

The subject of our interview today is Mr. Leroy Davis whose war experience was in the European Theater with the 99th Division, 394th Infantry. Mr. Davis if you could tell us a little bit about your life prior to going to the war.

Mr. Davis: Okay I was born to John Mose and Euna Gaye Davis Kennedy at Atbury Community in 1921, November 6th and went to elementary school and also to high school. I finished high school in 1942. I was running two years late because I had to miss two years in between because of transportation. From there I went to work in Clarksville at MP Brothers Company. I worked there until November 28th at which time I was inducted and went to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, and passed an exam. I was gone for seven days and back to Fort Oglethorpe, and got my issue of clothing. I went to Camp Cleburne, Mississippi, and got there somewhere around the 10th or 12th. I don't remember the exact date. There we had our thirteen weeks training. We also had D maneuvers. Do you want me to continue?

Keep going because there is a whole process of getting to this place.

Mr. Davis: We had maneuvers in Louisiana in August and then we crossed into Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. When the maneuvers were over we transferred to Camp Maxey, Texas. From there we did advance training and from there we went overseas. We went to P.O.E on three trains. One went south, one went to the middle states and one went north. I was on the one that went north. We went north into Canada and then from Canada back down into Massachusetts I believe. We were at Camp Miles Standish where we were at P.O.E. Then we left out of Boston Harbor for Europe in a Liberty Ship. It was small ship where, if I remember right, with about 1,300 people on it. It got quite smelly and the seas were rough too.

1,300 people on a Liberty Ship?

Mr. Davis: I believe so. I could be wrong.

That seems about right but I mean that's pretty quartered.

Mr. Davis: Yeah about three or four deep.

When you were sailing across the Atlantic, were there worries about U-boats?

Mr. Davis: We were in convoy, we joined a convoy. We had one where we could see it. They sighted one U-boat. It was close enough that I happened to be on deck at the time. This battleship was way back and you could just barely see it on the horizon and in a few minutes it was on the side of us dropping ash cans, I think they call them, and depth charge. Of course it was quite scary. The ocean was really rough when we crossed it because that little boat, the propeller on the waves would go up out of the water and you could feel it vibrate all over.

October is not a good time to be sailing in the North Atlantic.

Mr. Davis: No.

Of course there is no really good time to be sailing in the North Atlantic.

Mr. Davis: We landed then in Scotland. I forgot the name, Glasgow or something like that. From Scotland we crossed over by train into England. We were stationed a short time in England in quansit huts. I did get the opportunity to get to go to London on a 48-hour pass. That was an experience.

Yeah? Did you ever make it back there after the war?

Mr. Davis: No, I've never been back.

You were still in high school when Pearl Harbor happened. Were you reading newspapers and paying attention to what was going on between, just in general in the world?

Mr. Davis: It was mostly on radio that I heard what was going on. I was home by myself on that Sunday afternoon when it came on the radio that Sunday morning or Sunday afternoon. It was around noon-time anyway. When my parents got back home I told them that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Then next day when I went to school we listened to President Roosevelt declare war on the radio.

Now did they actually bring the radio in the classroom?

Mr. Davis: Yes we had one in the classroom.

Wow! Which teacher brought that in?

Mr. Davis: It was in study hall and I believe that was Mrs. Ramey, I believe was the study hall teacher then.

When you went to high school, which high school did you go to?

Mr. Davis: I went to Salem Junior High for two years and then they built Montgomery Central and I missed a year and went back and completed it in 1942.

When you told your parents about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, what was their reaction?

Mr. Davis: Total shock, like everyone.

What was the atmosphere like the next day in the study hall when you listened to President Roosevelt declare war?

Mr. Davis: It was very quiet; very somber.

Did most of the boys realize that somewhere along the line that we were going to be involved in this?

Mr. Davis: I think so. I think everybody realized that their time was probably coming. Most of them were farm boys. I don't know whether all of them went or whether part of them got exempt because of the farm or not. But a big part of them did.

When were you first told that you were going to the European Theater?

Mr. Davis: It was at Camp Maxey I guess because we were training more or less for that theater.

Do you feel that the training you received prior to going overseas was adequate?

Mr. Davis: Yes, I do.

I guess they worked out a lot of the bugs by then.

Mr. Davis: We had maneuvers and D-maneuvers and all kinds of maneuvers and field training; everything pointing toward combat.

