

Leroy Davis

Interviewer: What is your full name and where and when were you born?

Leroy Davis. Born in Hackberry Community, Montgomery County, Tennessee.

Interviewer: What branch of the service did you serve in?

Davis: Army.

Interviewer: What was the primary unit?

Davis: 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division 394<sup>th</sup> Infantry 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Company K 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon.

Interviewer: You were born when?

Davis: 1921, October 6.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

Davis: John Moss and Unna Gay Davis.

Interviewer: What were their occupations?

Davis: Farmer and house wife, homemaker I should say.

Interviewer: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Davis: Yes, there were twelve in our family. I had eleven brothers and sisters.

Interviewer: How long did you remain in school?

Davis: Through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Interviewer: Do you have any recollection of the great depression?

Davis: I sure do, plenty of it.

Interviewer: How did it affect your family?

Davis: Well we were poor but everybody else in the community was too so we didn't know any difference. We had enough to eat and enough to wear.

Interviewer: So you coped really well with this hardship?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: Were you old enough to have had a job before your time in the service?

Davis: I did work some part-time jobs and summer jobs?

Interviewer: What sort of jobs and how much did they pay?

Davis: I worked on the farm started out at .25 cents per day. Then I went to work in Nashville at Unity Brother Company for .35 cents a night. Twelve hours a night five nights a week.

Interviewer: Before Pearl Harbor how serious did you take the threat to America from the Nazis and the Japanese?

Davis: Well I didn't know too much about them except what I would hear on the radio.

Interviewer: So you did read the newspaper and kept in touch. Did the events of 1939 through 41 seem remote, that they did not touch your life?

Davis: It was real far away as a child, young man, I didn't think too much about it.

Interviewer: Do you recall where you were and how you heard the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941?

Davis: Sunday afternoon and I was home alone. My father and mother had gone visiting so when they came back home I told them what had happened.

Interviewer: Did you hear it on the radio?

Davis: Yes, on the radio.

Interviewer: And also did you listen to the FDR speech "A Day that Shall Live in Infamy" the following day.

Davis: Yeh, we were at school and they had it on the radio at school.

Interviewer: At that time did you think the war would reach American shores and touch your life?

Davis: I didn't believe it would cause America was strong and you're never fully prepared that they would ever come here.

Interviewer: Did you approve of the way FDR handled his office at the beginning of the war?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: You thought he was a good leader and he handled the programs well.

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: When did you realize you would be drafted or you enlisted?

Davis: I registered and was drafted it was in 40 that I registered and was drafted in 42.

Interviewer: Did you have a preference for other branches?

Davis: Yes, I tried to get in the Air force but they wouldn't let me go from the infantry.

Interviewer: Was it because you wore glasses?

Davis: No, they needed infantries.

Interviewer: Did you have a preference of the type of task you performed? Did you want to do engineering or artillery?

Davis: No, I didn't I was just assigned to the mortars and that was it.

Interviewer: When were you drafted?

Davis: Let me look and see. I was inducted the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1942. I passed my physical and came home for seven days. I went into active service on December 5, 1942.

Interviewer: Did you get inducted at an induction center?

Davis: Georgia.

Interviewer: Were you tested for skill and IQ levels?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: And did your civilian job have anything to do with what you did in the military?

Davis: No.

Interviewer: Where did you do your basic training?

Davis: Camp Vander Mississippi.

Interviewer: When were you selected for more specialized training?

Davis: Trained as a division I trained in what I did in mortars and that was it.

Inter: In Mississippi?

Davis: Yes.

Inter: What was your impression of your fellow recruits.

Davis: Well after you got to know them they were a bunch of good guys.

Inter: Was this your first time away form home?

Mr. Davis: No, I had spent a summer away from home.

Inter: So when you met the other recruits were they a far distance from home?

Davis: Most of them were from Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: So you weren't with the local boys?

Davis: No, the only one I knew wasn't in my outfit.

