

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Edland D. Clark– Life During WWII

By Edland D. Clark

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Box 1 Folder 5

Oral Interview conducted by Sharon Marotz

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

SM: How old were you when World War II started?

EC: World War II started September 1, 1939 I was born in 26 so I was only 13 years old.

SM: What were your thoughts when it first started?

EC: That's going back a long way and that was the start of the war in Europe but we didn't get involved in the war until December 7, 1941 so in the mean time it was something in the distance and didn't worry us too much. We didn't think too much about it.

SM: What do you remember about December 7, 1941?

EC: I remember hearing the news on Sunday and we had school the next day and I was in seventh grade and we listened to the radio when Roosevelt issued the declaration of war "The day that will live in infamy." I remember that very well and it was a strange feeling to suddenly know that we were threatened as Americans before. I remember that very well.

SM: How old were you when you joined the army?

EC: Joined is kind of an interesting word. I got a letter from the president that said that a group of me and my peers were to be drafted. So I joked that my uncle had sent me on an all expense paid trip to Europe straight out of high school. I was 18 on the 27th of June 1944 and I was inducted into the army in August 63 days after. I didn't really join, I was inducted and incidentally there is a difference if you join you are in the US army if you are inducted you are in the army of the United States and there is a difference in the way you are to be released.

SM: Did you have to do any training?

EC: Yes, I was trained at a camp in California. Everyone is supposed to have a year's training before they went over seas but I went into training. On December 16, 1944 the Germans were nearly defeated, everyone thought they were gone, but Hitler had underground factories and he was building planes and tanks and all these things and guns. On the 16th they broke through our lines and a lot of the soldiers were dressed in American uniforms and they spoke English. They put on MP uniforms and they spoke English. They put on MP uniforms and at the crossroads and on the counter attack they would send people the wrong direction so there was a lot of confusion and when they would come out into big areas their truck would back up drop the tailgate and machine gun them. They killed many thousands of our soldiers because of misinformation and I wasn't there at the time, but happened and my training was cut short we were sent overseas. Walter Cronkite said that we lost over 70,000 men in 6 weeks in the battle of the bulge. They had to be replaced so even though we hadn't finished our training we were given a ten-day travel leave time before we were to be at our bases to depart for Europe. That was my basic training. In an emergency I guess you can do that. I came up on the line as a replacement and that made a difference in the way you were accepted

into the unit because the people that you came to replace had trained for 2 or 3 years. Most of my outfit was from Tennessee and Arkansas and they had been killed and I had come up to take their place. I was a newcomer and I didn't realize at first that it takes awhile to be accepted so when there was a job that was risky that needed to be done it was easier to send someone that wasn't bonded to them. So I got into some situations in the early first few days that I wouldn't had otherwise.

SM: What were some of those experiences?

EC: The first night I went into battle we sent out patrols—all the time and you're always trying to find out what the enemy was doing. They would send 3 or 4 out to patrol to find out where they were and how strong they were and so what we do is you send out these people. They would let the head man go through and the second scout they'd shoot so that would leave a gap between the leader. So I got to be the second scout. We were pinned down all night in an orchard and the Germans were firing at us it was June or March and there was mud there and we hit the dirt and laid down in the ditch. In the morning I had dried mud caked on my body from lying in the ditch all night in the orchard finally as morning came some of our people came in and we could hear the motorcycles start up. The Germans like motorcycles. It was my first experience going into battle.

SM: How long did the Battle of the Bulge last?

EC: I was wasn't there too long, I got there about the 2nd of February and I was sent right up to the front and I was wounded on the 23rd of March. All the time I never had a shower. They brought in a truck and there was a showerhead and we were allowed to take off our clothes and run in and lather up with soap, rinse off then put your clothes back on. That was the shower I had when I was overseas but the water was a little cool.

SM: Since you had to cut your training short did you feel like you were prepared for this or is there anything that you wish they had told you before hand is it what you expected?

EC: I'm not sure if there was anything that we weren't trained to do. One day they took us out and showed us how to use explosives they gave us about an hour's training and said all right men, now you're demolition experts.

SM: Did you get to demolish anything?

EC: Well I sometimes tell people that the only thing I did as far as wanton destruction and meanness was when I was up on the front and we were staying in an apartment house and we were there that not and we slept on a bed, not in a bed. When we got the call that morning that we were going into battle there was an electric meter in the hall and I took my rifle butt and I smashed it. I think that was the only thing I destroyed just to destroy something.

SM: You mentioned how the showering left something to be desired, how was the food?

EC: The food wasn't bad. We had mess kits of course and they gave us coffee. I needed something else to drink so if I kept my canteen cup bright and they would let me dip it into peaches and pears so I had some juice to drink. Because it was always shiny, the rest of the guys would always borrow it to heat their coffee and it was always black so I had to keep cleaning it so it would stay shiny. But the food was good. I can remember that during the rainy season sometimes you would put your stuff in the bottom and they would pour soup on it. When it would rain your mess kit would get soggy because they always put liquid stuff on top of the other.