So the men of your unit, did they feel confident when they actually crossed the channel to France. Did they feel confident that "we were going to be able to do this job and we are going to win?"

Mr. Davis: I think so! I think everybody did. Of course there was always that wondering doubt in your mind.

Now you landed at LeHavre, France, on November 6th 1944 and went on the line about a week later.

Mr. Davis: We went by truck from LeHavre to Belgium and we went on line to relieve the 9th Division. They were already on the line so we relieved them and went into their positions from then until the war started. We were more just stabilized and just holding action is what it was. Our division was on a 22-mile front which was really thin; average was about 12-miles, I think, for the division frontage.

At that time did your leaders feel that the Germans were capable of a counter-offensive? Or did you feel like you were just on your way into Germany?

Mr. Davis: We just felt like we were there waiting for the supplies to catch up with us and that eventually we would take off again.

What was the supply situation prior to the Bulge?

Mr. Davis: It hadn't caught up because troops were moving so fast that supplies would lag behind and that is the reason they went into hold in action; so that the supplies could catch up with the troops.

When the Bulge started, what was that like?

Mr. Davis: To who? Tree-burst, we were in; the 3rd Battalion was in reserve which was part of our company. We were in reserve at a crossroad at Loshelmergraben. We were close to it and we were at a crossroad near it. When it started about 5 o'clock in the morning, they opened up with all the artillery that they had, I guess, and treetops burst. Our company was lucky that no one got hurt. We had built little squad huts in reserve and that helped to protect us, the logs did. It was about an hour or more of artillery and then they told us that they thought that a patrol had broken through and that we would move out. We moved out toward the line and from that time two days later it is completely blank in my mind. I can't remember anything but leaving and the next day being back at the same place, the crossroad where the Germans attacked.

So that two day period was just.....?

Mr. Davis: I blacked it out.

Wow.

Mr. Davis: According to the History, Doubtless, the book Doubtless, is another one besides the 99th History there. I was in the mortar section. It said that the mortars helped to hold up. They used up all the ammunition they had. It helped to hold back the Germans. So that is all I got to go by.

The next day I guess, December 17th, the regiment withdrew to Murringen.

Mr. Davis: Yes.

In the 394th history it says that on the next day, December 18th that the 394th slipped past the Germans to Elsenborn, Belgium. Were you all just looking for a hole through that line?

Mr. Davis: No we were kind of leap-frogging; one unit would hold and the other would pull back until we got to Elsenborn Ridge. I believe it was the morning that we walked part of the night, get into Elsenborn and we found a tent that was empty and we stayed in that part of the night. I had the fortune of crossing a little stream and falling in that stream on my back and getting my overcoat all soaked with water. So that night I spent shivering. I would sleep a little while I was so tired and then wake up and shiver and go back to sleep. The next morning we continued to Elsenborn Ridge where we set up defense and we didn't move from there.

What was your rank at this time?

Mr. Davis: At that time, I believe Staff Sergeant.

So you were responsible for other men and those guys were looking up to you.

Mr. Davis: Yes for a mortar section; which 4th platoon was a weapons platoon?

What was the level of your confidence in your leadership; your platoon leader, company commander?

Mr. Davis: We had good leaders.

As you were moving into a new position were the feelings along the lines of “we can handle this, we can...”

Mr. Davis: I think so. I think so. But during this time we were in snow; some of it up to the knees. It was the coldest winter on record in many years in Germany. It was really rough as far as weather was concerned. In fact I still have a result of it in my feet and legs; cold weather damage.

Did you get frostbite during this time?

Mr. Davis: Well they called it cold weather damage. My legs from halfway in my legs down to my feet are completely numb. I can step on my wife’s foot or fall on it and I don’t feel anything. My fingers are partially that way too.

Many of the soldiers who went through that seems to remember the weather as being much of the enemy as the Germans were.

Mr. Davis: There was a lot of frostbite. Me being from the country might have helped me more because I had been out working and cutting wood and stuff like that in the cold and snow. I don’t know that it did but I didn’t feel the effects of the cold weather until I would say maybe five or ten years ago. My legs started getting numb and tingling all over. Now finally they just get numb and I don’t feel anything.

The men under you, what was their feeling as best as you can remember during this time? How were they reacting?

