

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR  
(ADMIRAL NIMITZ MUSEUM)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Roy L. McIlvain, Sr.**

**Medaryville, Indiana**

**May 26, 2006**

**Summer of 1944**

**F-Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 385<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment,  
76<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division 3rd Army**

**B.A.R. Man**

**Wounded in Right Elbow**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is May 26, 2006. I am interviewing Mr. Roy L. McIlvain, Sr. at his home at 15418 West 150 North, Medaryville, Indiana 47957. His phone number is area code 219-843-3401. 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.

Mr. Misenhimer

Roy I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Let me ask you first, what is your birth date?

Mr. McIlvain

My birth date is January 30, 1921.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. McIlvain

I was born in Hartford, Kansas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. McIlvain

I had three brothers and three sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. McIlvain

No, they worked in the Boeing Airplane Plant in Wichita, Kansas. My youngest brother

was in the Navy for four years.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that after World War II?

Mr. McIlvain

Me and him went over to Rensselaer to sign up when the Japs hit Pearl Harbor on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December. He passed and I didn't. He went into the Navy and I was rejected on account of my eyes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So he was in the Navy during World War II?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he come home from the war?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes and he only got one finger smashed when they dropped a deep freeze lid on it. He was a cook on a ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were your mother and father's first names?

Mr. McIlvain

My mother's first name was Bessie Dolly Chambers. That was her maiden name.

Mr. Misenhimer

And your father's first name?

Mr. Misenhimer

My father was Clarence Clemens McIlvain.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. McIlvain

My father was a farmer. He lived on an 80 acre farm my Grandfather homesteaded in Hartford, Kansas. We lived there. He died when I was ten years old. So I lived without a father. We were having a pretty rough time of it because there were seven of us kids and my mother was due to have the last one that she had one month after my dad died. He was 35 I believe when he died. He was out putting in an orchard in April and he died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April with pneumonia. In those days we didn't have too much use for doctors. The doctor came out with a buggy. We lived ten miles from the closest town. The doctor, when he would come out; we didn't dig in our pocket to get money out, he had a crate on his buggy and we would maybe catch an old hen and put it in the crate or give him a couple dozen eggs. That's how we paid him. It was hard to get him to ride out there ten miles with a horse and a buggy when you were sick. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. McIlvain

Well with my dad being dead; Herbert Hoover was in as President at that time; that was pretty hard times. Then along came Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When he got in there he put in the WPA. My mother worked on the WPA and that's how she fed us kids. Our house burnt in the country. After our house burned we moved to Emporia. She worked

fixing pancakes for the transits on the Santa Fe Railroad. That's the way she made a living. Some of the people said, "I wouldn't walk six blocks up there, away from home, among all of them railroad bums. You are apt to get killed." If anybody had hurt her, one of those railroad bums would have killed him. (laugh) She fixed them pancakes in the morning and then they were allowed to stay overnight at the jail and the next morning they had to hit the rods and go back. That's the way she made a living for us kids and we got commodities from the government to help us along like milk and sugar and essentials like that. That was practically the way I lived. If it hadn't have been for that we would have probably starved to death because she had all those kids. She was a country girl herself. She came from down by Boswell.

Mr. Misenhimer

Here in Indiana?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes and my granddad came from Cincinnati, Ohio. He was a tailor in Cincinnati, Ohio and went to Kansas and homesteaded and gave each one of his boys and girls an 80 acre farm. We lived on an 80 acre farm. On that 80 acre farm there was an Indian burial ground and he wouldn't even let us touch a rock there. We never moved nothing off of that Indian burial grave. I don't know whether it's still that way or not but he had respect for them. The Prairie Pipeline went through our farm. Of course there were buffalo wallows there and where it went through a buffalo wallow it would be thin. I know he used to go out there and hammer and tap the rust on the pipe on the oil line and then it would leak. They would pay damages and that would pay the taxes. (laugh) Of course we were just a little bit north of the Flint Hills in the Oil Country. Then after we moved to

Emporia I went to school in Emporia at the Kansas Avenue School until I was 16. When I was 16 I quit school and went to work for my room and board for different farmers. Then being as my mother was from out here when they went back to Kansas, her oldest brother stayed at Rensselaer. His name was George Chambers. She came out to visit him and she met a fellow at Rensselaer by the name of Charlie Ray. She wrote back and forth to him and then he came out there and they got married. Along came the Dust Bowl and the grasshoppers. You could stand on the street and you couldn't see the people standing on the other side of the street; it was so dusty. It was worse than the fog because with a fog when you turned your headlights on you could see a little bit in the fog; but you couldn't see in the dust. You would go out and shine a light on the ground and couldn't see what was down there; the headlights just didn't show. In the Dust Bowl in southwestern Kansas cars would be going down the road and the sand in the west, we had gumbo clay there around Hartford and Emporia and through there, but where the sand was the cars would be going down the road and they would draw that air in from outside and it would draw that sand in and just grind the bearings out of the car and grind the pistons out and they would just leave it set because they had to overhaul the whole motor. They would just leave them sitting on the side of the road and go on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you all able to keep the farm; or did you lose the farm?

Mr. McIlvain

When my granddad homesteaded out there, he homesteaded and built him a cabin. Then a fellow by the name of Gashie, but I can't remember the old man's name, the ones that I knew were Grover and Dan, they came in there in a covered wagon. They were down in

the woods in a covered wagon and they got the flu. At that time the flu was killing them off like flies. So my granddad took them in and they stayed in his cabin. They all lived in his cabin. Then they homesteaded that. His son was my mother's insurance agent. When our house burned he got her, her insurance money so when she went to Emporia she bought a house with the money she got for the farm.

Mr. Misenhimer

She sold the farm?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. Then she traded the land off for a house. That's where we lived in Emporia, on Union Street.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mr. McIlvain

I went into the service on January 10, 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back. On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall where you were when you heard about that?

Mr. McIlvain

No I don't remember just exactly where I was because I got around quite a bit before that.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was on a Sunday afternoon.

Mr. McIlvain

I imagine I was probably either at the milk plant or at the restaurant uptown.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you heard it, how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. McIlvain

Well we decided that we were training with broomsticks so if they had come into California instead of Pearl Harbor we would have probably been overtaken just a little bit because it's pretty hard to kill a man with a broomstick. If you knock him in the head with a broomstick, it ain't much to knock them in the head with. We went over and signed up and he passed and I didn't because I had one eye that was 12-200. I had gotten that from cutting overgrown hedges along a fence and it left a scar on my eye. But like I said, we never went to a doctor too much. It made my eye blurry for a while but then I found out when I went there that I wouldn't make it in.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your brother you said went into the Navy?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you drafted later?

Mr. McIlvain

I worked at the cheese factory up here and I was transferred to Momence, Illinois and I ran a condensing pan for the Holloway Candy Company and made condensed milk for Holloway Candy. Then I quit there and I went up to the ammunition plant in Kingsbury; the Kingsbury Ordnance Plant. I had to sign a voucher that if anything happened to me during my time up there due to my left eye, my insurance was no good. So then I came

back and worked at the milk plant. I was drafted in 1941 I think and I didn't pass the draft. I was drafted again in 1942 and I missed it then. Then I was drafted again in 1943 and they put me in 1-B limited service. When I was put in 1-B limited service I was not supposed to go overseas. I was just supposed to be in the service. Then I passed that. First when I signed up for that, for the draft, George B. Logan up here was the trustee and he was working on the draft board. When he put my name down he put two L's in it instead of one and I told him, "George that's not my right name. My name has only got one L in it." He said, "They spelled it wrong." I said, "On my birth certificate it's only got one L." He said, "The doctor probably made a mistake." (laugh) Do you know I couldn't get any mail from my brother in the Navy that four years he was there because when it came to my outfit he sent it with one L and according to my records I had two L's; I didn't get any mail. So I had a hard time getting any communications from him. Then I went into the service and I took out an allotment for my mother because I was partly attached to that. I got married in 1944 and I had to take out an allotment for my wife. She worked in a garment factory. I drew \$16 across the table and the rest of them at home were making that much a day, and I was making that much a month. (laugh) At Kingsbury they made pretty good money. She worked in Kingsbury a lot.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where did you take your basic training?

