

## **Harrell Smith audio log**

Narrator: Harrell Smith

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

Dates: August 26, 2006 (?); August 1, 2009

Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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Log compiled by: Teresa Bergen, August 2021

### **Track 1**

- 00:00 Smith shares memorabilia he brought to a reunion, including photos, a quote from a fellow infantryman, a mailing list, artistic rendering of a bridge that blew up
- 02:21 going to a field hospital near Oxford, England after being shot
- 03:13 hospital filled up after Battle of the Bulge; Smith negotiated his transport home, not wanting to ride in the same tiny, crowded C-47 airplane he took from France to England.
- 05:07 waited until February 14, took hospital ship to Charleston, SC; went back to his hometown of Memphis, TN where he was hospitalized for two years
- 05:30 discharged in 1946
- 05:45 people ask why he didn't take the plane, and he responds, "If you'd ridden from France to England, looking at two inches above you with another man's butt in your face..."
- 06:40 final rank was private first class
- 06:49 after discharged, he got college degrees and made good money all his life

### **Track 2: August 1, 2009 session**

- 0:00 introduction, interview being conducted at the Biltmore Oklahoma City Hotel
- 01:26 Smith born in New Smyrna Beach, Florida on October 21, 1925
- 02:35 Smith served in 95<sup>th</sup> Division, Company I, 378<sup>th</sup> Battalion, highest rank was PFC
- 03:54 service dates were January 3, 1944-August 23, 1946; wounded in Metz, France November 18, 1944
- 05:00 mentions content of missing 2008 interview, in which they talked about Smith's career from ASTP through Indiantown Gap, and to taking SS Mariposa to Europe

- 05:21 description of five-day voyage on Mariposa from Boston to Liverpool via Greenland: overcrowding, seasickness, poorly ventilated cabins were too hot or too cold, zigzagging to avoid enemy boats
- 07:35 train from Liverpool to Winchester, England; they stayed in Quonset huts on the Tichborne estate, which Lord Tichborne had given over for wartime use
- 08:45 beds too short for Americans
- 09:19 enjoyed the local knights of the round table lore and sites
- 09:50 liked talking to the locals and hearing legends about stingy Lord Tichborne and his dislike for poor people that worked for him; curse his wife put on him
- 12:05 visiting London: people had penlights because of blackouts, looked like fireflies
- 12:45 loved riding subway and seeing London at a bargain price
- 13:46 buying clothes at Air Force's PX in London
- 14:32 took boat across English Channel which had four different crews on it; landed at Omaha Beach in France at about D-Day plus 60
- 16:25 understood how so many people were killed on the beach on D-Day, between being shot and drowning under weight of their 60-pound packs
- 17:19 description of buzz bombs in London
- 18:32 difficult hill to climb from Omaha Beach, plus you were an easy target and there were landmines; "And I thought, how could a man be fighting a battle and going up this hill?"
- 19:54 description of hedgerows
- 20:51 main army, not the 95<sup>th</sup>, had moved forward and was almost to Paris
- 21:18 heard about battle at Saint-Lô: "They bombed that city from the air, and said that there wasn't anything standing in Saint-Lô that was higher than four feet."
- 22:59 lived in hedgerows until August 1944, then put on forty-and-eight train
- 23:21 description of bumpy ride on forty-and-eights, which had no brakes
- 24:15 soldier who would make coffee by side of railroad track, drink grounds and all
- 24:46 route through Paris and Versailles; relieved 5<sup>th</sup> Division, which had gotten clobbered in battle
- 25:42 Second D-Day on November 7, 1944
- 26:29 still a lot of bodies out there from 5<sup>th</sup> Division losses; cold enough to preserve them

- 26:36 massive rain: “You couldn't dig six inches deep until it'd fill up with water, so foxholes were sort of obsolete because you couldn't get any digging done.”
- 27:00 were in a holding pattern, waiting for battle to restart; did a lot of patrols—could see the enemy and he could see them
- 27:56 mortar sergeant would use their limited ammunition to try to knock Germans off their latrines
- 28:34 Patton was upset about ammunition and other shortages in supply chain
- 28:48 still managed to stay fed on C and D-rations, and one hot meal a day
- 29:14 at night small groups would patrol and bring back bodies of 5<sup>th</sup> Division soldiers: “because they were actually frozen, so they weren't disintegrated”
- 30:05 dislike between Patton and Roosevelt; Roosevelt reelected November 7, the same day the war restarted full blast and Smith's company headed toward Metz
- 31:21 advancing, battles every day, capturing little villages
- 32:20 on November 18, Smith had been assigned to watch German prisoners they had contained in a village post office
- 33:24 recounts story where sergeant tried to make Smith poke his head up into the attic of a dark house to see if anybody was there; Smith didn't want to get his head shot off
- 35:10 sniper killed several people, included Smith's friend, while Smith was guarding post office
- 35:55 Smith's company was in a wedge formation moving towards Metz on a rainy dawn, while enemy shot at them from hills; American tanks and artillery shooting back
- 38:43 Smith shot when almost to a bridge. “Well, when I got wounded I went down. The guy in front of me was killed. And the guy in back of me was still standing.” Another wounded soldier went to get Smith a medic
- 40:36 while Smith awaited help, Germans blew up bridge; “That was the worst day that the I Company had in the whole war as far as casualties were concerned.”
- 41:46 no medic came for Smith, who was the only one left alive in the area where he fell
- 42:19 a German came up to him, Smith asked him for water but the soldier said no and shot him in the chest; Smith just grazed but played dead
- 43:46 a German doctor in the US later told Smith that German medics carried “mercy pistols,” used to shoot patients who were too far gone to save

46:01 a jeep picked Smith up to transport him to a field hospital; description of how stretchers were arranged on jeep

46:52 at field hospital, doctors initially thought Smith was German because of his blond hair and blue eyes. "One doctor said, 'Don't bother with him yet, he's a Kraut.'" Smith managed to say he was American.

47:30 remembers doctors cutting off his clothes before going into operating room

47:46 woke up two days later in the 30<sup>th</sup> Field Hospital, getting lots of penicillin, which was brand new; about 30 people in field hospital, which was a school building

49:09 patients were taken by ambulance to an airstrip and laid on ground in rain to await airplanes for transport back to England

50:20 meanwhile, a captured German general was staying dry in a big tent at the airstrip; Smith pointed out the unfairness of this and a major ordered all the wounded soldiers to be moved into the tent with the general

51:20 after uncomfortable flight to England in cramped C-47, Smith refused to fly in one again even though he could have been home by Christmas 1944

52:37 Smith waited until February 14, 1945 to take very comfortable hospital boat back instead; Smith still bedridden but they'd put his stretcher on deck so he'd get fresh air; boat had big red cross on top, so passing German boats left it alone

54:03 end interview