

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

VETERAN: FRANCIS KUNTZ

BRANCH OF SERVICE: ARMY

INTERVIEWER(S): ELYSSA SITAR AND ASHLEY COSTLOW

MAY 4, 2005

Today is Wednesday, May 4, 2005 and this is the beginning of an interview with Francis Kuntz at his home at 181 Penn Ave. in Portage, Pennsylvania. Mr. Kuntz is 81 years old having been born on April 11, 1924. My name is Elyssa Sitar and I'll be the interviewer. My name is Ashley Costlow and I will also be the interviewer; Francis Kuntz is my mother's father and also my grandfather.

Q. Could you state for the recording what war and branch of the service you served in?

A. The army.

Q. What war?

A. World War II

Q. What was your rank?

A. Corporal

Q. Where did you serve?

A. The European Theatre

Q. Where was your place of birth?

A. Benscreek which is now considered Lilly, Pennsylvania.

Q. How long did you serve?

A. 32 months

Q. Total? All Service?

Q. What were some of your duties during the war? What did you have to do?

A. Halftrack driver and radio operator.

Q. Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

A. I was drafted?

Q. How old were you when you joined the military?

A. 19

Q. What were your remembrances of boot camp? Did you go?

A. Yeah, I remember everything was rough

Q. What were some of the activities you had to do there?

Q. What was that?

Q. Some of the activities you had to do there..like training wise...

A. We'd work out into the desert, learn to fire the guns, learn to drive the halftrack

Q. Early wake up call?

A. Every morning. Early

Q. Briefly describe for me some of the military food, did you eat spam or SOS at all

A. Yeah, plenty of it.

Q. Did you like it at all?

A. When you're hungry everything tastes good.

Q. What did you like or dislike about the food in general?

A. I don't know...there wasn't anything I really liked.

Q. Nothing special...no desserts...or regular meals, nothing in general/

A. Nothing was really good you ate whatever you got because you couldn't go to the refrigerator and get something.

Q. Did you get any character building duties like K.P., mess hall, guard duty, etc.?

A. All of them.

Q. What do you remember about them?

A. Some were rough, especially down in Texas during sand storms.

Q. What do you remember about your officers? Is there a special officer you remember?

A. Yeah, Leutenant Ward

Q. What he was like, was he really mean?

A. No he was a good officer.

Q. What regulations were frustrating in the service?

A. I don't know.

Q. Were you allowed off base at any certain time?

A. We used to go to Varez across the border in Mexico on leave

Q. What was that just the city?

A. It was a big city in Mexico where they had the bullfights.

Q. Did you watch a bunch of those?

A. I didn't watch the bullfights but we ate a lot of bull meat.

Q. Did you go anywhere else while you were there?

A. Not in Texas, no

Q. What were like some of the things when you did go off base did you go to any dance halls?

A. We went to bowling we had a diner there we'd go to the diner and eat because that food was better than our food.

Q. So did you try to go there often I take it go to the restaurant as often as possible?

A. Every so often...you could only get a pass every so often not every day.

Q. Who was the most unforgettable character you met while in the service?

A. My sergeant

Q. Why

A. He was slow and he was always late coming out to roll call.

Q. What was his name?

A. Sergeant Levy, Martin Levy from Saint Louis. He dad ran an exterminating company.

Q. What were your opinions of the equipment, the clothing, the rations and the training of the military?

A. We did what we had to do we wear what we were given.

Q. Did sizes usually fit you or were they too big or too small?

A. No usually they were you could exchange them if they were too big

Q. Was equipment kind of limited as to what you could get?

Q. What do you mean? What we could pick?

Q. Did you have the best of the best as much as you needed or was there only so much?

A. We had enough.

Q. What about rations? Any good?

A. Rations.. no they were worse than anything else I guess.

Q. What part of the world did you like best in your military experience? Like where you went to..

A. Where did I go in my military experience? Overseas, England

Q. Any specific place you liked best there?

A. Well, you didn't like anything there but Australia was the nicest...not Australia, Austria was the nicest county.

Q. Did you get to go anywhere special there that you remember?

A. No, just wherever the army was going you went.

Q. Did you like the scenery?

A. The scenery was nice, the mountains.

Q. Was this your first time away from home?

A. No

Q. You've been away like other countries

A. In Ohio, Cleveland, I lived there before.

Q. What did you miss most about the United States?

A. Pepsi cola [laughs].

Q. Anyone special back home at that time?

A. Did I what?

Q. Anyone special back home at that time? Just family

A. Family, yeah.

Q. Did you take part in any combat action?

A. Five battles.

Q. Where at and when?

A. The Germans in Normandy in Northern France, Central Europe, The Rhinelands, and Desjardens was the last one at the Battle of the Bulge.

Q. So you were in the Battle of the Bulge?

A. Yes.

Q. Wasn't that the bloodiest one?

A. The most casualties

Q. How did you and your comrades regard enemy troops as fighters? Were you against them?

A. They were all good fighters, we were a little better that's all. Or maybe we had more.

Q. Did you have any nicknames for them, like for the Japanese.

A. Krauts.

Q. For Germans?

A. For the Germans.

Q. Did you fight Japanese?

A. No.

Q. Can you describe your baptism of fire and your reaction to that experience?

A. Well, you're not scared when you're in the battle and its firing the fact that its all over is when you get the shakes.