Mr. McIlvain

When I was drafted I went to Camp Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis. I was down there two days. I got put on KP of course which was a good deal because you got something to eat that way. You were assured of food in the kitchen. I got the job of cleaning the great

big copper kettle out. It was a great big thing. I thought, "Well they just cooked spinach in that it shouldn't be too hard to clean." So I opened up the valve on the bottom and drained all the water out of it. Then I thought, "I'll have to get up there and kind of rinse it out." I got up there and that thing was half full of egg shells. They had cooked the spinach in the egg shells. (laugh)I don't know what it was like, to boil the egg in water and then put the spinach in it too. I got sent out of there into Washington, D.C. I was put in a tent city right across from the Washington Monument on the Potomac River. Of course me being a country boy, I had never been away from home too far, besides coming out here; I got pneumonia. The old Sergeant was raising hell with me because I couldn't tell which was my right and which was my left so they made me carry a rock in my right hand so I would know which one was right. I went maybe 20 or 30 minutes before I passed out. When I passed out they put me in the ambulance and took me to Walter Reed General Hospital there in Washington, D.C. That was in February and Roosevelt's birthday was the same day as mine. They were having a birthday party for him and there were a whole bunch of movie stars there. I'm in the hospital and I was sitting on the floor over there and who came walking in my door but Roy Rogers. He came up and pulled up his legs sat down beside me and we talked there for probably two or three hours. He seemed to be just a regular fellow but since it was the President's birthday and mine was the same day as his they were over there. That's the reason why I happened to remember that. I got out of there and I was supposed to come home on a fifteen day delay en route. I had fifteen days to get from Walter Reed General Hospital over to the Potomac River by the Pentagon Building which didn't take very long so I came home. You can go any place you want to on a fifteen day delay en route. I came

home and I was supposed to have no excitement. She used to work at the garment factory and it was uptown here. Me with no excitement; that place was on fire. I had a brother-in-law that was on the fire department. Of course coffee was rationed and everything like that. It was in the winter and it was real cold. The fellow that ran the Peak Café took them booze; a bottle or two to keep them warm because their toes were freezing right off. They went around through the town and picked up; coffee was rationed, so he picked up a little coffee from each place and made coffee to help keep them warm. He went up to get a cup of coffee and the old woman that was pouring the coffee, old Mrs. Clark, she said, "We don't serve drunks." That really chapped him. (laugh) He got it into pop bottles. My wife came in and she said, "You stay away from him. He's wild." My wife walked up and was talking to him. Then while the garment factory was burning there was a bunch of kids in a car which ended up being my sister-in-law and others I knew real well. They were crossing the railroad track at the main street and they were looking at the fire and got hit by the train. So if that wasn't exciting enough then the girl that I used to run around with before, died. If that wasn't excitement. It just seemed to go that way but I lived through it. I didn't get excited and I went back. I hadn't had any basic training because I had passed out before basic training ever started. I went back and I was a Corporal. I had never had basic training. They put me on duty and I was out walking guard duty and with no basic training I just carried my gun like I was out rabbit hunting. My weapon, I called it my gun. I was just walking around that way and along came a Sergeant. I knew I was supposed to be; we had telephones at different places. Every time I saw that light coming I would either rush to get to the next stop or stay at the back stop. Finally the Sergeant caught up with me and said, "I don't know what you are doing, but you are supposed to

be out there walking. The Officer of the Day was out there checking on you and he couldn't find you anyplace." I would either stay here or go down to the next one. Finally he caught me and took me off of guard. I never had training for guard; I didn't know how to handle a rifle; I didn't know how to salute with a gun. All I knew was how to rabbit hunt back home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever get basic training then?

Mr. McIlvain

No. I stayed in Washington D. C. for a little over a year on the Washington Defense; a searchlight outfit. That was right between the Pentagon Building and the National Cemetery. I stayed there for a little over a year; maybe a year and two months; something like that. I still hadn't had any basic training. From there I went to West Falls Church, Virginia on a searchlight outfit. I was out there working on the searchlight. You know that old searchlight you could take it; I mean radar, you could take your ballpoint pen up and down like that and sparks would fly from static electricity but it looked like it was going to kill you. We used to have a lot of fun with that.

Mr. Misenhimer

So that was radar not searchlight then?

Mr. McIlvain

It was radar and searchlight. The searchlight was hooked up to the radar. You would set the binoculars back from here to that tractor out there and push a button and the radar would swing around to it. Or you could set the radar on that and push the button and the searchlight would swing. I was out there one day with the radar all torn to pieces. The

Lieutenant came around and said to the Sergeant, "Get that man off of that radar because he ain't supposed to be on it. He don't know what he's doing." He said, "But don't move him until he gets it back together. If he takes it apart he'll put it back together. If it worked before he started and it will work after." They left me there at West Falls Church, Virginia. From there I went back into Fort Meyer I guess and from there I went to Maryland. I wasn't in Baltimore but I was close to Baltimore. Beltsville, Maryland. I was in the searchlight outfit out there. That was right close to Springs Airbase. There were student pilots flying out of Camp Springs. When they would fly out and come back into the city; come back into Washington, D.C. they couldn't tell where the airport was, there were so many lights they didn't know where the airport was. So we had to get up at maybe 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning and go out and set up our searchlight towards the airport and flash it back and forth and another outfit did the same thing so they would cross where the airport was. We would get mad because they would get us up at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. So then when they were flying around up there in the daytime we would take that big 60 inch mirror from that searchlight and reflect it into their faces so they couldn't see where they were going. This was just a little area maybe an acre that we were in. You could hear those planes come through hedge hopping. When we heard one of them coming through, there he would be down in the trees. When you were out in the field you had better hit the ground because I believe I felt the breeze of that thing down my back. (laugh) We would be shining in their faces with the searchlight. So when they would buzz us that make us that much madder and we would get them again.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of an airplane was it do you know?

Mr. McIlvain

I think most of them were fighters; F4U and stuff like that. They were fighters and that was where they trained.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your searchlight outfit, were you antiaircraft? Is that what the searchlights were for?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. We used to go through the city of Washington, D.C. and never stop. It didn't make any difference if there were stoplights, stop signs or what. We put a fellow in the front seat with the driver with a rifle and drive through. We would go all the way through. If a cop stopped you that was 'secret equipment'. So if a cop stopped you he wasn't allowed to look in there to see what you had. You could go through there with an empty truck and never stop for nothing; not even the cops because it was a secret deal, radar and stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have antiaircraft guns there too?

Mr. McIlvain

No. Heavy artillery had the antiaircraft guns. All we had were the searchlights.

Mr. Misenhimer

If you had seen an enemy airplane what would you have done?

