

**The National Museum of the Pacific War  
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

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

**An Interview With  
Ralph K. Byler  
U.S. Army  
C.O. 965<sup>th</sup> F.A.B.N.  
Battle of Bulge  
Wounded 3/1/45  
Retired – Colonel  
March 23, 2004**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is March 23, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Ralph Byler by telephone. His phone number is (520) 648-8417. His address is 750 Lapusada Circle, Apt 17 Green Valley AZ, 75614. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. First off, let me ask you, do you have a middle initial?

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what is that?

Mr. Byler

K.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your mailing address there?

Mr. Byler

I don't have it here right now.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'll get it from you after while then. Agreement read. Is that satisfactory with you?

Mr. Byler

That's okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, fine, thank you. Let me start off by asking you what is your birth date?

Mr. Byler

March 11, 1912.

Mr. Misenhimer

And where were you born?

Mr. Byler

Marion, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Byler

I had 3 brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they all in World War II?

Mr. Byler

No, 2 of them were in World War I and one of them wasn't in any of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

The 2 in World War I, did they come home?

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Byler

At Marion.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Byler

1930.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Byler

Well, at that time, I was working in a grocery store.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did you work there?

Mr. Byler

Until college started in the fall.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to college?

Mr. Byler

Purdue University.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you major in there?

Mr. Byler

Electrical engineering.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you graduate from there?

Mr. Byler

1934.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished college, what did you do then?

Mr. Byler

I went to work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who did you work for?

Mr. Byler

Indiana Michigan Electric Company.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did you work for them?

Mr. Byler

40 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the Service?

Mr. Byler

Well, first I went in when I graduated from Purdue. I was in the Army Reserve. And then I took extensive courses from the Army and I got to be a First Lieutenant. And then I transferred to the National Guard. I resigned my commission as a first lieutenant in the Reserves and they accepted the second lieutenant in the National Guard.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which National Guard Unit was this?

Mr. Byler

It was part of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division in the 150<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battery D.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did Purdue have an ROTC program at that point?

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you had been through their ROTC program, is that right?

Mr. Byler

In 1930 when you went to Purdue, you either went in the ROTC or you went in the band.

Mr. Misenhimer

Out of curiosity, why did you resign from the Reserve and go into the National Guard and take a reduction in rank?

Mr. Byler

Well, the state wanted to establish a National Guard Unit in Marion, and don't ask me why, I don't know. They elected to put in a battery of field artillery, and I was a graduate of Purdue and field artillery and somehow or another they got my name and came and asked me if I would help them organize a unit. That was in 1937.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you actually go into active duty?

Mr. Byler

When the president declared the National Guard as federal troops, they were federalized.

Mr. Misenhimer

When was that?

Mr. Byler

I think in 1941 if I remember correctly.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this before Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Mr. Byler

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were on active duty when Pearl Harbor was bombed then.

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall hearing about Pearl Harbor and how you heard about it?

Mr. Byler

I saw it on TV.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm not sure we had TV then, did we?

Mr. Byler

I think we did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, did we? Okay. And what was your reaction? How did you think it would affect you?

Mr. Byler

I don't know. I was in the Army and I didn't think we would be part of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were activated, where were you stationed then?

Mr. Byler

The first station was Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there?

Mr. Byler

When we were activated, we had our guns and trucks and everything at Marian at the armory. And I was assigned to take the vehicles and guns to Camp Shelby. The rest of the unit traveled by train.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have at that point?

Mr. Byler

Second Lieutenant.

Mr. Misenhimer

What size guns did you all have?

Mr. Byler

155 Howitzers.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did that trip down to Mississippi take?

Mr. Byler

Oh, about 3 days.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did y'all camp out at night or where did y'all stay at night?



Mr. Byler

Well the first night I think was Paducah, Kentucky, we stayed in the fire station there. I had my drivers and myself and the motor sergeant. The second night, we stayed in a public garage in Memphis, Tennessee. And I think the 3<sup>rd</sup> night, we were in Hattiesburg, we were in Camp Shelby.

Mr. Misenhimer

How large a convoy was this going down there?

