

## VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

**Veteran's Name: Ralph Hedges**

**Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)**

**Date of Interview: Metz Victory Tour, Metz 2004**

**Transcriber: Carol Slezak**

**Transcribed: June 18, 2022**

**Reexamined and reedited July 6, 2025**

*Note on recording: Ralph Hedges, Joe Januskiewicz, George Hauser, and George Meimaris and other veterans rode with David Meyer in back of a two ton truck in the streets of Metz in November, 2004 for a Victory Celebration.*

*In some parts of the city the sidewalks are lined with French civilians of all ages hoping to catch a glimpse of the WWII veterans on this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of the city. Veterans have gum and Hershey Bars that they sometimes give out of the back of the truck (covered with canvas) to the civilians.*

*The recording was done both by handheld cassette and MZ-NHI mini-disk.*

Since this interview is to be loaded onto the 95<sup>th</sup> Division's Legacy Website, it has been mostly cut down to those portions where Ralph Hedges is talking about his experience in the war.

It is in three segments – first talking about what they found with a minesweeper; second his attack on the pillbox which left him injured; and third, the dream of owning a jeep

1. *in back of vehicle during Victory parade so Mr. Hedges talks while Mr. Januskiewicz and Mr. Meimaris are calling to French spectators from back of 2 ton truck*

**Ralph Hedges:** We are in the first (???row ??), going across... And.. uh .. there was a U.S. jeep out there that had been hit by something.

We didn't know if it was a mine or a shell.

So they sent us to check the road for mines.

**Interviewer:** Yes

**Hedges:** We did that. ... Two of us.. ... close together... with mine detectors.. We set each other ... (?) One did one-half of the road, the other did the other half.

Well, the other detector did something that made it buzz

So the guy took off his gloves—of course there was snow on the ground, this was Jan.. (corrects himself) December— and he felt around to see what was making it go off.

He picked up a hand

with a wedding ring band on it.

**Interviewer:** Oh...

**Hedges:** That was one of the... sad things that happened to us. So,,

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**II.**

**Ralph Hedges:** Well, when we were ... we came back after our break around Christmastime, you know, the Battle of the Bulge was on,

Our division went to cover the 20th Corps area, and the other four divisions were sent up to Patton

... But we were right at the start of the Siegfried Line, and a lot of the houses in the town were pillboxes in disguise.

So they sent me out with the patrol one night, well my partner and I, with a rifle company patrol, to try and see what we could do about one of the pillboxes.

Now, the theory was that the 50-caliber machine gun on our line would fire at the embrasure so they opened up and get them to close the steel door they had in there.

Then we were given what they call beehives—they're about 35 pounds of explosives; They had legs on them, three legs on them, and you'd jam them in the embrasure and that's supposed to blow it open. And then the rifle company patrol would come up and throw smoke grenades in. White Phosphorus grenades

Well, it didn't quite work that way,

Since when I went up they started shooting at me before I got close enough to do that.

**Meimaris:** You had to run up a beehive?

**Hedges:** Yeah... . Well anyway, I felt two bullets hit me.

Both felt like a rock. One hit my knee and one hit my hip.

So it knocked my feet out from under me and I rolled into a ditch, fortunately.

They were still kicking dirt down on me. But this ditch ran right away from this pillbox.

Two guys on the patrol that had been set up with me went back to the patrol. I couldn't get back there.

So I just laid there and played dead for.. I have no idea how long—I didn't have a watch. it seemed like about an hour.

The shooting had stopped. My feet were pointing away from the pillbox. I was on my back.

One thing I forgot was I had some blasting caps wrapped up in a handkerchief in my hip pocket.

So here I go crawling away, feet first down there, with those in my pocket [laughs]. But I was lucky (*lucky that the caps didn't explode as he crawled over them*)

So I got down to the ... got down to the end of this ditch and it made a right angle turn, which I thought was sort of parallel to our line.