Mr. McIlvain

We may have done them just like we did when we had target place. You know when they were dragging that sleeve through the air behind the airplane. Why shoot at the dadgum sleeve, you aren't going to bother anything up there; shoot the airplane. When we shot the turret off of a B-26 (laugh) they took notice and they said, "We're going around and

checking all the ammunition.” We had so much live ammunition and so much spent ammunition. We took the live ammunition that we had extra and buried it in the ditch so they wouldn’t find that. So they didn’t know who was shooting the airplane and who was shooting the sleeve. They would hit the cable and release the sleeve.

Mr. Misenhimer

How close were you to the antiaircraft guns with your searchlight? Were you close to them?

Mr. McIlvain

I don’t know just how far away we were because all we did was check. That building out there, if you had the radar turned on and hit that building with the radar you would lose it. That’s the way they used that little paper you know? (Window.) They would toss that paper and it would lift your radar up because you picked that up instead of the plane. In one of those places we had what they called rabbit ears. Two big horns here and one big horn here and you could hear them in your ears. We had a nightclub right close by and do you know we could turn that thing around and listen to that nightclub. We could hear the people talking over there. You had best not go out to that nightclub and get your girl and go out there get to talking to her because we could hear everything you were saying to her. (laugh) We always called them Mickey Mouse because they had two big ears.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was designed to listen for airplanes, right?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes that’s what it was really for. But now in our searchlight outfit we had that set up so that if we had the radar on the plane it would flip around on it. Of course the binoculars

were a lot stronger than these. All you did was push a button and the searchlight would get on to that spot and so would the binoculars get on to that spot. When they got on that spot you had pretty good close tab on them. One time we set it on the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge. That's where the naval station was. There is a big golf course out there. We used to see these Navy guys in their whites. You could see them in the dark. We would set these binoculars on them because we couldn't get the radar on them but we could get the binoculars on them. We would push a button and that searchlight would swing around. They would go to that golf course and when they would find a bush, they would hide down in that bush. We would put the binoculars on there and whenever they got right interested we would push the button and that searchlight would swing around like this and you know you could read a newspaper ten miles away. (laugh) We would put that searchlight right on them. (laugh) I will tell you one that was funny. What we were to do was to guard the city of Washington, D.C. We would sometimes catch a bus into town. Sometimes we would walk but we got the habit in Washington, D. C.; there were soldiers everywhere from Generals to Buck Privates. When we would go to town we would salute the first officer we came to. From then on, we saluted nothing above him. We used to get in some of the most awful trouble. (laugh) We used to go down to the Marine station and we would salute the Marines and they had to salute us back. All we were doing was walking around and saluting those Marines. They would get mad at us. We said they had to have something to do in the service, so they could salute us back. (laugh) From there I went into Charlotte. No, not Charlotte, but I don't remember. It was right close to Camp Lejeune, that Marine base down there.

Mr. Misenhimer

In North Carolina?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes in North Carolina. We went down there and we took the radar equipment. Of course it was all secret stuff. We took it in all covered up. That was down in the hills. Some people didn't even have curtains on the windows. There were big houses and a few dirt roads. The colored girls used to ride the cows to church. We pulled into there in the day time and that was all covered up. At night we uncovered it and checked it out. We took that searchlight and turned it 180 degrees out. We turned the light on and pressed the button and of course it went around to the radar. As it went around to the radar we flashed through those houses and nearly scared those people to death. They didn't know what was happening. They hadn't had anything in there like radar or a big searchlight. (laugh) They thought the world was going to end. We used to do that all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

What outfit was this? Did it have a number or a name?

Mr. McIlvain

It was just Washington, D.C. but I don't know as I know if we had another name or what people called us.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there in North Carolina?

Mr. McIlvain

We were there for probably a month; long enough that we could go swimming. We went to Wilmington. We used to dig up those sand crabs. We didn't have bathing suits so we

would put one pair of shorts on forwards and the other pair on backwards (laugh) and we would go swimming out on the beach. We would dig those things up and the girls would be sitting up there on the beach. Those things had six legs on them and they could run sideways, forwards, backwards; just whichever way they took the notion. We used to scare the heck out of those girls. We would dig those sand crabs up and away they would go, running after those girls. There were some girls that came up there and they hadn't been to the ocean very much. They waded out and they took hold of their dress tails and waded and the waves would come up and they would raise their dress tails up a little farther. Pretty soon a big wave came in and the pulled them clear up over their heads and the water from the waves came up over their heads. (laugh) We would just stand out there and laugh and make them mad. I got out there one time and was sitting on the beach and had my back towards the water. A big wave came in like that and when it went back I got caught in the undertow and went out under the undertow and I came up on the other side of the lifeguard that was out there on a little surfboard. He was giving me heck. I said, "I can't help it if I came out here. I never came up until I was on the other side of you." We were down there for quite a while and then came back. From there I got shipped out by it seems to me like it was by a railroad. I came through Lookout Mountain in Tennessee and we weren't supposed to get off the train. We didn't have to get off the train anyway because they sold enough White Lightning at the windows. All you had to do was open a window and get you a bottle of White Lightning. Then that troop train; came up through Tennessee and crossed Kentucky, then up through Illinois and we went into Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. I got set up there and I went into that and relieved two fellows from Teft. One's name was Cotton Jones and the other one's name was, Jim Stonebreaker. Jim

Stonebreaker and Cotton Jones from over at Teft were up there. I trained troops and myself at the same time. I still had never had any basic training. So I was up there training troops and learning what I could myself. We were up there for a long while; I don't remember just how long I was up there. Then I got called out and went from there to New Jersey. We shipped out of New Jersey on the *Sea Owl*. It was a little cargo ship. We got aboard that cargo ship and they took the cargo hatch and covered it over with planks and put canvas over it. We started out and our company commander decided that we needed some calisthenics so he got us up on that platform and we did the side-straddle-hop. Jump as high up as you could and clap your hands above your head and then ten feet later you come back down and maybe you hit the landing and maybe you didn't. Maybe you came back down the side of it. The old skipper of the ship came out there and made him quit that. He said, "You're going to kill somebody." You would jump up as high as you could and the ship would go down and you may be ten feet in the air when you got ready to come back down. (laugh). You may miss the cargo hatch and go down another four feet after that. We got into a storm on that little thing. We were headed for England and they don't have too many storms in the Atlantic but this time we hit a bad storm in the Atlantic.

Mr. Misenhimer

What time of year did you go over there? Do you know when you left to go over there?

Mr. McIlvain

No, not exactly but it was in warm weather.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this in 1944 or 1945?

Mr. McIlvain

This was in 1944, near the last of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was warm, so late summer of 1944?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. We went to Southampton, England. From Southampton, England I went to Bournemouth, England. That was a resort town. According to what they said, the United States paid them hotel bills for those places. They didn't have beds in them they had beds made out of 2 X 4's with hog wire across it and straw mattresses and we were paying hotel bills for that. (laugh) The United States was goofy for paying that. I stayed there for quite a while. We had chances to go into London and stuff like that. We weren't far from London but I figured, well I've been in Chicago and it probably wouldn't be a bit different from London so I never went to London. I had a hard time understanding English because in England we talk Americanish, American and they talk English. You could hardly tell what they were talking about. I would talk about the farm. When I left the state of Kansas we had combines out there, 24' combines and here in Indiana they had 6' combines, which looked like kids out there playing with their toys. This farm kid told me that they used to have to cut this by hand, the oats and wheat by hand. But now they had this modern equipment that cuts it, ties it and bundles it right in the field. That stuff was sitting in the junk pile at home. (laugh) That was the kind of farming they had there. The people treated us pretty nice the only thing was if you would go down to the pub to get you a few beers, then you had to take a tin can with you because if you took a glass somebody would bust it and then you couldn't drink until you got something to put

it in so we would just take cans from the kitchen. *(tape side ended)*

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had to take tin cans for your beer?

