

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Richard E. Werner
Winamac, IN
September 23, 2016
1106th Combat Engineers
7th Army
Landed Utah Beach
6/6/1944
Early Morning

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is September 23, 2016. I am interviewing Mr. Richard E. Werner at his home which is Pulaski Health Care Center, Room NE4, 624 East 13th Street, Winamac, IN 46996. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Dick, 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. Now, the first thing I need to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something. So do you have a son or daughter or some one we could contact if we needed to?

Mr. Werner:

Yes, probably my daughter.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's her name?

Mr. Werner:

Carol Short.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where does she live?

Mr. Werner:

Here in town, 492 West South Street, Winamac, IN 46996. Her phone number is 946-4320. I think it is.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's her husband's first name?

Mr. Werner:

Leonard, Leonard Short.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, what is your birth date?

Mr. Werner:

November 21, 1921.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Werner:

Here in Pulaski County.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you born at home?

Mr. Werner:

At home, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Werner:

My mother's first name was Margaret Werner.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And your father?

Mr. Werner:

Clarence.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Werner:

Had one brother, Robert, Bob.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Older or younger?

Mr. Werner:

Older than me. He was about four years older.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was he in World War II?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. Werner:

No. He expired.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If he were, I'd like to interview him. Do you know what he did in the war?

Mr. Werner:

He was in the tank division. He was in the invasion of Italy. But shortly before I was in the invasion of France. He was drafted in Michigan. He worked in Michigan and he was drafted

there. That's why we both went in the war at the same time and both in the invasion. If the government knew it they would have one of us been out probably because two of the same family if they'd been wiped out that would wipe the whole family out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Werner:

Well, we had a lot to eat. We lived on a farm of course. Had all we wanted to eat but as far as automobile, new equipment, we didn't have much of that. Horses mainly during that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a garden?

Mr. Werner:

Oh, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Milk cow?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, hogs, chickens.

Mr. Misenhimer:

As you say, plenty to eat.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But no money?

Mr. Werner:

No money. Everybody lived without money.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Werner:

Winamac High School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Werner:

1939.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do when you finished?

Mr. Werner:

The government had started one of the projects north of us at Kingsbury Ordnance Plant so I worked there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Kingsbury?

Mr. Werner:

I worked there three or four years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were what, 18 years old?

Mr. Werner:

I graduated when I was 17 and started when I was 5. I don't know why but started early and was 17 when I graduated.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You worked at the Kingsbury Ordnance Plant.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do there?

Mr. Werner:

Made shells. It was in a separate room, looked through a window to see the machine operating.

Made pellets for ammunition.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did you work there?

Mr. Werner:

Til I was drafted.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Werner:

September, 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me back up. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Werner:

Oh, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you hear?

Mr. Werner:

Radio.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Werner:

Figured we'd be at war before long. Started the whole thing. People changed their minds. I think that's what made the government...people were against war from World War I. When that came along, they thought we'll never get in that because we don't want a war but then after Japan, that changed the whole thing. Everybody thought, "Let's go get 'em."

Mr. Misenhimer:

There were lines. People lined up to volunteer.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

People were very anti-war before. When you went into the service you were drafted.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, drafted.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You went into the Army?

Mr. Werner:

Army.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any choice of the branch?

Mr. Werner:

No, I just took whatever, waited until they drafted me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. Werner:

Went to Wisconsin.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that basic training?

Mr. Werner:

It was about three months of constant drill and getting the education.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do a lot of marching?

Mr. Werner:

Oh, yeah. Lot of marching, drilling.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have the infiltration course where you crawl under the machine gun shooting over you?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, machine gun right over us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that?

Mr. Werner:

It was kind of scary. Of course you knew that they weren't going to shoot you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have weapons training there?

Mr. Werner:

Just basic training is all.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you fire your weapon, learn how to shoot any weapons?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, yeah. March, drill.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you grew up did you go hunting, that sort of thing?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you were used to using a rifle then?

Mr. Werner:

I was used to a rifle and ammunition.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything particular stand out from basic training?

Mr. Werner:

No. Got homesick. I'd never been away from home much.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Probably hadn't traveled very far either.

