

Warren Kenney audio log

Narrator: Warren Kenney

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

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Transcriber: Carol Slezak and Teresa Bergen

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Log compiled by: Teresa Bergen, August 2023

Begin Track 1

- 00:00 introduction; Kenney explains he comes from the lace curtain Irish
- 01:19 Meyer mentions that the American Legion Hollywood Post No. 43 is helping fund his project ; this interview will be sent to the Library of Congress
- 01:54 Kenney was born July 7, 1927 in Brooklyn, New York; father James Gilmore Kenney had ice cream parlor and candy store
- 02:42 mother was Anna Powers
- 02:48 older brother named Bob joined the service in 1941 as a medic; served in the field artillery unit with the 28th division; severely wounded at Saint Lo; spent half his life in and out of hospitals
- 4:18 "I worshipped him. He was tremendous, my older brother."
- 04:33 Kenney's wife was from Bay Ridge in Brooklyn, a Swedish neighborhood where Meyer used to drive a taxi
- 5:28 Kenney recently took his twin granddaughters to see the old neighborhood
- 5:58 realtors' new names for old neighborhoods; example of how the neighborhood is improving, except the first place Meyer was robbed
- 7:07 during his childhood, around 1933, police badly beat Kenney's father because they mistakenly thought he was anti-union; father was hospitalized for more than a year, so family got home relief, an earlier form of welfare
- 8:19 mother got a job in a varnish factory working long hours, Kenney went to live with his grandmother, an old Irish lady
- 9:24 "I think all the European ladies—Irish or Polish or Jews—they're all the same. They're all schmoozers and huggers, wonderful to live with."

- 9:54 memory of accompanying his grandmother to the butcher shop, who always asked the butcher to throw in a free piece of liver for a fictitious cat
- 11:04 skipping two terms ahead in school made him miss things: "I never learned one thing about grammar. I don't think to this day I know a verb from a pronoun."
- 12:49 Kenney was about thirteen when Pearl Harbor was attacked; the New York Giants were playing the Brooklyn Dodgers when announcement came
- 13:55 Kenney was at the dining room table doing homework when he heard about Pearl Harbor; awareness of Pearl Harbor and attitudes towards Japanese
- 15:13 brother Bob had just finished jump school in Fort Bragg, North Carolina; broken leg ended his jumping career; wound up with 28th Infantry in Normandy
- 15:51 Kenney originally went overseas as a replacement and was temporarily assigned to the 28th Infantry. Got pneumonia, missed D-Day landing
- 16:30 assigned to 95th Infantry, caught up with them two weeks before Metz
- 16:45 when asked to drive an ambulance, he didn't want to tell the officer he was too young to get a license. "You've got to remember, fraudulent enlistment was a capital offense."
- 17:21 lived in a very service-oriented neighborhood where the older kids all joined the military; at 15, Kenney left Brooklyn Technical High School and lied his way into the army
- 21:56 after a few weeks, his parents noticed he was missing, tracked him down. His angry father called him at Fort Grant, Illinois where he was in basic training.
- 23:49 Kenney had a prior record of disappearing, so his parents weren't initially concerned
- 24:43 astonished when a captain wanted to send him to troop leadership school, but he convinced the captain that he wanted to go to the front and fight instead
- 26:09 got sent to England where he endeavored to get out of driving ambulance because he didn't know how to drive
- 27:29 he was trained to be a medic; poor eyesight precluded airborne or infantry
- 28:24 sent to I Company of the 378th to relieve another medic
- 28:44 his first combat was at Tank Trap Hill near Metz: "God almighty, I was terrified."
- 30:04 modern military medical training involving pigs: "You're assigned a live pig. And they shoot it and they knife it and they blow them up. And it's your job to keep the pig alive."
- 30:37 instead, Kenney trained on simulated wounds made of plastic