Mr. Davis: They all worked together. Everybody was willing to do their share and work together and try to get the job done.

By the 20th of December, there is a notation here that the Jerries threw tank and infantry attack at the 1st Battalions stopped cold by artillery. When did you first encounter German soldiers?

Mr. Davis: We had encountered them in November when we were on line but more or less the riflemen had. We, of course, mortars were set up behind the line. One time I went on one patrol and on that patrol I got a Bronze Star. My mortar squad or section took one mortar section one mortar squad on the patrol and got a Bronze Star for that.

What was your opinion of the German soldiers that you encountered?

Mr. Davis: They were good soldiers. They were different from America though in that they had to have somebody to give them orders. With an American soldier, if the leader falls, somebody would pick up and carry on. I don't think they were that way. They had to have somebody tell them what to do. But they would fight to the death most definitely; the SS especially.

Did you ever have a chance to see the SS soldiers up close?

Mr. Davis: Not except at the time we were guarding them with the 1st Division.

Did they act different than the Wehrmacht, the regular Army soldiers?

Mr. Davis: I think so, I think they were more "we were better than anybody else, we are German." They just had that attitude of superiority.

Now midway through the Bulge, when did it occur to people that we were really going to hold here? That this was it?

Mr. Davis: That is when we pulled back to Elsenborn Ridge. Of course the ground was frozen and some people had thrown away their entrenching tools and we were digging in with helmets and knives and everything else. We were getting ready for the rest of the units to pull back through us. We were there to stay.

How hard was it trying to dig in that ground?

Mr. Davis: Oh boy, it was hard. It was frozen down probably about 12-15 inches. It was rough, especially having to put a mortar in place. It was probably a six by six and had to go down probably about three or four feet.

I was a mortar man and I know what it was like to dig a mortar position but not under those conditions, exactly.

Mr. Davis: What size?

I was 60-mm, 81, four deuce and 120's.

Mr. Davis: You got all of them.

Yep.

Mr. Davis: It was during the war I believe that the, what was it, was it 6 point something that came out? What was the next one after the 81?

It was large. Was that the Davey Crockett?

Mr. Davis: I can't remember.

I believe they had the four deuce at the time. But digging a mortar position in an absolutely frozen ground of course during that time I imagine there was a real big motivation because of artillery to get that position dug and to make sure.

Mr. Davis: Usually we would dig a slit trench first and then dig our mortar position and then come back and finish our slit trench in the two-man foxhole. An experience I had during the Bulge after I got back from Elsenborn was one night they called down to us and said, "We want you to fire a flare tonight." So the time to fire the flare went out and I tried to get the base....we always moved away from the position and I tried to get the base plate up and it was frozen to the ground. So crazy us, we picked up the mortar barrel and carried it over and set it down, fired the flair, and it buried that barrel. We had to try to get it out of the ground then.

Illumination rounds, they have the biggest kick. I remember that, that the illumination round will bury a base plate in a barrel really quickly.

Mr. Davis: We probably wouldn't have got it back except dig it up if it hadn't been frozen.

Which battalion, which company and platoon, were you in?

Mr. Davis: I was 4th Platoon, Company K, and 394th 99th Infantry.

Okay and that was what battalion again?

Mr. Davis: 3rd Battalion.

What was the worst point of the Battle of the Bulge? Was it Christmas Eve or Christmas Day?

Mr. Davis: That was part of it but it had kindly quieted down at the time. If I remember right, on Christmas Day we did get cold turkey. We got a Christmas dinner but it was of course cold and you could imagine in a metal mess kit at that temperature. If it was hot, it didn't stay hot long. We would go to the CP and get our meal and go back to the position to eat it. We would alternate.

Did you find yourself looking at the sky and wondering when those clouds were going to break and you would see some aircraft?

Mr. Davis: Yeah. I was just reading in this last night and looking through it. We had one break in the sky and planes came over and then it closed up again. It told in there about how they destroyed the tanks and I think that helped to, to kind of slow the Germans down.

What was the thrust of the German attack in your sector? Was it mostly just artillery fire or were there tanks and infantry?

Mr. Davis: All; infantry, tanks, and Panzers. Of course you had bazookas. If you could get close enough to one and fire the bazooka and knock the tread off, you had a better chance of knocking it out completely.

What was the feeling the first time you saw a tank?