Mr. Werner:

No, I hadn't. Michigan is about as far as I'd traveled. Had a grandmother that lived there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

After basic training, then what happened?

Mr. Werner:

Seemed like I got out on a small vacation. Came home to Chicago on the train. Hitchhiked home the first time. Took the train back. Probably only got a week or so off. Wasn't too long.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was pretty common. A week's leave after basic.

Mr. Werner:

Released from the Army and they sent you back home for a little bit.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Werner:

Then I went to South Carolina to a camp there for more training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of training did you have down there?

Mr. Werner:

Well, actually I was in the medical department there. Got into it with a doctor there and asked to

be relieved from the medical department and sent then to Georgia. That was a new artillery division.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Artillery division?

Mr. Werner:

It was a brand new artillery division. I was only in there about a month or two and then they sent me to California to Combat Engineers. They were practically all formed. They had been in service for...I think they got all organized and they just put me in the Combat Engineers, more training. They built pontoon bridges and we did that several times in California and we built a Bailey bridge there, too, it was a bridge that was on a track, steel bridge and you'd build it on one side of the creek, river, whatever, and shove it across with military trucks shoved it across and that was an English bridge. We thought we were probably going to go to Japan because we were right there in California. We stayed there for training for that fall. I had a vacation and went fishing and then we knew we were going to go overseas some place, didn't know where. They said that they were going to send me home for 30 days. Had to give them my address and sheriff's number here in Pulaski County so they could contact me. If they were moving out, I'd have to come back right away. So I stayed for 30 days at home. Went back to California, training, took trains from California to Chicago home, took train back to California. Hadn't any more than got there than they shipped us out to New York. Took a train back. Had all the train riding I wanted for a while. Then we stayed in New York for a short time and then went to England. I don't know. That was in the fall because we'd spent all the winter in an old British camp that they'd give up on. It was in terrible shape. Coal burning stoves, mud roads. We stoned it. We all worked on everything. We stayed there until we were shipped over to France.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you still in the Combat Engineers?

Mr. Werner:

It was Combat Engineers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you know what unit it was? What number or anything?

Mr. Werner:

1106 Combat Engineers. It was registered in some of the books I had.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were sent overseas to England, what kind of ship did you go over on?

Mr. Werner:

It was a U.S. Army transport. Well it was converted.

Mr. Misenhimer:

A liner converted?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. They had hauled over before. We went over single, one ship, zig-zagged all the way across.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip over?

Mr. Werner:

Well, it wasn't too bad.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Much seasickness?

Mr. Werner:

No, a lot of them did get seasick but I didn't eat that much. I lost my appetite and didn't eat too much. One thing was, they had poker games going all the time. It ended up one guy I think had all the money by the time we got to England.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What rank did you have at that point?

Mr. Werner:

I was Corporal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your job with the outfit?

Mr. Werner:

Well, wherever they'd take you at that time really. Training, all the different training. So we stayed in England the whole winter and the big leader, try to think of the name. He was

President.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Roosevelt?

Mr. Werner:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm sorry. When?

Mr. Werner:

Well, after the war was over.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, Truman.

Mr. Werner:

No. Another one. He was a big General.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, Eisenhower.

Mr. Werner:

Eisenhower, that's it. He interviewed us and told us where we were going. He interviewed our outfit for one. He said it was like ten percent they figured. Our outfit would be ten percent casualties. But we got replacements shortly after we left and it was probably two or three months we started getting replacements and I think it was only eight was all we lost. 4-Hers out of high school. They weren't Class A soldiers. They had thick glasses but they were good kids anyhow.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What day did you land on a beach over there?

Mr. Werner:

On D-Day, early in the morning. We went across there on one of those flats.

Mr. Misenhimer:

LST?

Mr. Werner:

No, Landing Craft Tank. Where the front dropped down.

Mr. Misenhimer:

LST they called them.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, LST. We went across the Channel and in a convoy and then...about half-way through it was pretty crowded in there and all we had a bump because evidently another ship hit us in the back. Scared the heck out of us. Didn't do any damage. The thing I noticed about that ship, landing craft tank, it had a flat front end and a lot of dead soldiers in the English Channel and that thing in front, picked up these dead soldiers and dragged them in front and then when they let the ramp down, lower it on the beach, it buried them. Worried me more than anything because they'd never recover I don't imagine. Maybe they would later on, I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About what time of day did you go across?

