

Mr. Sweetland: I volunteered for World War II in June 17, 1942.

Since you enlisted after Pearl Harbor did Pearl Harbor have a big impact on your decision to enlist in the armed forces?

Mr. Sweetland: Yes it made a big impact. I realized what we were up against and they needed all that they could get.

Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor occurred?

Mr. Sweetland: If I'm not mistaken Pearl Harbor occurred on Sunday morning. I was at church. I came back from church and got it on the radio.

Was it just a state of shock with everybody around?

Mr. Sweetland: It was a big shock to everybody, the whole nation. It just made a big difference in time. Initial enlistment stayed overnight and the next day for examination and was sent to Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia. We stayed there just to get our uniforms and shots for a couple of weeks and then I was transferred to Louisiana, Deritter Army Air Force Base in Louisiana. I went to Biloxi, Mississippi, for basic training for two months. I finished basic training after two months and went to Deritter, Louisiana Air Force Base.

What did they assign you to? Was it infantry?

Mr. Sweetland: I was assigned to the Air Force. Deritter Air Force Base was a last stage of training before the B-25s went overseas.

What kind of training did they give you?

Mr. Sweetland: Basic training?

Yeah, what was it mostly involved in?

Mr. Sweetland: The basic training was just mostly physical almost; mostly physical.

How about at the Air Force Base in Louisiana?

Mr. Sweetland: I was assigned to the Technical Inspectors Office. We had to keep up all the records and go out and inspect the airplanes and keep a record of all the changes and modifications and everything that took place to the airplane.

The Air Force took a much more active role in World War II as opposed to previous conflicts didn't they?

Mr. Sweetland: Yes, Air Force played a big part.

When were you shipped over to the European theater?

Mr. Sweetland: I stayed at Deritter approximately a year and a half I guess. Then I was shipped to Greensboro, North Carolina, overseas shipping center. From there they sent us to New Jersey, Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. We stayed there waiting on a boat. I think I stayed two or three weeks there and then one morning early they got us up and carried us up to the harbor of New York and put us on the Queen

Elizabeth. At that time it was the biggest ship floating. I done forgot how many thousands of people were on it.

Did you know that day that you would be going across seas or did they just get you up and tell you?

Mr. Sweetland: They would just get you up. You don't know. They don't tell you anything where you are going or nothing.

How long did it take you to make that trip across seas?

Mr. Sweetland: We crossed the Atlantic in seven days. It was so fast. We went in a zig zag course and we didn't have escorts. You zigzagged to miss the torpedo boats. You zigzagged all the way across. It took seven days.

There was a big fear of the German U-boats.

Mr. Sweetland: We landed at Scotland.

Did you stay in Scotland for a very long period of time?

Mr. Sweetland: No, we were immediately put on a train and sent to London, England.

In London were you just at an Air Force Base?

Mr. Sweetland: Yes, an Air Force Base at London, England.

Were there a whole lot of American planes over there?

Mr. Sweetland: Yeah. You can't describe it there were so many. When they would leave in the mornings for the raids over Germany it would just block the sun almost. It was just bunch after bunch. The British planes and our planes it was just unbelievable just how many were in the air.

Were you pretty much working hand in hand with the British?

Mr. Sweetland: We had our own air base there; Shepherd.

What stage was the war in when you arrived over in Europe?

Mr. Sweetland: We were bombing Germany heavily every day, day and night. That was the main thing I was involved in. I wasn't on the planes. I was base operation.

What was the moral of the people? Did they see kind of a light at the end of the tunnel or was it still...?

Mr. Sweetland: Moral was fairly good at that time. Moral was above average to be in the situation that it was. They knew that they had a job to do and they just more or less just thought it over that that is what they wanted to do; most of them.

When you first arrived in England were you aware of all the atrocities that Hitler was undertaking?

Mr. Sweetland: Well most of it. A little news leaked out. We knew that there was something bad going on. We could get some information but not much. News was hard to come by.

How did you get most of the news that you found out over there?

Mr. Sweetland: We had a weekly newspaper that was printed by the Army. They censored what they wanted to and let us know the rest of it. They didn't tell too much. Radios were the same way, most everything was censored.

When did you become aware of what the extent of what Hitler was doing?