31:10 Kenney didn't wear the Red Cross helmet: "One big target on your helmet."
31:48 going overseas on the Queen Elizabeth, Kenney studied medical manuals while other soldiers shot craps
33:03 putting his medic training into action during combat
33:36 reassigned to Second Platoon, L Company, but difficulty finding them
36:25 at first it was hard to be accepted by this tight-knit group; after annihilation at Ennsdorf, he bonded
37:30 explains "mouseholing" in Ennsdorf, led by brave and fearless platoon sergeant; more details on Ennsdorf fighting and losses
40:38 Kenney's increased importance to the platoon as a medic and pharmacist
40:59 big Thanksgiving dinner after Metz: "There was never that much diarrhea in the world, as there was after that Thanksgiving dinner." Kenney treated them with paregoric and bismuth tablets that he ground up with his bayonet.
43:56 his successful treatment helped his relationship with fellow soldiers: "If you can relieve diarrhea, they get close to you."
44:06 tough duty; living in cellars, many killed, running out of supplies
44:23 Germans had bombed out bridges, so comrades would bring supplies nightly on barges; "carrying parties" to unload supplies across a swamp
45:17 Germans would fire a flare to light up the swamp; soldiers were trained to freeze
46:00 attacked by Germans after Kenney's company found a stash of wine; grenade, wounded soldier
48:45 transporting a wounded soldier on an improvised litter while being shot at from a hidden pillbox
51:30 trying to save oldest battalion member whose windpipe was shot out
54:10 differing memories of how things happened: "Yeah, that's the way war is. It's chaos."
54:51 "friendly fire" accidents are inevitable in war
55:30 his friend's arm was shot off at Saarlautern due to "friendly fire"; Kenney's medical aid kit also shot off
58:12 difficulty in getting replacement medical aid kit
58:37 describes a guard duty shift where ten minutes after he was relieved, Daniels, the next guard, was killed

1:03:05 talks about a fellow soldier, a musician and addict, who stole his morphine; addiction was uncommon in those days, except in musicians like Gene Krupa

1:04:28 fighting with other soldiers who wanted to leave Daniels and other bodies behind

1:05:53 leaving Saarlautern, headed for the Battle of the Bulge, which was still raging

1:06:50 they discuss Joe Napier's story of how Patton got a lot of Napier's squad killed: "Well, the things that happen. It's war. It's terrible."

1:08:18 talks about his friend Bill Alexander from Tennessee

1:09:10 heavy fire on a railroad bridge across the Lippe Canal in Germany; Kenney had to brave fire to try to help Alexander and another downed soldier, but already dead

1:11:30 explanation of weapon called Panzerfaust, a German bazooka

1:11:45 comparison between American grenades and superior German grenades, especially the eggshell concussion grenade

1:13:00 short break

1:14:30 "You've got to realize, that monumental project of waging a four-year war around the world. The logistics, the supplies, the this—with no computers, pencil and paper, and a telephone."

1:15:42 Kenney is impressed by the high-caliber young people in the volunteer army

1:16:01 Kenney financially supports the USO

1:16:19 while the army now has many more amenities in the field, the conflicts drag on for years instead of months: "These guys go back for the second and third tours. The law of averages is going to get them."

1:16:55 opinion of marine and navy uniforms

1:17:29 Kenney injured his leg during service, later got surgery at a navy hospital, St. Alban's in Long Island, which was full of wild marines

1:19:31 procedure for leaving a body you can't move during a battle

1:20:25 blames captain for sending his unprotected squad onto the Lippe bridge

1:20:55 Colonel John B. Kelly relieved that captain of his command on the spot, called in mortars and Germans surrendered

1:21:53 tells the story of a Dutch woman who adopted the grave of an American soldier who's buried at Margraten Cemetery

1:26:14 side conversation with a woman who was a sergeant major, the highest enlisted rank

1:28:00 journalist Steve Ross wrote a book about the commander who staged the bridge attack: "So 50 years later you're going to write a book about what a prick he was for his family to see? He's long dead! Why bother? Leave it alone."