Mr. Werner:

It was night. I don't remember. We got on in the daylight but it must have been about evening and then they rendezvoused out there and started across.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About what time did you land on France? In the morning or afternoon?

Mr. Werner:

Morning, early morning. Just sunup. As a matter of fact, the paratroopers, a lot of them were still in the apple trees, the parachutes. In England they had light airplanes that were pulled by another airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, gliders.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. Those were supposed to go over and I didn't see any of them over there in France but I did

the paratroopers. Then where those light planes went, I don't know. There was just confusion I think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Most of them landed there.

Mr. Werner:

Were they? I didn't see any in France. Looked for them because I knew I'd seen them in England all the time, going across. Didn't know what they were going to do with them. They said they're going to invade with those, too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They landed a little way away from the beach, little bit further from the beach.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, on in. We went the first day about ten miles where we rendezvoused the first time. But I didn't see a one of those planes. How many rode on them?

Mr. Misenhimer:

There would be from 10 to 20 on it, depending on how it was arranged and all.

Mr. Werner:

They evidently pulled them to start them across and then released them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, they released them just before they landed. When they released them, they immediately landed.

Mr. Werner:

I didn't see any going across going through the dark.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Most of them went earlier.

Mr. Werner:

When I went across I got underneath the canvas because you got spray and I got in a truck and went to sleep that night. You couldn't do anything anyhow so you were just dry and warm and slept in there until time to land.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you first landed was there quite a bit of German artillery coming at you?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, lots of it. It was heavy. Matter of fact the ship, the landing craft, next to ours got hit they said. When we docked I jumped off in the water. A lot of them rode the truck out but somehow as soon as you hit the water, the guy didn't fix his truck good, insulated against the water. He died so I jumped off and went to shore.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you carry a gun?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. I carried a carbine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you fire it at all?

Mr. Werner:

No, I didn't fire it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you landed, were there quite a few bodies on the beach?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. A small tank was right ahead of me and he started to get out at the shore and I got behind the tank, guys got out and said, "What the heck, you guys got all steel, what you getting out for?" He said, "When a shell hits that thing and blows inside it sets all the ammunition off." Every shell. We get out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What beach did you land on, was it Omaha or Utah?

Mr. Werner:

It was one of those furthest south.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It wasn't the main one. It was one of the others.

Mr. Werner:

It wasn't the one that had the embankment. It was one of the others.

Mr. Misenhimer:

We're looking for towns here on a map.

Mr. Werner:

This the beach?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Here's the beach. This is the water, this is the beach. Here's Colleville. This is the English over here.

Mr. Werner:

We landed to the right of that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, your beach was to the right, is that correct?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Utah was here. I'm not sure what the other beach was past it. It doesn't show here. Anyway, it wasn't Omaha.

Mr. Werner:

It wasn't a gentle slope.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You moved in pretty quickly, right?

Mr. Werner:

Oh, right away, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the infantry was ahead of you, right?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. They used us as infantry, too, in combat.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, did they?

Mr. Werner:

Combat, yeah. Combat Engineers. I think some of our guys blew them water things up, those steel things. Where we went. To the right of us on the beach, to the left of us was a cement

bunker line, for the infantry. They didn't get in until the next day. The German artillery evidently was supposed to stop us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The German artillery was pretty intense there.

Mr. Werner:

Oh, big shells, ordnance. You could see our 12-inch shells from the ships coming in, big shells.

Looked like a Volkswagen.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They were big shells.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. They made a big boom. You could hear it go off and knew just what it was. The 88s were coming in pretty regular.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Those 88s were wicked weapons.

Mr. Werner:

Darned right. Coming in and you didn't know where it was going to land. But hoped it wasn't where you were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was anyone close to you hit?