Mr. McIlvain

We had to take cans. If you didn't have anything to drink it out of, you couldn't get any beer. If somebody broke your glass you had to have a tin can so that they couldn't break it and you could get beer. One night I got too much. I was out in the alley and this, we always called them Limey's, came along and he said to me, "I say old chap; maybe it would help you if you threw up." I stuck my finger down my throat and I didn't even gag. He said, "I say old chap, you're not a human." I said, "I'm as human as they've got 'em; I just can't throw up. There ain't no use throwing up because if I did I would just have to go in there and refill it and it would just cost me that much more." I had quite a bit of fun there in England.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you take your radar and stuff over there with you or what did you take?

Mr. McIlvain

No. I was in the Infantry from the time I went to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. That was the 76<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. From Southampton, England I think we went to Plymouth and then we went back to Southampton again and then we went across to France. We went across to Le Havre, France. The boat we had didn't carry too much water. It was a ferry boat that they haul horses on and the water level was pretty near the deck level. The English Channel had little bitty waves, about like a swimming pool. We went across to Le Havre. From Le Havre we caught a train and went on deeper into France. Then we

took a truck convoy and went on across France because the Germans were clear back into Belgium by then. Of course before we got into France the Americans had bombed the Germans because the Germans were in Le Havre. After we got out of there we had to carry our guns back with us. I carried a BAR in the Infantry. One shoulder hung behind the other one because that BAR was heavy. We got over there into Belgium. We went across through France in a convoy; through Paris and into Luxembourg. We went into Belgium and when I was over in Belgium by then it was winter time. My boots were frozen with mud on them. We stopped at a house and there was a woman that came out there and they had an old wood stove like we had here with an oven on it and stuff. She took me into the house; took my frozen boots off and put my feet up on the oven door the way we used to do at home; took my socks off and stood and rubbed my feet until I got warmed up; dried my socks out in the oven; dried my shoes out in the oven. Rest her old soul, that's what she did. I always liked them pretty well because they spoke English. They taught English in school and they could speak English as good as we could. Then I stayed there in Belgium by the Saar River all winter until pretty near spring.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get involved in the Battle of the Bulge?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. That's where we were going; into the Battle of the Bulge. We jumped off in February and crossed the Saar River into Germany into the Siegfried Line. I did a lot of going through the Siegfried Line. I ended up, I remember one time I hadn't eaten for three days. I had crawled through the communication trenches between the pillboxes in the Siegfried Line. You crawled through everything there, bugs, human waste and

everything. I finally got a K-ration, which is a ration in a box about like we used to get as kids as crackerjacks. It had cheese and crackers and I forget what else it had in it; not too much. I hadn't eaten in three days and I had that all over my hands; human waste all over my hands but I had a new pair of gloves in my back pocket. I told the Sergeant, "Take my gloves out of my back pocket." And I held my hands out and I said, "Put them on my hands." So he put my clean gloves on my hands because it was too dadgum cold to wash them. That's the way I ate that K-ration after three days. (laugh) That was on the Siegfried Line. I didn't get very far in the Siegfried Line until I got hit; shot in this elbow, the right elbow.

Mr. Misenhimer

I can see a scar there.

Mr. McIlvain

They took the skin off my leg in two spots and cut it in four pieces and laid it down there like they were patching an old pair of pants. They sewed it on there and when they took it off, it was full of puss; it was awful.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you get hit by?

Mr. McIlvain

I was walking through the woods where I had been the day before and the woods were full of briars and sticks and bushes and stuff. I was following this path. This cotton-picking German had dug him a foxhole back behind there and got rid of the dirt. I got about five feet from him and he raised up and shot. I carried that BAR and I always fired it like a rifle. I fired it from the hip. When I wanted to cover an area I would turn it over

sideways. I could turn it right side up, I could turn it like this; if you turn it sideways it would go off like this; I could make a bush look like it went through a lawnmower with that BAR.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you got him did you?

Mr. McIlvain

No. When I was a kid, if my mother would kill a chicken and I saw the blood I would pass out. I had grenades around my waist. I could have taken a grenade out and tossed it in there because he just raised up and shot me and went back down. My hand straightened out like this. I could have taken my left hand and pulled one of them out and pulled the pin out and tossed it in there but he might have tossed it back and I might have passed out before I got it all the way down there. So I never tried that. My rifle dropped down like this and I held it with my left hand. I just turned around and walked away. I got maybe 20 feet and there was a shell hole there and I got down in the shell hole and took my 12 pills and my canteen of water and then I took my trench knife. I always kept my trench knife sharp like a razor. I took my trench knife and cut my sleeve off here. I pulled it down the center and it looked just like a hamburger laying there in the sleeve of my jacket. I got through that without passing out. So then I crawled out of there and started out across a plowed field. While I was going across this plowed field, a machine gun was over here with the Germans shooting at me. Pht, pht, pht; all around me. There was a bunch of fellows over here; our fellows was over here with a machine gun nest and they kept hollering, "Turn and come over here. Turn and come over here." I thought, "If I turn over there I'm going to draw that machine gun fire into there." And the way they were

shooting at me, they were missing me and maybe they don't know where they are. So I went straight on until I came to the first pillbox. Those pillboxes were like this you know and they had a door here that you could go into them and come out here and then out here there was a shield across here. But there were 18 pounds of TNT sitting inside that door. Every time I would come out here to open this door, it would go across it. So I thought I better not hit that. So the only thing I knew to do to get the door open; there was a communication wire that went over the top of that door. I got hold of that and I pulled the door open but I broke the communication wire. When I broke the communication wire the communication officer over here couldn't use his phone anymore so he came to check on it. When he came to check on it he found me in that pillbox.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he an American or German?

Mr. McIlvain

American. As I went in there was a fellow there with his helmet caved in this way to his head and you couldn't get it off. I drug him inside and we were both in there when this officer came up. I don't know what they did with him but they put me on a jeep and got me out of there. I went back to Bar-le-Duc, France which was about 100 miles back. I'm getting ahead of myself. When we went into the Siegfried Line, that was when I came back that I met General Patton. I don't remember if it was when I was first up there or when I was there the second time because I went back after Bar-le-Duc, France to the front.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about meeting Patton.

