

INTERVIEW WITH GORDON SQUIRES

July 31, 2008

Holiday Inn French Quarter, Toledo Ohio.

Transcribed by David Meyer

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Track 1
9:31

MR. MEYER: This is David Meyer son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379th, (95th Infantry.) It is July 31st, 2008 and we're in the Holiday Inn French Quarter in Toledo Ohio Perrysburg Ohio and today I'm with Mister ... sir could you say your name...

MR. SQUIRES: Gordon SQUIRES.

MEY: Could you spell your last name?

SQ: S Q U I R E S.

MEY: And what company were you with Mr. Squires?

SQ: Company E the 379th Infantry Regiment..

MR. MEYER: Of the 95th infantry. Just a few preliminary questions. 0:42 When/s your birthday.

MR. SQ: October 25th, 1925.

Meyer: And where were you born?

SQ: Where was I born? A little town of Cassopolis (?sp) Michigan.

Mwywe: Was that in the north?

SQ: Near the Michigan Indiana state line.

MEY: And now you say you live in Elkton.

SQ: We live in Elkard.. Indiana.

MEY: And that's on the Indiana side of the Michigan Indiana line.

SQ: Yeah.

MEY: Is that far from where you were born?

SQ: Maybe 15 miles.

MEY: About 15 miles. Uhhh... (1:28) What was your final rank?

SQ: Corporal

MEY: These are just some questions they ask at the beginning. What were your parents names?

SQ: Frank and Louella.

MEY: Did you have any siblings?

SQ: I have one sister. Mau... Marilyn..

MEY: What was it like growing up in that time?

SQ: (1:57) Small town.. small school...uh... The size of the town was so that everybody knew everybody else and it was uh... pretty good place to live..

MEY: 2:21 Do you remember where you were when you heard about the Pearl Harbor attacks?

SQ: Yes... It was a Sunday and .. I was in the car with my folks and sister and we were going to see relatives in Kalamazoo. Do you know where Kalamazoo is?

MEY: Uh-hum... About how far away was the from ..

SQ: About 50 miles.

MEY: And it came over the radio?

SQ: Yep.

MEY: How old were you then?

SQ: Oh gee I must have been about... twelve or thirteen.

MEY: Twelve or thirteen. What did your parents do or ...

SQ: What did they do?

MEY: When you heard about it. When they heard about it.

SQ: They were surprised very surprised... but... I felt, "Well Gee,, I'm too young to ever be involved."
(laughs - interviewer joins in laugh)

Well maybe I could be an ammunition bearer of something but I didn't I never ... I just didn't feel that I was ever... gonna be in uniform, you know...

MEY: (3:45) And.. and... and... what were the circumstance (3:50) around when you joined.

SQ: I was in college and I took a test. Perhaps you remember A S T P - Army Specialized Training Program? Well I took that test, passed the test and I was awaiting assignment to a college.

I was at Ft. Sheridan near Chicago. And while I was there, they closed the whole program. (4:26)

MEY: Is that January or February..

SQ: Uhhh.....Well, yeah, it was February I think.. They just needed the bodies in Europe. That's why they sent us all to the infantry - the 95th.

MEY: Did they send you to Indian Town Gap

SQ: Yes.

MEY: (4:49) When you went there and you were... uh... you had all these veterans who has been there for a while... how did they treat you guys.

SQ: They resented us very much.

MEY: They did?

SQ: Yes. You see we were all college fellows and the permanent cadre had already been established in the 95th. And they... I guess they just didn't want greenhorns (laughs) in the outfit.

MEY: (5:37) Was it difficult getting use to.. uh...I guess all the hikes...all the new things because you just came out of college and now you're with all these...

SQ: ... Well, I didn't mind it. (5:50) We went through basic training and shortly thereafter why we were shipped overseas. And I think everybody felt the same way I did, it was a new experience and we were all set to go.

MEY: 6:15 What boat did you go over on.

SQ: The USS West Point.

MEY: I just talked to someone (Bob Brown) who grew up in Gloucester Mass and he said he grew up near the water so he didn't worry about being seasick. How did you do?

SQ: Fine. I didn't have any problem. And he must have been on the same boat I was on.

MEY: Yes, that's what he said, he said the same boat.. 6:46 - So the trip across was fine for you?

SQ: 6:53 We didn't have any escort we had a flying boat fly out as far as it could for cover.. and that was it... And then we changed course every I think every three minutes all across the Atlantic. Because it took them (the Germans) a little longer than that to set the sights of the torpedo and fire fast at us and so we ..

MEY:... were always zig..zaggin. going back and forth.

SQ: And seasickness didn't bother me at all.

MEY: Where did you sleep?

