.

¹ Known as the "Screaming Eagles"

Mr. Cox You mean you bailed out, and...

Mr. Young Yeah, we were supposed to be, they said at twelve o'clock, well that's close enough. I got on the ground with 45 pounds of TNT. Well, I was not at the place where they needed TNT. Some of the other sections jumped where those big pill boxes were, you know, they took 45 pounds to cave one in. And there weren't any in my area. And so, I discarded that. But I could hear artillery being fired, they were firing on the beaches. So, we had little crickets, I got one at home, that we identified ourselves with, and I popped it a time or two and got two more boys. One was my sergeant, and he didn't have any hand grenades, and the next one didn't have any hand grenades. It was three eighty-eights² down here were firing on the beach

Mr. Cox Now, you said eighty-eights, what do you mean by this?

Mr. Young That's artillery.

Mr. Cox Is that German or American?

Mr. Young German. And, so I told them, look we have to stop that. So I gave each of them one of my hand grenades. And I told them "now when they fire you're going to see light", and I said "when you do, I pick one out that you can pitch the hand grenade to". And so, that's what we did, we worked all that out

Mr. Cox And what you are saying, then as I understand it, you were behind the German positions,

Mr. Young Oh yeah. We always fought from the back end (laughter).

² The German 88mm dual-purpose gun was probably the most valuable artillery piece of the war as it provided deadly firepower against Allied airplanes, tanks, and ground troops.

Mr. Cox Well, if you will let's back up a little bit. I'll like you to describe, once you bailed out, you were on a what, C-45, 47?

Mr. Young C-47.

Mr. Cox C-47 and your stick of paratroopers, in other words a group, jumped out. Describe to me what happens when you are floating in the air?

Mr. Young Well, there were so many bullets in the air, that you felt like if you stuck your finger out like that, one would cut it off. That's how many bullets... The Germans didn't know what they're shooting at, they're shooting at sound, there was too much sound, they're just shooting. And I got lucky and made a good landing. When it got daylight the next morning, they sent us out to find trouble, to look for the Germans. And the first thing that I found was General Pratt who had been killed. He came in a glider and the Jeep broke loose and took him and the pilot both out, both dead. I took the Jeep back to my headquarters. And so I went on and it was about, I guess an hour later that they sent me on a patrol and I found the Germans all right (laughter). I came back and reported in and I don't know how they got there, but the 1st Battalion came in. They came down the highway. And they went up there, and took the Germans on. Those people didn't act like they really wanted to fight

Mr. Cox Those people, you mean the Germans?

Mr. Young The Germans, yeah. And we had 3 of these big landing boats, and they told us there's no use to take any prisoners. Well I saw some prisoners marching in down the highway towards us, and I thought well they are going to send me and 2 machine gunners down the beach put them down, so they did. They went on by, and I called in headquarters and I said "What's the matter? Where those prisoners going?" And they said they're putting them on the landing craft, and they had

three, that they overloaded and took back to England. Some of those ended up in the U.S. down here in a POW camp below Austin, Texas.

Mr. Cox They loaded them up with German prisoners?

Mr. Young Yeah.

Mr. Cox And ended up in Texas.

Mr. Young Yeah. (laughter) Some of them ended up right where I was from.

It took you about a day to get oriented. You know, where you were. We killed lots of people there. They were just, the ones that were fighting; we just wiped them out. Say a company, it would take us 10 minutes to take them, they just didn't have much. When we got rid of their pillboxes and their artillery. They didn't have much air corps because our Air Corps was taking care upstairs.

Mr. Cox Let me ask you a question, you are talking about killing Germans. How did you feel when you killed your first man?

Mr. Young How I feel about it?

I was sent over there to kill them. It didn't bother me at all, if they're shooting at me, I didn't mind shooting back. There's a group of Germans, one of them spoke English, I talked to him a little before he died. But anyway, there was a cement drainage ditch for some reason, and those German paratroopers jumped in there. They were looking for protection, believe me. And they all died...big deep cement ditch. Well I was sitting in there in one end of it, and the 1st Battalion was right along it, and they killed the whole damn bunch.

Mr. Cox The Germans that were in that ditch?

Mr. Young They killed them all, and I was sitting down at the end of it and I couldn't keep from killing them. And about ten minutes later that ditch ran pure blood. That's how many were killed in there. If you go there, I've been there to the graveyards at one time, if you go you can see how many Germans were killed in Normandy. We killed them, I've may have killed them. (sniffing)

Mr. Cox Let's get to a lighter thing that you told me about. You said once you got over there you got a horse. Now you're from Texas (laughter), tell me that story about that horse.

Mr. Young I got that horse, I got 2 of them. The Germans had them down there on a bridge, a bridge across a little old bayou, and they were butchering those horses. I don't know where they brought them from.

