

A Veterans Oral History
Heritage Education Commission
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Raymond Grefsrud
Narrator

Unknown
Interviewer

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This interview is being conducted on 23 August 2005. I'm interviewing Raymond B. Grefsrud of rural Hawley. He was in the U.S Army during World War II. He served in World War II during the period of – the numbers right here – the 16th of July 1942 to 3 November 1945. He received a Purple Heart for combat injuries, received three battle stars and combat infantry badge.

RG: I served in the infantry and they flew me from Europe to England in a C-47.

INT: You were drafted into the service – tell me a little about that and how that worked?

RG: Well, I was one of the older men when I was drafted. And they flew me from England to France in a C-47.

INT: You were the second wave going in on D-Day.

RG: I guess so, yeah.

INT: Talk a little bit about how you were injured.

RG: Well, I was walking along and all of a sudden bullets flew all around me, and we dodged into the ditch. They never hit me except for through my arm and through my helmet.

INT: You came into France?

RG: Yeah.

INT: And then went how far into Germany?

RG: Oh, quite a ways into Germany.

INT: Did you get as far as Leipzig?

RG: No, I don't think so.

INT: Tell me what it was like as far as weather and ...

RG: Well, in the wintertime it was so cold. We still slept because we didn't know what was coming.

INT: Did you sleep in trenches outside?

RG: Yeah.

INT: How was that?

RG: Oh, it was cold.

INT: It was cold. Did you get trench foot or anything?

RG: No.

INT: Did you see any important people?

RG: No, not really. We saw the president, Roosevelt, and just when the war ended, he died. I just wanted to cry.

INT: Did you come back to the United States then from Germany.

RG: From England.

INT: And then you were discharged at what fort?

RG: Fort Snelling.

INT: And then when you got back then you went back to farming?

RG: Yep.

INT: And then finally married.

RG: Yep.

INT: Did you write letters and stuff?

RG: Oh yeah. A lot of letters.

INT: And you wrote to your family?

RG: Yeah.

INT: Future wife?

RG: Yeah.

INT: Did you get mail over there?

RG: Oh yeah. It took a long time,

INT: Okay.

RG: And I told them not to worry because I was just going to go [indecipherable], didn't have to worry.

INT: You were in the hospital?

RG: Yeah.

INT: How long were you in the hospital?

RG: Oh, I don't know. A couple of months.

INT: And was the hospital in England or in Germany?

RG: England, I think.

INT: What major towns were you in Europe?

RG: Well, I know Cologne was one of the worst towns. There wasn't a building standing there.

INT: Oh, did you see the cathedral.

RG: No. I don't think so.

INT: Because that's probably the biggest building there. And so you went from Cologne to which other towns?

RG: We went home of course and then we went to England and Europe.

INT: Okay.

RG: We went in the C-47's.

INT: When you went into service were other people from this area with you?

RG: Oh yeah, there was quite a few.

INT: Do you keep in contact with those people?

RG: Oh some of them I do.

INT: And then reunions, how often do you go to those?

RG: Oh not very often.

Mrs. Grefsrud: It's been several years since you've been to one.

INT: And then you said you had relatives in the service at the time?

RG: Well some, not very many.

INT: No brothers?

RG: Oh yeah, Norris was there.

INT: That would be your younger brother?

RG: Yeah.

INT: Did your folks have a star in the window for you?

RG: Well, I imagine they did. I don't know.

INT: And you received a sharp shooter [medal] for both, M-1, BAR and carbine? And what military post were you at when you did that?

RG: I suppose it was in England. I don't know for sure.

INT: You went into Fort Snelling and then where did you take your training?

RG: (Indecipherable)

INT: Okay. Texas?

RG: Yeah.

INT: There were quite a few U. S. posts?

RG: Yeah, in California.

INT: You said that with the 96th Infantry, did that support the Third Armor?

RG: No armor at that time.

INT: So you never did run into Patton or Patch or ...?

RG: Yeah, I run into Patton.

INT: What was that like?

RG: I don't remember.

INT: He didn't impress you that much.

RG: Well, he was a good commander.

INT: What was the most interesting part of the military for you?

Mrs. Grefsrud: Tell about the man that died. The one that was in the foxhole with you.

RG: (Indecipherable) He asked me if he could sleep with me in the foxhole that night. Yeah, I said, and the next morning we started out and he was killed right beside me.

INT: Did you know who he was?

RG: Yeah, I knew but I don't remember.

INT: And did you see much in terms of casualties?