So I laid there a while.

Finally I got up out of the ditch. Still didn't draw any fire.

And was right at somebody's backyard.

There was about a four foot fence there.

So I crawled over to it and rolled over the fence and managed to get between the houses out to the street, where the pillbox couldn't see me any more.

So my knee ... by hanging onto the front yard fence. I maneuvered to walk on that. And there wasn't really much blood because there's not much on the side of your knee there. So I ...

(*Sirens*)

**Meimaris :** You know in neutral weather we made these 20-pound poles [?].

**Hedges:** Yeah.

**Meimaris:** Either we used the TNT half-pound blocks or we used a plastic. To get the pole up we used to go up on the roof of these buildings, knock a tile off, and just to get the poles. And then you put a board on the end. We made all kinds of those to run up to the pillboxes in Ensdorf.

But I never had to run one up.

**Ralph Hedges:** Well anyway, to continue my story...

**Meimaris:** Oh I'm sorry, I didn't mean to ...

**Ralph Hedges:** I did manage to get down to where we had put out anti-tank mines, and I knew that was where an outpost was that these riflemen had.

So, when I got there they challenged me. I gave the password.

Somebody called out, Is that Hedges? I said yes.

They said, **Thank** God you're here. The patrol radioed out that you'd been killed. So they took me in and the medic looked at my knee.

Put some sulfa powder on it, bandaged it up. I said, I felt one hit my hip. It felt just the same.

So he looked there, couldn't find anything. Nothing wrong.

Then somebody said, Hey look at this.

And he had my trench knife. And the case was all torn up and the bullet had bounced off the blade in that and didn't touch me.

So ... Anyway that got me... that was the end of my combat.

**Meimaris:** Sorry, I didn't mean to butt in.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember what the password was that night?

**Ralph Hedges:** No, I haven't the vaguest idea what it was.

**Interviewer:** Mr. Hedges, what was your company?

**Ralph Hedges:** Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 378th Infantry.

**Interviewer:** And what rank were you?

**Ralph Hedges:** I was PFC.

**Interviewer:** So after that? They.. they?

**Ralph Hedges:** Well, I ended up in the field hospital. And uh..

There, unfortunately, when they took me in to work on my leg and put a cast on it and so on I lost my French knife. Somebody decided they wanted it. So I didn't get home with it.

Anyway, eventually they flew me back to the States, and my knee got OK so I could get up on crutches.

So the doctor said, "Well, we'll send you home on a convalescent furlough for two weeks. When you come back we'll start getting you off crutches."

So I went home but I got sicker than you could imagine.

There was an epidemic of hepatitis going around the hospital — I think from needles that they, you know, quote "sterilize" that had been used on other people. They had .. some guys come back from the South Pacific that had hepatitis. So it took me longer to get over that.

So I only had one month of active duty.

They kept me there at the hospital. They were closing it up and needed help with records.

Actually, my official title was Chaplain's Assistant [laughs].

So, that was my last month in the army. Then in January 1946 they released me.

**Interviewer:** When did you start going to reunions?

**Ralph Hedges:** Reunions? About 1970.

I started coming... I went to the first one in Lexington, Kentucky

Somebody in our company had started a newsletter. He contacted all of the men he could find.

And one man would know where another one was, and so on. So he put out a newsletter, which we still have now. Same group of us.. , there aren't as many of us now.

But the first time I went we had close to 40 and their spouses.

We'd get two extra hotel rooms

### III

**Hedges:** You know, I had hopes of owning a Jeep after the war. Girl I know saw a deal somewhere. She read about it somewhere that you could get 10 surplus Jeeps for a thousand dollars.

So she got 10 friends including me, to sign up a hundred dollars a piece  
Something happened the deal fell through and uh she never did get them

But Uh, I was ready to get a Jeep for a hundred dollars after the war.. ...

This is the kind of, that's the kind of vehicle I can work on. You know, I know all the parts and..