SQ: Well, we were in the..bunks. I think there were four or five high. We were jammed in the place. And I think we had about a five hundred man overload so a lot of fellows slept on the deck.

MEY: (8:00) Did you sleep on the deck?

SQ: No I was inside.

MEY: How was the food on board. Did you have a long wait...?

SQ: Food was good. I think we only had two meals a day though...because of the.. overload.. and all the masses of men... We were always lining up to go eat.. (laughs)

MEY: Sure

SQ: But I didn't mind it at all. It was an adventure.

MEY: Sure... because now you're about...it's '44 - how old are you now?

SQ: Well.. uh... I passed my 19th birthday in a foxhole in France..

MEY: so you eighteen right now. So you are on this boat.. eighteen years old on this boat going over... and then you land in England.

SQ: Uh-huh.

MEY: I understand some people landed in Liverpool

SQ: Either Liverpool or Southhampton. I think it was Liverpool.

MEY: And then... (9:15).. how was your time in England.

SQ: Short... (laughs) We did some war training and pretty soon we went across channel. 9:32.3)

End track 1 (double checked 5/23)

Track 2

MEY: Where did you land?

SQ: Omaha Beach.

MEY: What did it look like? I know it was 60 days or so after D-Day

SQ: It was.. kinda torn up. There was no problem with enemy fire then it was past that time. We landed... We were on a British Sightseeing boat.. that was the way we went over. Of course we had to get down by use of cargo nets.

MEY: Yes.

SQ: The side... (laughs)... That was an experience.

MEY: Into what .. the landing craft?

SQ: Into an LCI

MEY: So you had to climb down those big ...net things... did you have to drop into it.

SQ: As I recal it was just a matter of climbing off the net and going ashore.

MEY: That.. is an experience.. (laughter)... So you get ashore then do you climb up the cliff..

SQ: Well.. no.. this was... a little bit... left... west I think... of the high cliffs... so it was more like an easy beach thing.. with lots of rubble and stuff on it.

MEY: So you (2:00) landed there and gathered there ... where did you go next?

SQ: Well we bivouacked right... along the coast.

MEY: In the hedgerows?

SQ: Well it was before you really got to the hedgerows there was an area between the channel and the hedgerows.. and it really kinda fuzzy right there I don't really remember..

MEY: Some people talk about orchards
One person mentioned being in an apple orchard area.

SQ: Oh yeah there were some orchards, yeah.

MEY: 2:51 - Were you part of Red Ball Express?

SQ: I wasn't personally but there were others who were.

MEY: What did you do when you were camped out in that place... waiting?

SQ: I don't recall really... uh... We uh... cleaned our gear and so on.

MEY: Did you have any contact with the native French at the time?

SQ: I didn't, no.

MEY: Okay.. (t2 3:30)the next thing... people talk about yougetting on "40 and eights" (note: these were WWI boxcars).

SQ: Oh yeah... yeah. Did you ever see a "40 and 8."

MEY: I've seen a picture of one... What was it like?

SQ: Well a "40 and 8" means... it will accommodate 40 men or 8 horses...

MEY: ... a box car ...

SQ: ...yeah...well the way we were crammed in. in most cases... and this was the way it was when we were in prison camp... there could've been as many as 60 people in that box car. Crammed in.

MEY: How wide was the box car?

SQ: Oh... gee...

MEY: About as wide as this roo..

SQ: I don't know from about here to the wall.

MEY: About eight feet? Ten feet.

SQ: I got pictures of it at home.

MEY: Was it as long as this room? (30 feet)

SQ: Maybe not quite as long.

MEY: So pretty cramped. 4:50 - Did you stop sometimes and had everyone go to the bathroom..

SQ: Oh.. yeah... we had to.. Sometimes we made it and .. Sometimes... we didn't make it (laughter) And.. at one time, I guess this pre-dates the forty-and-eight thing, we were on regular French trains... or... I don't know... for a little ways anyway.. and we stopped once in a while .. I remember some of officers had target practice with fresh eggs. And that just killed the French because that was food to them. We were destroying their food. It was just something... Along the way you stop for a while you set up their eggs out there you took pot shots at them... it was just something.. to do.

MEY: Of course to the French... it's valuable.

SQ: Yeah..

MEY: Oh sure..

SQ: Yeah... (end of track 2) 6:14.9

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MEY: Where did the trains drop you off? Where did you go?

SQ: Well, you got me there I don't remember.

MEY: Do you remember getting out. Did they assign you to ... after you got out of the trains what happened next?

SQ: After what?

MEY: After you got out of the trains, after you disembarked.

SQ: Well, we wer pretty close ot the front lines, we could still pitch tents. But... it was a war zone.

MEY: So you could hear... you could hear the combat? You could hear shelling?