RG: Oh, yeah.

INT: Saw a lot?

RG: Yeah, I did a tour running back and forth from the bombing.

INT: And you saw mostly Americans or did you also see Germans?

RG: Oh yeah. I saw everybody.

INT: Did you have any dislike for the Germans?

RG: No.

INT: Did the other soldiers talk about Germans?

RG: Oh yeah, some did.

INT: The 96th Division.

RG: The 95th.

INT: The 95th?

RG: Yeah.

INT: Came back as a unit?

RG: Yeah.

INT: So you came back all together?

RG: Yeah, most of them anyway.

INT: That were alive?

RG: Yeah.

INT: Do you remember which ship did you come back on?

RG: No, I don't remember which ship it was; but it was from England.

INT: Sailing didn't bother you, did you get sick?

RG: Some of them got so sick, but it didn't bother me.

INT: When you got out in '45, late '45, you separated at Fort Snelling?

RG: Yeah.

INT: And you came home at that time?

RG: Yeah.

INT: Were you examined by the medical people?

RG: Oh yeah, I was.

INT: Was that interesting or?

RG: That was interesting.

INT: Did it bother you to leave the military?

RG: Oh no. I was glad.

INT: You were glad to go home?

RG: Yes, I was.

INT: Did you have any bad dreams and stuff when you got back?

RG: No, I don't think so.

INT: So you were pretty well adjusted?

RG: Yeah.

INT: Did you see any of the major, other than the Cologne, town bombings?

RG: Oh yeah. A lot of them.

INT: Tell me just anything that you think might be interesting to some of us that weren't there.

RG: Well, I don't remember any excitement. I know I did get home again.

INT: You never thought of staying in the service?

RG: No.

INT: And then when you come back home, did you use the GI Bill at all?

RG: No, I didn't.

Mrs. Grefsrud: Yes you did. Didn't you? You took some ag training.

RG: Oh, yeah.

INT: With the extension?

Mrs. Grefsrud: Yeah, he did.

INT: And then did you join like the VFW or anything when you?

RG: Yeah, I did.

INT: Well, let me stop it now and if you can think of some other things. I'm looking at a V-mail letter written by Raymond Grefsrud to his brother Norris at Camp Wolters. Raymond was

in England in the hospital recovering from his wound and this letter has some interesting items. It says:

Dear Norris,

I suppose you really will be surprised to receive a typewritten letter from me. Well, it's just practicing a little on an old typewriter that was in the building that we're staying at so I hope you will excuse my mistakes.

Well, how are you getting along now a days? Well things are not too bad here either. We aren't on the front line at the present anyway, and I hope we don't have to go back for a while anyway. It sure is a relief to be back here again. The news doesn't look too bad now and I sure hope it's soon over with over here.

Now the weather, excuse my spelling, has been down. How's the weather been down there lately? It's been a little cooler here lately, but it hasn't been bad. I had a letter from Ma yesterday. It was written April 16th, and she said that they had about a foot of snow there, and I guess it hasn't been so very nice back there lately.

Say I didn't think I told you about the prisoner I took with just a flashlight one day, did I. Well at least I learned to carry my rifle with me wherever I go from now on. Well here is how it happened. One day while attacking a village, a few of us went in to search each building; and this one building, we searched from top to bottom; but didn't find any Geri's. So we got orders to fold it up where we were for a while. Well, I laid down my rifle and ammunition; but then decided to look around a little more; and being we hadn't found any Geri's in any other part of the building, I didn't bother to go back for my rifle but went down with just a flashlight and started looking around. Don't you think there was a Geri standing in the corner. I don't know who was most scared and surprised, him or myself. But lucky enough he didn't put up a fight. But from now on I'm carrying my rifle wherever I go. Huh.

I was down in the front line for the first time the other day and it was almost three quarters of a mile underground and it really gave me a funny feeling going down for the first time.

I guess I told you that Adeline sent me her picture sometime ago, didn't I. She writes quite often too now, and she says she is waiting for me and hopes that I will be able to come home soon.

Did I tell you that Alvin Stocky is back in the States now? Also Mike. They were both wounded about the same time I was. Mike says he's been out driving the tractor one day and he said it really was fun to be back on it again.

Now Norris, I guess this will be all for this time. I really hadn't planned on writing tonight; but I figured while I was monkeying with this anyway, I might just as well make a letter out of it. Bye.

Hoping this finds you fine and write whenever you have a chance.
By now, Love brother, Raymond.