Mr. Davis: Fear!

Did you have armor support of your own?

Mr. Davis: Yes, we had Sherman tanks.

What were some of the units that were close to where you were? What type?

Mr. Davis: On our right was the 106th and a Calvary; it seems like it was the 14th Calvary or something. They were next to the 106th. On our left, at that time, the 78th Division I believe.

As a Staff Sergeant did you and the Platoon leader get briefings during this time as to something involving the larger picture?

Mr. Davis: Well usually the Platoon Sergeant and the Platoon Leader would get the briefings and they would come and brief the squad leaders.

When they would give you these briefings what was the feelings that you got from it? Was it worry or was there still a great feel of confidence from your leadership?

Mr. Davis: Well still there was confidence and the worry too of course. You always had that fear of "Am I going to be next?"

Artillery barrages; what was it like to come under artillery fire?

Mr. Davis: It was scary, even in a jeep track. It seemed like the lower you got to the ground, it gives you a little bit of protection but of course it didn't give much of any.

What sort of casualties did you suffer within your unit and within the company?

Mr. Davis: Well within the platoon I can talk more about that because we were just set up wherever we were needed. The rifle platoons, they had more casualties than we did. If I remember it seems like it was seven in the 4th Platoon that were killed and a number wounded. I don't remember how much.

When was the first time you saw a dead American and how did you feel?

Mr. Davis: I believe it was one of the machine gunners in my Platoon at Elsenborn Ridge. He was the first one I saw. The feeling was, I can't explain it. There was my buddy and we had been together since December of 1942 and we trained as a division. Every once in awhile they would

take out some for replacements and replace them. Most of the people in my platoon stayed together from the time of induction or until the activation of the 99th through the war.

How close knit were you all? Did it get much closer once you got to combat?

Mr. Davis: Real close; like brothers.

Do you still stay in contact with as many as you can?

Mr. Davis: Yeah, but they are passing away fast though. In fact a couple of weeks ago one of my, after I got to be a Platoon Sergeant, the guy that passed away was made Squad Leader for the mortars. He was in his eighties; I think about 80 and he passed away in Florida. Also, one of my machine gunners lived in Dyersburg and he passed away several years ago but his son contacted me. So we got to be real good friends. He comes up every once in awhile to visit us.

When the sky finally cleared and the aircraft were able to come back and do their mission, how rapidly did you move from the defensive to the offense?

Mr. Davis: It was in January, I believe, but we held the position at Elsenborn until I believe it was January. Then we started out and the 9th Division was on the left and we were in the center. In other words they pinsered us out. If that is what you call that. We went into reserve awhile and then we got a break. They called it a rest time but we had to go back and cut trees and build roads. I think we did get about a week's rest after that and then back on the line again.

That doesn't sound like a lot of rest; cutting trees.

Mr. Davis: At least it was different. When we went back on line, I believe it was the 82nd Airborne we relieved at the time.

When did you first cross into Germany?

Mr. Davis: That would have been in January or in February.

When you first crossed the Rhine and you knew you were standing on German soil, was there a feeling that...?

Mr. Davis: We were on German soil before we crossed the Rhine after the Bulge. We were on the border of Germany and Belgium.

But crossing the Rhine though, to actually overcome that obstacle and be standing on the other side, was there a feeling among the men that "we are getting close, we are getting closer to home?"

Mr. Davis: "Anytime now" was the feeling.

As it became more and more apparent that the war was winding down to an end, was there an extra note of caution among a lot of the men?

Mr. Davis: I don't think so. I think they did their jobs just the same.

Just the same all the way through? That is what I heard from just about everybody. What was the next big event after the Bulge?

Mr. Davis: We took the Ruhr Pocket. We were part of that and captured I don't know how many thousand troops. But it was more than a thousand, I remember. We eliminated that and from there we crossed the Cologne Plain. According to this history, we were the first division to the Rhine River. Then our next first was we were the first complete division to cross across the Rhine. Of course, the armored was across there, but as an infantry division we were the first.

In the unit history it said that you enter Germany near Aachen March 2nd and then the Battle of the Erft Canal on March 3rd and then crossing the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen and attacking to the south. Describe that period.

