

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Raymond Kington – Life During WWII

By Raymond Kington

February 28, 2004

Box 4 Folder 18

Oral Interview conducted by Brian Gee

Transcript copied by Luke Kirkham April 2005

Brigham Young University – Idaho

BG: When were you born?

RK: July 1, 1922. That makes me 81 years old.

BG: 81 years young. That's good.

RK: Ya.

BG: That's good. So on December 7, 1941, how old were you?

RK: Oh let's see.

BG: Let's see, 1921. That makes you 20 years old.

RK: 20 years old.

BG: What do you remember about day?

RK: When I was 20 years old?

BG: The day Pearl Harbor was attacked.

RK: Oh that. That's kind of scary.

BG: I imagine. So when did you hear about it? Do you remember?

RK: Oh, we must have heard about it on the radio. Did we have TV then?

BG: I don't think we did.

RK: I don't remember. It must have been on the radio.

BG: Radio, okay. So, were you in the Armed Forces during that time?

RK: No.

BG: You weren't? Okay. Which branch were you in?

RK: The Army.

BG: Did you join the army after that or did you get drafted?

RK: I was drafted.

BG: Yeah, how did you feel about that?

RK: Well everybody else was going so I thought I might go.

BG: So there were a lot of guys from this area that went?

RK: Uh, no, uh, uh. There was one other guy from Rexburg who was in our company – 200 people.

BG: So were you ever in combat when you were...

RK: No, you remember the Belgian Bulge, I think it was called, we had to drive all night and the Germans were right on our tail all night long. That's scary.

BG: Ya, I'll bet. I was in Germany when I was on my mission so I can sympathize a little bit I guess. I know what the Germans are like. What was your rank when you were in the army?

RK: Private First Class.

BG: What were your assignments?

RK: Let's see, I was in a company, a first platoon, and then they shipped me into headquarters to drive a supply truck.

BG: So did you drive a supply truck during the entire war?

RK: The Company I was in was in the engineers.

BG: Oh, you were an engineer there?

RK: Ya.

BG: So did you travel around a lot for that?

RK: Ya.

BG: Which parts of Germany were you in?

RK: Well, we followed the invasion is what we did. We went in I think four days after the invasion.

BG: Of Normandy you mean?

RK: Ya and we just followed them guys, mending their equipment and keeping them in supplies – clear into Luxemburg.

BG: Wow, that's quite a ways.

RK: But you know that there is something about France that really surprised me. They've got a barren land in the middle of France – oh, I'd say it's a hundred square miles. And that surprised me.

BG: That is surprising. When I was over there, all the cities are so close together – everything is so packed.

RK: Ya, well we got out there in the middle of France and there was nothing for about a hundred square miles.

BG: That's a good chunk of France if you think about. It's not that big of a country.

RK: Ya, it really surprised me for a country like that to be so barren in the middle of it.

BG: I'm sure you made a lot of friends didn't you?

RK: Ya, I guess you can call them friends, ya – buddies, war buddies is what they were.

BG: These guys you trusted. How would you define the words war buddies as opposed to being friends?

RK: Well, I guess they are pretty close together, but to me instead of friends they were war buddies. Now I don't know why I think that.

BG: Have you ever met up with any of them afterwards?

RK: Uh, no. I don't think so. No they were not from around here.

BG: So what was training like?

RK: Oh, man.

BG: What did they make you do there?

RK: We went to Texas in I think it was February, and it was cold in Texas.

BG: Really?

RK: You bet. Boy it was cold. That wind in Texas goes right through you.

BG: What year was it?

RK: Around February. But by the middle of the summer it was so hot.

BG: I always picture Texas as being really hot.

RK: It is in the summer, but in the winter, the months we have here, it's cold down there in Texas because – well I was in there in February, and I just imagine it was cold three or four months before that.

BG: Do you think they prepared you well to go overseas? What did they make you do?

RK: Let's see. I think when I went in it went from \$21 to \$50 a month.

BG: Well, that's good.

RK: I think that's the way it was, but boy, things like that are kind of fuzzy for me to remember, but I don't think I was ever in there when it was \$21 a month – I think it was \$50 a month when I got in there.

BG: Did they make you do a lot of running and things like that?

RK: You bet. Boy, I'll tell you there's one time I can remember. We started out at just before dark, and we walked all night long to get in our 25 mile quota.

BG: Wow.

RK: This one buddy of mine, we were walking along, and all of a sudden – it was darker then heck – but all of a sudden he wasn't there by me. Pretty soon he came running up. He'd stepped in a hole and fell down. His name was Swiggler, and we were walking along there, just black as heck, and all of a sudden he wasn't there. But in a few minutes he kind of got up and he said he stepped in a hole and fell down. I didn't even know he fell, it was that dark, and he was right by me.