Mr. Byler

Well I had a battery, four guns, four Howitzers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Several trucks then I guess, right.

Mr. Byler

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you got to Camp Shelby, what did you all do down there?

Mr. Byler

Well, when I got to Camp Shelby, I found out that I was the Captain.

Mr. Misenhimer

Jumped 2 ranks all at once, huh?

Mr. Byler

Yeah, the executive officer had resigned when we were federalized. He had just taken a new job and he didn't want to leave. The captain, when they got to Camp Shelby, why,

he was transferred to a Battalion staff and I was senior officer then and they promoted me to Captain.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were the Commanding Officer of Battery D at that point. Is that correct?

Mr. Byler

That's correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you all on Camp Shelby?

Mr. Byler

Oh, you know, you're taxing my memory.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just do the best you can, whatever.

Mr. Byler

It was about 1944 I would say. I had been bugging them to go to officer's school cause I felt I ought to have it on my record, and they would never send me cause I had already been through Purdue. So they came up with a new program. It was a field officer's school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and I was assigned to that and that was Field Officer's School #6. So I went to Fort Sill, was there, what 90 days or something like that. In the meantime, this was when they trying to realign, the artillery. Prior to that, why, a division had one battalion, a medium artillery, and two battalions and one was one, 75s and later became 105s.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Byler

When I finished school, my battalion had moved from Camp Shelby, Mississippi to Camp Forrest, Tennessee. And they were re-designated to I think 155 guns. Anyway, the designation was changed from 150<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, I think, to the 108<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you still Battery Commander at that point?

Mr. Byler

I was still Battery Commander at that point. It was kind of a coincidence. When I arrived at Camp Forrest, Tennessee, the Camp Commander for some reason had called an officer's call for all officers at Camp Forrest. I went to that. At the conclusion of the meeting, when we were breaking up, a colonel that was in my field officer's course in Fort Sill, Oklahoma saw me and came over and spoke. This field officer's course, by the way, there was 2 captains; myself and another captain. All the rest of them were either majors, lieutenant colonels, or colonels. As I say I was one of 2 captains.

Mr. Misenhimer

This colonel came over and what did he say to you?

Mr. Byler

We just passed the pleasantries of the day at that particular time. I don't know, a few days later, he called me and wanted me to come up to headquarters and meet the General Sheets. At that time, it was called the 14<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigade. They offered me, it was a temporary assignment, their plans and training officer had been moved off onto umpire duty during the Army games, and he was a regular Army officer and I don't know what happened to him. He didn't come back. I don't think I ever had anything other than

just a temporary assignment there, and later they were starting to move troops out. By the way, it ended up while it had been the 14<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigade, eventually it became the Third Corps Artillery. And I was the plans and training officer for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps Artillery, but I think it was still just a temporary assignment. We had, don't hang me on this, I think 19 Field Artillery Battalions scattered over the southern part of the country. We had troops at Fort Leonard Wood, Camp Rucker Alabama, Camp Gordon, Georgia. Anyway, the General and I, he took me with him to inspect these different troops, and we ended up, I think I should tell you. The Field Artillery Range at Camp Forrest, Tennessee was not an artillery range. It originally involved a coal company and the coal company hadn't mined the coal and they just let it grow into timber. And when the Army took it over, the Army hired a contractor and they just went in and cut the trees about 4 to 6 inches about the ground and let them lay right where they fell. No roads, no observation posts, nothing. I think that the 208<sup>th</sup>, I was assigned to them when I first got there. We didn't have any long toms, there wasn't any. So they gave us what they called GPS, I believe it was a 155 gun, and it was a monster, big thing. We did take it to the artillery range. I remember one occasion and one of the Battery Commanders and myself had an order to route up there as far as we could go and ford the creek and didn't have to cross any bridges cause the guns were so heavy, they would have never made it.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you transport those guns?

Mr. Byler

They had a tractor, a track laying tractor.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you and the General went on this inspection tour, what all did you do there?

