

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT ELIAS PALMER

A VET OF WORLD WAR II

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF WORLD WAR II

I received a letter from the United States Government stating, "Greetings from the Government. You are to report for duty."

The examination to enter the service was from my head to my toes. I was sworn into service 12-17-1942 at the age of twenty years. My stepfather, Melvin Fisher, received the same letter but did not have to go into the service due to having polio at a young age. Melvin walked with a limp.

I was allowed to go home until after Christmas. I reported to duty on 12-26-1942. There was a gathering area in Linden where I lived. We were transported to Union Station in downtown Columbus, OH. We boarded a train to Ft. Thomas, KY. We received supplies and many injections for diseases. We were in Ft. Thomas, KY for two weeks.

We boarded a train to Ft. Hood, TX. I was assigned to the 893rd Tank Destroyer Division of the Army. We were the first unit to arrive at Camp Hood, TX. The 893rd was the first tank destroyer school and contributed several hundred men to this new organization. Three men became generals with the Red Division. The motto for the 893rd Tank Destroyer Division was "Seek, Strike, and Destroy." We were attached to the 28th Infantry and were called the bloody buckets. The first sergeant who taught class was the first to be killed when we arrived to fight in the war.

We were at Ft. Hood, TX for three weeks. We boarded a flat bed train with all of the equipment and headed to Camp Shelby, MS. We stayed at Camp Shelby for one year while in training.

We received anti-aircraft training in the Gulf of Mexico. We would leave the camp for a week at a time to train on an island. We had to be careful of the poisonous snakes on the island as they would like to curl up with one in the middle of the night to stay warm.

After this year we boarded a train for Camp Kilmer, NJ. We were in New Jersey for two weeks while receiving additional injections for disease and preparing to leave for Europe.

We boarded a large ocean-going ship. We sailed the Atlantic Ocean for 12 days in a zig-zag pattern to try and stay away from German ships. Every man had to stand guard on the ship and watch for German submarines. The seas were rough day and night. The rolls were 60 feet high. One had to hold on for dear life when climbing up to the crow's nest when performing guard duty.

We landed 1-18-1944 at Liverpool, England. Liverpool was the first time we saw bomb damage from the Germans.

We left on trains to Chudley, England where we lived in small huts. The weather was cold and rainy.

We left for a south-coast town in England and received additional war training. We left with the 2nd Infantry Division March 1944 for Normandy, France.

July 1, 1944 we arrived at Omaha Beach. We crossed the English Channel at night. The Channel was rough crossing. We saw American fighter planes in sky. We saw German bombers flying in the sky to bomb London, England. We saw buzz bombs. We did not take cover, because these German planes were going to London. In France we had camouflaged clothing. We were the 893rd attached to the 2nd Infantry. We bombed a lot in the field driving the tank. We bombed out buildings, homes, and hedge rows trying to protect the homes with no fences. When we entered France the town's people would cheer for us. Paris was about the only town the Germans held in France.

I never went hungry. We had all kinds of sea rations. We had canned eggs, canned hams, candy bars, cigarettes, ten and ones, bacon, eggs, pancake flour. Everything was in a box. We had gas fired stoves in the tank destroyers. We had plenty of candy and cigarettes.

In our tank we had 5 men: gunner driver, radio operator, loader, commander. At this time I was a driver. The Army always tried to knock out the Germans with air strikes first. Trees were blown up by the air strikes. The landscape looked weird with blown up trees.

Our tanks would breakdown and the tracks would come off. We had to repair the tracks the best we knew how. We were always afraid to get out of the tank and always looked over our shoulder for the Germans. I know many men who were killed when trying to help other soldiers. We did have maintenance men to help repair our tanks but we always helped each other. That's the way it was: a brotherhood.

The French people were in the way of the movement. The people were told to get of the way and make room for the Americans. We travelled across France with our tanks paving the way for the 2nd Infantry. There were 12 tanks in a platoon, 3 platoons in a company. We had a total of 36 tanks. While fighting in France we had the first people killed in our unit.

We had tanks blown up from German plane bombs. The smoke was dense. In Armand, France we bombed targets. We were lucky. I only lost one tank, but no one was killed. This was the first battle.