47:00 SQ: Not right there except there was a German pilot that...flew over everyday . . .we called him "Bed Check Charlie" and he went over every evening to see what's going on. And then pretty soon we moved up... And... things started kinda happening fast there.

MEY: What's the first thing that started happening fast.

SQ: Well, we crossed the Moselle River. (1:20)

MEY: How'd you cross?

SQ: Well, in that time in that area we went over on a bridge... It was all smoke you couldn't see anything and then we came to this little town of... .. what was it? ... Corny... you know where Corny is?

MEY: Uh..huh.. (yes).

SQ: And we dug in there. We had our platoon CP (command post) was a French restaurant and we were,, in the building during the day and in the foxholes at night.

MEY: (2:16) What was your job then... what was your day to day life?

SQ: Well, at night we were two men in a foxhole and uh... there were big jackrabbits over there... and there were flare guns. Flares all over the place...and a jack rabbit can set off a flare..

MEY: oooohhh...

SQ: So we were always on the alert anytime a jack rabbit or any other animal wnet by and set off a flare we had to ... flip off your safety and get ready to go...

3:05 MEY: What sort of rifle did you have?

SQ: Oh I had a M-1.. that was the Best Rifle going at the time. That was my pal.

MEY: Did you clean it everyday?

SQ: (3:20) Tried to... yeah. Now... at night... once in a while, we got into the house...and had our set-up post... in the house..

3:44 Oh one night I was in there with the company sniper... he was a real good shot but he was scared to death... of course, we all were. But... more so with him.

He blocked off the door.. and we had sandbags around -- we uh --stayed behind the sandbags and he said, "Now, do you know what an engineer's tape is?"

White... tape.. about that wide. (an inch wide) He said, "Well he said I'm gonna tie this tape to your arm . . .and when I pull it once, it's time for you to go on guard - we took turns. If I pull it twice.. get over here in a hurry because I hear something. So I went to sleep and ... pretty soon he jerked it twice and I jumped up and got over there and he says "There's somebody out there."

(4:51) So I listened ... And ... it was uh... it was ... through an open window... and it was on the side of the street. The Germans had the other half of the... know the ..(of the street..)

SQU: So it was very likely that there was somebody out there.

He said, "I hear somebody tapping signals on a rifle butt."

And I listened and I couldn't hear anything but he was really up tight and I said, "Well, throw a grenade out there."

5:35 Now they didn't want us to fire anything because it gives your position away but a grenade...it would be all over.

So he pulled the pin on the grenade

and then he froze..he absolutely could not throw that grenade..

5:57 Now picture this here we were behind sand bags

the door was blocked he blocked it off,

yet he had to go down a flight of stairs with that grenade in his hand with a pin out and find someone who could get downstairs and turn on a light and put the pin back in.

MEY: Oh nooo Oh noo.

SQ: And all hell could have broken loose any minute, he could have slipped or dropped it or something and we'd have been gone.

But he made it down there and got the pin back in and saved our necks. We never did find out if there was somebody out there or not.

6:44

That was just one of those little things that uh...

MEY: So... you're in Corny?

SQ: Yeah.

SQ: And this is what's going on.. How long are you in Corny?

7:08 SQ: Ohh.. probably a couple of weeks... .

MEY: and anything else happens while you were in Corny that comes to mind. Want to mention.

SQ: Uh.. yeah.. we had our first casualties there. (7:37)

One of my friends was killed in a foxhole.. his buddy ...uh... escaped it I guess the guy who was saved was on the bottom and the guy who got killed was on top...

We had our food there; we had to cross the road from the company CP or the platoon CP to get over on the other side. Where there was a little more room. We had to run back and forth with our uh cooking stuff... because we cooked it ove across the road. (8:30) And one day I was carrying some pots

and pans over there and I dropped one right there in the middle of the road, and across the road, of course the Germans were down there in a machine gun next and... uh... I went back and got it.. but I was a little bit apprehensive.

Now my wife and I have been over there and we went to Corny. The big building that we went to was a brick factory and I wanted to see what is was like, you know. Well the brick factory was gone. The café was redone... and so on ...was back in business.

MEY: Was the building still there that the café was in?

SQ: No, they had torn it down and built it and redone it.

MEY: Was there anything there that reminded you?

SQ: No. not really... uhm..I knew it.

MEY: How did the French...were the French aware that you were a veteran.

SQ: Yeah... Have you ever met Roger Gorgiot. Rose Gorgiot.

MEY: Yes.

SQ: Well we went over and contacted him and he rolled out the red carpet for us took us around and I said, I want to go to Corny for one thing. So we went back and looked it over. And... you've probably seen the monument? The bald eagle? 10:21

MEY: Sure, sure.