Mr. Davis: I believe we were in first Army at the time that they crossed the Rhine and we went by truck about 200 miles to Remagen. We got there at night time and it was continually shelling all night. The next day, early the next morning we crossed the Rhine and set up position across the Rhine and then we attacked after all the division got across. We attacked to the south. At this time the Germans were trying everything to destroy the Ludendorff Bridge. They were bombing it and that is where I saw my first German, or first plane ever, jet plane. They were coming over trying to bomb it and destroy it. They also had frog men that were floating down the river with dynamite trying to blow it up. We had already moved and our company was taking Hufingen I believe it was. We were sitting in the town and they couldn't use mortars in the town. We were setting up on the bank of the Rhine River and they were firing continually. Anything that would float down the river the machine gunners would fire at it and one of the bullets ricochet off the water and hit one of the guys helmet. Of course we had move up over-looking Hufingen and there they fired everything they had I guess at us; anti-aircraft guns, 20 mm, anything they had they would fire and cut treetops off. This is where the next guy and he was a machine gunner also was killed. The guy before him, there was one other guy who made Platoon Sergeant, he was wounded. He and several other men were wounded there. But he was the only guy in our Platoon that was killed, Melnick. I took over as Platoon Sergeant then. The next day or two days later we took Hufingen. We were pinned down actually with all this anti-aircraft fire and stuff. At this time they had asked for black volunteers. Our Platoon Leader, Lieutenant Roston, and one of the Platoon Sergeants from the rifle company had been sent back to train these black guys. They came across the Rhine and came up and at our back when we were in a clump of trees. They came up and relieved us and the Germans almost had us surrounded. They asked about black people fighting. That group fought. I was going to tell you awhile ago, one of these guys I got to be friends, he was Lawrence Boris and he was from New York. He calls every once in

awhile and we call him. They also have a reunion. They call it the 2221 Club which was the number of the black volunteers and we had been to it. The year before last we went to Nashville to their reunion. I got to see Lawrence and all the other guys but he was the only one that was there from our company. From then on they were our 5th Platoon. We had a 5th Platoon, Company K did.

Was it an all black Platoon?

Mr. Davis: Yes. Well except for the Platoon Leader and the Platoon Sergeant. The rest were blacks. They had rank too. But a lot of these people, the thing of it is, is that they had given up higher rank just to get to come fight.

They gave up higher rank just to be able to come and fight?

Mr. Davis: Yes.

When they first showed up and when the other men got to see how they behaved and how they fought did it change some minds?

Mr. Davis: Well yes, especially among southern people of course. They were welcome. When they came up they were the ones that kind of relieved us because we could hardly move at all.

So the resistance during this time in the early part of March was just getting more intense?

Mr. Davis: At times it would be sporadic. We would go take a little town and get no resistance hardly at all. But then on the next one they may be set up good and hit us hard.

Did you notice as you progressed through Germany the soldiers seemed to be getting younger and older at the same time?

Mr. Davis: Yes. There were 12, 13, 14 and 15-year old kids and really old men.

Did you take that as an indication that they were really just about at the end of their string?

Mr. Davis: Yep.

When American soldiers saw dead 12, 13, 14-year old Germans did they consider them different than the older guys? They were just the enemy.

Mr. Davis: No. I was fixing to tell you about Hufingen. That is where the black Platoon had really shown themselves that they were willing to fight. The story in there was that this one soldier went in the building, kicked the door in and went in the building and we called them _____ opened up on him. Of course he fired back and when he went to see who it was, it was a woman. They call them flak; flak maids or something like that. She had her _____ gun still in her hand holding onto it. Women and young kids, they were desperate toward the end.

As you were progressing through Europe and seeing some of these towns and seeing some of these cities did it occur to you just how sad it was that so much good was being destroyed and lost?

Mr. Davis: Yes it was. It was sad to see their homes destroyed and maybe the people didn't want it that way. In the towns there were hardly buildings left.

On April 5th there is a note here that the 394th jumped off in the Battle of the Ruhr Pocket. From April 5th to the end of April just give us a general overview.

Mr. Davis: The Ruhr Pocket is where they had managed to get around behind the Germans and cut off and they formed a pocket of them. That was part of our job, to go in and help clean up the pocket. That is where thousands of German soldiers surrendered. They had a choice to die or surrender so a lot of them surrendered and of course others fought. A group would surrender and the rest of them would pull back and fight again.

Was the SS surrendering in the same numbers as the regular Wehrmacht?