BG: How many people would you train with? How many people were in your group?

RK: There was two hundred in our company, but our platoon, let's see, oh I forgot about that. I can't even recall that. It seems like there were 60 men in our platoon – three squads – I was in the middle squad. It's probably wrong, but all I can come up with is 60 men in my company. The whole company was two hundred, and in my platoon was about 60 men. I think that's the way it is.

BG: Okay. That's a pretty big group.

RK: Ya.

BG: So what did you know about Hitler during time? What was your image of him?

RK: Gee, I don't remember. I guess we knew he was a mad man, but you didn't call any of your buddies Hitler or anything like that if you didn't want to be floored. He was a pretty bad guy I think when we were in the army.

BG: When did you first hear about the concentration camps?

RK: Now what I can remember, when we were going into Germany there were people coming out of Germany and they were four abreast, and they were just mile after mile.

BG: Really.

RK: The Germans had come and gathered all them people out of France. I guess they got a lot of them out of England, I don't know how they got them out of England, but they got them all out of France and places like that and there were just mile after mile of them, and people walking back home. When we were going in there, the Germans they took off and left these people that they had carried out of France, Luxemburg and places like that.

BG: Did you ever see any of the camps yourself?

RK: Ya, I used to have some pictures of this concentration camp, and they just built a ditch, like a canal, and they laid them crossways. One picture I can remember there was a little naked baby. Oh he wasn't a baby but he was only maybe two years old, naked baby among these people thrown in crossways in the trench.

BG: That must have been a horrible thing to see.

RK: I'll never forget that.

BG: I don't know how you could forget that. So how did the community around here contribute to the war effort? Do you remember much about that?

RK: No, I can't remember. I can remember them saving cans that had fruit or vegetables in. They would take and save them cans and turn them in because we needed the metal for defense.

BG: Huh, I never thought about that.

RK: Ya, I can remember that. I think we would take that can and split it open, if I remember right, and then just have them in layers. But I'm not sure about that either because that's a long time ago. But I can remember saving fruit and vegetable cans and turning them in.

BG: So when you were over there, did you ever do anything for fun? Did you ever have time to do any recreational activities?

RK: No. I can't remember having any fun over there. Maybe I did, but it's been quite a long time ago. Boy, that's completely slipped my mind what we did over there.

BG: Did you eat very well?

RK: No. My mother said when I came home I looked like a little boy.

BG: Ya.

RK: Of course, I can't eat a lot. I'm pretty picky when it comes to eating.

BG: Oh, really.

RK: And there was a lot of stuff that I'd put on my plate, and I'd just slush off in the trash barrel.

BG: Did you like German food very much or did you ever have any?

RK: No, I never had German food. One time, I can remember this just plain as can be. They had a great big barrel with cocoa, and I thought, "Oh boy, am I going to fill up tonight. And they burnt that cocoa, burnt the pan, and it was scorched so bad I couldn't eat it. But boy, I thought I was really going to get to fill up on that big ole barrel of cocoa we had. And them doggone cooks had scorched it till you couldn't eat it.

BG: So did you have mostly military food there or what was that like? Did you just find food in France or how did that work? Was it rationed out?

RK: Well, they had these little C rations, a little box, so long, and wasn't too much of the time that we ate out of those boxes. Most of the time we would have a meal, I mean a cooked meal.

BG: That's nice. I guess you said it didn't taste very good, huh.

RK: Them cook – I don't think you could classify them as cooks.

BG: They heated stuff up, huh?

RK: Yeah.

BG: That's about it. Was there much rationing around here – around this area?

RK: I don't know.

BG: Gas rationing or anything?

RK: Ya, I can remember before I left we had a gas card, and I could get something like three gallons a week or something like that.

BG: Three gallons a week?

RK: Yeah

BG: Can't go very far on that can you?

RK: No. Uh uh.

BG: So what kind of vehicle did you drive?

RK: I had a 35 Chev.

BG: Oh, really?

RK: And it was a pretty big one. A two...four seater...or whatever you want to call it. I lived in Idaho Falls before I went into the army and I worked for the potato growers down there. I lived about two miles from this warehouse. And a lot of times I walked that two miles instead of driving my car on account of no gas which was all right. If I would have had plenty of gas I would have rode...drove that two miles instead of walking.

BG: I can imagine you'd probably fill up your truck and then drive it back and it would be out of gas, wouldn't it?