Mr. Werner:

No. Not that I knew of. I traveled to where we were supposed to meet at, rendezvous. We got there early in the morning and we stayed there until afternoon and we went inland. We were about ten miles off-shore. At night they were coming in and bulldozing down those hedges

where we went in. We went in and stayed there by the woods. I didn't even dig a hole, I just slept. Didn't sleep much. We stayed there. Next morning, you know, our planes come in and we thought they were Germans and I got my shovel and started digging. We didn't realize they were our planes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand those hedgerows were a big problem.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, they were. They'd been there for a hundred years, some of them. Only thing to move them was a big tanks or bulldozers. Our company commander he stepped on a mine. He was one that got killed. But the big guy, he went to the same school Eisenhower went to.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it?

Mr. Werner:

What was the name of it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

West Point? The Academy?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. Did Eisenhower go to school there? Our Company Commander went to the same school. He kept us informed on things. We met the Russians at the Elbe River. That was in Germany. Never figured out which stretch we was on in Germany. We were in the German Occupation forces. We stayed there for close to six months after the war was over.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were going across France, how much fighting did you get in? Quite bit of fighting?

Mr. Werner:

Just the shells. Before we got to a river we decided what we were going to build. We would build bridges.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You built pontoon bridges then?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. That was our job. The middle of the Rhine River somebody built a big house there and they went over there with metal boats and brought back a boatload of wine. We knew got to drinking the wine and someone said you got to try this one, you got to try this one. Pretty soon a bunch of us were tight from the wine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you in the Battle of the Bulge?

Mr. Werner:

I didn't go over there with them but some of them went over there, scouting. They said the Germans had been in there, too. Brought back a boatload of this wine and there'd be 1800, well you got to try this one, just a sample. Pretty soon it caught up with you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, when you were going across France, after you left the beach, all the way across France to Germany, was there quite a bit of fighting across there?

Mr. Werner:

There was at times. They were trying to get to the next river to fortify themselves in. We were trying to keep them occupied, keep them fighting. Of course battles, blow the bridges to cross over but the thing is, there would always be four or five guys in a line.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Germans would?

Mr. Werner:

The Germans would. We would then leave behind infantry radios, tents and stuff up. The German airplanes would really bomb us. I always figured that those guys give them a clue to where we stayed. The first night they went for a bombing. Then the next day we'd see them, catch them, they were POW's.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how many bridges did you build? Quite a few?

Mr. Werner:

Oh, almost every river was in our line. Lot of rivers across there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of bridges did you build mostly?

Mr. Werner:

Pontoon.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Rubber pontoon bridges?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. That's all we built.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your job doing that?

Mr. Werner:

Actually got down and assess the water purification because of dead soldiers and animals. Got to

the next river and we'd go upstream, put your hose in there to get the water and purify it. Like I said, the water was just sent back to these camps to have their own water. They had a big canvas thing and the water was cool inside.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you're building bridges, what did you do there?

Mr. Werner:

Well, either pumped full of air or helped put the treads across.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you being fired on when you were doing that?

Mr. Werner:

The first thing you'd do is put that rope. We used that rope to anchor the bridge. Of course the Germans when we were trying to build a bridge, they'd try and knock it out. They did get that rope a couple times and the bridge would get loose.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your most frightening time over there?

Mr. Werner:

When we'd start to cross one of those rivers. That was probably the most scary time. They didn't want us to. They'd try to knock us out then. Most scary time was when we started building the bridges. We was laying down and the stuff was flying.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did they knock out many bridges you were building?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. We'd get that rope down first thing and then they would cut it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Werner:

Oh, they were really good most of them, real good. The company commander, he was a young guy, just out of college, you know and drafted in. He was good.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened over there?