Mr. Sweetland: After we got to Germany. The main thing you could see what he had done. We learned more after the war was over about what had happened when we got to Germany. I went right to Berlin eight days after the war was over. It was pretty evident of what had happened during that time.

Going back to England for a second can you take us through what the living conditions were and what a typical day was like?

Mr. Sweetland: The living conditions were better at the Air Force bases than other outfits. Of course we weren't on the move like some of the other outfits were all the time. We had pretty good food and we had some spare time after working hours and bicycles to ride anywhere we wanted to go. That was the only mode of transportation. Everybody was nearly issued a bicycle.

Where would you go over in those towns?

Mr. Sweetland: It was little crossroads town all around. They had little café's and beer joints, pubs they were called in England. There would be a bunch at night hearing music.

Did pretty much everybody go there?

Mr. Sweetland: Yeah, it was just about the only recreation there was after working hours. We would go out and ride our bicycles to different places.

Was Germany still bombing England at that time?

Mr. Sweetland: Yes, we had a lot of trouble with those V-2 rockets and buzz bombs they called them; unmanned flights, bombs they would send over. We would be up and down all night long going to the shelter and back. Sometimes it was 12-14 times a night. We would get back in bed and about that time sirens would go off again. We would go back to the air raid and get back to bed and have to go back again. They pretty well kept us busy at night.

Did you find it pretty difficult to get a full night's sleep?

Mr. Sweetland: Yes, it sure was. There were a few planes slipping over the channel strafing our air bases; fighter planes with their machine guns. We had a lot of trouble with that. They had the air raid shelter it was a big mound of dirt. It had a little concrete walkway that goes right through the middle with the other one coming the other way cross ways and it was narrow. That would keep those strafing planes; the bullets didn't come straight down. You could get in that and huddle down close to the ground. Those little walkways go through that big mound of dirt. It was reinforced concrete and that was what they called our bomb shelters.

Was it pretty cramped in there?

Mr. Sweetland: Yes, it was. It would be pretty full, but you were still glad to be in one. I spent quite a bit of time in one. If it came straight at you those little narrow things wouldn't have done much good but if it was coming...of course you could get where they crossed one another and you could get in one where it wasn't coming toward you.

Can you tell us where you were when you found out that Germany surrendered and what you remember about that?

Mr. Sweetland: Specific news came out and I forgot what time of day it was. That next day I was in London. That was something. If you got outside on the street you had to go with the crowd. There was such a crowd you couldn't turn around and go where you wanted to. You just had to walk until people went to bed or got thinned out. It was just the awfullest celebration you had ever seen. Everybody was happy that it was over. They had taken a pretty good beating in England themselves on all those bombs and whatnot, rocket planes. It was a big relief for them.

After Germany surrendered you said eight days and you went to Germany?

Mr. Sweetland: I went to Germany. We had a stopover in Paris, France. We stayed there two or three days, lay over, and then we flew on over in to Berlin at Berlin Air Force Base; _____ Air Force Base, it was in the city of Berlin. It was so torn up that we had to land on those steel runways, those portable runways. When we hit the runways were all bombed and tore up. They laid down those temporary steel runways; we had to land on that. But after that it took, there was a big hotel, a great big round hotel with a big courtyard in the middle and they were pretty well bombed and tore all to pieces but that is where we found enough rooms and enough bedding and everything that is where we located right there at that big hotel. When we got our stuff together enough to start operating again they put me in charge of making some rooms and places for the VIP's to come in to Berlin to peace conferences and everything and I was in charge of getting beds and fixing up rooms. I had a work bunch of Germans and then I had one old man that was an interpreter that worked under me. He would do the telling them folks what to do and how to do it. I couldn't tell them. I could tell him and he could tell them. We got pretty nice quarters set up. We had General Eisenhower and a bunch of the big people come through there and spent the night for a few days.

How long did you spend doing that job?

Mr. Sweetland: I imagine we were over there six months. They would start rotating them home but it took a long time after the war was over. We stayed there I imagine six to eight months or a year maybe, I don't know.

What was day to day life like for you while you were over in Berlin?