Interviewer: Did you participate in maneuvers stateside?

Davis: Yes, in Mississippi and Louisiana.

Interviewer: How good did you think your training was for the task ahead of you?

Davis: I thought it was good. We did a lot of training and a lot of hiking a lot of practicing.

Interviewer: So you felt really prepared?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: How good were the living conditions like in the camps?

Davis: Well in Mississippi it was just an old rough barracks with tar paper on the side so it wasn't too good. When we moved to Texas, we went from Louisiana to Camp Maxey Texas and the barracks were more like the old barracks at Ft. Campbell.

Interviewer: What kind unit did you serve with immediately after your training?

Davis: Still the same unit. I stayed with the 99<sup>th</sup> until the war was over.

Interviewer: Now why did you move from Louisiana to Texas, more training?

Davis: Yes, mass training. The whole unit moved.

Interviewer: Did your unit travel overseas in troop ships?

Davis: Yes they did.

Interviewer: When and from which port did you depart from?

David: We were at Camp Knox in Massachusetts, in Boston Fort Wiggin.

Interviewer: Was this your first time on the water, on the ocean?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: How long was the voyage?

Davis: If I remember right about 13 days.

Interviewer: How good or bad were the food and living conditions on the ship?

Davis: If you could keep it down it wasn't too bad. It didn't bother me too much.

Interviewer: How many soldiers were on the ship?

Davis: I don't remember on that.

Interviewer: Where did you land?

Davis: Scotland. Groc., Scotland.

Interviewer: Was that Grasso Scotland?

Davis: I think so.

Interviewer: Were you housed in temporary or permanent barracks once you got there.

Davis: We went to Scotland by train to England. We were in Dorsettler, England in consul huts there. It's a metal building that comes over like this. You've seen them.

Interviewer: How long did you stay in those?

Davis: We were there from November 6, we were there from October to November.

Interviewer: Where did you go after?

Davis: We crossed the channel and landed in November in the heart of France.

Interviewer: Did you have and civilian contact while you were in England?

Davis: Yes, I think so.

Interviewer: Did you see combat soon after arriving or was there a prolonged trainings overseas?

Davis: We went from England directly to Belgium by convoy, no further training.

Interviewer: Once you arrived in Belgium, I mean as soon as you arrived in France did you see any combat?

Davis: No it had already advanced into Belgium by the time we went on front.

Interviewer: This was still 41?

Davis: 44, November 44. We went on the line at Lotionhobingrobin sector.

Interviewer: So you were still in the same unit?

Davis: Still in the same unit.

Interviewer: Who was your commanding general of your unit?

Davis: General Lawry.

Interviewer: What was your impression of your officers and NCOs in your command?

Davis: We had some good officers.

Interviewer: So you didn't feel like they were new officers straight out of college?

Davis: No a lot of them we trained all through our training with the officers.

Interviewer: What kind of equipment and arms did you train with?

Davis: I trained with a 45 pistol and a carbine and mortars 60 mm mortars.

Interviewer: What was your first experience with combat?

Davis: We were online from November until December when the battle started it was quiet, not much action just in a holding position.

Interviewer: What kind of reaction did you and others in your unit have.

Davis: Surprise, it started with a 90 minute barrage of artillery, the place we were was exploding mostly in the treetops so nobody was ready for it.

Interviewer: How did it feel to be shot at and to shoot back?

Davis: You shoot back with everything you've got. With the mortars we were kind of in the rear. You sit up behind a hill. Because we weren't mobile we couldn't move.

Interviewer: How would you describe the cohesion inside the unit?

Davis: Good.

Interviewer: Did you feel close to those you shared your time with in the service with?

Davis: We got to be like brothers.

Interviewer: What did you do in your free time?

Davis: Overseas, wasn't much to do, sleep and eat.

Interviewer: So you didn't get a lot of furloughs?

Davis: I got one three day pass in Paris. Well I did have a 48 hour pass in London. Other than that just sleeping and reading if you got a letter.