Sept 10 Company C left from France to Belgium. There was fighting along the way to Belgium. Germans were holding a town. We opened fire upon the Germans and drove them out of this town. There were a lot of people killed during this battle. There were soldiers lying dead along the roads and in the fields. These soldiers were mostly killed by bullets or exploding shrapnel.

There was a lot of fighting in Belgium going into Germany. We crossed into Bouchet, Germany, Sept 14. We stayed in pill boxes. These were cement boxes where one could fire a field of rounds then pull back into the box because it was covered with dirt.

I was still in the tank. We had a large battle in support of another regiment. One tank was blown up with a mine. The tank driver jumped from his tank but landed on a mine blowing his body to pieces. Eleven men were killed just inspecting the fields while the Germans continued to fire.

10-28 we moved into a forest in Germany. We had 3 companies.

11-22 we arrived at Vossneck, Germany. We took several towns. We took the River Roer Dam. The weather was cold. The mud made a muddy mess of the vehicles. Telephone lines were knocked down.

We saw dead soldiers everywhere.

Kommerscheidt Hill was a big battle with lots of bombing making it so the American planes could see but the enemy couldn't see us. Eleven destroyers were lost in this battle. Only 27 men made it back to headquarters alive, and I was one of the blessed ones. We stayed on that hill protecting it. We had no open firing because the firing would give up our position. We couldn't give away our position. We had to get out at night. We were surrounded by the Germans. In the cover of darkness we left the hill. I followed the brightest star in the sky to lead the men back to camp until it became foggy. We used a compass at this point. We could hear the Germans firing their guns off in the distance thinking they were killing us. We carried our carbines. Carbines are small guns, 30 caliber, short (2 ½ feet long.) We made it back to camp and didn't lose anymore soldiers. We could see a large fire far off on the horizon, and we knew we could make it back. We actually stumbled upon headquarters by mistake. When we got back to headquarters we were each given a bottle of beer for "making" it back.

I was assigned to another tank to start the process again to "take" the town.

We saw a great amount of soldiers dead all over the place. We saw a lot of dead Americans and Germans all scattered together. Trucks would come and pick up the dead bodies of both sides and thrown them into the back of the truck. The dead were taken to a sorting place. The Americans performing the sorting would take valuables from the dead Germans such as rings and watches. We never saw anyone taking valuables from a dead American soldier.

We went onto the next town.

12-10 we went to any company that needed help. We came across a mine field. The leader asked for a tank driver to volunteer to cross the field. If that tank was able to cross the field without blowing up from a mine the foot soldier could cross in the tracks without stepping on a mine. I volunteered to drive my tank across that field. I safely made it to the other side and received the bronze star. I was afraid to cross that field but it had to be done or many men would have been killed.

Germany received a lot of snow that winter. We had a foot of snow at one point. We had proper clothing so we were never too cold. The ground was black even though we had snow. The black came from the firing and bombing. When the unit was firing their bombs it would whistle like a hot stove poker going into cold water. We "took" a big house and had good gun position with a road block. The people were gone from their home.

We found wine buried in the fields under cabbage plants. We had good wine. The Germans and the French would sometimes poison the wine to kill the Americans. Americans had to be careful the wine was not poisoned. Many Americans were poisoned and died from this type of wine.

We always had to watch and take precautions when going into an area for the first time. We received large blasts from the sky to illuminate the Germans.

One time it was so cold, and I couldn't get warm. I finally fell asleep for a short time but had to get up to go with the tank to "dig in."

One time it was so dangerous to sleep but I needed sleep. I slept in a coal bucket with coal over me.

Any animals that were found in the fields the Americans would kill and butcher. We ate pig, chicken, and farm animals.

We didn't pay much attention to the season because it always seemed cold. The cold always added to the battle. In the summer it was warm.

In a battle one night another tank driver didn't think there were Germans around and opened the hatch. He stuck his head out, and the Germans shot his head off. The body fell back into the tank. No one else in that tank was killed. They were the smart men in the tank. One had to be smart to survive.

I made sergeant toward the end of the war. We needed a gun commander and because I volunteered to drive across the mine field I was chosen as commander of the tank. I can't remember what happened to the previous commander of my tank. I have this commander blocked out of my memory. He was probably killed.

We crossed the Rhine River over the Remagon Bridge which was called the gateway to Germany. This bridge was never hit but it finally collapsed due to the heavy bombing around it.

