

## **VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

**Veteran's Name: Henry Kolar**

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

**Date of Interview: August 13, 2004**

**Transcriber: Carol Slezak**

**Transcribed on: April 6, 2018**

**Note: For the 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry Foundation's Legacy Project – the three CD tracks of Mr. Kolar's interview have been combined into one with 2 second pauses between the tracks.**

**Interviewer:** Hi, I'm David Meyer, this is August 13, 2004. I'm son of Earl Meyer, Company H, 379<sup>th</sup>. And I'm with Henry Kolar, Company I, 379<sup>th</sup>. And what was your number?

**Henry Kolar:** Oh, don't give me that [laughs]!

**Interviewer:** Okay, I won't give you that. And also with his wife, Lenore. Okay. Where did you enlist?

**Henry Kolar:** Oh, I was in Illinois, Chicago. And I was drafted for the army. And they sent me to Camp Grant, in Illinois. And from Camp Grant they sent me to the coast, California. I can't think of the name of the camp.

**Interviewer:** In the desert, or by the coast?

**Henry Kolar:** It was by the coast. Because we went to Stockton, to study engineering depo work. See, I went in as a mechanic. I don't know where they got the depo, but I went in as a mechanic [laughs]. So then we were there for a couple weeks. Then I took my basic back at the camp. I don't know if it was Camp Beale, something like that over there. Can't remember the name of it.

**Interviewer:** Was it still in California?

**Henry Kolar:** California, yeah. Is there an army camp there, could you?

**Interviewer:** There's a couple.

**Henry Kolar:** It was near Stockton.

**Interviewer:** Near Stockton?

**Henry Kolar:** Because we drove over there.

**Interviewer:** I'm trying to think if there's —. I know there's Fort Ward, but there are some other camps up there. Let me think. So you were there for a couple weeks, then you went back —.

**Henry Kolar:** Back to camp. And get our basic training, like the obstacle course and stuff like that. We went through that. And then one evening, the 997<sup>th</sup> treadway bridge outfit needed a mechanic. That's when I found out I was a mechanic! They shipped me over to the 997<sup>th</sup>, and they were going out the next morning. But I didn't go through the infiltration course yet.

So they run us through the infiltration course. I was full of mud, and I had to jump under a shower and wash off that way, and get a clean outfit on, and I went that morning to the 997<sup>th</sup> treadway bridge outfit. And that was the outfit that built pontoon bridges. And I didn't know nothing about them. I knew nobody. And here I am being sent over there, and they were shipped to Boston.

So there I got on the boat.

**Interviewer:** With strangers.

**Henry Kolar:** Strangers! Absolute strangers. I got on the boat and there was a kid named Kelcisak (PH). And he slept above me. It was four high, and these were Liberty ships. And I took sick. Fourteen days I was sick [laughs]. And he kept shoving me chocolate bars. I wanted to kill him [laughs].

But anyway, we got over there in England. Edinburgh, I think, England [Scotland?] it was. We stayed there. And that's when I got to look at the trucks that they had.

They had these big Brockway trucks that had booms on them. And they would unload these big treadways onto – well, where a crane would pick them up if we couldn't get them with the truck there. The crane would reach it out onto the river. And they'd pull them together. ... The pontoon they'd take up river. And then they'd fill them with air – they had some big compressors. Then they'd float it downstream to where we're going to put up the bridge. Then they'd hook them all together and put the Treadway on top of them. And then these tanks could go across down there.

**Interviewer:** And this is in England?

**Henry Kolar:** No, this is when I landed in France they did that. I landed 14 days after the invasion, with the treadway bridge outfit. And I didn't know, I'm telling you honest to goodness the truth. And we landed over there, and had all this equipment. I never put up a bridge. Well the first bridge we were putting up was out at – well, I don't know the name, Seine River or something like that. We were putting it up and we got blown to hell.

**[TIME 5:00]**

**Interviewer:** No. From the air, artillery?

**Henry Kolar:** Artillery. A lot of aerial burst.

**Interviewer:** Fourteen days after D-Day.

**Henry Kolar:** Yeah. Well, they were dug in all the way over there. And we had these big trucks, they were like tanks for crying out loud. Well anyway, we were hit so bad. So then the 95<sup>th</sup> needed men. And I don't know what happened, I got transferred out to the 95<sup>th</sup>. They took me over by truck. At night, we arrived. And they told me to get down in the basement and find a place to sleep. I said, Where, there's no cots?

Right on the floor, he said. Take a blanket and go lay down, he said.

They had these bottles of gasoline with rags stuck in them, for candles. When you get up in the morning your nose is just black from the soot from it.

So I laid there until the morning, then the sergeant — of course, I don't know who he was — asked me if I'd ever fired an M-1. I said, No, I fired the old 3, and a carbine. That's what I had with the engineers. So he said, Well, you'll learn how to fire an M-1. He said, "We'll get you out there."

