

Billy Olive audio log

Narrator: Billy Olive

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

Date: August 14, 2004

Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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Log compiled by: Teresa Bergen, October 2021

Track 1

- 00:00 Olive mentions notes he's made about his Army memories, Meyer mentions his own notes
- 02:14 introduction. Recording at Holiday Inn, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
- 02:47 birth certificate says Olive was born in North Carolina November 5, 1921; but nurse had notoriously bad recordkeeping, and Olive's father told him he was really born November 6. He celebrates November 6.
- 05:02 childhood camping with friends, and parents who encouraged independence and risk taking helped prepare him for army
- 06:00 Olive is from Piedmont section of North Carolina; family moved to Durham
- 06:25 learned to swim at an early age
- 06:35 spent summers working hard on uncle's tobacco farm; "I guess all I'm saying here is that I had no fear of hard work. And using my body physically."
- 07:29 early jobs: fixed cars from the time he was a teenager, did roofing work, worked in a machine shop
- 08:28 parents were strict Baptists and questioned his job in a restaurant that served beer
- 08:50 hitchhiking to work
- 09:29 father was a lawyer; he'd served in World War I but was discharged with flu
- 10:55 at Indiantown Gap: "You were really throwing a bunch of college students in with a bunch of sort of almost professional soldiers. Soldiers that had been with the 95th a long, long time."
- 11:59 people of Pennsylvania were extremely kind and hospitable
- 12:54 altercation with a sergeant when Olive corrected his pronunciation

- 13:33 otherwise was able to keep up and get along with others
- 14:00 had no ambition to be an officer, even though he felt he had the qualities and leadership background from high school and college
- 15:06 taking a combat course where they practiced crawling on stomachs to avoid machine gun fire; one of the best exercises he experienced in the army
- 16:38 bayonet training; “That was hard for me to accept that I would have the guts, if I had to, to stick a bayonet in somebody. But I learned to do it.”
- 17:50 how he kept fear and nerves at bay
- 19:45 Olive’s dog tag number was 14124344
- 20:11 were temporarily stationed at Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts; left there to board Mariposa for England
- 20:48 had 15,000 men aboard; so crowded you could barely sit or lie down
- 21:18 terrible food smells coming up from galley; Olive survived on chocolate bars and pickles
- 22:05 forty-foot waves, zigzagging, escort ships dropping depth bombs in case of German submarines—terrible trip, and lots of seasickness
- 23:10 greeted in Liverpool by English ladies serving tea; as soon as ladies weren’t looking, the soldiers all dumped their cups. “I mean, it was awful tea.”
- 23:52 description of buzz bombs while on leave in London; Londoners carried on as if nothing was happening
- 25:12 English welcomed them; a British soldier showed him how to trick telephone system into letting him make free calls
- 25:50 while he was in England waiting to go to France, Olive built a radio; used a razor blade as a tuning crystal
- 26:44 not sure where he was stationed, maybe somewhere in the middle of England
- 27:05 horse-drawn wagons used in England
- 27:30 landing at Omaha Beach; jumping from boat onto landing craft in full gear
- 28:59 many of the soldiers wished an unpopular lieutenant would break his neck trying to board the landing craft, but he didn’t

- 29:44 they went to Omaha Beach on a Belgian boat with a black Algerian crew speaking French. “That was an unusual experience for me.”
- 30:21 once they landed, soldiers relieved themselves en masse on a hill; a French family came upon them. “Everybody takes everything in stride.”
- 31:15 brief description of landing craft
- 31:49 description of Omaha Beach—lots of debris, no bodies
- 32:28 in French villages, saw devastation of war—blown up houses and cattle
- 33:23 landed in August; pleasant weather
- 34:20 on December 14, 1944, an all-Black engineering group laid down a smokescreen to protect Olive’s company as they crossed huge field to capture Ensdorf, Germany
- 36:42 Germans started shelling them; As part of the machine gun crew, Olive was carrying about fifty pounds of ammunition; had to drop to muddy ground to avoid shells
- 38:00 they managed to get across field and shelter in a basement, where they discovered they were missing three boxes of ammunition
- 38:28 three men broke down crying; “And they had had all the war they could take at that moment. They really were classic examples of shell shock.”
- 39:31 Olive and two others volunteered to go back for the missing boxes of ammunition; on that trip, Olive hit by shrapnel; “I’ve always been thankful that it hit my foot and not my head.”
- 40:40 description of how shrapnel is designed for maximum incapacitation
- 41:09 sounds of battle—bombs, guns
- 42:12 didn’t want to leave fellow soldiers, but realized he couldn’t stand or walk; crawling to safety in a boat on the river
- 43:07 weather: wet and muddy
- 44:05 somebody rowed the boat across the river, Olive crawled up a bank on other side to medic station
- 44:27 medics cut his shoe off, gave him shot of morphine; description of morphine prepacked for field hospitals
- 44:50 transported in ambulance; shell blew ambulance into a ditch; American tank pulled them out

45:14 foot operated on in a field hospital; Olive watched the operation in a mirror and saved the piece of shrapnel

45:49 transported by ambulance and train to a Paris hospital; woke up next morning in a bed with white sheets, surrounded by French nurses; "I literally thought I was in heaven."

47:25 in hospital, his skin came off his legs and feet in layers

48:24 earlier, somewhere between Metz and Ensdorf, Olive was alone, searching for Germans in a thick forest; incident where a German could have killed Olive, but instead surrendered

51:27 when they entered towns, they usually shot down church steeples and chimneys first thing, because that's where snipers hid

52:07 Olive was almost hit by a sniper in Metz

53:55 experience of being frozen while sleeping in the snow one night in France or Germany; frostbite

56:05 Olive's brother was in the finance corps of the army; brother was able to visit him before Olive shipped out to France, and also in England after Olive was wounded

57:18 recovered in England for extended period, perhaps one to two months; took hospital ship back to New York; three men thrown in brig on ship

58:38 voyage back to US much more pleasant than trip on Mariposa; Olive had a bed and was treated well as a disabled veteran

59:07 back in the US, Olive went to a hospital in Staten Island; visit from sister

59:42 transported to VA hospital in Black Mountain, North Carolina; discharged from Camp Butler sometime in 1945

1:00:45 war experience gave him deeper love for country and respect for military, and greater confidence in himself

1:03:22 war also gave him an appreciation of life and ability to enjoy it; so many of his friends were killed

1:05:18 spiritual beliefs: Olive believes in a higher power, but thinks people put too much energy into the particular form of religious practice

1:07:08 Olive thinks he was in Staten Island on V-E Day

1:07:34 remembers hearing about Pearl Harbor bombing while working at a machine shop in Durham

1:08:17 discussion of organizing audio and written notes

1:10:04 end recording