Mr. McIlvain

We were in a convoy of trucks. We had colored drivers on the trucks. They were, I guess, pretty good drivers. When they heard the first round fired, they quit and that was it. We were going up through there and they heard this tank. A fellow was sticking up out of the hatch about this far; waist high; with pearl handled pistols and he flagged us down. He said, "Where are you going with them?" They said, "We're going up to the front line." He said, "I'll tell you what. You turn the trucks around and you take them back." He said, "Hell them men are damned near dead right now. Take them back to the rear because you are five miles back of the line." In the process of turning around the truck drivers practically tore all of the trucks up. Some of them would run and some of them didn't. The ones that did run pulled the ones that didn't and they finally got us back out of there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were behind the enemy lines at that point?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. That's where Patton was;. Old Blood and Guts. When you were with him, you were with him and that was it. He was right there with you. He was back of the front lines himself in a tank. He said if he had enough trucks to haul the dog tags back he could end that war in two weeks. (laugh) We had to walk every place we went. I always called myself a belly bomber because every place I went I was on my belly in the mud and the dry and the mud and everything else you know. I was a belly bomber because that was the way we fought. We couldn't ride too much because Patton's tanks had to have fuel and if they didn't get the fuel up there we couldn't go. So whenever we could we would jump on Patton's tanks. You were supposed to come up behind the tank and take a telephone

and call the driver and have him stop and all that stuff but he wouldn't stop anyway if you did call him. Ed Nielson over there, he was a tank driver. He said, "You don't stop for nothing." He said, "When you stop you are a still target. If you keep moving you can keep out of their sights." We used to just run up behind it and get on the track. When they are going that track goes up like this, you just jump on that track and ride up. When you get up on the tank you jump off onto the tank. When you get ready to get off you just step out on the tread and jump off. You don't have him stop and let you off because he won't stop and let you off. If he had everyone to get off you wouldn't have got up there to start with. That's the way you rode the tanks. Unless we caught something like that we didn't move very far. I'll go back; I skipped over some of it. When I was in France I went snow blind from the bright sunshine on the snow. I went snow blind and I couldn't see where I was going so I got out of the formation and got lost. A jeep came along and I knew it was an American jeep because of the way they were talking. So I got on it and went with them and they took me to their company, but they wouldn't feed me at their company because I wasn't one of their men. I had to get something to eat somewhere and I had my BAR so I would walk into a restaurant, a club, anything I could get a sandwich from. Over there in Germany you didn't get too much of a sandwich. It was just a piece of dry bread with grease on it; that's about all it was. I would go in and get me that and get me some beer to wash it down and soften it up a bit. I always just dropped my BAR down like this and nobody ever said who's going to pay for this or nothing. They knew better than to talk about paying. I would just walk out. Then I got over there in that Siegfried Line and the Siegfried Line was set up to where they could use the Regiment in there. It was hard to knock one of them out through his air because they had to have air down in

that hole. They would maybe go five or ten miles in back of the line; that's where the smoke stack was that they pumped their air in and out with. So you had to get back there to that before you could do anything to it and then you could smoke them out or something like that. Hitler's biggest trouble was he had his forces that were going to be the big shots when Germany took over the country and they had this one world government. His SS Troopers were going to be the super race in that. They would take these Wehrmacht which were Poles and Czechs and all that stuff and put them in the service and call them the Wehrmacht. One SS Trooper would be in charge of maybe 15 or 20 of them. They had to fight or else he would get after them and kill them, you know. They used to come into that Siegfried Line and they would come out and put their hands up and take their helmets off like this and when they took their helmets it would maybe spin because they were shooting at them trying to keep them from giving up. Then the ones that made it into there would say, "Now there's so many men up there in that pillbox. Don't raid it; just let it go and as soon as that SS Trooper goes to sleep we'll come out because we'll be rid of him then." In a little while they would come out; there wouldn't be any SS Trooper and the Wehrmacht walked out on him. If Hitler would have pulled all of his troops out and manned the Siegfried Line we would probably still be fighting it due to the way it was set up. It was set up one here and one here and one over there. This one could fire this way and this way and this one could fire that way or that way.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had interconnecting fire so they could cover each other?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes, each pillbox could cover the other one. The windows were made sloping in this way, then a small window but out here it was big. They could see the bullets but you couldn't hit right in the hole. They had that old hard-tack bread that looked like black bricks. I don't know how old it might have been; how long it was in there. I know a little kid told us that his mother was having a birthday party and they were having cake and he said, "American bread with chocolate on it." So we figured out that was cake because it was American bread with chocolate on it. Of course those little kids some of them, maybe just not little kids, I've seen kids maybe 15 or 16 years old that didn't know what a stick of chewing gum was. They would chew it and swallow it. They knew that every so often we got rations, when we would line up at the CP to get our rations, those little kids would be around there and of course you never could eat the candy bars. We would get cigarettes and candy; rations and chewing gum. We would give them the calgumy and the chocolata and we would smoke a cigarette; the ones we didn't sell for \$20 a carton and we paid 50 cents I believe it was for a carton of cigarettes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got into France what was your first contact with the Germans?

Mr. McIlvain

My first contact with the Germans was when we crossed over into the Siegfried Line.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was the first contact?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes when we crossed over the Saar River.

Mr. Misenhimer

You hadn't had any contact up until then?

Mr. McIlvain

No. We stayed there on the Saar River practically all winter because I spent one Christmas in there.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would have been Christmas of 1944?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. Then we jumped off and that's when I got hit. I didn't go back right away. I lay back in Bar-le-Duc, France in a hospital and watched the big bombers go through; smoking and engines burning off and stuff like that. I was in the hospital in Bar-le-Duc because this was on my elbow where I was shot but I couldn't get my leg below my heart or it burned like fire. I went in there in February and I didn't get out until May. I was in there that long.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day were you wounded do you know?

Mr. McIlvain

The 18<sup>th</sup> day of February, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they had D- Day; when they invaded France on June 6, 1944, where were you then?

Mr. McIlvain

I was still in the States. I didn't get in on Normandy and all that.

Mr. Misenhimer

So your first combat was there on the Saar River then?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have quite a bit of combat?

Mr. McIlvain

The first part of it wasn't so bad. I had an ammunition carrier by the name of Murphy. You've heard of Wrong Way Murphy, and Murphy's Law and all that stuff? Well Murphy was my ammunition bearer. He had square bags like this that he carried ammunition in for the BAR because the way it fired; you had to have plenty of ammunition. We were out one time firing live ammunition in France. We were supposed to run down through and then hit the dirt and then fire live ammunition. I went down and I hit the dirt and I got my BAR in front of me on the tripod and what happened but Murphy comes down; my ammunition bearer. He hit the ground right in front of me. If I would have pulled the trigger I had it stuck right in his butt. (laugh) He was about three feet in front of me. That was Murphy. Then me and him were in foxholes together before we crossed the Saar River and of course you didn't smoke a cigarette on the front line in the dark because you could see a cigarette for ten miles. I said to Murphy, he was supposed to be out standing guard while I slept in the foxhole and I had got up and I said to Murphy, I said, "Murphy put that cigarette out." He said, "I ain't got a cigarette." I said, "Just stand right still because as soon as I get the sights of the BAR on it, I'm going to get rid of whoever has got it." And the cigarette was gone. (laugh) He knew I would do

what I told him, "If there's a cigarette out there and you ain't got it; somebody's got it and there ain't supposed to be anybody here but me and you and I'm going to get whoever has got that cigarette." I always hated old Murphy for that reason. You never could depend on him. He was always in the road. It was nice because he could carry the ammunition and I didn't. When I went across the Saar River they handed me a bunch of machine gun ammunition and I did like the rest of them. I got tired of that. I didn't want to carry that up through there. I took that damn stuff and threw it off into the water.

Mr. Misenhimer

The machine gun ammunition you threw away, huh?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes I threw it away. I'll tell you another thing. You know they talk; like my daughter in law that lives here, she's a registered nurse and she works up at the hospital up at Medaryville in the Emergency Room and she's always talking about getting sick from poisoned food and stuff like that but do you know in the Saar River, no bigger than it was, there may be two or three dead horses laying up there because the Germans used horse drawn artillery and dead horses were in that water. You would dip your canteen down in there and put a couple of pills in it, iodine tablets, and you would drink it. It didn't kill you.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you cross the Saar River?

Mr. McIlvain

How did we cross the Saar River? Damn fast.

Mr. Misenhimer

In boats or what?