- 1:30:29 Ross put the women in Holland who tend Alexander's grave in touch with Kenney
- 1:31:27 Les Wolfe was a fatalist who didn't worry about death; got together again at Peoria reunion
- 1:32:45 tells story of Wolfe and his brother and neighbor being let off with a warning when they were home on furlough, drunk driving in Chicago
- 1:33:30 Kenney sent the grave tenders a photo of Bill Alexander
- 1:35:40 18,000 buried at Margraten, including many British soldiers
- 1:36:00 further correspondence with the grave tenders; appreciative letter from grave tenders' mother; Nazi occupation of Holland was horrible; resistance movement
- 1:38:00 Kenney takes Creon for his pancreas, connection with Solvay Pharmaceuticals
- 1:39:12 thousands of people are taking care of graves, and even have grave adoption certificates
- 1:39:37 they discuss how to get media attention for their work with veterans, and the current state of journalism
- 1:45:02 acting even when you're afraid
- 1:45:59 Kenney feared screwing up his job more than he feared death
- 1:46:49 injuries that were difficult to find
- 1:47:38 washing other people's blood off himself in a cold canal
- 1:48:37 importance of clean, dry socks to avoid getting trench foot; long marches were hard on feet; sock tips
- 1:50:04 showers were rare; describes a German shower facility in a steel mill
- 1:50:39 trying to dissuade fellow soldiers from executing unarmed prisoners
- 1:51:20 confrontation with a bully who flipped out during an attack: "And suddenly he goes bonkers. He goes crazy! He shoots the rifle in the ceiling and he's putting the rifle on everybody and screaming and threatening you—totally lost it."
- 1:53:02 wartime ban on sulfanilamide powder
- 1:54:10 treating a German prisoner who thought Kenney was pouring salt in a wound, rather than medication
- 1:54:50 German prisoners surrendering in Germany; German POW camps in US
- 1:55:46 bad smell and appearance of open wounds: "Meat, blood vessels exposed, it's just horrible"

- 1:56:25 medics these days have much better training. “And they’re all given a pig. And the pig is shot and stabbed and burned. Horrible. Imagine the animal rights people get into this one. And the thing was to keep that pig alive.”
- 1:57:53 extremely expensive and effective battlefield bandages of today
- 1:58:30 access to helicopters is a huge advance in battlefield care; Kenney had to carry men on heavy litters; the important thing was to transport them to where they could get better care.
- 1:59:19 “Once the sulfanilamide was gone, we could do nothing about infection other than a clean bandage.”; use of tourniquets
- 2:00:06 tells the story of another bad attack with many injuries; just two years ago, found out that Julian Lee, one of the very injured soldiers, had survived; story of Lee’s recovery and post-military life
- 2:08:05 mentions some of his best and worst commanders, including one who shared his liquor rations on special occasions
- 2:09:21 British Army stopped for teatime
- 2:09:41 mentions another bad injury where the officer surprised him by recovering
- 2:11:20 soldiers in Iraq are expected to perform with inadequate training
- 2:1:55 Kenney was fortunate never to get badly hurt during war; he has some hearing loss now from old age
- 2:12:47 describes rescuing soldiers from a tank, got a Bronze Star for his actions
- 2:14:08 got separated from the outfit, stranded alone in Germany
- 2:14:22 his friend advised him not to carry a gun, because he’d be treated worse if he was captured
- 2:15:00 they discuss a general whom they both admire, and one they don’t
- 2:17:25 how the war changed him: “Really, I just forgot about the war. I never discussed it. I didn’t join anything. No American Legion. No VFW. I didn’t want to be one of those silly guys with a funny hat on standing around the bar.”
- 2:18:30 mentions his wife’s connection to Peoria; three kids born there
- 2:19:03 they discuss Billy Olive, who was wounded at Ennsdorf; going back to visit Ennsdorf
- 2:21:10 Kenney’s rich son-in-law is the grandson of John D. MacArthur of the MacArthur Foundation fame; story of their family money
- 2:22:48 daughter’s journalism career; she covered story of murdered Black children in Atlanta

2:24:09 Meyer comments on Rumsfeld's military strategy, then compares Japanese and Chinese soldiers

2:26:17 opinions on Iraq War, Islam

2:28:52 Meyer explains Ken Burns' technique of accessing an untold story

2:29:51 was destroyed when his wife died

2:30:08 drinking in military

2:31:00 being billeted in the house of Louise Croquette, who made pies for the troops

2:32:16 process of getting a pass for R&R

2:34:46 describes Bill O'Connor, who suffered from obsessive-compulsive disorder and alcoholism after war

2:35:36 death of his wife

2:38:39 death of the son of close friends; cost \$1400 for them to get to his funeral

2:39:30 wife's funeral mass and cocktail party 30 days after her death; getting a degraded cassette restored that his wife wanted played at her funeral

2:43:39 the cassette turned out to be "The Party's Over," sung by Eileen Farrell; recites some meaningful lyrics

2:45:15 has no regrets about joining the military. "I think I was a damn good soldier... Still, my pride and joy is that combat medic's badge. You earn that son of a bitch."