Mr. Byler

Well, I think we ended up at, the last station was Camp Gordan, Georgia, and we went from there to Atlanta where the Corps Commander was located, and I didn't go with him. He left me in the camp and he went in to see the General, and the result of it was that he told the General that our artillery range wasn't an artillery range. It wasn't fit for anything, and he would like to be able to get all his battalions together and have some artillery practice with the 19 Field Artillery Battalions. The General approved it, to go to Camp Gordan, Georgia. Well, after we got back, the General gave me the task of going down and telling Camp Gordan, Georgia that we were gonna move in there with the 19 Field Artillery Battalions. I went down there and stopped in to see the Post Commander and told him what had been proposed and he said he wanted me to come back at one o'clock, and I didn't know what it was all about, so I agreed to be back at one o'clock. And I got there and I walked in and the room was full of Generals, Lieutenant Colonels, Colonels, everything but Captains. I think I was the only Captain there. The First Commander opened up the meeting and then he just turned it over to me. So I explained who I was, what I was doing there, and we didn't have any place where we could get all the battalions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps together and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps Commander approved the move. Well, that's when the sh-- hit the fan. Everybody in there had a reason why it wouldn't work, including the officer's club. So about midway through the meeting, I asked for the Army regulations and I forget the number now but at that time I knew the number, and the Post Commander brought out his Army regulations and I just asked him to read it. It was by General McNair proposing that all troops, including infantry units, train under

artillery fire. After that, the meeting kind of calmed down. But I got my permission to bring all the battalions in.

Mr. Misenhimer

19 battalions would be a lot of people, wouldn't it?

Mr. Byler

Yes, we didn't go into barracks, we just were out in the field. We were assigned an area where we could establish bivouacs for the different units. The General and his staff, including myself, we were in barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the General in charge of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, what rank general was he?

Mr. Byler

I think a Lieutenant General.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, 3 stars then.

Mr. Byler

I'm not real sure but wasn't Leer at one time the Commanding General of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps?

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did it take to get all these battalions in there?

Mr. Byler

It didn't take long. I wrote an order and told them to be there at a certain time and they were all there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then how did that work out with all training together?

Mr. Byler

It worked out real good. I had had a number of Army problems while I was out at Ft. Sill and I rewrote those to fit the situation and we started, I can't remember now the name of the town that was over close to the coast. We started with the assumption that the Red Forces had moved into the area where Camp Gordan, Georgia was and our mission was to meet the enemy force and throw them back. Then later on, I had orders for different infantry units down in the area, and they had their own problems. They had problems for food supply and everything it took for a unit in the field. One thing that did happen that wasn't anticipated, the units, wherever they were located, were stationed in barracks and here we were stationed out in the field and I don't know who wrote the order but the American Housefly found us real quick. And the next thing we knew, we were having problems with dysentery. The executive officer of the outfit got to fly swatters, I don't know where he got them, nets. Anyway, he solved the problem.

Mr. Misenhimer

It would take a lot of fly swatters.

Mr. Byler

Yeah, sure did.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did this training go on there at Camp Gordan?

Mr. Byler

Gosh, I don't know, 3 weeks, a month, I don't remember. Then we went from there back to Camp Forrest, Tennessee and General Sheets immediately talked to the commanding general of the corps again and got his headquarters moved to Camp Gordan, Georgia. If

you recall, that was one camp, I don't know of any others, there probably were, they were black and white and the camp was divided more or less down the middle and the blacks didn't go across that line over to where the whites were and whites didn't cross the line to where the blacks were.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then what happened next?

Mr. Byler

Well, in my career, about the next assignment I remember of any importance. General Sheets was ordered to the Pacific and a new general, and I don't recall his name, came in. He brought in his own staff with him, and I told you this commanding officer of my unit was off on umpire duty, so he called me in and gave me the opportunity of taking that battalion, taking command, which I did. I immediately moved from Augusta, Georgia to Camp Forrest. My family had already gone back to Indiana and my battalion didn't ever have the GHQ test so I received an order to take the battalion to, as I recall it was Camp Polk, Louisiana. And when I got there, they immediately put us through the GHQ test and I remember because we had a sleet storm and there was about an inch or so of ice. And then we got orders to go to I think it was Camp Shanks in New York and we were moved there by train, turned in all of our equipment. And we got to Camp Shanks and were told to get ready to go overseas, and we didn't take any equipment at all. We landed in Liverpool. It was Easter Sunday. I remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year, '44?