Mr. Davis: No they weren't. They fought, a lot of them, to the end.

By the end of April this is getting very close because the war is winding down, across the Danube on April 28th and 29th. What happened over the next week?

Mr. Davis: That I can't remember. I remember crossing the Danube. It seems that right at the Danube that they had on the opposite bank that they had set up a pretty good defensive and they held it for awhile. After we broke through, then they pulled back. We would set up and fight, then pull back and set up and fight.

When did you finally get word that Nazi's surrendered?

Mr. Davis: We were going into battle. We were marching down the road. I believe it was on May 8th and they said, "All troop movements halt!" So we pulled over to the side of the road and sat down. Finally they gave us orders to pull back. We pulled back to a farm. Our Platoon set up and took over the farm. I have some pictures of the old farmer there and his horse and the house that we set up in and waiting for the final turn; the surrender turn and the Germans to acknowledge it.

Once the surrender came what was the mission of the 99th Division 394th Infantry?

Mr. Davis: We pulled back to the main river. We stayed there and did some part time training until they decided on the sectors for the military government and then we went into Aub, Germany, our company did. We sat up there as a military government. One of my jobs as Platoon Leader was that every afternoon or every other afternoon we would go up to all the other little villages around and talk to the _____, I believe is what they called them then, and to see if they had any needs or anything.

Once the surrender came, first off what was your feeling when you first heard “Germany surrenders!”

Mr. Davis: Joy! Jubilation I guess you would call it!

And the men around you? What did you do that first night?

Mr. Davis: I got a good night’s sleep. We tried to find some food and had a good night’s sleep.

Did a lot of the men start talking about home again?

Mr. Davis: They talked about their girlfriends and home like we did all the time. That was one of the subjects.

This is something that is really common as far as a memory for a lot of guys in the situation, food. Now you have been living primarily off of what up to that point?

Mr. Davis: C’s and K’s.

Did it continue that way after the surrender?

Mr. Davis: No, they set up kitchen and we would have regular meals.

What was like the first good meal? Where was that and when was that?

Mr. Davis: I don’t know. It was before the surrender though. It was I believe it was Elsenborn Ridge that we had our first meal. We were heaping our mess kits up “Boy we are going to eat all of this!” But we couldn’t eat it. We would eat part of it and the rest of it, well we couldn’t eat it. Our stomachs had shrunk so much you could just eat so much and that was it.

The Army must have been a pretty good weight loss program.

Mr. Davis: It was at this time. You know the kitchen could set up and keep up with us as fast as the infantry is moving.

Did the men in your Platoon ever talk about how well the Navy had it or the Air Force flyers had it?

Mr. Davis: Maybe the Air Force. I don’t remember anything about Navy. Of course the Air Force had a good warm bed just about every night and food.

Was there an awareness among your men that the Air Force had it good but that they also had it bad in some ways too?

Mr. Davis: Yeah, they took the chances too. I was talking to my sister-in-law and my brother-in-law was in the Air Force. He was in the South Pacific and he said something about it. I said,

“Well we were on line 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.” At least they got to go back most of the time at night and get a nights rest and food.

After the surrender, was there a worry that, “We were going to be sent to the Pacific?”

Mr. Davis: Yes, some. They set up a point system. The people that had been there of course they had the most points and they started shipping them back home to stay. Of course the lower the points the more chance you had of going to the division that was going to the South Pacific. Apparently I had enough points that they sent me to the first division which was Army Occupation and guarding SS troops.

What was it like guarding these guys after the surrender? What was their feeling when they finally realized that is was over?

Mr. Davis: They would usually do what you told them to do. Our job, we were close to Nuremburg right off of Nuremburg. Our job with them would be every morning we would put them in trucks and take them into Nuremburg and make them shovel all the torn down buildings on trucks and haul it away. Of course they didn't like the labor part. But we didn't have a lot of trouble.

Did the arrogance start to disappear a little bit?

Mr. Davis: Yeah I think so. They started to unwind themselves a little bit.

About this time did you start to hear rumors or talk about some of the things that other units were finding in Germany and elsewhere?

Mr. Davis: Yeah I think so. I don't know whether we had a radio, I believe we did. I believe somebody confiscated a radio so we got to hear what they were finding at Dachau and the other places. We relieved some prisoner-of-war camps.