SQ: My wife took a picture of Roger and I standing beside the bald eagle. Uh... and we... couldn't get too close.

Now I was captured at Fort Joan of Arc.

There were lots of forts over there around the city of Metz.

10:49 And it was still a fort... I mean it was still active... and we couldn't get near it... it was off-limits.

MEY: That's interesting. It's still active?

SQ: You see... it was up near the French German border. And the French and Germans in that area just never got along.

That's the reason I think that they kept the fort active. Just in case, I guess.

MEY: ... After Corny, where did you go next?

SQ: 11:37 Well.. let me see. That was when the fighting started a little bit more seriously in that whole area, and we dug in and we had hot meals there. (12:08) We had two more casualties. They sent out a patrol and the patrol got lost. They called for one artillery shell to mark the target and they were on the target... So they were both killed. 12:40

(pause)

MEY: Do you remember their names? (faint)

SQ: No.

MEY: Oh... gosh... so now you're heading.. So now are you heading toward Metz?

SQ: Yes.

MEY: Are you going to the forts around Metz.

SQ: Well Metz and Corny weren't too far apart. And uh... (13:18) We had some skirmishes in that area. Then we decided... somebody decided... that we should attack the Fort.

MEY: This is Ft. Joan of Arc?

SQ: Yeah. Well.. yeah.

MEY: okay.

SQ: Now Gen'l Patton was an advocate of marching fire, maybe you've heard of that.

MEY: Yeah I've heard of that.

SQ: You just fire from the hip as you go you know.

MEY: Yeah. I remember somebody saying... somebody asked him about. "What about our flanks" and he said "no you march and fire and make the enemy worry about their flanks."

SQ: And General Eisenhower had apparently told Patton to by-pass Metz That is was too dangerous that it was too heavily fortified and so on. And if you know Patton you know what kind of a guy he was he said, "Hell no, I'm going to take it." 14:38 Well he didn't for quite a while. But that was where I was captured.

MEY: That was where you were captured?

(end of track 3 Squires14:47:3)

Track 4

MEY: Where did you say you had your 19th birthday?

SQ: In a foxhole.

MEY: So now you've already had your 19th birthday by this time.

SQ: Yeah

MEY: What's the weather like?

SQ: Well, it was November 14th. It was a little bit on the cool side. It hadn't gotten as cool as it would later on. We started off before daybreak, and right away the Germans detected us and set up flares and started firing and so on. And we didn't... we at least... we gravel-scratchers... didn't know where we were going, really. And uh.. there we eight of us that got too far ahead of ourselves I guess. Uh.. we ended up real close to a German... some kind of a I think it was a "MG-42" gun. And uh..

MEY: Is that a machine gun?

SQ: Kind of like a machine gun it's not really ... I don't think it's really fully automatic but its. And uh... our staff sergeant surrendered us.

MEY: So it's early morning you start out and you don't really know it's before dawn. You're not sure where you're going...

SQ: We were just going ahead...

MEY:.. you were just going ahead...

And you get ahead and all of a sudden this gun starts firing and ... what made him surrender?

SQ: Well... then we hit the dirt and started crawling and..

MEY: You trying to get out of there...

SQ: Well... we didn't want to go backwards we wanted to go forwards..

MEY: Sure...

SQ: And like I said we got.. to close... without realizing where we were and I guess it must have been a ... German bunker or foxhole or smoehting... I recall lying in a kinda a muddy ditch. And uh... There was firing too much to get any place... I just stayed right there hoping it would kinda let up. And the next thing I knew this staff sergeant surrendered us.

MEY: Holy cow. He just surrendered the eight of you.

SQ: Huh?

MEY: He surrender the eight of you.

SQ: Yeah.

MEY: Without saying anthing he just...

SQ: No. We were just... at that time I was just a PFC and the rest of us were too.

MEY: How did he do it.. did he call out or a white flag?

SQ: I don't really remember.

MEY: Did he tell you before he was surrendering?

SQ: There was one of us who got hit. It was just a kinda of a flesh wound kida thing. He felt that we oughta surrender and get aid for this guy. It was a stupid thing to do but since he... outranked us... we uh... did as we were told.

MEY: And how did... how did... what happens during a surrender do you come up to the Germans come up you put your hpartns us.

SQ; Yeah. They got us out of that hole... with their weapons handy And took us back.

MEY: Holy Cow. It must have been... disorienting ...it must have been...

SQ: Yeah. They took us back into the town of Metz and uh... we..uh.. and there were more men... GIs... coming in all the time. They captured quite a few of us because... we didn't know what we were doing? There was no... (5:34:08)

[REDACTED]

(Sunday night 11:57 end - 16 minutes)

MEY: There was no ... (strategy?)
No... direction

MEY: And this was November you said November...?

SQ: November 14th.