Mr. Byler



I'm sure it was '44. When was the Invasion?

Mr. Misenhimer

June 6<sup>th</sup> of '44.

Mr. Byler

Okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was before the invasion, right?

Mr. Byler

Yes, we were stationed in a place called Worsley. Worsley was a very small town and they still had their courthouse, the judges still met with their white wigs. The community was very, very receptive to our being there. They did everything to make us comfortable. We were living in pup tents primarily. This place where we were was a castle, I think it belonged to Earl of Elswood. It had burned in 1914 and was just a shell, but it was over these coal mines and the weight of it was beginning to tell on the under pinnings. And the government had sold the castle and all the trimmings to what they called a demolition contractor, and he was there to tear it down and salvage what he could out of it. I think all the piping in the castle was lead. They replaced it with a flat roof, that was lead. And we were there then I think, I remember we went in the invasion on D plus 25. I'm not sure about that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you say D plus 25?

Mr. Byler

I think that's right. I'm not sure.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which unit is this, is this a battalion still or what unit is this?

Mr. Byler

Yeah, I had a battalion. The battalion at that time was designated as a 965 Field Artillery Battalion.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you still have the 155s?

Mr. Byler

Still had the 155. We drew new equipment all the way around once we got to England.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these long toms or were these Howitzers?

Mr. Byler

No, they were Howitzers.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you cross the channel to get to France?

Mr. Byler

We went on to what they call landing ship tanks, LSTs.

Mr. Misenhimer

And where did you land in France?

Mr. Byler

I think at Omaha Beach.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there still quite a bit of wreckage on the beach and all?

Mr. Byler

Yes, we were there just a short time before the breakthrough at St. Lo. That's when General McNair was killed.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you all initially start firing your guns?

Mr. Byler

During that battle.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long had you been there, then just a few days?

Mr. Byler

Just a few days. We occupied a position that some other unit had been in, and the very first night we were there, we caught some interdiction fire from the enemy but it didn't cause any damage, but it sure made us love slit trenches.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did y'all return fire to them, then?

Mr. Byler

We returned fire.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened next?

Mr. Byler

Well, after the breakthrough to St. Lo, I had one Battery, it was C Battery that was attached to, and I'm not sure of this, I believe it was the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. And they broke through and was heading for Paris. They were only gone a couple days and I got

them back. In the meantime, we had been ordered to... I was with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army when I first went in, and this time we were re-designated and assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> Army and went to Brest to help clean up Brest where the submarine pens were located, and I can't remember the other units that were there but we stayed until the operation was complete. Then I got orders to report up in the Hurtgen Forrest and I ended up where Belgium, France, and Luxemburg all come together. We were just outside of Germany.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you attached to a division at this point?

Mr. Byler

No, I was just a part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps and the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps made the assignments. I took orders for wherever they sent me.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you would be with a different unit from time to time then.

Mr. Byler

Right, like I say, I was with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army then I was with the 9<sup>th</sup> Army then during the Bulge, there was a period of time I wasn't with anybody, and I finally ended up with the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps and then they start pushing back out. At that time, I was attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division.

Mr. Misenhimer

When the Bulge started, you were there at the junction of those 3 countries?

Mr. Byler

That's correct. I had one battery that was in Germany and the rest of them were in, I guess, Belgium.

Mr. Misenhimer

How close were you to the Bulge? Were you in part of the Bulge?

Mr. Byler

I was part of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

How far back from the front lines were you when it started?

Mr. Byler

Well, I had observers out at the front lines and when the Bulge started, of course, they fell back with their infantry units. Then I got an order, first we were in the defensive position. I had A Battery was in Germany, B Battery I guess was back a short distance, and C Battery was 3 or 400 yards back with me. Then when we got orders to move, first I got orders just to move A Battery, but before they got moved, I had orders to move the Battalion.