Interviewer: Did you write a lot of letters?

Davis: I tried to. To keep my Momma and Daddy informed.

Interviewer: Did you receive letters from relatives and things?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you play any cards?

Davis: No.

Interviewer: Play sports?

Davis: No.

Interviewer: Just mostly read and wrote letters?

Davis: Yeh.

Interviewer: You never had any leave time back to the states.

Davis: No once you were overseas you didn't move unless you came back.

Interviewer: When you were in the field did you get food sea rations or something in between?

Davis: Both it depended on where we were and how fast we were moving.

Interviewer: Did you sleep on the ground or in tents or in barracks?

Davis: On the ground most of the time.

Interviewer: Did you feel like you were on the move often?

Davis: Yes, I was pretty well all of the time.

Interviewer: Was it ever possible to take showers, shave or at least wash up?

Davis: I think in winter of 44 I got to take one shower. Shave and we had a little stream where we were set up where we were set up and we would shave in cold water, ice cold water.

Interviewer: So in 44 you moved into Belgium how long did you stay in that area.

Davis: We stayed there until after The Bulge January. When The Bulge was over we started in Manson and moved into Germany.

Interviewer: Did you often feel sleep deprived and over worked?

Davis: Yes, you get tired, real tired. You stay on guard; take your time on guard.

Interviewer: Were you promoted during your time in the service?

Davis: Yes I was.

Interviewer: What were you when you started off?

Davis: I was a corporal.

Interviewer: And you made it up to?

Davis: Speck Sergeant, E7 now.

Interviewer: I read somewhere where soldiers didn't want to be promoted they felt like.

Davis: They don't want to take the responsibility.

Interviewer: Did you feel that way?

Davis: No, I thought I should take the responsibility.

Interviewer: Were you impressed with the qualities of the enemy. Examples leadership, bravery, ability to withstand hardships, weapons tactics?

Davis: Yes, they were tuff.

Interviewer: Did you come to respect the average enemy soldier or would you use other words to describe it?

Davis: I guess respect is a good term.

Interviewer: At anytime did you ever realize that the enemy had a mother and father or anything.

Davis: Really you don't have time to think about that very much. Someone shooting at you you're going to shoot back.

Interviewer: What about civilians & refugees, did you have much contact with them?

Davis: Some during the later part of the war we freed a lot of POW camps and also refugee camps, forced labor camps you know.

Interviewer: Is that more like, I don't know if that's different because I haven't done much research on it, are you talking about Jewish camps, concentration camps?

Davis: No, it was like forced labor camps police and all, Russian just a mixture of that.

Interviewer: What were these people like once they were released?

Davis: Most would a lot of them I'll say would start wondering around the countryside but they would try to keep them in camp until they could make arrangements for them to be shipped back to their home.

Interviewer: Did it look they were treated well?

Davis: No, a lot of them were just skin and bones and had been worked real hard.

Interviewer: Did you find any Americans in the camps?

Davis: A POW camp, they were like the rest of the people just getting whatever they could potatoes soup maybe a slice of bread something like that. They had a lot of, the men we was in our company were skin and bones.

Interviewer: Kind of like what you see on TV, kind of like what you see on TV now when you see soldiers being released.

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: Where you part of occupational force among civilians after the fighting was over?

Davis: Yes, our division was occupational force. We left the 99<sup>th</sup> and went to the first division sometime around September until the war was over were occupational.

Interviewer: In Germany?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded?

Davis: No, thank the lord for that.

Inter: Were you ever recommended for a metal?

Davis: I got a bronze star and then after the war was over they awarded everybody in the battle a bronze star so I had two bronze stars.

Interviewer: What was your first bronze star for?

Davis: Meritorial service, patrol.

Interviewer: Were friends or fellow soldiers wounded or killed?

Davis: Yes, several.

Interviewer: Did you ever have a sense of the big picture meaning did you ever know the strategy involved in the powers.