Mr. Sweetland: It was good. You weren't under the pressure of war time. It was more relaxed. We had a job to do but we had a lot of free time. Our main thing we would go down at the Brandenburg Gate. That is where all the Russians would hang out. We would go down there and trade. Them Russians would give you anything in the world for wristwatches. They had them from the wrists up to their elbows.

Can you take us through a typical day whenever you arrived over in Germany?

Mr. Sweetland: When we arrived in Germany the moral was a lot better. Everybody was out from under the strain and life became a lot better. We had a lot of time off. We had a lot of work to do but we had a lot of time off. I was assigned to the VIP quarters to get them ready for the VIPs to come in for their meetings and what not. We had to confiscate a lot of furniture and fix them up where they would be

livable. That was my job for most of the time that I was left in Germany. We had a crew of German workers. They done the work and I had an interpreter. I could go through him and tell them what to do and he could relate back to me. Life was just a lot better there. After they got established a little while there we would go to the dining room which was a big hotel dining room originally and we would sit down at the table and we would have a waitress to bring our food to us. They had a band on the bandstand playing while we were there which was just a big change than what we had been used to. Everybody kind of relaxed and we had a lot of time to go sightseeing through Germany, through Berlin.

Did you have a lot of interaction with the German people while you were over there?

Mr. Sweetland: Well, they were pretty well reconciled that they had been defeated and they were nice. I would have to say that they were glad that it was over with too because they had taken a lot of loss. It was a sight that you didn't want to see but the town of Berlin was pretty well destroyed. It was awful looking. We would go down and there was always somebody wanting to sell something to get a little money. We would swap and trade and buy and sell to pass the time away and just sight see. We done mostly walking. That was the main thing. There wasn't much transportation left over there.

They took you bicycles away from you?

Mr. Sweetland: Yes. We didn't have any bicycles over there. It was a big change from the war. There were a lot of interesting sights that was pitiful sights. We went through some of the death chambers where they had done away with the Jews. In some spots it was just horrible, some of those ovens that they had burned them in. I had been in them. We would go just about all over town. We went to what was supposed to be Hitler's headquarter office. I wound up with several souvenirs. We got a bunch of his stationary with his private stationary with everything across it. We would use it to write home with. We would pick up a lot of souvenirs and trade for them and swap.

When you were talking about writing letters I know they censored a lot of the mail during the war. Once the war over was the mail still censored?

Mr. Sweetland: It got to where it wasn't censored, no. We could write freely after so long of a time. It was censored all during the stay through England and all but they lifted it.

You mentioned about getting some souvenirs from Hitler's office. Can you tell us what that is right there that you have?

Mr. Sweetland: This is an official German stamp of some kind with a swastika on it that they used. We were just wanting stuff to bring home as souvenirs and we picked up most anything we could get. This is one of the stamps that I got out of what was supposed to have been Hitler's office.

The medal you have right there, can you tell us the story behind it?

Mr. Sweetland: There were all different medals for a different amount of male children that were born. Hitler was trying to build up his future Army and the mothers would get medals for the baby boys that were born. There were different medals for the different number. It would go up every time there was another one so I guess at that time that this meant a lot to the women. It was one of Hitler's gifts to them.

Did you find that in the place that you found the stamp or did you trade?

Mr. Sweetland: I picked that up in the office myself. We were rummaging through the bombed out, it was all bombed out, but you could go through, what you could get through and I picked some of this stuff up in the office and the stamp came from the office too.

How did you know what it was; just talking to some of the Germans?

Mr. Sweetland: Yeah. We could communicate with some of them. We got to where we could get by pretty good with language and trading. We learned about swapping and trading every day. That is where we got most of the information from.

Can you tell me how you spent the end of your time in Germany?