Mr. Misenhimer

And to move back, or which way?

Mr. Byler

To move back. I think at that time, they found out a little bit more what the situation was and what they were planned to do was keep the Corps Artillery from being run over.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they succeed in keeping you all from being overrun?

Mr. Byler

Yes, the end of the first day, we had been sitting on a road like sitting ducks. If the Germans would have had any Air Force, we'd have been in trouble but they didn't, and

we got by with it. At the end of that first day, we were given an area to go into bivouac and this wasn't too far back from the front. That night, I went to Corps Headquarters to see what was going on and get orders for the next day and we wanted to continue to move to the rear and I forget what unit it was, when they passed I was supposed to pull in in back of them and get on out of there. While we were sitting waiting for the other units to pass, I received a messenger from I think the 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. He was a Second Lieutenant and he came there at the request of the Commanding General of the Artillery. They wanted some help. They had moved into Saint Vith. I was just a short distance south of Saint Vith and they wanted some artillery to help stop the German Armor. And so I questioned him some and then I'm going with the lieutenant back to their commanding officer of the artillery of the 7<sup>th</sup> armored. He was an officer, I think I'm right on this, he had originally been with the 150<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, not the 150<sup>th</sup>. I think it was the 151<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>, as part of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division the same as I was. When the division was broken up, why, he ended up as an artillery commander of the Armored Unit. He told me what the situation was and they were trying to hold Saint Vith with the road network to keep the Germans out of it, and he needed some help. He then wondered if I would come in and help. Well I had tried to contact the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps Artillery and I couldn't reach them by radio. So I said, "Okay, you get me released from the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps, I'll be here." Well, whether they did or didn't, I don't know. I do know that I ended up going up and into position around Saint Vith, and one of the units that they had brought in was 106<sup>th</sup> Division, which had never seen any combat. And they ended up I think losing the entire division. Another division that was there was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. I was kind of straddling the line I think between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 106<sup>th</sup>. Anyway, I supported both of

them and the units I supported got out. The rest of the division went down the drain. I was with the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored, I'm guessing, about 3 days. We changed positions 2 or 3 times. I know at one time, of course I only had 4 guns, and the one time I had...wait a minute. I had a battalion. I had 12 guns. One time, I had one Battery pointing north, one pointing east, one pointing southeast, cause those 155 Howitzer with a split trail, you couldn't move those like the 105s that the armored had. They were killing my men just wearing them out, so we finally just put them in one direction and held it there. Our observers were primarily armored observers. They were out in tanks. They loved our 155 Howitzer. When they put one of those and you didn't even hit the tank, you just came close to it, he scrambled. I can't tell you the date that we left there, but he had told me when I agreed to go in, he said, "I promise you we'll get you out." And so I stayed until about the darkest part of the night, he gave me a close station march order and a route to take to get out. When we headed back, we had to cross the, I forget the name of the river now. Anyway, when we crossed that river, we fell back with the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were talking about that you were drawing back to cross the river and you were now with the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps.

Mr. Byler

Yes, I think. Was it the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division?

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm not sure.

Mr. Byler

Okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

The 101<sup>st</sup> was at Bastogne. I don't know if you were anywhere close to Bastogne or not.

Mr. Byler

No, that was way south of us.

Mr. Misenhimer

It probably was the 82<sup>nd</sup> there. I'm not really sure.

Mr. Byler

You wanted my address.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, Sir.

Mr. Byler

750 Laposada Circle Apartment 17, Green Valley, Arizona 85614.

Mr. Misenhimer

Great, I'll need that to send this to you when we get done.

Mr. Byler

I'll tell you something else that may or may not be of help to you. I had an officer, Lieutenant Kelley, in Massachusetts and he got interested in history. And he was able to gather morning reports of practically all the time we were in combat. Someplace, I've got a copy but I just can't get around, but I'll try and get his address if you'd like to have that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure, that would be great if you could sometime.