Q. Just kind of a big shock as to Wow what just happened?

A. Concentrating on the firing everything you're worried but that doesn't bother you until after it's all over.

Q. If you or your close friends were ever wounded in action please recount the circumstances.

A. I wasn't wounded but I had friends that were wounded.

Q. Were they shot, or?

A. Shot. There were Germans in foxholes and we were going up the road and they opened fire on us we had a lieutenant who was killed and few wounded soldiers

Q. What impact did the USO have on your military service?

Q. What do you mean? What impact?

Q. Did it have an impact on it? Did the USO succeed in keeping up your moral?

A. When we could get to see them.

Q. Did you see any famous people that you saw at USO shows?

A. Bob Hope

Q. What were some of the shows that you saw?

A. Well, they would come out and sing there was no movie or anything they would just come out and sing it was like a stage show.

Q. Kinda like a music concert usually or dancing.

A. They didn't do too much dancing, mostly singing, comedy.

Q. Did you ever use V-mail?

A. Yes.

Q. How was V-mail used?

A. Well, you wrote a letter and they would take a picture of it and send it home.

Q. Was any of your mail ever censored?

A. Overseas all of it.

Q. Was it censored because you said where you were?

A. They didn't want the family to know where we were I guess.

Q. Did you receive a lot of mail overseas?

A. A good bit.

Q. From who? From who did you receive mail?

A. Mostly family.

Q. What was your immediate reaction to being discharged?

A. Hooray!

Q. Excited to get back home mostly?

A. Yeah, yeah

Q. Did you participate in any welcome home celebration?

A. No.

Q. Did they have any in the area?

A. Well, maybe months or years later they would have something but nothing right after the war. They did in places.

Q. Did your family have a party or you?

A. No, they all greeted me when I came home though. I was a king for they didn't even know I was coming home until I walked in the door.

Q. Have you maintained contact with anyone in your unit?

A. We have, well our outfit has a reunion every year about every five years I get to go to one of them to see some of the friends there are a lot of friends that live around here in Portage too.

Q. About how many usually attend pretty much the celebrations?

A. Well, it started out there were hundreds now its down to about 50. We're getting old and some of them aren't around anymore.

Q. How did the government reward veterans for their service in the war? Did you get anything beside like medals? Did you get anything else?

A. We got medals but they were the medals I earned during the war. They only gave you \$400 what they called mustering out pay.

Q. What medals did you receive from the war?

A. Good conduct medal, President's citation medal, battle stars, we got silver battle stars, victory medal, sharpshooters medal.

Q. Do you think the government did enough to reward you for fighting?

A. I think so. There was a lot of people in the service and they couldn't give everyone a thousand dollars or so.

Q. Did you take like any souvenirs when you were at a certain place? Did you get anything special and send it home? Or keep for yourself?

A. I brought some of it home. I got a pistol I have a flag a German flag with a big swaiskta on it and a lot of German medals, coins from all over the world I keep, German coins and occiupation money I don't know what else I got.

Q. Do you still have your uniform?

A. Mmhmm

Q. Every part of it pretty much?

A. No I don't have the trousers.

Q. Does the jacket still fit?

A. You've seen it.

Q. Do you remember any certain experience being in the war stuck out in your head that you remember really clearly?

A. Oh boy, yes, when the planes took off of D-Day from England we were in England guarding an airfield it was a real bright moonlit night and we watched we were guarding the airfields and we watched them all go over our troopers when they came back we looked thourgh a lot of the planes that were shot up bloody planes.

Q. What did the planes look like? What colors were they?

A. They were box cars they were big though C-47s that's what they called them, something else I don't know what they called them. They were just open planes where they hauled cargo in them they had the men in there and they got over Germany they jumped out and the planes came back.

Q. Do you remember anything from the Battle of the Bulge?

A. It was cold and miserable. But I guess we were lucky we didn't get too much action. We were more or less guarding airplanes. Stopping the airplanes from coming in they didn't have much left of their air force so we were lucky in that part.

Q. Were any major battles where people around you were getting shot or you were getting shot at?

A. We were getting shot at but when we were at the Bulge I don't remember anybody of ours getting killed.

Q. Anywhere else?

A. There were a lot of places where we got in fact two officers got killed down in France we were cut off for three days in a town by the Germans and three officers were wounded they were taking them out in an ambulance and they later found the ambulance with the officers they killed the officers that were wounded.

Q. Were you pretty much stuck there for three days and you couldn't really go anywhere?

A. No, in a foxhole.

Q. Were rations getting low did you need supplies when you were there?

Q. Need some what?

Q. Supplies. Did you need supplies or rations when you were there? Cause you were stuck form three days.

A. Yeah, we didn't eat much I didn't eat for three days just bread and water.

Q. Did you get enough sleep then could you ever sleep?

A. I don't remember you take cat naps that was all. It was raining and they couldn't get the planes in to open up the roads for us to get out of there it was on Nov, 11, Armistice Day when the planes it quite raining and the planes came in and opened up the road and we got out of there. It wasn't fun. I show you that plane if you want to see it.

[Pause the tape to show artifacts he got from the war]

Q. What is this a tank?

A. A halftrack.

Q. A halftrack?

A. It has tracks in the back and wheels in the front.

Q. What kinds of guns are on the?

A. 450 caliber they was on a turret you turned the motor on there it turned around and up and down. We had the record planes shot down in the European theater our outfit 126 planes.

Q. Wow, 126. And who's this with you in this picture?

A. I don't remember his name.

Q. But he was a fellow...

A. No.

A. Here's a Migrant and a Lesgo. The Lesgo's live right up...that's where he used to live he was in the armed service with me.

Well, thank you very much for letting us interview you and for showing us the pictures and your German flag that you got and this concludes the interview with Francis Kuntz on 5/4/05.