Davis: Most of the strategy we were involved in was what came down from the company level.

Interviewer: Let's see you said you were involved in the Battle of the Bulge and was there any other battles you were involved in?

Davis: There were several of them.

Interviewer: Can you list any of them.

Davis: Yes, let me look here. We were in the attack on Hawkin Germany, Earth Canal, Goodenorf bridge which is the Remogin Bridge at Lumindorf where we crossed the Rime River. Our division was the first full division to cross the Rime River we didn't take the bridge but we were the first full division. After that took a number of towns Eason Germany, Murabocky, Madburg, Danburke Valley, Ludwig Canal, across the Danu River they kept us moving all the time. May 9<sup>th</sup> was when the war was over and we kept going into Germany and they called a halt for everyone to stay where they were so we sat down on the side of the road we were going to be for a while. We just went to a farm house and we stayed there until we got orders. Until they decided what the occupation would be for us.

Interviewer: At that time did you meet any civilians that would bring out food or anything like that.

Davis: Yes, some of them would. They would bring you out water most of what they had was big brown black loaves of bread. Of course that tastes good when you're hungry.

Interviewer: Let's go back; do you want to talk about any of these wars? DO you want to go back to battle of the Bulge or what it was like?

Davis: It was rough, cause we were attached on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> they told us well it's just a patrol that run through and we'd be back in a couple of hours in our start position. We stared moving out and the road toward the front from that time until the next afternoon my mind is completely blank. According to our record, this happened in Doglus our division history one of them said that we had to fire all of our ammuniton to hold them back. I have to take someone's word for it because I can't remember.

Interviewer: I've heard about that, people can't remember, I think its called shell shock. Were you ever near the area of Baston?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: The cold?

Davis: Yes, it was cold, snow. More after the battle it was up to your knees almost snow.

Interviewer: After the Bulge did you experience any type of battles like that.

Davis: Not as bad, we had been reinforced we were north of Harrington. That was where we got our name Battle Babies because we were new, this was our first major battle, the news named us Battle Babies. But after the second day we were online the Germans were attacking we got orders to pull back. We pulled back to Nelson Ridge when we got set up there well they couldn't move us any further we held the line. Coming home I went to the 1<sup>st</sup> division came back as First Sergeant there and stayed there. Went to Czechoslovakia with another division from there I went to the Heart of France and then came home.

Interviewer: How long were you overseas for?

Davis: About 15 months 15 and half months.

Interviewer: Once you got home how long did you stay in the service.

Davis: I came home from overseas and went to Camp Atterbury, Indiana and was discharged there. So I didn't have any service time.

Interviewer: Then you just came back to Clarksville,

Davis: Yes

Interviewer: I assume you got the Montgomery GI bill?

Davis: I used a little bit of it I think for two months or three months I was under the GI Bill. I worked in a grocery store and then went in the grocery business. Worked there about 18 ½ years then Fort Campbell about 20 or 20 ½ years.

Davis: Our company company K934 was one of the first units to get a black platoon. They had a white platoon sergeant and a white lieutenant but all of the rest of them were black. NCOs were black and we crossed the line and we were almost surrounded they came up the rear from behind us and wiped out the Germans. They fought and proved themselves.

Interviewer: I didn't know that because I talked to another gentleman who was in the military he was an African American gentleman and he said everything was very segregated.

Davis: I guess it would have been around 45. We got along good together. In fact one of the guys we called him Grits, I can't remember his name, that's all I remember and he would come stay with us all of the time, with our platoon. There wasn't any trouble to anyone we were there for one purpose and we were fine for that one purpose. One of the guys called me a couple of three years ago he was trying to get in touch with some of the other black guys. I had a picture of him that he sent to me. During our conversation we remembered a lot of things together.

Interviewer: So there was a lot of comradely going on?

Davis: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you stay in touch with anyone?

Davis: Not real close anymore, used to. We used to have a company reunion once a year. More or less a platoon reunion. Of course you get old you get away from things.