Mr. Byler

That would tie down some of the dates that I'm not sure of.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's fine. Yes, we can do that. Or also, when this gets transcribed, we'll mail it to you to edit. So you were withdrawing there with the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps you said.

Mr. Byler

Yeah, we fell back of them when we crossed that river and then we were just there a few days and they started to push the Bulge back and at that time, I was I think attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. And that's where I was when I got in trouble.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened?

Mr. Byler

I tried to stop a German 88 shell and I did a hell of a poor job.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were wounded there, were you?

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened along that line?

Mr. Byler

Well we got up to the Rhine Plain and the Rhine Plain was just like a tabletop. You couldn't see anything. There wasn't any points for observation. I could see I'm guessing 3 to 500 yards to right under a thousand yards, and all that was there was line a of trees.

Beyond that, you couldn't see anything. So the Germans had retreated that far and they were putting down some interdiction fire and one of them hit a tree and I caught a piece of shrapnel.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did it hit you?

Mr. Byler

In the right shoulder. Went down through the top of my lung. There's a lobe where your lung comes up there and went through that and out my back. From there on, my services were one hospital to another.

Mr. Misenhimer

How large a piece of shrapnel was this?

Mr. Byler

I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

How large was the wound?

Mr. Byler

From what I've been able to see of it, it was about 3 inches. I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

A large wound then. Did this knock you unconscious did it?

Mr. Byler

No, as far as I know, I never lost consciousness. I had 4 or 5 officers there with me and several enlisted men and I was on a bank. There was a cut in the road that went from this creek, I think the name of the Creek was Erft.

Mr. Misenhimer

How quickly did the medic get to you?

Mr. Byler

Oh, we just went past an aid station 3 or 400 yards before that. They got me down, they came up with the jeep and loaded me on the hood of the jeep and we stopped at the aid station. Prior to that, the aid man had given me a shot of morphine, and the doctor there just looked at me and laid me back down on the wound where it came out my back. I think he was trying to stop some of the bleeding but it didn't do any good. Then the ambulance I was in was trying to go back when an armored division was trying to come up front. I don't know what time I got there but I was the only patient they had at the time. Then they worked on me most of the night. Then I was in the field hospital for I think 10 days and then on back to an evacuation hospital. First Hopkin and later to Brussels and then I was back in England.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of treatment did they give you there in England?

Mr. Byler

My wound, the field hospital had done an excellent job. The doctor's name was Captain Lieutenant. He had just returned from the States in which they were discussing this type of a lung injury and he had me sit up, I think I sat up for 10 days. At that time, they evacuated me back to another hospital and I was able to lay down.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you got good treatment, then?

Mr. Byler

I had excellent treatment. I can't say enough good things about them.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm assuming at that time a lot of wounded were coming in, too.

Mr. Byler

Yes, well from where we were, we were about 10 miles out of Bohn and the American troops had overrun the Germans and, what was it the Remagan Bridge?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, Ramagan Bridge, uh, huh or whatever the bridge was there.

Mr. Byler

Anyway, my battalion was the first artillery unit to cross. They were the only American Artillery on that side of the river for quite a while.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this was after you were wounded?

Mr. Byler

Yes. I only know that from talking to the fellows after it was all over.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in that hospital there in England?

Mr. Byler

I was injured on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March and I finally arrived at Fitzsimmons General Hospital in Denver, Colorado on I think it was the 10<sup>th</sup> day of June.

Mr. Misenhimer

So a little over 3 months then. When you came back to the States, was it on a ship or did they fly you back?

Mr. Byler

I was on a ship. I went in through New York. I don't know what hospital I was in there.

We were an evacuation hospital and I went by train from there to Colorado.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of treatment were you getting at this point?

Mr. Byler

I never had anything but the very best of treatment.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it physical therapy, or what kind of treatment were they doing? Were they still treating the wound?

Mr. Byler

Just treating my wounds and giving me transfusions when I needed them. I didn't get any physical therapy until I got to Denver. There, I did get physical therapy. I did some on my own while we were in England. When I got back to England, I got back there I think it was on my birthday, which is the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, they set the cot down on the floor alongside of the bed and I had been sitting up in that bed for 10 days and by God, I wanted to lay down. And I got up off of that cot and got into bed.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm assuming you lost quite a bit of blood. Is that right?