RK: Well, uh, how did we work that? Oh, ya we were clear over there somewhere and for a week that truck I was driving was completely empty of gas. I had to drain the gas out of mine and we put it in one truck and it went back so many miles to get a load of gas.

BG: Uh uh

RK: There were gas cans that were five gallon, but they were narrow.

BG: Oh, really.

RK: They were that high. One truck, like I say that one time when we had to drain everything that was in it, in the outfit, and put in this one truck. And he took some cans with him so he could get there for gas.

BG: It must have been pretty difficult getting around, huh?

RK: Ya.

BG: So how did you get over to France? Were you on a boat?

RK: There's something I can remember – the Queen Mary.

BG: You took the Queen Mary?

RK: I rode the Queen Mary, and we made it in seven days.

BG: Really. That's pretty quick, I would imagine for crossing the ocean.

RK: Seven days in the Queen Mary, but when we got off of that boat, we got so we could turn around and look at it, you wouldn't believe how big that thing was.

BG: It seems like I saw that one time when I was a little kid. We went down to California and it was docked there. I'd imagine it was pretty packed wasn't it?

RK: Well, there's another problem. You can only go one direction on that boat. If you went down one side and up the other, and you couldn't...the MP's were there and they'd say you couldn't go this way. Until I got used to it, I had a heck of a time getting to where we could get something to eat because it was at one end of the boat, and we were at the other. And every time you went to go somewhere, the MP's wouldn't let you go that way.

BG: So how many people were on that boat?

RK: Oh, let's see. I don't know whether I know or not. We had a slig up on there and I can remember we had berths – beds – and they weren't hardly anymore than that far apart, clear to the ceiling.

BG: Really.

RK: You had a heck of time getting in and out of them because of the top bunk.

BG: Huh. That's an interesting problem.

RK: Ya, when you get out of that bed you had quite a struggle because that bed was right above ya, that next bunk was right above ya, and you couldn't even sit up at all. You come in that bunk laying down and you come out laying down. They were clear to the well the ceiling wasn't very high in that boat, but I think there must have been four or five bunks. I don't remember just how many there were.

BG: So how long were you over in Europe?

RK: Two years.

BG: Two years? And then you were done, huh?

RK: I spent nine months in the states and two years overseas.

BG: What were you doing those nine months you were in the states?

RK: Texas.

BG: You were just training to become an engineer?

RK: Ya, well mostly we had... You know before I went in the army I went out here by Roberts and shot jack rabbits.

BG: Oh, really?

RK: And I got down there on the rifle range, and I was the head honcho as far as hitting that target.

BG: I bet you were pretty good.

RK: They couldn't quite figure that out how I could hit that target so much, but I spent a lot of time out here before I went into the army shooting jack rabbits.

BG: Ya, that's some pretty good practice, I guess. Did you ever have to use your gun when you were over in Europe?

RK: We carried one all the time.

BG: But you never had to use it?

RK: Uh, but uh, no. We got close enough one time that the machine guns was quite loud.

BG: You mean of the enemies?

RK: Ya, ya. Well, what happened the commander, him and the jeep driver they just took off, and these loaded trucks could only go so fast. The jeep commander...well the company commander...they made a turn. Well, we was so far back, that the heavy loaded truck went straight on, and we went right up to the front – right in the machine gun fire. There was a couple of infantry men up there, they come up out of the war pit and says, "You guys better stop." They says, "The last thing that went by here a little while ago was the German command corps. So we just about ended up over on the German side.

BG: Oh, man. That wouldn't have been good.

RK: Well, I don't think they would have shot us, but we would have been prisoners.

BG: Ya.

RK: And they would have taken our trucks.

BG: So did you know anybody that was killed?

RK: No, no, I don't know. Like I say, our outfit, we were never infantry, but we carried guns alive, but we never shot at anybody that I can remember of.

BG: So you mentioned those concentration camps. Which one was it that you saw or did you see multiple ones?

RK: Nordhausen.

BG: Nordhausen, that was it huh?

RK: Boy that was a scary one the way they killed all them civilians and what they done. Our planes kicked off their defense plants, so the old Germans, they figured, well we'll stop that. So they went out and rounded up all those slave labor people and put in them camps. And then our Air Force come along and bombed 'em.

BG: Oh, really.

RK: And they just slaughtered them people.

BG: Do you imagine we knew that they were in there?

RK: No, no. They wouldn't have bombed it if they knew there was slave labor in there. They wouldn't have bombed it. That's what the Germans done. They figured they saved their factories by putting slave laborers in em, but I guess the Intelligence or whatever it was didn't get a hold of that stuff, and we didn't know we had killed all them people until we got in there.