SM: Were there other LDS people with you or were you the only one?

EC: Nope I was the only one there. One of the fellows that I met from Utah was in my company but not in my squad and he was killed. He was the only one that I knew was LDS.

SM: Did most people know that you were LDS? Did you stand out?

EC: I don't remember that ever coming up. They just knew that I didn't smoke or drink.

SM: Since you were a member, do you think that had any influence on what happened during the war?

EC: I guess I should go back a little bit and say that when I was 14 I desired to have a patriarchal blessing so I went to Brother Hilliam from Ashton—and I was 14 at the time—and he said that the time will come when you will have the desire to know what part you are to play in the war. If you're called into battle don't go with the idea of taking life and only take life in the defense of your family, your friends, and your constitution. He went on to say that I would have a family and be married in the temple and be a leader in my ward and stake. When training was called short I called up my folks and told them I'd be home a certain day. But there was a wreck on the railroad so we didn't get home that day but my dad came to the depot and I wasn't there, but he came the next day. My dad was always quite close to the spirit. At breakfast sometimes he'd say, well my brother Keith will be up today. He just seemed to sense things. So when I didn't come that day he said, "oh he'll be there tomorrow," so he came and met me at the depot. So I had ten days and in my blessing it said I would hold the office of a teacher and later those with authority will be anxious to confer you with the Melchizedek priesthood. So while I was home even though I was 18 and you didn't get the Melchizedek priesthood until you were 19 the stake president said that while you were home we'd like to. In those days we had a little booklet that had all our priesthood ordinances and my mom had typed them up on onion skin paper so I was very thin and I had a little bottle of oil, and she sewed a little leather bag for me to put them in my watch pocket so I would have them in case I needed to bless somebody and though I never had the occasion it was still a comfort. And she said now Eddie—and the theme in the MIA that year was "I the Lord am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say ye have no promise." She said now remember the Lord said that and as far as I know you

have been faithful and if you ever get into trouble don't be afraid to ask for help. So that was all in my mind.

SM: Did that knowledge ever come in handy?

EC: You bet it did. On the 23rd of March the Germans were nearly defeated and they were nearly out of gasoline so they were pulling their trucks with horses and they were really in bad shape and we were going over the Hagganau pass. AS we got up over the pass there were a lot of horses that had been killed by shells. I had been sick that morning, I had an upset stomach and had been throwing up a little bit and they gave me a little grapefruit juice to settle my stomach. There were trees on both sides of the pass and we waited at the bottom to make sure it was clear. AS noon came and the horses were warm—the 23rd of March was kind of cool—so I remember going up and there was a dead horse with its stomach ripped open and its innards flowing out and I sat on it and ate my lunch. So my stomach wasn't as queasy as I thought it was. Then we went across the pass and when we got down on the other side suddenly when we got out into the open all hell broke loose. Everything they had they pulled back behind the hill: tanks artillery, infantry and we were out in this wide open prairie and all of a sudden everything started coming in: mortar shells, artillery, tanks, and everything. I was in the armored infantry which meant that we arrived in half-tracks so we stopped and tried to find a place with a little cover. WE had an old general and whenever he'd see you he'd ask the same question, "Soldier, what is cover?" And you were to say, "sir, cover is dirt between me and the enemy. Enough dirt to stop any small arms fire that might be against me." And then he'd let you go. We tried to find enough cover to give us some protection so I ran across the field and I got down in this furrow and there wasn't anyone around me right close and I got down in that and look around to see what I could do. The shells were coming in and then I felt some sting across my back and I realized that behind me was a pile of rutabaga or beet or something that they'd use to feed the cows and it was covered with dirt. And there were some German soldiers behind there and the bullets were coming so close that they would come through my shirt and burn my back, but you got awfully thin. I got thinned out as I could get close to the ground. I heard another shell come in and instead of a whistle it had a sucking sound and I knew that was mine. When it exploded it was an 88 shell from a tank and was almost 3 feet long and about the size of a saucer around and they set to explode in a certain length of time and at a certain distance. The big head was filled with bits of things and so the shrapnel went in through the Achilles tendon of my right leg and took out most of the anklebone and left a big hole on the other side and broke my leg. Some of the shrapnel went into my elbow. I can remember thinking to myself that this is what mamma talked about. So I decided that it was time to ask for help so I said, "oh God the eternal father, and I asked him in the name of Jesus Christ to bless me that I may return home to receive the blessings that I had been promised. The next shell came in and landed, and it must have been closer to me I guess because when it exploded the shrapnel passed over my body. I realized that if I was to get out this was my chance and so with my leg broken and my ankle pretty well gone I picked up my rifle and I walked probably 75 yards back to where the half-track was and as I got near two men came up to meet me and put their arms around me and brought me back to the half-track and once they had touched me and gave me support every strength

