

Roy Milks audio log

Veteran's Name: Roy Milks

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

Date of Interview: August 6, 2010

Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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Log compiled by: Teresa Bergen, December 2022

Track 1

- 00:00 Meyer introduces himself and the interview
- 00:44 Milks was born October 31, 1921 in Midland, Michigan, 125 miles northwest of Detroit
- 01:11 Milks served with was with Battery A, 920th Field Artillery Battalion in World War Two; final rank was private first class
- 01:49 hearing about the Pearl Harbor attack on the radio during his freshman year at Michigan State in East Lansing
- 02:41 got permission from parents to enlist, because he was too young to legally decide for himself; wanted to join Air Corps
- 03:01 Milks failed a physical at Selfridge Field due to an old knee injury from a skiing accident
- 04:17 he was placed in enlisted reserve, and called up several months later, when he went to basic training at Camp Wallace, Texas
- 05:10 first impressions of military life: "I was surprised that some of the guys had suitcases and pajamas and things like that. And I think I knew enough, I just left home with what I was wearing on my back."
- 06:13 knee got better in basic training, but he's had a knee replacement since
- 06:50 basic training was tough, but he liked it overall
- 07:20 after three months of basic training, went to Army Specialized Training Program at the University of Pittsburgh; studied engineering, which was not his choice
- 08:18 ASTP program got closed down and Milk went to the 95th Infantry Division as a replacement at Indiantown Gap; resentment of ASTP guys

- 09:34 Milks was assigned to artillery; In West Virginia, “what we did mostly was trying to cut trees, and fix roads so our trucks could go over them, and that type of thing.”
- 10:14 his main artillery job was as a loader on a 105-millimeter Howitzer; explanation of loading and firing the Howitzer; shells weighed about 45 pounds
- 12:54 commanding officers
- 13:25 was in West Virginia on mountain maneuvers on D-Day; next day, packed up and got ready to go overseas
- 14:07 sent to Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts
- 14:25 Milks was excited to cross the ocean on the USS West Point
- 14:57 description of cramped bunks onboard
- 15:08 much later, his wife wanted to take a cruise that left from Southampton; “I said, ‘Irma, just forget it.’ I said, ‘Last time I got on a ship in Southampton, next morning I landed on Omaha Beach, and I’m not going to take a chance!’”
- 15:57 after about two weeks in England, sent to Omaha Beach, France; description of England; landing on Omaha Beach in LSTs, seeing wreckage on beach
- 18:25 bivouacked in Trevieres; American supply lines were really breaking down, lack of gas and ammunition; spent two weeks without much to do besides picking up a little debris
- 19:44 drove in their gun trucks to next position
- 20:47 digging in guns to keep them safe; Captain Elliott told them that soldiers were expendable but guns weren’t; description of digging in guns and making parapet
- 23:06 in his first combat experience, on the French side of the Moselle River, ordered not to fire without direct order due to severe ammunition shortage; also, they had only enough gasoline to retreat
- 25:25 remembers seeing a sign in Verdun asking drivers not to honk horns, but to respect the thousands of people killed there
- 26:10 unless you saw a sign, you didn’t usually know where you were. “They didn’t tell privates very much.”
- 26:48 after Metz, General Patton visited Milks’ division and said the men needed vacation, so they were sent to a little village in France, perhaps called Falch

- 28:12 meeting a French schoolteacher who had pictures of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs cut from American magazines, asked Milks to tell her the story
- 31:54 learning which artillery sounds to be afraid of
- 33:44 guns overheated one time from firing so much during a Ruhr River crossing
- 34:39 explanation of gun set up, different types of powder and shells
- 36:06 Milks respected his commanding officer and thought he did a good job of picking protected locations
- 37:17 joined the Battle of the Bulge during the tail end, weather was miserably cold; still remembers a woman who filled their canteen cups with hot broth as they traveled through a small town in Belgium; everybody suffered cold toes
- 38:55 long-term hearing damage from being in artillery
- 39:33 learning of Roosevelt's death; not knowing much about Truman
- 41:12 firing at Metz; several of their people hurt or killed
- 42:27 right after the Battle of the Bulge, Milks was transferred to the 9th Infantry Division under Montgomery's 22nd Army
- 43:06 Rhine River crossing; realizing the war was winding down
- 44:22 he carried his lucky Canadian two-dollar-bill through the war, and still carries it today
- 46:47 made a deluxe sleeping bag out of several blankets, using a filed down part of a C-ration can as a needle to sew it together
- 49:00 Milks locates his lucky two-dollar-bill and shows it to Meyer
- 50:01 received Bronze Star, seems to feel he didn't do anything spectacular enough to earn it
- 50:40 recalls an especially scary night of German firing; "I got in the foxhole and I was actually trembling."; if not for a faulty fuse, he would have been killed by a grenade; discussion of whether that shell was sabotaged
- 53:22 V-E Day was anticlimactic because fighting had already stopped

- 53:49 before the war was officially over, Germans tried to surrender to Milks' artillery unit: "And we didn't have any ways of taking prisoners. And we just told the Germans to keep on going."
- 55:11 combat is 90% boredom and 10% terror; "I would have enjoyed having a book or something to read, but there was just absolutely nothing to do."
- 56:00 mostly stayed with his own outfit, occasionally saw friends in other outfits
- 56:32 description of food. "Not good."
- 57:37 mentions his close army friends, who were the most important people to him during the war
- 58:54 sightseeing alone in Paris while his buddies drank and caroused; has been back to visit France three times since the war
- 1:01:00 war matured him, inspired him to finish college; also, he lost his taste for hunting
- 1:02:10 Milks believes some sort of service to the country should be mandatory, whether it's military, civilian conservation or Peace Corps; "It's something to make them appreciate their country."
- 1:02:54 Meyer talks about recording people at LA Library, and meeting a kid who didn't know who Hitler was
- 1:03:47 importance of studying history; "If it hadn't been for the allies, America, Britain, I don't know what kind of world we'd have right now."
- 1:05:09 attending the opening of the new World War Two monument
- 1:06:20 Meyer talks about meeting Ken Burns' producer, and her strategy for getting never-before-told stories out of narrators
- 1:07:29 Milks tells the story of one night when they were expecting a German attack and he manned the bazooka alone; over the night, he was afraid but got a physical feeling of accepting his fate, whatever it was
- 1:09:30 Irma Milks mentions that Roy never told any war stories until they started attending the 95th reunions
- 1:10:20 thanks, goodbyes
- 1:11:10 end recording