This bridge received heavy bombing from the Germans because the Germans did not want the Americans to enter the city but this bridge never received direct hits. We took the bridge before the Germans had a chance to wire it with explosives. We started across the bridge but with the German bombs exploding all around this bridge collapsed.

American Army engineers built a pontoon bridge down the river from this bridge, and we crossed the Rhine River.

After crossing the Rhine River we fought our way into Berlin but we didn't go into Berlin. We were told to hold our ground so the Russians could go into Berlin to take their share of the city. This is how there was East Berlin and West Berlin.

We all thought the war was coming to an end because Germany was running out of fuel for their machines. The Germans started using animals to pull their equipment. The Germans were being killed by our Air Force. Germany was using cows and horses to drag their guns.

The Germans were being pushed back by the United States. The Germans did not have fuel so that is what it takes to win a war. Germany tried their very best but just could not handle not having enough fuel to run their equipment.

I travelled all over Germany in my tank. I was close to all famous generals at all times. I received the Purple Heart because of the blood I lost while driving the tank with exploding shells all around me. One of the exploding shells hit my face. I received a cut. I have a scar to this day from this cut.

The end of the war battle was the Battle of the Bulge. We dug in and had road blocks. We shot artillery to harass the Germans all night long to keep the German soldiers upset.

Germans were even watching Germans in the end of the war and really "layed" it on the traitor Germans

When the war was over we were all happy. We stayed in Germany for a while to guard and help liberate German prison camps. I saw German concentration camps

after the war and before the end of the war, but I saw no dead people. We did not look for the dead people because of the battle line.

German prisoners ate grass because there was no food. There were German soldiers in these prison camps because the Germans thought they were enemies. The Germans cut women's hair off and made them completely bald if they thought these women were flirting with the Americans.

We were sent off to camp Lucky Strike in France. We stayed at this camp for several days. We were loaded onto trucks to LeHavre, France. If approved by the government one could bring back souvenirs. There was a limit as to how many German guns one could bring back in the States.

We left France on a ship called the Liberty Ship with orders to go to Japan and help settle that war, but the atomic bomb settled that war.

In New York harbor ships were honking their horns and shooting water in the air to welcome us back home.

We went from New York City to Indian Town, PA to be mustered out of the service. We had seven days to be free and after those seven days we received our discharge. When I returned to my home in Columbus, Ohio I didn't do anything for about two months. I had terrible war nightmares. Anytime someone would talk about the war I had these war nightmares.

I could have received a pension from the government for \$20.00 a week for 52 weeks but we were proud men and refused the money. The government later gave each soldier \$300.00. I was married at the time and needed to buy coal for the furnace to stay warm during the cold Columbus winter.

I finally was offered a position where my uncles worked. I worked as a foreman for this company for 26 years.

I continued to have problems with my ears because of the loud exploding bombs. I still have problems with my ears to this day. I tried to get assistance from the government for medical attention for my ears but was refused.

I knew every man who was missing in action from the 893rd. The 893rd knocked down one German airplane, 3 marked, 33 tanks, 22 marked VI tanks, 32 anti-aircraft, 59 pill boxes, 10 mortar positions, 6 observation posts destroyed, 21 day guns, 4 ammo trucks, 16 artillery pieces. 10 bunkers, 2 – 380mm rocket guns, 28 self propelled guns, 12 half track tanks destroyed, 53 fortified houses destroyed, 214 strong points neutralized, 42 road blocks knocked down, 5 supply dumps captured, 3 fuel dumps burned, 1 train destroyed, 4 motorcycles destroyed, 3 infantry houses captured and destroyed, We had 55 officers captured, 2872 enlisted men captured, 2202 men killed. There were 1,000 men my battalion. We were attached to the 4th, 22nd, 12th, 28th, 8th, 78th, XVIII Airborne Division, 3rd Corps.

One staff sergeant in my company received a big award from France because he worked with free French people and the Underground Railroad.

I was in 5 major battles:

Normandy Battle

Belgium

Northern France

3 Rhine lands

4- Ardennes Forest

5- Battle of the Bulge.

I received 5 Battle Star Ribbons with 5 Battle Stars.

I received the Good Conduct Metal and an Honorable Discharge from the United States Army.