Mr. Cox What were they butchering them for?

Mr. Young Food. They didn't have much meat and they like them horses. No telling where the horses came from. But I got hold of this horse and I was riding it bareback, and an old Frenchman from a little old town, I believe called St. Mère Église, he says, he can talk English and he said "do you want a saddle?" and I said "I sure appreciate it" (laughter) He goes back in his barn and he comes out with a saddle. Well I had me saddle the horse. Well, I was doing pretty good for traveling (laughter) and I came to another boy. And he got on my horse, and so we buddied up (laughter)...

Mr. Cox Everybody else had a motorcycles and the Texan had a horse.

Mr. Young Well, I had a German Jeep. That rode pretty quick, that feller he came running by me and he didn't even get past me. So I can see a damn Lieutenant coming along, he said "I got to have that Jeep" and indeed he went and away he went with it

(laughter). And then I had a motorcycle and I wrecked it like, so I quit that (laughter) and I stayed with my horse.

Mr. Cox If I may advance to when you got wounded. Tell me, even though you said it was a slight wound you gave blood for your country. Tell me about it.

Mr. Young We made the invasion in Holland. And, we got shot down there, my plane got shot down. Of course we all got out of it except the pilot, the radio operator, and somebody else who was killed inside of it.

Mr. Cox And this is of course after D Day?

Mr. Young This was Holland.

Mr. Cox So, this was months later.

Mr. Young Yeah, 3 month later, I believe, or 2. We took the town of Eindhoven. That plane went on and belly landed in a planted forest, trees were about this high, and the plane dug it into those trees. The co-pilot got out alive.

Mr. Cox The trees were about 4 foot high then.

Mr. Young Yeah. The others were killed, they were shot all to pieces. And we were lucky to get out. But anyway we advanced, and we took Eindhoven before dark. And then the Germans started their artillery parade and their bombing parade and we went through that. It was pretty bad. They killed lots of boys. They wiped out the town of Eindhoven. They, really laid it down.

Mr. Cox You know how to spell that?

Mr. Young E-I-N-D-H-O-V-E-N, I think. Eindhoven. I got, started back up to our zone and they got to shelling us. I was in the brush, I wasn't on the highway. This shell comes in, two pieces hit me, one on the inside of this, and one on the outside of this one. Right there. I could still walk and everything, but I got on up to zone and the company Medic saw blood on my britches. He said "what's the matter with you?" "Well, I guess I got a little shrapnel in here". So he pulled my britches up and there's a piece sticking in the bone there, and so it was about, like your little fingernail. He pulled it out (laughter), and of course it bled like hell, I didn't notice what he was doing, and he said...I got up and "asked what's going on", and he said "wait a minute I want to see that other leg". So he come over and pulled the britches up here, and he picked it out. It was little itty piece, more like a bean.

Mr. Cox Did you have any pain?

Mr. Young I didn't feel good. (laughter) Yes, yes I had pain. But anyway, I was going on up the road. Well, there was a Captain walking down the middle of the road like he owned it. And I said, "Captain," I said "you better get your hinny out of that road", I said "or you're going to catch some". He said "nah, they ain't going to shoot me". And he just kept walking, and he did take three steps after that they shot him right here. He didn't fall or anything, he staggered around a little bit, and I went to him and I said "let's get out of this road". I dragged him over got him out of the damned road. A Medic came along there. And so I told him, he was going on by, and I said "wait a minute you can take this one to the hospital, he's got to go to England!" And he looked at me and said "what's the matter with him?" I said "he's shot right there".

Mr. Cox Right above the heart.

Mr. Young It was right above his heart (laughter). And he was back in a month, back on duty, yeah. But that was a big shoot factory, Eindhoven was. They flattened that,

I got out of there either way, they sent me back to England with him, on account of these knees. And when I got back to England I took the flu, first thing. And I thought it was going to kill me. (laughter) I finally got over that. And they said you are not going back to paratroopers anymore, you can't jump. And I said "why the hell can't I?" I said, (laughter) "I get out the door and I want to back to my buddies", and so they said well we need a...I was qualified to drive any kind of train that was in Europe. They trained me on it. They needed a train operator in South America, and dammed if they didn't sent me down there. (laughter) Sent me to Trinidad. (laughter)

Mr. Cox Well, with that Mr. Young we are, due to time constraints we've got to cease this, but as I promised you, I'm going to get back with you and we are going to complete our interview.

Mr. Young Well, you need to talk with me and Jake. Jake will be here in a couple of weeks. We're going, we'll be over there in Normandy. I don't know if they want us to jump, or what (laughter) on the 6th. They're taking us over there and the little girl sitting back by me is supposed to go with me. They'll be two couple of us going.

Mr. Cox Have a safe trip.

Mr. Young Yeah, thank you sir.

Transcribed by:

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