MEY: November 14th.

SQ: That's a date I think I'll never forget. And...to make a long story short, they put us up in a .. a building in Metz and the next morning they put us on buses took us to the railhead...put us in forty-and-eight boxcars

MEY: Again.

SQ: And uh...

MEY: The building they kept you in in Metz was it a prison?

SQ: No... it wasn't really a prison it was a building. Well guarded.

MEY: How many were you to a room?

SQ: Well it was just a great big open thing.

And uh... there were lots of guards. And we were pretty helpless. And the next day they took us to the railhead put us in boxcars (7:09) And shipped us off.

7:20 The one thing I remember is we had to go to the Berlin marshalling yards. And while we were in the yards, there was an airraid.

And, of course, they didn't know we were there and we were lucky that they missed us...
But it was kind of a scary thing.

MEY: With an airraid to you just hear the rumbling of the airplanes first?

SQ: The sirens first. Airraid sirens.

MEY: The Germans who were guarding you did they give a damn. Did you get down or...

SQ: `No. They didn't care about us. They were able to get away from the boxcars and we were inside the box cars..

MEY: Just hoping that they didn't bomb you.

SQ: Yeah.

MEY: That's very scary. So from Berlin... where did they end up taking you. Did they take you to just one prison or.

SQ: Well, there are prisoncamps all over that part of the country. They took us first to, I think it was Stalag uh.. "2 A"- New Brandenburg I think it was. (8:55) We spent a few days there and they put us back in boxcars and they took us back to.. Stalag "12A" which was Limburg I think. And we stayed there for a few days. And of course, kept getting more and more GIs. And finally they took us in the boxcar again and took us to an airfield, a German Airfield. (9:29)
And we were...it was not identified by anybody as a prison camp.
And I think we were about a hundred..a hundred and eighty people in all... and we were slave labor.

In the wintertime, they uh cleaned off we had to clean off the runway. We dug fuel storage tanks.
We dug potatoes... Whatever they wanted done, you know.

And I forgot one thing - I hope this doesn't screw your whole thing up

MEY: Oh no no no, people are always... (end of 15 minutes) 11:43..

SQ: Do you edit it our something 10:41 - (discussion about editing)

SQ: 10:45 Well they took our uniforms away from us.

MEY: At the very beginning?

SQ: Well, within a couple of weeks.

MEY: What did you wear?

SQ: Well, I still got the hat. A Belgian hat, a Belgian jacket, some pants made out of something like burlap and a long thin German overcoat - very thin - and wooden shoes. Wooden soles with just a little bit of an upper. And that was it (11:41) And that was the worst winter ever in Germany.

MEY: Did you have underwear? Socks?

SQ: Yeah.. well we had pieces of clothes about that square (makes gesture) that we could wrap our feet in and we did have some underwear a little bit... but the Germans took those uniforms and gave them to German GIs - young fellas - who were fluent in English. And they went behind our lines (12:19) and they raised all kinds of Cain. 12:24 - One of the things they did was they got a hold of some "M.P." armbands. We had supplies going up to the front all the time you know. Well they used these armbands and all of a sudden they became "M.P.'s" Well they directed the flow of material to the German lines in stead of the American lines.

MEY: ohhhhh..

SQ: You can see what kind of havoc that would cause.

MEY: Sure, sure. 'Cause this was getting ready for the Battle of the Bulge.

SQ: Yeah. Because of the poor conditions and so on I froze my feet. I'm considered by the V.A. as "totally disabled."

MEY: Because of your frozen feet?

SQ: `Frozen feet, frozen fingers. (13:28) We were... it was... pretty crude.

MEY: Where'd they have you sleep? (13:33)

SQ: Well, we had a little fenced-in compound, with well guarded with uh..

MEY: Did all hundred and eighty of you...

SQ: Huh?

MEY: Did all 180 of you sleep in the same building?

SQ: Yeah. It was a pretty good sized building and we were packed in there. (14:04) Now while we were there we had seven killed and twenty-two wounded. Two of those fellas had escaped. They (the Germans) went out and caught them. Brought them back and executed them. The rest of the fellas that were killed and wounded...uh.. (14:33) there was a railroad line..about maybe a couple hours from the camp. (14:36) And a British (14:38) bomber went over one night and blew up the railhead. Rail line. It was loaded with ammunition.

And you know he was ... had no way to get out...

MEY: (ohhh)

SQ: so he went up with the flames (ooo.hhh..)

And they asked us to go over and fix the rail line.

Well they piled us all in about... well about... there must have been about 40 of us. In open top box cars - gondola cars - and took us to the scene of the disaster and we were supposed to fill the hole and put in new tracks and so on well we could only be there one day. Well nobody could do that much. So there were other prisoners...