2:46:47 Meyer recounts another medic's tale about why he was disgusted by his Bronze Star; talk about oral history waivers and copyright

2:51:15 story of meeting his wife at a dance in Brooklyn in 1949; she refused to dance with his shorter friend; mentions other gorgeous girls he had dated

2:55:23 Edith was smart, had her master's in education

2:56:00 they got married four months after meeting; stayed married till her death 58 years later

2:56:45 Edith gave up her career to move to North Dakota for Kenney's sales job

2:58:11 transferred to Chicago; lived in Peoria

2:58:49 Edith was in charge of all details running the house while Kenney spent many nights on the road; moves to Minneapolis, Providence, St. Louis, Atlanta

2:59:30 Edith never complained, fully supported his career, until move to Atlanta because she liked St. Louis so much

3:00:30 moved to Greenville, SC, made executive VP of Bigelow-Sanford, where he worked for 39 years before being fired

- 3:01:12 the company screwed him over but he hired an attorney and got an amazing severance package; he'd tape recorded their illicit goings on
- 3:03:15 the bosses wanted him to fire a long-time star employee while he was in intensive care
- 3:04:38 company's illegal rejiggering of pension program
- 3:06:24 aftermath of Kenney's firing and sale of company to Karastan Carpet Mills; subsequent sales of company; eventual bankruptcy of one company led to Kenney losing 30% of his pension
- 3:08:03 Kenney's service dates, February 1943-June 1945; July-December 1945
- 3:08:40 had to register for the draft when he was 18
- 3:09:16 PFC was the highest rank he attained; was attached unassigned, spent entire war in 2nd platoon, L Company, 378th
- 3:10:30 in January 1945, while he was in the hospital for pneumonia, military found out he'd lied and was underage; discharged
- 3:13:08 Kenney had to find his own transportation home
- 3:14:25 at division headquarters: "Flaming bunch of gays. The whole goddamn bunch of them. Nobody could be and act that feminine if they weren't gay."
- 3:14:40 Meyer talks about a seemingly gay veteran he met in Baton Rouge
- 3:16:24 describes his multi-day trip to Le Havre in a freight car with Scotch paratroopers. "These guys were so Scotch I couldn't understand a word they said."
- 3:17:37 stopover in Paris, running into a neighbor from Brooklyn who was stationed there. "God almighty, the life this guy lived in Paris! The broads and parties every night!"
- 3:19:18 took a train to LeHavre, then got on a ship
- 3:19:40 describes his passage to Normandy; sleeping in hammocks, storm, seasickness
- 3:20:20 encountering a group of Big Red One guys returning from furlough
- 3:21:02 assigned to work at a dispensary in Litchfield, England
- 3:21:13 was in Birmingham on liberty when V-E Day was announced: "Brits went bonkers. Oh my God! Unbelievable. And they're cheering and dancing in the squares."; invited to a big party by gorgeous redhead
- 3:22:00 describes notorious Colonel Kilian of Lichfield, who served prison time
- 3:22:45 after his med kit was shot off, he got a new one and figured out how to pack it better so he wouldn't run out of supplies, even if somebody shot it again
- 3:23:14 Kenney was discharged on what was called a "minority section" since he was underage; no real repercussions, honorable discharge

2:23:49 two weeks later, he turned 18 and signed up for the draft. “So I report for duty in uniform. So I’m only out for two weeks. I don’t even own civilian clothes.”

2:24:33 memories of being in Manhattan for V-J Day

2:27:33 saw Eisenhower go by in a car as part of victory day parade. “It’s the only time I ever saw him. I had to go to New York to do it.”

3:27:52 impressions of Patton; once saw him Saarlautern

3:28:50 next steps for depositing oral history: “And someday when the people from Pluto come here they’ll find these records in the year 28000.”

3:30:03 talks about his son Brian’s career path

3:32:28 end of interview

01:5