Mr. Werner:

I had a dog, a cocker spaniel, just went crazy with all the shelling and bombing. She was just going crazy and the guy in the headquarters there picked her up and after a month or two, found out she was pregnant. So later on she had six pups. I adopted one of those, cocker spaniel, male it was and he slept with me in the bunker or the ward room there. Anyhow he'd crawl in and I would treat him with DDT and he never had a tick or flea or nothing on him just because of that DDT and he slept with me and no fleas. He stayed with me all the time, never had a collar or leash on him. He would just go around the guys and he'd sit up and beg for food. Every time we'd go to leave, every time we'd go to pull out, he'd come back. He'd jump in the truck I was in and we'd go. Kept him all through the war. We came back and he rode back with me and I came back to town in France or Germany or wherever. But the guys on the ship, the guards and so forth. The ship's paper, the guys said he dumped him off and he come back to me. He couldn't leave the ship and during the night he came back. One of the guys turned back and he found him. The same way, got home and he'd jump in and we'd take him. He was quite a dog.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You mentioned food. Could you get pretty good food when you were over there?

Mr. Werner:

Well, at first it got so rough at sea we couldn't hold it down. But the British had enough kidney stew that they'd give us some kidney stew on the stuff. Most of the guys would eat that and then they'd throw up. I didn't eat very much of it and I didn't throw up so much. About two days later it started to improve. Got C-rations for the first few days.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was on the land or on the boat?

Mr. Werner:

On land. That's where we got the C-rations.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were crossing France, did you have any contact with the local French people?

Mr. Werner:

Oh, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How were they?

Mr. Werner:

They were friendly people. Especially when we'd go through a town. In fact they'd load the trucks down. They were real friendly people.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about the English people in England. How were they?

Mr. Werner:

They were pretty good. They knew what we were there for.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you go to the pubs there?

Mr. Werner:

Oh, yeah. Got vacation and went to London. They were friendly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were there, did any V-2 or V-1 rockets come in?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. The rockets came in but they would go around town and make noise.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you on May 8, 1945 when Germany surrendered? Where were you then?

Mr. Werner:

I was at the Rhine River I think. I believe that was as far as we got. We were in that direction and then they put us in bivouac. Can't think of the name of it where the German people... We were overseers there in Germany for a while. I was a Sergeant then. We were the Occupation Force. I was at a German camp where there were sick people and they treated them. There was an officer who had a girlfriend, American officer, and he took off and left his girlfriend there. I don't know where he went or whether he met his wife or something. He was gone and I was taking a truck to get parts for this camp, maybe something for the well or radio tube or something. We'd get German soldiers that would speak real good English, better English than I did. Then we'd go look for parts together and we went to a flower place to get flowers and met this German girl in this flower place and we got along pretty good. Every time we went through we'd stop and visit with her. He got injured and was in that camp and he was confused.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any of the concentration camps where they had Americans?

Mr. Werner:

One where they had the Jews. I didn't see another. I was busy but I had been told about it. I didn't see it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. Did you have any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Werner:

We didn't have any celebration I guess. Glad the war was over. Had work to do. Had a lady there, she asked us what we were going to do. She had a child (at that time) and they asked to take a bath. Nice big house. It had a hot water heater. We were with the 7th Army.

Mr. Misenhimer:

7th Army?

Mr. Werner:

7th Army. The 1106th. Had a map at home where your parents showed where Germany had towns, every place we went with the 7th Army and the 1106th. Evidently there were several outfits that built bridges like us. Big operation, boy. Hitler would have taken over the world if he could have.

Mr. Misenhimer:

April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. We were sad. I got back; I got to take a trip. I got a little vacation over there, three days off. I remember that. That was in April.

Mr. Misenhimer:

April 12.

Mr. Werner:

What year?

Mr. Misenhimer:

1945, just before the war was over.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Just about three weeks before Germany surrendered. How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Werner:

Pretty good. Most of the time it was pretty high. We had pretty good luck going and no big...the Battle of the Bulge was rough. The weather was cold, froze toes off. It burns.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That winter of 1944-45 was one of the coldest they had.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a lot of trouble with cold weather?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. It was cold. That was during the Bulge.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did your feet ever get froze or anything?

Mr. Werner:

The toes got froze.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did they?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, they burned like fire for a while, itched.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you ever wounded at all?

Mr. Werner:

No, I never was. Didn't get a scratch at all. Pretty lucky.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Axis Sally on the radio? Do you know who Axis Sally was? She was the lady on the radio, German lady on the radio.

Mr. Werner:

We didn't have radios.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Didn't have radios.