Describe that.

Mr. Davis: We got to see the guys and some of them were from our unit. We got to see those guys and also how they had been treated; starved actually. Most of them had lost so much weight and sometimes you couldn't hardly recognize them.

When you found out how those prisoners had been treated and then when you started finding out about some of the other things that our troops were finding in Germany, did you realize that you had taken part in something that just had to be done?

Mr. Davis: Yes, I think so. It was over and we were glad.

Did you personally take part in relieving a prisoner-of-war camp?

Mr. Davis: No, not personally. Usually the riflemen were there first. We usually most the time were in the rear where we could go. The machine gunners could go where they were needed and the mortars could also set up. It was mostly riflemen that were first there.

When did you first find out that you were going home?

Mr. Davis: They transferred me from 1st Division to the 70 something Division in _____, Czechoslovakia. I was there a short time. I don't remember exactly. I would say a month or so and then I got my orders to go to Camp Luck Strike which was at LeHavre to come home. I came home with the 80th Division.

Describe the homecoming.

Mr. Davis: We got into New York and went by the Statue of Liberty. That was a good sight. Then we went from there to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. I got myself and everything set up. From there I went to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. I was discharged there and nobody knew I was coming home. I went by bus home and surprised the family. I had two more brothers that were in the service. One was in India and the other was in Germany also. But I never got to see him the whole time I was over there. In fact his unit and our unit were knocking at the same time. But it just surprised everybody when I got home.

I imagine that you had been writing letters home and they had been writing letters to you and back on the home front that was hard for them too. Describe the feeling when you got home.

Mr. Davis: Happiness that is all I can say. I was just happy to be home.

When did it first really hit you, "I survived this? I survived this and I got an entire life left in front of me?"

Mr. Davis: I don't know; probably at the end of the war. Of course there was still danger though because some people were fanatical enough. I think then that's when it really dawned on me. "I made it!"

It must have been a wonderful feeling.

Mr. Davis: Yes!

When you were in New York was there a parade or anything like that?

Mr. Davis: No. We just got off of our ship and got on a ferry, crossed the New Jersey side and there wasn't anything for us. All the parades and everything were all over.

When you first got home did you wear the uniform for awhile?

Mr. Davis: I don't think so. My parents lived out in the country so I just went into my civilian clothes.

How did you pick up the threads of your life from there? How many days before you went back to work?

Mr. Davis: Well around the farm I helped my dad. At first I was going to farm for the year and my brother-in-law asked me to go in business in a supermarket with him. So we both did on June 13th 1946, and from there things progressed.

As the rest of the veterans from the war from the Pacific and the European Theater came back did any of you ever talk about it?

Mr. Davis: Yes, some. At one time several years ago, a number of the 4th Platoon, K Company got together. We had a mini reunion and several of us got together. I had one friend; he was a Section Sergeant that came through it without a scratch. He got back home and some drag racers ran him off the road and he was paralyzed almost completely. He could manage to feed himself and to shave and to smoke. But everything else he had to have done for him. He would either come to the Smokey Mountains or we would go to Georgia where he lived outside of ___ outside of Atlanta. We would go down there, all of us would, to meet together so he could be close to home and not have to do a lot of traveling.

Would you say that the attitude of most of the veterans when they came back was, “Well that job is over and now it is time to pick up?”

Mr. Davis: Yes I think that was their attitude. “Let’s start our life all over again.”

As things deteriorated between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, was there the thought that, “Oh no, here we go again!”

Mr. Davis: Yeah, I’m sure it was.

When you first heard just five years later that we were at war with Korea, what did you think about that?

Mr. Davis: I felt sorry for those guys.

Can we take a look at your scrapbook? I’d like to take a look at some of the pictures that you have. This little booklet right here is a record that we have of the 394th and various days all the way through the war. It is very handy for recollecting various things. The history of the 99th Division by Major General Walter E. Lauer, Battle Babies. Where did that nickname come from?

Mr. Davis: I didn’t tell you that did I?

No you didn’t.

Mr. Davis: Battle Babies, that name was put on us by a news reporter because we were green on line with one of the divisions that had just went on line and hadn't had any combat experience. After we showed ourselves, he named us the Battle Babies. That stuck.

Was it a nickname that you all embraced?