So they got me out there then in the morning, and he says, Have you ever handled a hand grenade? I said, Yeah, I'd had that experience. Not combat, but I was taught.

And from then on I was in the infantry with the 95<sup>th</sup> Division. We went to Saarlautern, the Saar River we crossed. And, well there's an experience I wrote down.

**Interviewer:** Great. Do you want to read it?

**Henry Kolar:** Oh, you look at it first. And see what you think of it.

**Interviewer:** Let's see. Oh, this is – this is the one where you're crossing the Saar River in Germany, and you were taking Saarlautern.

**Henry Kolar:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** "We were being shelled by artillery and tanks. You got so scared you dug a hole in the river bank and you put your head in it, and you left your butt out."

Okay, tell me about that. Well, I'll just finish this up, then you tell the details.

So the Germans were pushed back by our armored division. We had a lookout overlooking the Rhine River, and the women that lived in that house made cherry pie for us. We had it rough. [Henry Kolar is laughing as interviewer reads this out loud.]

You were being shelled and you put your head in a hole – I'd do the same; I'd crawl in a hole.

So you were crossing the Saar – was that in November?

**Henry Kolar:** It was, yeah.

**Interviewer:** After Metz?

**Henry Kolar:** No, it was before.

**Interviewer:** Before Metz.

**Henry Kolar:** Yeah. I can't think of what type of weather we had there. It was cold. No snow. I can't give you the exact date. ...

**Interviewer:** You lose track.

**Henry Kolar:** Yeah, that's right. The only thing, when you saw a sign up Saarlautern or Saarbrucken or one of them, you know, then you knew you were there, see what I'm saying? So that's the way that works. ...

**Interviewer:** On this story, was your buddy with you at this time?

**Henry Kolar:** Well, that's why I tell you – I don't the people, the fellows I'm with. I met this Joe Barford (PH) later on. And him and I, and Ed McCorney (PH), he was our BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle) man. And I met him with the squad, see?

**Interviewer:** Do you want to go on to the next story?

**Henry Kolar:** Well, that's the next story.

**Interviewer:** Well, let me ask you about the first story. Did you ever have to build pontoon bridges?

**Henry Kolar:** I started; I was operating the boom. On the Brockway. To take the treadways off. And they got so bad we just dropped everything and got onto the trucks and got out of there, like retreat. And that's when I was transferred. And nobody knows why or what happened. I can't find them. I can't locate them. I've gone through so many people to find the 997. I want to know what happened to them. And I cannot locate them. Yet they're on my discharge papers so I'm not lying.

**Henry Kolar:** ... And he knew somebody. And he said, Boy I'll get you the information. He took my name and all that information. I went back there to service my car, never heard a word from them after that. People.

**Lenore Kolar:** They tried to help him find something on him. They don't find anything.

**Henry Kolar:** She's got it on the computer, she tried to find. We can't find out what happened to him.

**Interviewer:** Well I'll – so they were the 997<sup>th</sup> artillery?

**Henry Kolar:** The treadway bridge. It's an engineer outfit. And Captain Whitewood (PH), our company commander.

**Interviewer:** I'll see what I can do.

**Henry Kolar:** It's just a unit attached to another, like to a division.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Henry Kolar:** That's the way it was.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Henry Kolar:** Where'd what's-his-name go? Did he leave us? Joe, he was with the 95<sup>th</sup>.

**Interviewer:** Tell me a little more about this. So you're crossing the Saar River, and you start hearing shells?

**Henry Kolar:** Well, we get on the other side. And we were going to attack, and then the Germans started with their tanks, and firing on us with their machine guns, off the tanks – you know what I mean. So naturally we're ducking, You don't stand out there. They'd hit me [laughs].

So that's when I put my head in the hole, in the bank, and waited [laughs]. Until artillery started pushing them back, and got across the Rhine. I mean, the Saar River. They took part of it. Part of it was blown up, though. But we got part of it.

**Interviewer:** And then – about the Rhine River – the woman lived in the house?

**Henry Kolar:** Yeah, there were people living downstairs. We took over the upstairs, the third floor. We were up on the third floor looking over the Rhine, watching the Germans. So they wouldn't cross the Rhine.

And that's how the people were to us. The German people were good to us. It was the SS troop soldiers. They had to fight, you know, just like we were drafted. We had to fight. But the women, anytime we could get them to cook for us, they would cook for us.

There's another story in there that you'll read [laughs] —.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Henry Kolar:** Some of it was good, you know what I mean? And when the shells were coming in, it was bad.