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So they had to give you several transfusions?

Mr. Byler

Well if I remember correctly, I think my medical records showed that I had 7 pints of cold blood and 3500cc of blood plasma.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, man! That's quite a bit. Were you able to regain the use of that arm?

Mr. Byler

Yes, for a long time I couldn't but I kept at it. I had a lot of pain while I was getting over it, and I asked a doctor one time, I said "How long is that pain gonna last?" He said, "About 40 years." One day, I woke up and I realized that I didn't have any pain and I got to thinking by golly it had been about 40 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it affect your lung very much?

Mr. Byler

I don't think so. No doubt it did.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there in the hospital there at Fitzsimmons?

Mr. Byler

Until I was released at the end of the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you released?

Mr. Byler

As I recall, it was about the 30<sup>th</sup> of November I went home, and I had about 3 months of accumulated leave and I took that. And I was finally released I think the 1<sup>st</sup> of March of '46.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's when you were released from the Army, March 1 of '46?

Mr. Byler

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you stay in the Reserves?

Mr. Byler

No, they wouldn't have me anymore.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you given a certain amount of disability then?

Mr. Byler

I was retired for disability.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you got retirement at that point then.

Mr. Byler

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had been in for 14, 15 years, something like that, 12 years?

Mr. Byler

Well when they retired me, they also promoted me. They promoted me to Colonel and retired me at the same time.

Mr. Misenhimer

To full Colonel?

Mr. Byler

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you a couple of questions. In May of '45, Germany surrendered. Of course, you were in the hospital in England at that point I'm assuming.

Mr. Byler

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all hear about it and did you have any kind of a celebration or anything?

Mr. Byler

I was in the hospital and I don't recall there was any celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then in August of '45, Japan surrendered. You were in Denver at that point. Have any kind of a celebration then or anything?

Mr. Byler

My wife was visiting me at that time and we took a cab and went downtown. That's about all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were overseas, could you get your mail with any regularity?



Mr. Byler

Yes, I wasn't one to write letters though. So I didn't get a great deal of mail.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Byler

I got, on that breakthrough at St. Lo, remember I said I had a Battery that was attached to an artillery unit? An armored unit?

Mr. Misenhimer

Right.

Mr. Byler

One of the officers came back and he handed me what they called a P38, which was an officer's handgun 9mm, and I got home with that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Byler

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have an experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Byler

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Byler

I got a lot of medals for different units. I got a Purple Heart, a got a Bronze Star. The battalion was given a Presidential, what was it, Citation?

Mr. Misenhimer

It was a Presidential Unit Citation I think they called it.

Mr. Byler

Our battalion received a French Croix D'Guerre, and a Belgium Croix D'Guerre. That's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any Battle Stars?

Mr. Byler

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many did you get?

Mr. Byler

I think there's 4 or 5 on one of the ribbons. I'm sitting here looking at it but it's about half a room away from me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Being in the artillery, you did not get the Combat Infantry Man's Badge. Is that right?

Mr. Byler

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there any time when your unit actually fought as infantry?

Mr. Byler

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the range on the 155 Howitzer?

Mr. Byler

As I recall, around 17 to 18,000 yards.

Mr. Misenhimer

8 or 9 miles, something like that. When you pulled into somewhere, how long did it take to set it up and start firing?

Mr. Byler

I can't tell you. It wasn't very long.

Mr. Misenhimer

Less than an hour?

Mr. Byler

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned something about a split-tailed gun. What is that?

Mr. Byler

Well on an artillery piece, when they fire the first round, there's a spade on the end of the...I don't know what they call it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, that tail piece or whatever they call it there. right, okay. I know what you mean.

Mr. Byler

155 Howitzers, that was split and so you ended up with 2.

Mr. Misenhimer

And so when you fired it, it would drive that into the ground. Is that right?

Mr. Byler

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

And so then to move it, like you say, you could not rotate it to fire different directions very easily.