(my note to myself 15 minutes transcribed from 10:41 - say 11:00 to 16:00 to 15 minutes is 5 minutes or 1 hr is 3 to 4 hours - and 5 minutes of time (15 minutes transcribe) is about a page and a half what they said) so this 15 pages is roughly 3 pages = 2 days or 10 days (but worked longer so probably 7 or 8 days)

The next day and the next day and so on.

But as the end of the day approached and it got dark we all piled back into this open topped gondolas and headed back.

Now it was dark, and another British plane came over and saw what he thought we was another ammunition train

He fired at us and killed ... well.. seven more and twenty-two wounded.

And, we buried the fellas the next day (16:32)

MEY: Did you become close at all with the other people in the prison.

SQ: Yeah. Yeah.. I got real close to the fella from Rockport, Illinois Indiana. And my wife and I and he and his wife became quite close. Now, he's gone and I think she's gone because I haven't heard from her for a long time.

MEY: What was his name?

SQ: Roy Bauman.

Pause a few second.

SQ: 17:23 There were several airraids.

Either German or American or British - on the base. And quite often we'd have to scamper for foxholes. Sometimes I'd end up with a German in my foxhole. There wasn't... that was just life. We had uh.. German Black Bread (18:00) maybe that long (gestures) and like that, and we had to divide that into six or seven pieces. That was our staple, our food for the day.

We had ersatz coffee in the morning. And this bread and some what they called "grass soup." It was our evening meal.

MEY: What was "grass soup?"

SQ: Oh it was... well it looked like weeds but it was some nourishment I guess but not much.
Uhhm... I lost about sixty pounds and I wasn't real heavy then. (laughs)

19:00

MEY: How long were you there? (faint)

SQ: Five and a half months.

MEY: Five and a half months.

SQ: Now we were in the area that was Russian territory. And when the Russians came through they told us we could stay right there until our buddies came to get us. And they did - a few days later. But..the Russian policy changed about two weeks after this happened. And all the other fellows...were herded into boxcars and shipped to Russia...and I think they became slave labor too.

MEY: American who are ... (slaves?)

SQ: Uh-huh.

MEY: How do you think you escaped? 19:57

SQ: It wasn't until after when the Americans came in, we got out they shipped us out. Two weeks later, they changed their minds.

MEY: And you knew people who came in...

SQ: Yeah.

MEY: That's interesting. 20:26 end of track

Track e

MEY: When the Russians came in and the Germans left, did the Germans stay or leave?

SQ: Well ... uh... we were in the area where there was one of the last big battles of the area (0:22)
And I recall I think that the Americans... were...in charge or were doing the firing and so on... the Germans all got their discharges from the German Army and they went... "galley west" - they went to the American lines and the Americans said, "We don't want you." But if they went to the Russian lines, they got shot.
It was kind of a problem right there.

MEY: So what what happened then?

SQ: I don't really know. It was the end of the war. It was within, maybe a week of the time the armistice was signed.

MEY: (1:25) Where were you on VE day?

SQ: (1:30) I guess I was still on the compound, the prison compound waiting to get out.

MEY: Do you remember seeing the first US troops the ones that came and got you?

SQ: It's ... kinda hazy. I couldn't put a name or a face on them. But they got us back into allied territory as fast as they could.

MEY: Where'd did you go then?

SQ: Well, the first bunch of guys that they got they just said... "Here's the mess hall go eat." Well, it was the worst thing in the world for them because our stomachs had shrunk (2:25) and quite a few of the fellas died.. they just couldn't ... couldn't handle it. They gorged themselves.

MEY: How did you...?

SQ: ...By the time they realized what was going on they put us on a diet... a real strict diet, so we had no problem.

MEY: 2:53 When you looked back on the time in in the prison camp.. How did the Germans treat you were they nice or what?

SQ: 3:00 - Well we had one guard, we called him "Frenchie." He was conscripted into the German army when the Germans had Alsace Lorraine. And he was... pretty good to us.

3:20 There were time when he came into the barracks, lay his Mauser up on the bed... and we'd sit there and strip it... just for something to do.

(laughs) Put it back together, give it back to him you know.

Uh... but we had a coupla of pretty stinky guys.

One we called "Liverlip." He was a (*sounds like* "Felds - ape - pul") I think that was a Three-striper, maybe a four striper. He was kind of rough on us.

But we survived.

They weren't uh.. weren't kind to us at all. We all lost weight.

MEY: And the .. the cold must have... you're right ... the worst winter.

SQ: Yeah it was cold, real cold. We survived. It wasn't easy.

MEY: In the barracks... sometimes two people would share (a bunk) that's what I was told to share a cot just to stay warm did that ever happen.

SQ: No.