**Interviewer:** So, this one. I'll tell you what. This is so nicely written in your voice. Do you want to read it? ...

**Henry Kolar:** [Reading] Hi, Ed Percony. This is your buddy from "I" Company, Henry Kolar.

I'm sure you remember me, because I spoke with you many times on the phone. I know you remember when you were taken prisoner for a short time when an 88 was pointed at you, and you surrendered. It wasn't long when we freed you. You, Joe Barford, and I would hunt up food for the German women to cook for us. We ran into a German that wouldn't give us potatoes, and I kicked him in the butt, down the stairs, and we got potatoes. PS: Joe Barford played the harmonica to entertain the women [laughs].

**Interviewer:** That's great. Now where did you meet Ed?

**Henry Kolar:** In the 95<sup>th</sup>, he was in our squad, BAR man.

**Interviewer:** I saw a BAR today. That's pretty heavy.

**Henry Kolar:** Oh, he's a big guy. He's a farmer. He comes from Nebraska. Yeah, I correspond with him. He calls me, and I call him.

**Interviewer:** And in your squadron, what was your job? Were you still a mechanic?

**Henry Kolar:** Squad leader. I was a T5. They wanted to take it away on me. And Patton says anybody transferred from one outfit to another, like a lot of air corpsmen were, and they were sergeants, staff sergeants, while I was a T5, a corporal. And they wanted to take it away before they would give me a chance. And I said, No way. I said, Patton says I keep it. They transferred me, I earned the stripes, so I keep 'em. So they made me squad leader then, for a short time [laughs].

**[TIME 5:11]**

But, like I say, you didn't know, from one day to another, I didn't know the individual, you know what I mean, really personally. Joe Barford and I, we made up a bazooka team one time. And there's a story on it there. ...

**Interviewer:** I don't think it's here. What is that story?

**Henry Kolar:** We were held up by the farm area, so they brought us hot food in. C-rations. And they heated it up and you go get your mess kit – we were holding the position. So these two women come by with baby buggies, and they had two kids. And we got them some food. And we give them food, but we weren't supposed to fraternize. And here we were fraternizing with the women, you know, giving the kids food and that.

So that night, we were going to advance. So at night they told us, Joe Barford and I get in a hole with a bazooka out there. And if any tanks come, shoot at them, the back end of them. ...

So I said, Joe, I never fired a bazooka in my life.

He said, Don't worry, we'll fire it.

He was game as hell.

But anyway, we stayed in that shell hole, and nobody came by – no tanks came by. And we jumped off in the morning. When we jumped off in the morning, they were set up with us, this tank that Ed Percony was pinned down with? And we advanced, and then, I never noticed, but there was a fence. And when we had to retreat we fell back, and I noticed there was a fence when I went back to attack the Germans again. How the hell did I get over the fence? I don't know [laughs].

But they were strafing us with .50 caliber machine guns, you know. And that's when Ed Percony had the BAR and they took him prisoner. Then when we re-attacked we took him – the Germans, they surrendered. Why, I don't know. But they just gave up.

**Interviewer:** So when you reattacked, were they in a tank? Were they in a house?

**Henry Kolar:** No, they had a tank there. In a barn, yeah.

**Interviewer:** And they just gave up?

**Henry Kolar:** Yeah, they just surrendered. I think there was four of them there. But the others moved out. See, there was more. You could hear them at night, moving. You could hear the tanks rumbling. They were moving out. But we didn't know what they left behind.

**Interviewer:** Where do you think this was?

**Henry Kolar:** God, you got me. ... It was in Germany, but I can't tell you – honest to goodness, I can tell a story, but. Like I tell you a shell burst? You have no idea what a shell sounds like.

**Interviewer:** What does a shell sound like?

**Henry Kolar:** Oh, God. ... We moved up on a position with tanks. Armored tanks. And this was a town, they had apartment buildings in it.

We were on the outskirts, in a field. And we were alongside this tank. And he fired a round in this apartment building. It picked me up – I'll bet you two feet off the ground. That's the concussion from a tank when they fire.

**Interviewer:** It threw you up two feet from the ground.

**Henry Kolar:** That's right. The concussion from it.

**Interviewer:** The concussion from it.

**Henry Kolar:** Yes. And we used to ride sometimes, tanks. But then we didn't like tanks. Because they made too much noise [laughs]. One way they were good, one way they were bad.

And then when we'd do street fighting, we went from building to building. They had TDs, what they called – tank destroyers. And they would punch a hole in the building for us to go into. And we'd go from building to building that way, by a hole being punched in the building.

**Interviewer:** What did they use to punch the hole?

**Henry Kolar:** This TD would shoot a shell into it. And explode it. Blow a hole in the wall.

**Interviewer:** What was the TD?

**Henry Kolar:** It was like a tank. It's a tank destroyer, TD.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Henry Kolar:** And they would blow a hole for us. And move up along the street, you know?