Mr. Sweetland: Well they got to where they would give us a furlough. I decided I wanted to go to Switzerland. They gave us two weeks furlough plus whatever traveling time it takes to get there and back. I spent two weeks in Switzerland and toured pretty much the whole country. We were in Geneva and all in the mountains. We went up on the ski lifts to the places on top of the mountain. I bought several souvenirs in Geneva and shipped them home. I think the bad weather set in and my way of travel kind of collapsed and I think I was gone a month on that two week furlough. It took us a month to get back. We got back to Frankfurt, Germany, and the weather was so bad that the planes were grounded for about two weeks. We would go down at the airport every morning and wait on a train trying to hitchhike home but the planes wouldn't come in. We would go back; we were all bedded up in the Frankfurt Army Base there. The next morning we would get up and go down to the airport and finally after about two weeks one morning there was a couple of Lieutenants that came down after some cargo or something and we asked them could we go back with them. They put us back in the back with that cargo and we rode back to Berlin. We finally got back to Berlin. From that time on it was pretty well waiting until our number come up to start our trip home. We waited and waited and I was shipped back to Paris and we waited there and waited and waited for three or four weeks in Paris before we got to board a ship to start home on. We came home on a small victory ship which was rough riding. It was awful rough, it was so little. I think it took us two weeks from the time we boarded ship until we landed back in New York Harbor. That was a good sight to see that Statue of Liberty when we got in sight of it. That was one of the best feelings you can imagine.

What was the country like when you arrived back?

Mr. Sweetland: Well, it was something, our country hadn't changed that much. We were sent back to the same place we left from, Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Of course they greeted us with all the best foods, fresh milk and eggs and everything in the world we had been out of for so long that it was something to get back on American soil or to think you are headed home eventually.

How much longer were you in the armed forces once you arrived back over?

Mr. Sweetland: In the states?

Yeah.

Mr. Sweetland: We stayed in Camp Kilmer I guess a week to get paperwork straightened out and get transportation back, how we shipped from New Jersey back to Atlanta again. I was discharged; we were on a train about two days and nights. We had to side track, the troop trains had to side track for the trains that were carrying supplies and regular trains. We were in a sleeping compartment. It took us about 2 ½ days I believe to get back to Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia. There we had to debrief and go through all the paperwork and everything of getting our final discharge. I was there about four days I believe.

Here are a couple of the items that he got while he was stationed in Germany and trading with the German people.

(End of Interview)

First off I want to thank you for helping us out with this, with my project. Letting you know what this is for, this is for my History class where we are interviewing World War II Veterans and civilians during the 1930s and 1940s. Can you please state your name and date of birth for the camera?

Mrs. Bussard: My name is Norma Bussard and my date of birth is February 28, 1925.

What was the size of your family?

Mrs. Bussard: I had six brothers and five sisters; a family of 12.

That's immense. How did your family, how did you feed such a huge family?

Mrs. Bussard: My dad was a milk man. He worked for a milk company. He worked very steady. He had a good job as far as that was concerned at that time of year so we didn't have too much of a problem.

Was your older brothers or anyone else in your family, were they working?

Mrs. Bussard: I had three older brothers. No, they were both married. They were much older than I was. I think that is a mistake, they weren't married in the 1930s.

What was your family like during the Depression in the 1930s?

Mrs. Bussard: We didn't have a lot. Like I said, my dad was a milk man. We didn't have a lot of excess stuff but we had what we needed. We handed our clothes down from one child to the other, the same way with the boys. We had a lot of beans and soups and things like that. We never had any problem really with; I can't remember. We always had lots to eat. My dad and mom, they baked all our bread. Daddy always mixed it up and mom put it out in the pans and baked it. We always had lots of homemade bread.

You and I were talking earlier just before the camera, you are from Oil City, Pennsylvania, and that is where you lived all of your life.

Mrs. Bussard: Yes.

What was Oil City like back then in the 30s?

Mrs. Bussard: Oil City had a population I think of about 18,000. At that time most of the businesses was oil and petroleum and stuff like that; steel mills, a lot of steel mills.

Was it a booming city do you think or was it quiet? It seems rather quiet.

Mrs. Bussard: Yeah, it wasn't no city like Pittsburg or anything. It was just more or less like a small town.

You were born in 1925. Let's say at the age of 10 in 1935 what would you consider an average day? What did you do then in a basic day?

Mrs. Bussard: At that age, I started into 1st grade when I was five. An average day around 10 I would have been in 5th grade. We would get up in the morning and mother would get our breakfast. Of course there were other kids that we had to get ready to go to school. I was the oldest girl so there were other children and then there were children at home. After we would get home at night we would have to help momma with supper, wash dishes, sweep the floor and clean up and do our homework; average day.