MEY: Did you have blankets there?

SQ: (4:49) We all had two real thin blankets. And it was cold.

MEY: In the morning what time would they wake you up how would you get up?

SQ: Well, I don't recall it was early. I suppose about daybreak.
5:20 We had a pot bellied stove on one end of the room. And there were
Ten or twelve rooms like this and that was our source of heat. At
one end.. yeah.

MEY: Did you have the same cot every time?

SQ: Yeah.

MEY: Was your cot near the ...

SQ: I was up about the third deck.

MEY: On the warm end of the room..

SQ: Cold end.

MEY: Cold end.. Ahhhh...

SQ: Yeah.

MEY: So you are third deck. Is there someone above you too?

SQ: Yeah.. 6:01
The lice.. were horrendous.
We all had lice. They didn't give us showers they didn't give us
anything. They deloused us a couple of times.. But when you go someplace
to get deloused and you come back, crawl into the same bed. Into the same
blankets, you got them all over again.
I always tell my wife.. makes her kinda squeamish..
We'd get these bed (6:37:7)

Lice and we'd pinch them between our thumbnails to see how far we could
make the blood squirt.(laughs)... That was our entertainment.

MEY: ..I was going to ask you what you did for entertainment.

SQ: We didn't have books. I did have a self-teaching French book. But
I learned a lot more German than I did Frnechbecause Iwaswith them all the
time. Uh... No cards.
Some camps had musical instruments.

MEY: Not you?

SQ: Not us. No. See we weren't in a registered recognized prison camp.
Like I said we were slave labor. So all we did was work.

MEY: So you still have the hat.

SQ: Yeah. Got a little red tossle right here in front. (laughs)

MEY: (7:55) After you get back and start to get acclimated do you go back to the 95th or ...

SQ: No... they shipped us home.

MEY: And how long until you discharged after that?

SQ: Oh... I think I had a 60 day furlough. And then I think I got discharged. (8:25) That was the time when they talked about sending people right over from Europe to fight Japan.

MEY: Were you considered for that?

SQ: No..No...

MEY: After what you'd been through...

SQ: We were a pretty sad bunch of guys.. we wouldn't be much good in the front.

MEY: 8:45 Do you remember how much you weighed?

SQ: I can't really tell you. I lost 60 pounds. But I don't remember just how much I weighed when I ...

MEY: You're very tall. How tall are you?

SQ: Well, at the time I was... a little over six feet. Six feet and a half inch I think.
But I shrunk. Yeah..

MEY: (9:20) When you ... when you were in camp did you hear anything about Roosevelt dying?

SQ: Yes. We did. They told us about Roosevelt's death. And I think they thought it would break our spirits. But uh... we just rolled with the punches. Couldn't Do anything about it. So.. we knew about it.

MEY: Did they talk about the war going against them?

SQ: No.. 9:54 There were rumors about the ... well they were playing football along the Elbe River or the Rhine River... and we didn't know if that was truth or fiction. But uh...

MEY: (10:17) How would you hear about a rumor?

SQ: What?

MEY: When someone told you a rumor what did they say, they overheard something?

SQ: Well, yeah...yeah.. I don't remember just where the rumors started but they got to us ..uh.. soon or later.
10:34 I never stole anything in my life but

I stole a loaf of bread over there. (laughs)
We went ... we went by a big wagonload of bread... and I just got close enough
so that I just reached up and grabbed one and stuck it under my coat and
hoped to heck they didn't see me..
And they didn't ..with uh.

11:04 - During the time that the snow was the heaviest. They didn't have
any snow removal equipment over there at all. All the farmers from miles
around drove their wagons in and we had to load up the wagons.

Well one day, one of those horses died... and we talked the guards into
letting us take the horse back to.. to cut up and eat.

Well we did it but we didn't get much because the ... somebody broke into
the cook house that night and stole the horse.

They were hungry too you know.

MEY: Do you remember horsemeat? How it tasted?

SQ: Yeah... it wasn't bad. But it was food. Of course, we had no idea
what killed that horse.

MEY: That's true.

SQ: But we didn't care , we were that hungry... yeah.

MEY: When you got back on (from) your sixty day furlough, did you go back
to Michigan.

SQ: After my fur... Yeah. Yeah.

MEY: (12:36) How was it how was it coming back was it strange? Did
you.. put it behind you, did you talk about it.

SQ: Oh gee, I don't remember. I don't think we talked much about it.
We were on a real rigid diet of course.

MEY: So you couldn't eat anything people put down in front of you?

SQ: Well, no. Yes, we ate everything they put down in front of us
because we were all in the same boat. And we didn't... and they didn't give
us anything we shouldn't eat.
I recall drinking lots of milk shakes. Just.. to build us up.