We got into a building there, and it was all open, the side of the building. And there was a couch there. So I sat down to rest. And they must have lobbed a mortar in on us.

And it hit the ceiling outside. And I got full of plaster. And the guys were laughing at me.

I was the snowman [laughs]. But I didn't get hit.

**Interviewer:** Did you get enough sleep at that time?

**Henry Kolar:** Oh, in between. You attack, you rest for two days, you move up again, another platoon will take over. And you just keep moving back and forth like that. You're never steady on the line. ...

(other veteran came by says Hello)

**Interviewer:** That was Mr. Holmes. Marion Holmes came up and said hello from I Company.

**Lenore Kolar:** We have a picture at home, after the war they sent them to Camp Shelby, and he was standing right next to Hank. ...

**Mr. Kolar:** He's got problems. Blood problems.

**Interviewer:** Ohhh..

File C

**Interviewer:** Is there anything you want to say that you haven't said?

**Lenore Kolar:** The family that's in Belgium.

**Henry Kolar:** Did I mention [the family] who took care of me? ... And the boy who was around [age 12]? Well the boy passed away here not

too long ago. And the girl is 72 years old. And for my birthday she sends me chocolate.

**Lenore Kolar:** When you stop and think, that was back in 1944, '45. And here it is 2004. And she's ... they still correspond.

**Henry Kolar:** They had cows and chickens and whatever living downstairs. And we lived upstairs and that steam from the manure would come up. By the windows you could smell it [laughs].

**Lenore Kolar:** And he used to bring – he'd get cigars in his K-rations, and he used to give the cigars to the grandfather, and the grandfather used to call him "Churchill."

**Interviewer:** How long did you stay with them?

**Henry Kolar:** Oh, I only stayed there a week or two, not even two weeks I don't think. See, you don't keep track of time.

**Interviewer:** No, but you made such an impression that 60 years later they still send you gifts.

**Henry Kolar:** Well I would give the kids food. When I was able to get up they'd serve us C-rations. That was warm food. We were holding the position. We were waiting to move up to the Bulge, see.

That's why we were there in Belgium. In the meantime, they had to feed us. So when I got well I'd go there with my mess kit and cup and bring them coffee or whatever I could and food on the tray. And give it to the kids. And that's why they remembered. Chocolate bars I get in the K-ration, I'd give it to the kids. They love it.

**Interviewer:** What's their names?

**Henry Kolar:** Andre, and —.

**Lenore Kolar:** Andre is gone.

**Henry Kolar:** Yeah, he passed away.

**Lenore Kolar:** Her name is Idalie, and it's I-d-a-l-i-e. And her last name is, it was Hennis, H-e-n-n-u-s. And I guess her married name is Hans, H-a-n-s.

**Interviewer:** Have you been back to visit them?

**Henry Kolar:** No, I'd like to, but ain't got this [money].

**Interviewer:** Well you know the woman here from Belgium who is doing the Metz reunion, if you look in the program they say if you can afford to pay your plane fair, the city of Metz is going to pay for lodging and food for everybody who comes there.

**Henry Kolar:** And I'm still doctoring that. I have to space myself. I'm going to go to Washington DC, and about every Tuesday I got to go to the doctor. Now when I get back Monday, I have to go to a doctor with my back. They're giving me shots. And then my legs. I have a rough time walking. They ache. My feet are freezing right now. They're cold.

**Interviewer:** Speaking of walking, what were the 25-mile hikes like?

**Henry Kolar:** I was a kid, what the hell [laughs].

**Interviewer:** How long would a 25-mile hike take?

**Henry Kolar:** (laughs) Too long.

And we used to get – guys, they were from Tennessee, I'll never forget them. We'd go on a hike and they'd make up a pack.

And it looked like they had all this stuff in it. And it was empty. They were carrying it on their back, until they got caught [laughs]. Then they got KP duty.

**Interviewer:** What was in it?

**Henry Kolar:** A stovepipe [laughs].

We had a guy from Tennessee that wouldn't salute an officer. He was stopped in England there. ...

The colored had one night out and we have next.

We used to have fights with the colored, that was them days. But anyway, officer stopped him, and he said, I'll salute an officer when I see one [laughs].

It hurts. I don't know whatever happened to him but boy, he was ornery, that guy. I wouldn't want to meet him in combat, he was rough [laughs].

**Interviewer:** What I'll do with this.. tonight I take it up to my room..

(explains process)

If you see that I'm empty and tomorrow come down. (explains) If you think of more stories, feel free to stop me later.

**Henry Kolar:** That guy from Texas, in the archives, he was out at our house. And he wrote up a book on me. And he's supposed to have it all together. And give me two books. And one will go in our newspaper in Indiana, and one at the archives, he said it would be there.

**Interviewer:** Let's see.. let me just go through –

end file-