Mr. Byler

No, because you had to pick it up and move it over. You could only move the Howitzer on its axle so far and then beyond that, you had to get the trail up and move it. It was a lot of work.

Mr. Misenhimer

How large was the projectile? How heavy was it, what did it weigh, the projectile?

Mr. Byler

100 pounds.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now on a 155, is the projectile and the powder charge separate?

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You used a powder bag. Is that right?

Mr. Byler

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else do you recall about your time in the Service? Have you all had any reunions since you got out?

Mr. Byler

They've had one every year for the past 15, 20 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you attended many of those?

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill when you got home?

Mr. Byler

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Byler

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you had been married how long when you got out then?

Mr. Byler

I was married in '38 and I got out in '46.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had been married about 8 years.

Mr. Byler

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the various officers you had over you?

Mr. Byler

I was fortunate. I had good officers. Most of them were National Guard.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were under the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army for a while. Did you ever meet Patton or get close to him?

Mr. Byler

I met him.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was he like?

Mr. Byler

He was about 6 foot 4 and like an iron post. He was all soldier. I admired him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who was the commanding general of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army?

Mr. Byler

I can't tell you.

Mr. Misenhimer

And those are the only 2 you were under, the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup>?

Mr. Byler

Yeah, and I was under the Airborne Corps and they just picked me up I think probably for rations.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall about your time in the Service? You were saying that some of the units got new vehicles that were track-laying?

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what happened there? I missed that.

Mr. Byler

They couldn't maneuver in the snow and ice, so when they went to go up the hill, they just spun their wheels and slid on into the ditch.

Mr. Misenhimer

But your 6X6 could make it you say?

Mr. Byler

I had put an extra set of wheels or tires on the front so that I had 6 wheels on the ground and they all had chains on them. I ended up pulling a lot of units up the hill and out of trouble. I also brought out a number of vehicles and a lot of trailers that were, I don't know what they had in them, but they were infantry and artillery pieces.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of clothing did you have during the Battle of the Bulge? Did you have warm clothing?

Mr. Byler

Yes. We had primarily GI clothes. I had a pair of tank boots that I had bought. I had a tank jacket I had on when I was injured and the corpsman just took a pair of scissors and ran up the sleeve and ruined them.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand quite a few of the infantrymen did not have enough warm clothing. Do you know anything about that?

Mr. Byler

I don't know about that. I had a good supply officer and I know that he saw that we had plenty of food and plenty of clothing. I also brought out an extra 155 Howitzer that had been sent into maintenance for repair of some kind, and it was in there when the Germans were about to run us over, so I just sent a truck down, pulled it out.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the closest the Germans got to you?

Mr. Byler

I can't answer that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Less than a mile?

Mr. Byler

I had a warrant officer that went after the mail and he was killed. I had a forward observer that got a rifle shot in the middle of his forehead. We didn't have any hand-to-hand combat that I know of.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many casualties did your unit take?



Mr. Byler

I can't answer that either. I'm guessing 6 or 8.

Mr. Misenhimer

Not a large percentage then.

Mr. Byler

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, good.

Mr. Byler

I had some forward observers that got shot.

Mr. Misenhimer

They're very vulnerable up there.

Mr. Byler

Yeah. I know one lieutenant that I thought a lot of, he got a piece of mortar shell in his back. I often wondered what happened to him. I learned here within the last year that he had died.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you have these reunions, do you have quite a few people show up?

Mr. Byler

Oh, yes, and one of the first ones was in Portland, Oregon. That's where the bulk of my men came from. We had 2 in Indianapolis, Indiana. We had one down at Cherokee Village in the Smokies. We had one up close to WestPoint. We had another one in Oregon, and I think we had one in Oklahoma. I wasn't able to go to all of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this was the 965<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, right?

Mr. Byler

965.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, 965 FA. Now when you got out of the Army, did you move back to Indiana?

Mr. Byler

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And went to work for I&M, huh?

Mr. Byler

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

All right. I want to thank you for the time you've taken to give this interview today, and thank you for your service during World War II.

Mr. Byler

Okay.

Transcribed by  
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