that I had was gone. Whether it was someone not from this world, I have no idea how I got from one place to another, all I know is that I did. So they put me down in the trench and then bandaged my arm and put me back in the half-track. But the tank had been hit and the gas was all out so they couldn't get it started and so they tried to get a tank to take me but they didn't have room. Finally one guy from Tennessee that couldn't read, I had been trying to teach him to read, turned the switch and got the auxiliary tank turned on in the half-track. So they grabbed my legs and threw me up into it. 144 out of 205 were killed in 5 minutes so they took me back a ways and took me to a red cross jeep and laid me down with my head down in front and my legs up over the windshield so I wouldn't bleed all over. There was a German in with me, they'd picked up a German. They put us in an ambulance and took us back to MASH unit—guess that's what you'd call them today. This is not a story of courage but rather one of faith and promises made and kept. When I went to the hospital I had an LDS doctor and I had lost so much blood that the nurse said I mad the sheets look pink. He prescribed a shot of whiskey for me three times a day and I said, "Doctor I'm a Mormon and I don't drink," and he said "I'm a Mormon too and its medicine you take it." So they would bring me a shot of whiskey and I would give it to his guy from North Carolina and he liked it. He would give me a candy bar which I wasn't supposed to have but when they found out they made me drink it in their presence but even then Heavenly Father was good to me. When I would give it to this kid he would squirm as it burned all the way down but when I drank it, it was like lemonade and tasted more like sweet syrup to me. Somebody mentioned that I was the only one that it was given to and I didn't want it and it was picked up by the San Francisco Examiner and my grandmother found it and sent it home to my mother. So that was that.

SM: How long were you there in the hospital?

EC: I was in the hospital 7 months. Another thing that my mother had told me, she had done her genealogy and found that there were some bleeders in the family. She had told us when we were kids that if we ever got hurt to be sure to tell them that we had a tendency to bleed so after they had cut off all my clothes and as they were giving me anesthetic and things I pulled my mask off and said that I may have a tendency to bleed and he said ok so they gave me some vitamin k. The next morning the guy next to me said, "We nearly lost you last night you got to bleeding, but luckily they'd put a guard on you and were able to take care of it." Years later I had my tonsils out and I was doing fine and I was home for the hospital, but my dad stopped by to see me and something told him that Eddie's in trouble so he came back and the stitches in my tonsils had come loose and the blood was running down the back of my throat and I was warm and happy as could be but I was nearly gone. So they took me to the hospital and stopped the bleeding. So I spent 7 months in the hospital and they put us on a train—I didn't have any clothes on so they could bandage us easily. Oh those starched sheets felt good. It was the first time I had my clothes off. When we got to Nice in France the captain came by and said that I was to go home. I had a million dollar wound it was bad enough that I couldn't go back to the front, but still good enough that I was going to heal. So they put me on a train and we went south to an airfield and they took us to a tent and I was put at the front of the tent. When the plane came in it was raining and they didn't have room for me so

they took off and went to England and for three days planes couldn't come in because of the rain. So I stayed all by myself for three days, no clothes, just wool blankets over me and they were so tight that I couldn't turn. I lay there for three days and I suppose that I was in and out of consciousness and they finally came and found me and flew me to England. They had a little cart made out of bicycle wheels that they'd roll the stretcher on and as I came to the hospital the nurse came up to me and lifted the blanket up "do you have clothes on, nope." So they took me up and gave me pajamas.

SM: Did your family know what had happened to you?

EC: Yes they did. Of course they had gotten a telegram to say that their son had been wounded in action and I wrote them a letter to tell them that I was all right. Mother was convinced that I wasn't telling the whole truth. She had been down in Salt Lake for a mastectomy when I came home. When I got home, of course my dad was down with her, so there was no one there to meet me. When they dropped me off in front of the bank there was a couple of girls there that I had worked with and the bishop was across the street and he took me home. Pop came back up and took care of me. Bit I can remember that when I got into Ogden and was about to get out of the plane a big tall skinny colonel came up and grabbed me under the armpits and helped me out of the plane. I said thank you and he said, "that's the least I can do because your outfit got me out of a prisoner of war camp so if there's anything I can do let me know."

SM: Did you actually see the POW camps?

EC: No, it was done after I was injured but my group liberated so may POW camps that on the bottom of our patch they put the work liberator for our hats. But it's been a wonderful thing. I tell people that experience was worth a million dollars. I wouldn't do it again with a million unless they asked. Bit I came away with the knowledge that America is something special and freedom is special. And to have all the world's good and not be free is not good, it's better to be the other way and not have so much, I have a real love for America. I see its flag. I remember when I was out in the mission filed in Texas I remember hearing a band play, I couldn't help but walk along and love them. I love the flag. But anyway I guess the whole story is that the Lord makes promises and through his priesthood leaders he makes them known to us.