BG: Wow. So one other thing I was wondering was like if you had any vivid memories about the war – anything that stands out to you in your mind?

RK: No, uh. Well I already told you about all the civilians coming back out of Germany. That's the most vivid thing I can remember is.

BG: Miles of them.

RK: Just miles of them – four, about four abreast.

BG: Were they all of a certain nationality? Were they all Jews?

RK: Gee, I don't know what they were. I don't think we were allowed to talk to 'em.

BG: Oh, really.

RK: They were just slave labor. Now I don't think most slave labor were Jews, but I'm not even sure of that.

BG: Ya. I know like prisoners, prisoners of war, were lots of times used for slave labor and things like that, but I don't know.

RK: They just went in, when the Germans went through, made that push into France and them countries, they just took everybody they could find back to Germany to work in them factories – slave laborers – so their men could be soldiers.

BG: So did you learn to speak any German or French when you were over there?

RK: Oh, a little German. But France – French – that's a hard language.

BG: It is a hard language.

RK: But German, there's a lot of English in that.

BG: Ya, that's true. Well, kindergarten, you that's a German word.

RK: Oh, is it?

BG: Ya, that's what they call it in Germany. That's how we got it. So, ya, there's lots of German words in the English language that I've noticed anyway. It's pretty interesting after you kind of pick it up.

RK: Ya, after a while if you listen pretty close you can figure out a little bit what the Germans are talking, but when the French get coming that's, boy, that's something else. You couldn't figure out what they were saying at all.

BG: So, did you talk with many German or French people?

RK: Oh we talked to a lot of, well, there was what they called no fraternization – you weren't supposed to talk to them. You put some soldiers on something like that and pretty near everyone will break that rule of no fraternization.

BG: Ya, I can imagine.

RK: Ya we talked to 'em.

BG: So what was it like coming home after it was all over? How had things changed?

RK: Well, we got on, coming home we got on a little banana boat – a little banana boat – I think they rule that as a fourteen thousand ton deal, but it was nothing like the Queen Mary. And I was sick all the way over on the Queen Mary.

BG: Really? Did it move around a lot?

RK: Seasick. Well if you wanted to move, but about all I did was lay in that bunk and be seasick for seven.

BG: Did the boat rock back and forth a lot?

RK: Ya, well uh, the Queen Mary, I don't know how come I got seasick on the Queen Mary because it was so big that it stayed pretty level.

BG: That's what I was kind of wondering.

RK: But I was still seasick for seven days. It was the whole trip. But coming home I got on what they call a banana boat and we were fourteen days coming home. And right off the bat I got elected to get on KP, so I got up out of that sick bed and went in and worked in the kitchen. And I got over being seasick. Right off the bat I got over being seasick, and we got into some pretty rough storms coming home, but that didn't bother me.

BG: Huh.

RK: I can handle any boat however it rocks once you get used to it. But that Queen Mary, I don't know, I just didn't feel like getting up and getting around but like I say when I was coming home, they made me get up and work, and my seasickness left. I would have probably died coming home on that fourteen day trip from seasickness if...before we even got off they got me up and put me to work and I got over seasickness. Like I said any kind of boat rocking and bouncing...because I can remember coming home we had guard duty on the boat and we got in a storm and that old boat, it lit up good, the whole boat lit up good, but we were in a storm and that old boat would go down and the water come over the front of it.

BG: Wow.

RK: That boat would go clear under the water and then it would come back up.

BG: How long was the boat? Do you remember?

RK: No.

BG: Was it pretty big?

RK: It wasn't very big compared to the Queen Mary, but I can still remember that old boat going down and the water coming over the front of it. By the time the water got pretty near to the middle of it, the boat was coming back up. And the water would run off the sides.

BG: That would scare me. I don't like the ocean.

RK: It was kind of scary to me too, but boy you are out there in the dark, well the boat was lit up, but you could see that water come over the front of that boat, like I say, by the time it got half way back, the front of the boat had come back up and the water ran off the sides.

BG: Well, I hope I don't ever have to go on a boat like that. I don't like the ocean.

RK: If you ever get on the ocean, and you feel a little sick, get up and mover around. Laying down you just get sicker. I did anyway. Like I say, when I started coming home, they put me on kitchen duty and I had to get up. Now I wasn't up very long until I wasn't seasick. I got over it. So if you ever take an ocean liner, why move around, and I think you can get over that seasickness.

BG: Well, is there anything else you want to add?

RK: Oh, I think we really shot a lot of bull here.

BG: Ya, I think we pretty much got it.