Mr. Davis: Well yes, because I got it on my bumper out there on the front bumper; the 99th Division Battle Babies.

Explain to me some of the stuff that is in the book here.

Mr. Davis: This is a group of the veterans at one of the reunions. Is it glaring?

Back in 1972. Let me see if we can put that over and maybe bring it over here by the couch, right there on this table. This should be good.

Mr. Davis: Here is the man I was talking about that came through the war without a scratch.

...and then had that incident happen with the drag racers. Is that you right there?

Mr. Davis: Yes.

Do you have some pictures of you in uniform?

Mr. Davis: I have one up here on the mantle.

Wow, you looked like a tough guy.

Mr. Davis: That was taken in Paris, Texas.

Is all this stuff on file at the library?

Mr. Davis: This is the survivors of K Company; the originals.

Where are you in this one?

Mr. Davis: I believe that right there is me.

I bet that that was one happy group.

Mr. Davis: This is just general stuff that I had brought home with me. I had cataract surgery and this is my T.S. card.

What is a T.S. card?

Mr. Davis: You don't know; in the Army 20 years and don't know?

Oh yes, we had something a little bit different than a T.S. card but it amounted to the same thing.

Mr. Davis: I didn't keep a copy of the report but this is the answers to a survey I got and there are several pages of it there. That is at Aub, Germany, occupation. That is an old castle. This is the Platoon Leader. This is the Section Sergeant, mortars and machine gun. John D___, mortars and Clarence Smith, machine gunner, section machine gunner.

Tech Sergeant Leroy Davis. You look like an Army poster child. Tech Sergeant, E-7, Leroy Davis, Giessen, Germany.

Mr. Davis: This is in combat. This was during one of our breaks. That is my discharge there.

I've seen this. Harry Truman.

Mr. Davis: That was taken at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. I was a recruit there. Another thing I didn't tell you about, after the war was over there were two Belgium men that they called themselves amateur archeologist. They go out into the 99th Infantry sector and try to find different things or whatever they can find. They found one dog, my dog tags that I lost during the Battle of the Bulge and they sent it to me. I got word that they, he wrote to me and told me that they had it. He found out through records in St. Louis my address, so I have that back.

When did they find that?

Mr. Davis: That was back, it must have been 10 years ago or more. I believe the last count was that they found twelve killed in action people that would have never been found and accounted for. They found that many so far. They found all kinds of bracelets and stuff like that and they send it to the people. Now the 99th Division Association has them come to the states every year to the reunion and they have it this year in Little Rock, Arkansas; the 99th Reunion.

I imagine that that is something that a lot of people never really think about are all the missing; all the people that just received a ___ or whatever and never came home and nobody knew what happened to them.

Mr. Davis: Maybe they were thrown in a foxhole and buried right there and maybe they find them.

What was it like to get that dog tag back? When you opened that up and saw that?

Mr. Davis: Well he had written the letter first and asked me if I wanted it so I knew it was coming. It was a surprise because I had forgotten that I had lost it. It's in here somewhere. This is for my discharge also.

All this is copied and on file at the Montgomery County Library?

Mr. Davis: Right. It is in the locked up file. You would have to ask somebody to show it.

Citation for the Bronze Star.

Mr. Davis: Those two are support planes. They use those primarily for supporting Infantry. This is my second Bronze Star.

You received two Bronze Stars?

Mr. Davis: Yes.

All in all, how would you describe your experience now? How has it affected the rest of your life?

Mr. Davis: Ordinarily I would say that it hadn't really affected me except for the cold weather injury. I haven't asked much from them. I do receive 10% on each leg. I kept my GI insurance so I still have that. I had bought an annuity on it so I get that now, so disability and annuity. That's about all except for what I worked for from the government I get.

As the years go on does it hit you occasionally just how important what a vital part of American History that all was and what we did?

Mr. Davis: Yeah, it was an amazing thing. I will put it that way, with what happened and the outcome in both Germany and the Pacific. God had to be on our side. That is all it could be. That is all it mounts to.

Would you like to say anything else before we conclude here?

Mr. Davis: I can't think of anything except praise the Lord for what he has done for us.

Well on behalf of everyone I want to personally thank you for your service to our country. I genuinely appreciate the opportunity you have given me today to be able to record your story.

Mr. Davis: Thank you and I appreciate you coming.

(Tape Ends)