Mr. McIlvain

On foot across the bridge; we went across the bridge on foot. The Saar River wasn't a very big river. It was a river like the Kankakee or something like that. There was a bridge across it and we got across that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What company were you in?

Mr. McIlvain

I was in F Company, 76<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. We were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army; General Patton and Eisenhower.

Mr. Misenhimer

What regiment?

Mr. McIlvain

The 385<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Misenhimer

The F Company would have been the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your first combat was there? When you crossed the Saar you went into combat right?

Mr. McIlvain

Just before we crossed the Saar there was a general that came up there. I don't remember

what his name was. He said the Germans had a mine field across between where we were at and the Saar River. He said, "I want you to start across that mine field." He said, "It may kill 100 but it may save 1,000." We said. "Well if it may kill 100 we may be part of that 100. If you want us to go across there, you go first and we'll follow you." We never went across. Nothing happened to us for not going across because if it would of, when you were over if there was somebody you didn't like, if you didn't like them bad enough you just eliminated them. The same way with prisoners. You take a prisoner over there, if you had to walk him very far, and you had already walked that far and you had to walk this prisoner to keep him going; sometimes he made it and sometimes he didn't. It was just how tired you got. If you got real tired some of them didn't make it. You never wanted to shoot a man to kill him because it only takes one man to bury another one but if you just crippled him, it takes 21 people to keep him going by the time you figure it all the way through. So you never wanted to shoot a man to kill him, you just wanted to shoot him to wound him. That way it takes more troops to keep him up there; otherwise all they have to do is bury them. Some of them they didn't bury because like in Munich, they didn't bury too many people up there one at a time because they dug those trenches and threw those Jews in there. They may not have been dead but they couldn't get around so they would just take them by the arms or legs and throw them on the pile and throw lye on top of them to keep them from smelling and they would just push it shut. Those mass graves; a lot of people said that never happened. It sure as hell did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see some of that?

Mr. McIlvain

Like I said, if they came into here and they would say, "You go to the gymnasium up at the school here." That's where a lot of people would get. They would put straw around there so they can't shoot you. They would put the straw around and burn it. That was some of what we had to put up with.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see much of that?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. Along with the little Hitler Youth they would give the women medals for having kids. All the boys, they would put them in the Hitler Youth for servicemen and they were fanatical. The girls, none of them would get to go to school and nobody went to church. I'm afraid of what is happening right here right now. They are taking the Ten Commandments out of the courthouses and not saluting the flag. They kicked one kid out of school for a day because he brought a flag to school with him and stuff like that. I don't know if it's going to end up that way or not, but it sure is bad. That's what I hate about it. I went through all of that stuff. I'm a disabled veteran and what money I made after I got out of the service, I saved some of it and I get about 1% interest on my money and on 18% of that interest I have to pay income tax on and they are bringing the Mexicans up here from Mexico and they don't have to pay any taxes. What little bit of money I saved, I still have to pay taxes on it. I don't know what it's going to turn out to be but it doesn't look good to me. It looks to me like it's about the same deal that Hitler was in. He was a Corporal in the service when he first started out and he ended up as Dictator of the German Army.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all take many prisoners? Did your outfit take many prisoners?

Mr. McIlvain

No, not my outfit because I missed the biggest part of that after I got hit by being back in the hospital from the Siegfried Line clear over into Germany. When I got back up to the front line I went back in to Chemnitz, Germany and the war was all over by then. That was at the foot of the Alps Mountains and then I got started back home. I came back through Camp Lucky Strike, Phillip Morris and all of them, coming back through. I got down to Southampton ready to come home from overseas. Then what did I run into but the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne going to Japan. They were our transportation home. We stayed in England for Christmas in 1945 and we finally got out of there. We got started home. I rode home on the aircraft carrier *Wasp*. They had gotten the hangar deck curtain knocked off of it on the way in to Southampton. They fixed that up with steel. They put steel posts in and then put plate steel over the hangar deck curtain. The hangar deck curtain had holes in it, like a garden hose. We hit a big storm on the way back and the flight deck on the *Wasp* was 145 feet above sea level and we hit a wave that knocked 45 feet off of that. Of course that was officers quarters and there were officers going every direction. We never paid too much attention to the naval officers. I've had them tell me, "You wait right here and I'll get somebody to help you empty the garbage can." "Yes sir, I'll be right here." He would get out of my sight and I was gone. When he came back he had to find somebody else to help the other guy that he went to get to help me. One funny thing on the way back home, we were riding on the *Wasp*, which was a big aircraft carrier. They had converted it into a troop ship. She would rock up like this and this side would go

underwater and she would come back up like this and this side would go underwater. Every time that side would go underwater the holes in that metal would flood. (laugh) If you were sleeping it was just like I turned a hose on you all of a sudden. Of course every time a GI would fall down everybody would throw their hands up and say, "Yea." Well here came a fellow in a foul weather coat with a little hat up on his head and he started across the deck. Those metal decks would get greasy and slick with all of those troops down there. He lit right on his head and shoulders. Everybody jumped up and hollered, "Yea." Man there was naval officers coming out of the woodwork. They said, "That's the Skipper of this ship." We said, "Well he should have had sea legs by now." (laugh) We fell just as hard as he did.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many did they have on the *Wasp* coming back?

Mr. McIlvain

I don't know just how many they had.

Mr. Misenhimer

A large number though?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. It was all it could hold and then we hit that big storm. That was something unusual.

That wouldn't have been unusual in the Pacific but in the Atlantic.

Mr. Misenhimer

The North Atlantic gets pretty rough in the winter time.

Mr. McIlvain

We went clear up to Iceland and back around dodging it. I know I got off of that dadgum

ship in New Jersey. We landed back in New Jersey and we had our duffel bags with all of our belongings in them. We started across there and they gave us a quart of milk; gave everybody a quart of milk. That's where my duffel bag stopped because I had to hold that quart of milk with both hands to drink. I drank that quart of milk and left my bag laying there to see if I could get another one. The Army gave me another one. I didn't know when I would get another quart of milk. I had been overseas for a long time and hadn't had that good fresh milk. And too before I went in I was in the milk plant up here and I used to drink straight cream up there. I drank that quart of milk and left that duffel bag laying there and it didn't bother me a bit. I had clothes on and that's all I needed.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you lose your duffel bag?

Mr. McIlvain

I don't know whatever happened to it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You lost it there, huh?

Mr. McIlvain

I'll tell you the most that I lost. When we were over in Germany, this was way back when we were over there fighting through Germany, we went through the Ardennes Forest and it was darker than heck in the Ardennes you know like the old song, "In the pine, in the pine where the sun never shines and you shiver when the 88's roar." We were walking along there and my ammunition bags; I had dumped the ammunition out of them and put my loot in them. I had a little Walther pistol that fit right in my hand. I could carry it in my pocket. I had cameras and rings and watches and stuff like that I had got. My loot.

We were walking through the Ardennes Forest and right over our head was an 88. Boom, that old thing went. I said, "Grab those duffel bags and ammunition bags and turn them upside down" and took off. (laugh) No excess weight on me. I lost all my loot and what I didn't lose there I lost when a dadgum officer wanted us to turn it all in so he could ship it back. He shipped it back alright. He shipped it back home to his place. We lost it all. I got one gun back from Germany that I brought back with me. It has a barrel about that long; a .22 pistol; smooth bore.

Mr. Misenhimer

About an 18 inch barrel?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes and it breaks open like a shotgun. I've got it in there in a drawer somewhere. I don't know where it's at.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any other souvenirs besides that?