MEY: Sure... Easy on the stomach.

Who were the most... when you look back who were the most important people
to you or most important person to you in your time in the service?

SQ: You mean in prison camp?

MEY: Or in prison camp... yeah.

SQ: Well we... like I said we did form some bonds, some freindshps and Roy Bauman was the one I thought the most of. Kept in contact when I got home.

Uh... the rest of the fellas went hither and yon.

MEY: When did you start going to the 95th reunions?

SQ: (sigh) It must have been about fifteen years ago, we didn't even know they had them for a long time. But a friend in Elkhart put an ad in the paper asking if anybody in the area was a former member of the 95th. And I was... and it just so happened that his wife and my wife were pretty good friends.

MEY: Really.

SQ: Yeah.

MEY: That's coincidence.

SQ: Yeah.

MEY: What did you think about your commanding officers, what was your opinion of them?

And I know... your opinion of Patton...

SQ: (15:15) I didn't think very highly of Patton.

MEY: Not many people I talked with didn't think highly of him.

SQ: But the rest of them are okay...uh..

I didn't have anything bad to say about any of them.

MEY: And that sergeant who surrendered you... did.. was that the last time you saw him.

SQ: I never saw him again.

MEY: ...never again.

SQ: No. (15:45) See they kept the non-coms separate from the peons like me.

MEY: Okay

SQ: And they were treated better.

(15:50) There was another level, like air corpsman ... who were treated much better.

MEY: I talked to a bombardier he was put in Stalag Luft One near Denmark.. and as officers - former officers - they didn't have to work. They played baseball. They did different things.

SQ: Well I really think that - for our mental state - it was better that we did work.
Kept our minds occupied.

I don't know what I'd do if I just sat around doing nothing for five and a half months.

MEY: You could go crazy.

SQ: Huh?

MEY: You could go crazy.

SQ: Yeah.

MEY: 16:57 - Would you ... this is just a general question .. How did the war change you?

SQ: I don't know that it did really. 17:15 I went back to college. The government treated me very well - the G.I. Bill - I finished my education under the G.I. Bill. I went to G.I. hospitals. And it was great. And I'm still going to a Veterans' Hospital.

MEY: Do your feet ever bother you still?

SQ: Yeah... they do.

MEY: They do... and the same with your hands?

SQ: Yes. My hands are... numb or..partly numb.

MEY (18.02) Would you recommend military service to young people nowadays.

SQ: Absolutely. Absolutely. Because I think that's our problem because nobody has said anything about it neither the Democrats or the Republicans (*interviewer's note: for perspective - interview was done a few months before the 2008 Presidential election Obama/McClain*) But I think we ought to have two years of military service for everybody because kids nowadays don't know what they want to do when they get out of high school.

And if they had some military experience, they'd grow up a little bit.

MEY: I hear that all the time.

Now last year's reunion in Oklahoma City, some of the 95th had asked me to ask you guys some questions. One of the questions was, "What advice would you give to soldiers nowadays?"

What advice would you give the current 95th. What would you say to them. Do you have any advice for today's soldiers - anything comes to mind?

SQ: No... not really. I just think that military service would give them a well-rounded education and it wouldn't hurt 'em.

MEY: (19:3) Now here's a question... I'd gone to see Ken Burns the filmmaker one time and his co-producer of the show that was on last year it was called, "The War," her name's Lynn Novack and after they were done

I asked her "What's your favorite question to ask people" and you already talked about something's remembering a time you felt afraid, you already mentioned a coupla times like that, but she said her favorite question was, "Tell me a story you've never told anyone before."

SQ: Oh yeah.

MEY: And I said, "That's a lot of nerve to ask it." And she said, "Yeah, you know on television people are coming to us," but I say this now and sometimes - you know it can be anything - remembering what the light looks like in the morning waking up in the morning, or just something about the mud or the food - whatever it means to you if it means something, tell me a story you've never told anyone before. (20:54:1)

SQ: I think I've told you more than I told anybody else.

MEY: Anything come to mind?

SQ: No.

MEY: Yeah, I think you have told me everything. You've told me a lot. Do you have anything else, any words of wisdom, anything?

SQ: Well, probably tomorrow morning I'll think of a lot of things but I can't think of anything right now.

MEY: Well the good thing about this is if you do think of anything I'll always have this (*the recorder*) with me so just tap me on the shoulder and I can splice it in, I can edit it in.

Well then I'll just close, okay.

This is... David Meyer, son of Earl D Meyer, Co. H, 379th, 95th Infantry. It is now almost ten p.m. on July 31st, 2008 and I've had the great privilege of talking to... could you say your name again..

SQ: Gordon Squires

Company E, 379th Regiment 95th Division.

(22:10:6 - end of track and interview)