

## **Interview Log.**

**Veteran's Name: Eldon Knuth**

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

**Date of Interview: Metz France, November 23, 2019**

**Venue: Meeting room of Ibis Hotel, Metz, France**

**Transcriber: Carol Slezak**

**Transcribed: May 11, 2019**

**Log – July, 2025**

- 00:00 Introduction Meeting Eldon Knuth, Mrs. Knuth, and co-interviewer Kay Grosinke
- 00:57 Birthdate 5/10/1925. Drafted August 1943 Discharged August, 1945. Was in Co F/379<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment/95<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Mortar Squad. Highest rank was PFC
- 04:07 Adopted after a few days. Parents Alvin Knuth and Amanda Knuth. Farmers in Iowa. Lutheran. Relatively conservative Via adopted family brother, Donald (RIP). Half-brother Eugene Koevenig (RIP) and half brother Ronald Huff
- 05:21 Growing Up in Iowa Grew up in Luana, Iowa. Blond, slender, athletic. Basketball, Baseball. Also academic. Graduating class of eighteen
- 08:31 Heard about Pearl Harbor while harvesting potatoes in the Iowa cold. Was 16 years old. Father had passed away so Mother head of household.
- 11:00 Was in college studying engineering when receive Draft notice. Drafted. Shocked but went. Knew when he went to college he would be drafted

- 12:08 Chose Army because promised ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program) and would be sent to college. Had for half a term. Carnegie Tech. Slang for ASTP = "All Safe Til Peace" Recites service number
- 14:01 Prior to going to ASTP went to Basic Training at Fort Benning. All were ASTP candidates Close to 1,000 were there
- 15:10 While waiting for Ft. Benning, was at Camp Dodge, Iowa. Learned to peel potatoes
- 16:24 Training and Life at Fort Benning Physical training fairly easy because was a farmer. Food good but hominy strange
- 17:10 First experience of Segregation, Only one black in Luana, Iowa. Segregation in the theatres.
- 18:15 Was impressed that many trainees at Ft Benning of German background.
- 19:17 Typical day in basic training.
- 20:11 After basic to ASTP at Carnegie Tech. January, 1944. Only there a month when told ASTP would disband.
- 23:34 Announcement and some students cheered. Took train to Harrisburg, PA
- 24:28 Joining the 95th Infantry Division at Ft. Indiantown Gap, PA
- 26:27 Life at Indiantown Gap Hazing. Called Whiz Kids by old timers.  
  
Assigned to mortar squad. 60 ml mortar. Couple inches around. Maybe 2 ½ inches. Tube 2 feet. Stand and legs
- 28:25 Was an Ammunition bearer  
On positions on the mortar. Someone carries base, another the legs, another the tube, another the ammo.

- 29:52 Gallagher was platoon leader Santi was squad leader
- 30:13 West Virginia Maneuvers. Mountain training. Challenging Rugged
- 32:05 At Indiantown Gap, leave to Harrisburg. Stayed at YMCA. Hung pants over bedpost, Next morning, wallet gone
- 33:13 Talks of girls. Dances Alice. Helen. Wrote to them throughout the war.
- 35:55 Deployed to Camp Miles Standish, Mass. Then to USS West Point. Cross the Atlantic Several days. (Has all this down on paper back at home.)
- 38:15 Arrival in England. Liverpool. First meeting with a Cockney. Didn't understand what he was saying
- Talks of learning to play bridge for relaxation. Regular partner (forgets name.)
- 41:26 Life in England.
- Camp Barton Stacey. 1000s of men. Barracks. Bunks. Never made to London.
- Had trenches at camp. If hear buzz bomb jump in trench
- 42:25 Saw British people at Dances. Food. Good season for Brussel Sprouts so had Brussel sprouts every day. Can tolerate them now.
- 45:20 To Southhampton, England for Deployment to France On a civilian channel boat.
- 46:20 Landing at Omaha Beach D-Day plus 60. Some debris from Invasion.

- 47:25      Setting Up in Normandy  
              Marched inland from the beach. Couple weeks
- 48:15      Training. Patton wanted “an aggressive run-and-drop approach.”  
              March and Fire
- 49:35      If rained told “don’t touch the tent surface” from inside because  
              It will drip through.
- 51:20      Journey to the Moselle River crossing France.  
  
              Mr. Knuth rides in badly beat up coach car on train. Seats,  
              broken windows, bullet holes. Car also carried supplies.  
              Remembers a gallon can of orange marmalade.
- 53:00      Four days from Omaha Beach to Moselle. Last by truck. Passing  
              Through Paris. Travel was intermittent.
- 55:10      Arrive at Moselle River. Walked across on a bridge at Ponte  
              Maison. Smoke screen ineffective because of wind.
- 55:578     Took over foxholes of another division so didn’t have to dig  
              them.  
  
              On foxholes Dig it deep enough so you feel safe “without  
              exerting yourself too much.” Enough room to lay down and put  
              a few supplies in with you.
- 57:31      South of Metz. N of Nancy. (Could hear the shelling at Nancy).  
              Just holding. Waiting for Patton’s orders
- 58:45      Mortar Operations Explained    On tabs. Paper but explosive.  
              Attached in a way you could pull them off.  
  
              More tabs on tail of mortar shell, the farther it could travel.  
              Dropped in shell. Mortar squad was five men.