Mr. McIlvain

No because I dumped them all out. I dumped them all there and then that officer went and collected them all up and was going to ship them home for us. We didn't get them there. Another thing that happened; when I got home my wife's dad was living in Connecticut and we went out to Connecticut. This boy that just walked in here and my other boy just younger than him, I said, "When we get to the ocean in Connecticut I'll let you fellows get out in the ocean and swim. But you have to mind me and stay right up close to the bank." I don't know which one of them it was that raised up and said, "Daddy, we'll be good. We won't go out in the middle." (laugh) They didn't realize that it was 3,000 miles

from there to England. (laugh) They weren't going to go out in the middle, they were going to stay close to the bank. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes, USO. A lot of people say they don't like the Red Cross and some of them say they didn't like the Salvation Army; it was according to what area you were in. I saw the Salvation Army and I saw the Red Cross. USO used to go out and pick up crashed planes to get the plastic off of them and bring them back for the kids in the hospital. One of the worst things was to see a kid that had come out there on the front line and had never been into nothing other than just to come out there on the front line. You would see him lying with his body here and maybe five feet over there lay his head; it was hard on you. A lot of times you even saw them in your dreams. They come and go. I know every once in a while I tell the kids something about something that happened over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see any big names at any USO shows like Bob Hope or anybody like that?

Mr. McIlvain

There were a lot of them but I don't remember just who all they were. I know Hank Williams was over there once and Bob Hope. We used to have a lot of church over there. Over here now they have to have a big church and every thing like that but you can go underneath one of these trees here and hear the same thing that you can get in a big cathedral. I always figured that it was like that picture with the fellow walking down the beach and there are two sets of tracks and all of a sudden there is one set of tracks and he

says to the Lord, "You would never betray me but where were you at when I was making only one set of tracks?" The Lord said, "That one set of tracks was mine, I was carrying you. You had slipped." (laugh) That's the way I had always figured. There was always somebody in that foxhole with me but I never had to dig a foxhole any bigger for him to be in there with me. Like there, when I got hit right there, the man five feet from me, I could have got hit anyplace else, but he just barely got my arm and I think it ricocheted off my rifle. He also said, "Where you are, I shall be also." So it doesn't make any difference where you are at. In Germany the churches were empty until after the war was over. After the war was over you couldn't find your way into one of them; they were so full. Then when I had an operation on my lung back in the 1990's, they went to x-ray my colon and they got too high and got up to my heart. The x-ray didn't show it here this way but behind my heart I had a lesion on my lung. They took that off of there and I said to the doctor, "Doc, what kind of treatment am I going to have to have when I get out of here?" He said, "All I can figure out is whoever you've been with, stay with him because he is taking care of you. You have no sign of cancer anywhere and you've smoked for 60 years. Just stay with the one that has been taking care of you." So that's what I try to do as much as possible but it's like I say, you sometimes slip but he still carries you. Just keep faith in him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back and ask you; in Germany did you see many of these concentration camps where they had the Jews and all? Did you see many of those?

Mr. McIlvain

I never saw too many of them, no because most of Germany I wasn't in to it.

Mr. McIlvain

Were you in Poland at all?

Mr. McIlvain

No. One of the jokes was, "Do you know how the Germans took the Poles so easy? They marched in backwards and the Pollock's thought they were leaving." (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

(laugh) That's not a very good joke is it?

Mr. McIlvain

No, but that's what they thought.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about American prisoners? Did you all release any American prisoners that had been captured by the Germans?

Mr. McIlvain

I used to work at a PW Cage where they had German prisoners. I had one there by the name of Schultz; a big fat guy. Of course I could speak a little bit of German. When he would come into the building I would say "Vas es loos Schultz." That means, "What's the matter." He said, "Nothing's loose, nothing's loose" in English (laugh) and then he would laugh. He would steal that GI soap that we used to wash clothes with out of the PW cages.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do in the PW cage?

Mr. McIlvain

I mostly just operated the telephone and kept things going like that. A lot of the German

prisoners were in the German Army and had worked in communications. We had some of our Sergeants that knew it from the book and stuff but they could take one of those old crank telephones, those German officers could, and turn it and tell you how far down the line to go to find the short. Our officers didn't like that too well because they couldn't do it so they didn't let them do that too much. That's mainly what it was. We always kept a gun. We never mistreated very many prisoners after we got them in there. Sometimes out there in the cold you hated when a fellow would run in the cold and you would have to walk somebody back that you had been fighting with. It's like I told a fellow here that was married to one of them German girls. He had gone over there in the 1950's or something like that. I told him about how we used to go out and the German women would come back into the houses and we would go in and like if we had come here we would tell them people to move over to that house over there and if they didn't move over into that house over there; if they wouldn't let them over there, we would move them out and move these in and stuff like that. We would stay in the houses. They would come in and put bedclothes on the bed and I would come in with feet muddy and turn the white sheet back and stick my muddy feet down in the bed and go to bed. He said to me, he was married to one of them German girls and he said, "You fellows treated them German women like a battleground." I said, "I didn't go over there to make love to them. I went over there because if I didn't kill them, they would kill me. You went over there later and you just went over there to make love to them." (laugh) He married one of them. She had no education. She had never worked any place; couldn't drive. I said to him, "Why don't you get you a job where you can get a pension so if something happens to you your wife will be taken care of." He said, "Ain't nothing going to happen to me. She

can take care of herself.” One day a kid went up and said something to him. He was sitting out in the yard and he just fell off the chair and that was the end of him. I don’t know how she ever made out. She had never worked anyplace; she had no education; couldn’t drive or anything. That would be hard on a woman.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in the PW cage was this before the war was over, or after?

Mr. McIlvain

It was after.

Mr. Misenhimer

On April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. You were probably in the hospital then, right?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all hear about that?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think? What kind of reaction did people have to Roosevelt’s death?

Mr. McIlvain

Well they didn’t know about what Truman was going to do but he went ahead from there and took it on through. Then along came John Kennedy. Now I know where I was at when John Kennedy was shot.

Mr. Misenhimer

On May 8<sup>th</sup> Germany surrendered; where were you then?

Mr. McIlvain

I was in Chemnitz, Germany right at the foot of the Alps Mountains, right south of Berlin.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were back with your outfit then?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go back to the same outfit you had been in before?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

F Company?

Mr. McIlvain

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you gotten into any more combat when you came back?

Mr. McIlvain

No. When I came back it was about all over. The Germans had already given up and stuff like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they surrendered did you all have any kind of celebration?

Mr. McIlvain

No because we would have had to celebrate by ourselves because we were just out there in foxholes. We didn't have much of a celebration other than just jumped up and hollered whoopee or something.

Mr. Misenhimer

After the war was over what did you do then; from May of 1945 until December of 1945?

Mr. McIlvain

I came back to Belgium, Luxembourg and France. When we came into Le Havre, France we had to carry our guns because the Germans were in Le Havre, France and we went in to bomb them out. Americans went in to bomb them out and just before we got there to bomb them out they moved out. The French didn't like us on that account because we bombed their city and there weren't any Germans in it. We had to carry our rifles because you weren't safe on the street.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was after the war was over?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes, that was on the way starting back home, on our way back to England. I don't remember how I got across the English Channel. I remember going over but I don't remember how I came back. I don't think I flew.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had some camps in France called Camp Lucky Strike, Old Gold, Chesterfield; were

you in any of those camps?

Mr. McIlvain

Oh yes, you had to go through them as you were coming back from Germany. You had to go through them to go back to Le Havre and then go across to Southampton, England and then leave from there to come back home.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you get back to the States?