Mr. Werner:

Huh-uh. I never heard a radio come to think of it. In Germany we found a radio factory where they made them and they were short one tube. Picked up one of those radios or someone gave it to me. Brand-new out of the factory and I was over there with this kid from Germany. It was short a German tube. We went all over that part of Germany. We were in these radio shops and he'd ask for this tube. I had to go up to the door and knock on the door to see if there was

somebody in there. He'd see an American at the door. Never did find that tube. It was short that one tube. That radio was all there, brand-new, but we couldn't find the one tube.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did you stay over there after the war was over?

Mr. Werner:

I think it was about six months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Six months?

Mr. Werner:

I believe that's what it was. Started getting Occupation Force trained for that. We weren't trained. We were just overseeing. The German people were real friendly, real good.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were they?

Mr. Werner:

Matter of fact, in the office there were two or three girls worked there and talked to us. One of them was a pretty nice little girl. Her folks had allowed her to come over there. Stayed in their house about six months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was this after the war?

Mr. Werner:

After the war, yeah. The German people were friendly. When we were in Germany we weren't supposed to talk to them, any of them. They weren't the ones that were mad at us because we didn't talk, you know. They were real friendly, the German people.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In that six months after the war, what were you doing then?

Mr. Werner:

Well, just this Occupation. I drove a vehicle all over Germany, looking for parts or stuff for this camp but one German died and I had to fill out the forms. I never did see that officer after the first two weeks. I wondered where in the heck he went after the war there. She, the young girl, was friendly and I didn't have anything to do with any of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you know when you came home from Europe?

Mr. Werner:

Took a boat ride from Germany home to a barracks some place. I don't remember what port it was but took a boat and went south of here, big camp.

Mr. Misenhimer:

There in Germany or in France somewhere?

Mr. Werner:

In America, in the United States.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, when you got back.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, south.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What part of the country was it in?

Mr. Werner:

Southern, southeast, in one of the...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Norfolk, Virginia?

Mr. Werner:

That's probably where it was, Norfolk, Virginia. From there took the train and bus, both I guess, to Indianapolis.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you come back from overseas, do you know? What month? In 1945 of course.

The war got over in May over there, so when would it have been?

Mr. Werner:

Been in the fall.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Fall?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, roughly six months in Germany and from there on, as soon as they got the Occupational Force in, they started sending us home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Probably around October or November then?

Mr. Werner:

Seemed like it was November.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When were you discharged?

Mr. Werner:

Boy, I got out the 1st of November, just guessing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

November of 1945?

Mr. Werner:

Had to be 1945. Been so long ago, I'm all messed up on the days.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Probably in the fall of 1945.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, it was the fall of 1945. I was in there almost four years altogether. Went in 1942...

Mr. Misenhimer:

That would have been three years if you went in in 1942. Three years and several months.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah that's probably what it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. Werner:

Oh, yeah. Brought a German pistol back. Flags. Picked up...dog mainly I brought home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, did you use your G.I. Bill for anything?

Mr. Werner:

No, I didn't. Got out of the Army, I never...never went to school or anything.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Didn't buy a house with it or anything.

Mr. Werner:

I did go to a medical thing up here for a while but I got the same here at home as I did up there and just as good care so never bothered.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Werner:

No, I kind of stayed home all that winter so I got a job at Kelly's Hardware I guess it was. First job I had.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you start there?

Mr. Werner:

Oh, boy. I was there about twenty some years. Must have been in 1946. By the time I got out. I helped farmers when I first got out, I run some combines for them and tractors and different stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Werner:

Sergeant, Buck Sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Werner:

No, I don't think we did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You've not been to any? Anybody in the service you've kept up with?

Mr. Werner:

Yes, there's one kid in St. Louis. I had his address and I went down there and stayed with him a couple days. He was one of the young kids they put in the draft.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945 you were still overseas. Any kind of celebration or party then?

Mr. Werner:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was there any talk of sending you all to the Pacific?

Mr. Werner:

We thought maybe at first we would go but when they got the Occupational Forces we were pretty sure then they wouldn't send us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been on the Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.?