- 01:00:52 When first time used a mortar. Didn't see target. Observer would pick out target for you and report back for adjustment
- 01:02:23 Eerie Village Evacuated. Deserted but church bells rang all the time. Wine there. (not for Mr. Knuth)
- 01:03:00 Food and Supplies in the Field
- 01:03:57 Backtrack. What's the first time you saw Evidence of War Omaha Beach. Moselle.
- 01:04:50 Ill at ease? No. "No bullets flying around me or shells dropping near."
- One night snow at Ponte Maison. Snow collected on branches and dropped and troops mistook this for the enemy and would throw hand grenades at sound of snow.
- 01:06:00 Went to special unit. Got a shower and change of clothes. Entertainment. Local girls sang.
- 01:07:13 After a few weeks tuck to Ft. Gravelotte Walked down to the Mance Ravine (Relieving another division – maybe the 5th.)
- 01:07:48 Nice foxhole. Roof of artillery shell ases filled with direct laid crosswise over foxhole top Moved there on November 4th. Was 19. Spent more time inside foxhole than average soldier.
- 01:10:21 At Ft. Gravelotte saw graves and crosses from Franco-Prussian War. Eerie.
- 01:11:47 Story. Found dead German soldier who was set as a booby-trap. Took a pocket watch from him. My Sergeant said, "Go back get his ½ his dog tag and bury him." Got tag and saw wire running from a hand grenade on his belt to a tree.

- 01:14:11 In foxhole waiting for orders. Sometime a night patrol. Sometimes shot with mortars at motion on part of German. Waited 10 days before attack.
- 01:15:26 Mr. Knuth tells of going on night patrol. German hit buddy's helmet but didn't hit him but died anyway. (*Concussion wave?*)
- 01:16:25 Rain gets men wet. Build fire to dry off. Germans fire an 88 ml shell lands near the fire. Defective but still killed a couple men. Mr. Knuth in foxhole. Dirt shake down on top of me.
- 01:18:17 Foxhole was built on steep ravine bank so entrance was same level as floor. Tried to visit it again but off-limits
- 01:20:20 Orders come (after 10 days) to go up out of the ravine in daylight. Climb to level ground wait to advance
- Heavy bombardment from us to Germans and Germans return with machine gun and rifle fire Half a mile away.
- No shelter. "Just lying on the ground with bas of mortar in front of me
- 01:23:30 Advance by foot and its chaos.
- 175 men all advancing. Didn't know what anybody else was doing didn't know the target, Just going forward.
- 01:24:30 Friend Bill Gallagher says, "Lets give them mortar fire. So go into shell hole. Bill acts as observer, Mr. Knuth fires mortar
- Little while later Bill Gallagher shot in stomach; Took sulfa pill and water (not supposed to if shot in stomach). Mr. Knuth tells medic who says when firing stop, "We'll take care of him."
- 01:25:39 Mr Knuth puts bayonet on end of gun stuck in ground (sign someone needs help) and moves on.

- 01:26:22 Got to Ft Jeanne D'arc late in day. Surround it. Dug foxholes near a wall. Fellow shows up who hadn't dug. Mr. Knuth shares "Most uncomfortable night of my life."
- Couldn't move. Couldn't turn over. Survived the night. He digs own hole next day. Spend five nights there.
- 01:31:44 In attack Mr. Knuth finds out they had lost many of their leaders all in one day. Gallagher, platoon sergeant, ill. Lieutenant in charge of company killed. Not sure who is leading. "Sort of a mob."
- 01:33:48 Two incidents with Latrines
- Needed to go to bathroom and two of us crawl over the wall. Other man, Femino, got shot and I got back. Had German POW and another fellow bring Femino back. Femino dies.
- 01:35:25 Latrine #2. Would fill ammunition containers (with human waste) and send them over side of foxhole. One of our men threw hand grenade and blew up the (crap-filled) container.
- 01:36:34 Five days. Hear German horses running loose. Don't know if there are people with them. Disturbing.
- Supplies dropped from our observer cub plane. All Mr. K gets is a few chocolate bars so hungry
- 01:37:09 We were cut off. In foxholes and reached objectives but troops on our sides did not so German lines close up and we are back behind lines for five days.
- 01:37:50 Stayed in fox hole. Snowed. Rained. No dry socks. Close to freezing. At end of 5 days chance comes leaves fox hole and walks to caserne (barracks) for treatment. Has trench foot
- 01:39:17 Trench Foot Red and Swollen. Took Mr. Knuth out of the war. No one had warned him about Trench Foot.

01:40:15 Friends to remember? Gallagher and Femino – both shot when Mr. Knuth was with them.

01:41:29 Did you ever dream of the war after returning home?  
Tell of hearing backfire from car in middle of night and Mr. Knuth rolls out of bed onto the floor in reaction.

01:42:06 On this trip remember things he had put out of his mind.  
Coming upon a cowering German soldier in a foxhole.  
Two GIs stand next to foxhole ordering him to get up German doesn't understand and they killed him.

Mr. Knuth thought that he could have helped because he spoke enough German but they shot him "before he could say a word."

Memory just came back on this trip.

01:44:10 Hospital nine months in England. Then March 1945 set to Camp Butner in the States . Discharged 9th of August, 1945. Inducted 19th of August, 1943.

01:45:30 Medals. Combat Infantry Badge, a couple of Bronze Stars. Offered a purple heart when wound up with small cut on his hand in attack with Germans. Mr. Knuth refuses.

01:46:08 Would not recommend military service now. Knows someone has to do it but thinks they had enough people now and individuals in service now are not a cross section of society.

01:48:05 What would you say to your great-great-granddaughter 100 years from now.

We did something useful. Something need to be done.  
Personally government gave mr. Knuth opportunity to do his schooling GI Bill.

01:49:20 Words of Wisdom No more wars. Stay out of war. Develop a work ethic.

01:49:45 Conclusion and Gratitude

01:50:13 End of interview