Mr. McIlvain

I got back to the States on January 11, 1946. I went in on January 10<sup>th</sup> of 1943 and I came back on January 11<sup>th</sup> of 1946. It was that close together.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. McIlvain

We had some that made battlefield commissions. The one that made battlefield commission he was an officer but the one that went to school didn't amount to too much. A bunch of shave tails that didn't know too much about it. They were classified along about with Bush; a bunch of shave tails. About all they knew was they were there; that's about all Bush knew was that he was there. The only time I ever saw Bush in the service was when he was getting aboard that airplane. They showed pictures of him getting aboard a little fighter plane and that's the only picture I ever saw of him in the service. Of course his dad was President there and that made him a little famous. What I always hated about Bush down in Crawford, Texas; have you ever seen the pictures of his property down there? Old junk truck sitting back here, a manure spreader sitting over

there; an old building over here with the roof falling off of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's not his property. I've been to his property and that's not his property.

Mr. McIlvain

What is that?

Mr. Misenhimer

It's down the road.

Mr. McIlvain

One of his neighbors I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's just what the media has picked out to show to give the impression that you are talking about. That's not his property.

Mr. McIlvain

It looks to me like a pile of junk.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's not his property because I've been by his property and that's not it.

Mr. McIlvain

You know what I hate about him? He'll be talking on the television about all these fellows getting killed over in Iraq. Here he comes out with a big smile on his face, just like this, like "Look what I'm doing." He ain't doing nothing. He's just trying to show off is all.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time over there?

Mr. McIlvain

Probably that deal with the 88's in the forest. (laugh) I know that scared the hell out of me. I've asked a lot of fellows, "Were you ever over there?" "Yes." I said, "Did it scare you when you would get shot at?" He said, "No." I said, "I'll tell you what, you're telling me a damn lie one way or another. You're either telling me a lie and you weren't over there and you told me you were; or you told me you weren't scared and you were scared. One place or another you're telling me a damn lie because I know how it feels." I know I was out here one time and these people that lived right over here, there used to be a lot of shooting. I was back over there on my brother-in-law's field back over there. I used to have a Staffordshire bull terrier that I showed at dog shows all around.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that you can remember about your time overseas?

Mr. McIlvain

Well we used to spend a lot of time in Washington, D. C. The USO used to have a USO place up there and you could go in there and get you a hamburger or a cup of coffee and it didn't cost you anything. I remember walking down 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Pennsylvania Avenue where the President goes through. There were pickpockets, millionaires and what have you. It was all on 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Pennsylvania Avenue (laugh).

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in Germany and England, did you ever hear Axis Sally?

Mr. McIlvain

I don't know if that's the one we called the Berlin Bitch or not.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was probably the same one, yes.

Mr. McIlvain

She used to say, "You ought to give up and come in because you are going to lose anyway." That was the Berlin Bitch.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and battle stars did you get?

Mr. McIlvain

I got a Purple Heart. A Combat Infantry Badge. An Expert Rifle Badge. I should have got a Bronze Star but I didn't. When I took that fellow in the pillbox, he got the Bronze Star for saving me and I took him in the pillbox when his helmet was caved into his head. I lived through a lot. Did you ever eat any helmet stew? Were you ever in the service?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. McIlvain

Did you ever eat any helmet stew?

Mr. Misenhimer

No, but I know what you are talking about; tell me about it.

Mr. McIlvain

The helmet was made of metal and it served every purpose you wanted. You could dip it down into the water, set it on the fire, warm it up, shave with it, wash your face, wash your hands or whatever you wanted to. Then put some more water in it, boil it just a little bit; go out and get you some bully beef; stew some bully beef. Every German you would

catch always had a package of potatoes in his bag. You cut those potatoes up and put them in there and if you could find any carrots in anybody's garden or onions, you would put that in there. You would mix that all up and make stew out of it. That old helmet stew was the best stuff and you would clean it out and take another bath in it; wash your feet in it. And if you got under fire you could take that helmet like this and put it on a mound of dirt and it looked like Pike's Peak. (laugh) It wasn't but it seemed like it was that high.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was a very handy thing.

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. You could dig a trench with it; you could eat out of it; you could shave out of it; wash out of it; bathe in it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Japan surrendered August 15<sup>th</sup> did you all hear about that?

Mr. McIlvain

I was still in England I believe then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. McIlvain

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got out on January 11<sup>th</sup>, so you came home right before that from England, right?

Mr. McIlvain

Yes. I spent Christmas in England.

Mr. Misenhimer

Christmas of 1945 in England, right. Did you use your GI Bill when you got home?

Mr. McIlvain

I was drawing my rocking chair money for just a little bit and then I quit drawing my rocking chair money and went to work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. McIlvain

No, not too much. My wife was here when I came home. She already had the house set up with furniture in it and all that stuff. We had a little bit of money, but not much. Then we went down and bought a place down here on the highway. The boy that just came through here he was born up by the garment factory. Then that summer we moved down to this place and we've lived here the rest of the time. I've got pictures of stuff; all the stuff I've got; you accumulate so much in 57 years that I don't know where they're at. If you want some pictures to go in with that, I'll tell you what I've got a picture that I'm going to have you put in that has a picture of my mother and me and my wife. Then I've got a picture of just me and my wife. It was from when we got married.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. McIlvain

I never went to any of the reunions because the biggest part of the 76<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division reunions they have are in New York and around up there and all the big shots own the hotels and stuff. I figure I'm done with the big shots. They say the big shots of tomorrow

are the little shots of today that just keeps shooting.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall from your time overseas over there in combat or anything?

Mr. McIlvain

I had one funny thing happen. I don't know if you want to put it in here or not. But you know those Germans wore those big long overcoats. In the Siegfried Line I saw this guy come up out of the pillbox and he gets up out of the trench, up on the bench. You could see that big coat tail there and he went back and you could see; I was laying there with my BAR pointed right at him and I could see him pulling that coat back and all of a sudden he squats down like this. When he got all squatted down I had that BAR pointed right at him and just as he squatted down and I went brrrrtt. I moved him, his bowels and everything (laugh). His coat tail was just a flapping. I don't know how he ran with his pants down like he did but he took off for that pillbox. We were over there laughing. I didn't shoot to hit him; I just shot to scare him. I used to ride along with those trucks across the pond and take the BAR. An old hen would go across the muddy field and I would go brrrrtt brrrrtt and the hen would go up in the air like that you know. I wouldn't shoot to kill; just shoot to scare them and then laugh. I used to get started after rabbits. The Germans mowed their hay with an old scythe and raked it up with a big old yard rake and they moved that on a wagon. A doggone rabbit would start towards them and they were over there loading that wagon and you just start in with that BAR and get right in behind that rabbit and they would see that rabbit coming and hear you shooting at him and they would throw those forks and away they would go. (laugh) They figured that rabbit was going to run right up there where they were at and if you were shooting at the

rabbit you might hit them and miss it. I wasn't shooting at the rabbit; I was shooting to scare it.

Mr. Misenhimer

That BAR was a good weapon wasn't it?

Mr. McIlvain

Oh yes. I was a Corporal here and I couldn't carry the BAR and keep a Corporal rating so when I started for Germany they said, "We're either going to have to make you a PFC or we're going to have to take your BAR." I said, "I'll tell what you do. You just leave that damn BAR; I don't care whether I'm a Private or what I am. If I'm going into combat and I've carried this damn thing all the way through the States, this big heavy gun when I get over there, I want it with me.

*(end of interview)*

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