Mr. Werner:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you know of it?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. Heard of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out did you join the 52-20 club? You used to get twenty dollars a week for 52 weeks.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah, joined the American Legion I think when I came back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This was that the government paid you twenty dollars a week if you didn't have a job.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. That must not have lasted long.

Mr. Misenhimer:

A year. Well, it could last a year but...

Mr. Werner:

I guess I got a job pretty quick. I don't think I ever got any of that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If you got a job, it stopped or something like that.

Mr. Werner:

My brother got some kind of farm deal when he got on my dad's farm. He was the first one out and he got paid to learn to farm. That was just...I didn't get any of that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were overseas could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. We got...matter of fact I got some of those little...

Mr. Misenhimer:

V-mails?

Mr. Werner:

Yes. There are some of them sent over. Big thing. Usually got mail call, hoped you got mail.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get it about every day or how often?

Mr. Werner:

Didn't get it every day but seemed like whenever you went back to camp they had mail call. Got a bridge job, scouting or something, you didn't get any mail. But you'd go back to camp and you'd get mail call.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you never had to fire your carbine at the Germans, huh?

Mr. Werner:

No. I never did. I was always back behind, building bridges and they'd bomb the heck out of the other side where we were building a bridge. The Air Force would bomb the heck out of them.

The Germans didn't affect us much there. Air Force was a big factor in the war. Saved a lot of lives.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They pretty well took care of the German air force.

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. After a few months in the war the German air force got less and you'd see less and less of

it. Matter of fact like I said there'd be five or six of these guys that wouldn't cross with us and I think they had some contact with the air force because about the first night we'd have air strikes from Germany. You'd hear them coming in. They had a different sound than our planes. You could tell the sound of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was it the German jets?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

See some of those?

Mr. Werner:

Yeah. I see there was a bunch of bombers and knocked two or three of them and they'd come down. Feel sorry for them but they'd come in behind them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in the service?

Mr. Werner:

One night there was a fire patrol. I and a Jeep driver and another guy, I was in charge of the water thing at that time. We went to the river in the afternoon about three or four o'clock, five maybe, and you walk upstream to make sure everything is clear, go about a mile up and come back and nothing to make a place to put your water filter and the three of us went up there to see and come about dark we decided to camp, stay there all night. So we did. Nothing happened. Next morning there was a German house up there or French, I don't remember where we were then, went up to this house and asked if they had any eggs or anything we could have for

breakfast. The woman told us there were about three or four German soldiers they'd seen out there in the thing. Everybody stayed there all night without any guard or nothing and these Germans were running around trees, looking to get out of there. So we got out of there and went back to camp. That was stupid of us. Didn't see anybody or hear anybody all night but probably we didn't sleep too good either. Just one of the occasions when you weren't thinking too good. Because they were trained to kill just like we were. So that's about all I know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have any experience with the medics while you were in the service?

Mr. Werner:

No. Never seen hardly any of them really.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Didn't see them treating any wounded or anything like that?

Mr. Werner:

No. Our commander stepped on a mine and the medics put a band around his leg and got him back to camp. That's the last we seen of them. That was about as bad as anything. They'd blow parts of your arms or legs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They were one of the worst things.

Mr. Werner:

Oh, yeah, they were good at that, too. When we landed on D-Day that kept on my mind. I figured out if I went where they bombed, where the bomb dirt was, there wouldn't be no mines there so I tried to do that. Didn't step on any mines. Sometimes when I was working over here after the war you'd think of some of those things happened but you'd try to forget them as much as you

could. The noise or bombs or booms or something dropped, it scared the heck out of me. Matter of fact when we built a house we put hot water heat in so we didn't have any nighttime noise, you know. Tried to put an oxygen tank manufacturing machine in my room here and I said I can't sleep with that thing. At home I had one there that was put in another room and had a cable so I could sleep. They wanted me to try it. I tried it but I stayed awake all night, sleep in the daytime.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, I think that's all the questions I have, unless you've thought of something else.

Mr. Werner:

No, that's about all I can think of.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, thank you again for your time today and thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Werner:

Everybody served I guess. There's a guy, a poker player, that cleaned everybody out they said.

He'd hire a guy to help protect him until he got to his home bank.

End of Interview

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