

Joe Wojtecki studio log

Narrator: Joe Wojtecki

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

Date: June 9, 2012

Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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Log compiled by: Teresa Bergen, June 2021

Track 1

- 00:00 introduction, final rank was sergeant, technician third grade
- 02:36 Wojtecki drafted into the army in New Cumberland, PA in 1944
- 03:13 his two brothers volunteered after Pearl Harbor, but he was too young to join them
- 03:40 brothers came back and said no way should Wojtecki go
- 03:51 worked for a railroad and got several deferments until drafted
- 05:12 was living in Fredonia, PA when drafted
- 05:20 positions held at Erie Railroad
- 06:08 Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at New Cumberland, going into company clerk and warehouse jobs
- 07:11 basic training in Camp Fannin in Tyler, Texas
- 07:39 sent to Europe as a replacement, traveled on the Queen Mary with six decks' worth of soldiers
- 08:24 seasickness: "I could never be a sailor. I just had to hang on the guard rail, and heave."
- 09:47 later had to travel from Camp Stoneman to occupy Japan; was again seasick
- 10:25 two of his brothers were sailors, two in the army; sixth brother, Frank, stayed home to take care of his wife, children, mother and family farm, in addition to fulltime job at a plant
- 12:06 names his siblings
- 12:37 father worked in Pittsburgh in steel mills; lost two farms during the Depression

- 14:52 father had to sell WWI Liberty bonds at a loss; “We just did what we could to survive, and have something to eat.”
- 16:48 two brothers in infantry, two in navy
- 17:27 Wojtecki took Queen Mary to Glasgow, then traveled to Southampton
- 18:32 lost a lot of people on beaches during battles
- 19:01 put on forty-and-eight boxcars at Le Havre
- 19:36 could hear artillery when they got close to Metz, where he joined the 95th
- 20:29 after Metz, 95th moved into northern France, Central Europe, Rhineland, etc.; Wojtecki went to Ensdorf
- 20:59 got Purple Heart in Ensdorf after exposure to phosphorus gas
- 23:08 joining as a replacement and not knowing anybody, quickly becoming family
- 23:52 as a rifleman, Wojtecki earned the combat infantry badge
- 24:21 becoming private first class
- 24:30 injuries from phosphorus gas, shrapnel and falling rubble
- 25:20 other soldiers dropped ammunition to lighten their loads on forced marches; Wojtecki picked it up
- 26:46 Wojtecki sometimes carried the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), but he was so short it dragged on the ground
- 27:20 the enemy was always looking for the people carrying the BAR, “They didn’t usually last very long.”
- 27:50 fear during combat
- 28:13 battled in Central Europe, Rhineland, Northern France; got three battle stars
- 29:45 after being gassed at Ensdorf, Germany on December 10, 1944, Wojtecki went to a field hospital for two weeks before returning to I Company
- 30:28 Christmas at the front, getting cards from Patton, Eisenhower and Twaddle
- 31:00 opinion of Patton, a fulltime soldier from beginning to end

32:18 Wojtecki carried a small Bible with a metal plate over his heart

32:59 the 378th went by truck to Belgium, as replacements for Battle of the Bulge soldiers, but wound up not being needed

33:55 so they returned to Central Europe

34:08 Wojtecki was briefly transferred to British Army, where he served under General Montgomery

34:35 overriding memory of rubble as they moved house to house, pillbox to pillbox, using bazookas, artillery and charges

37:00 positioning a bazooka

37:34 Kay Grosinske, daughter of soldier from 378th, joins conversation; talks about names and drinks

39:10 Wojtecki was more of a rifleman and BAR, than a bazooka user

39:24 setting up BAR on bipod; one person carried ammo in a canister, the other carried gun

40:36 firing BAR while marching

43:20 capturing an injured German officer, who was later prosecuted

45:18 displaced persons who would come out at night to relieve themselves before hunkering down in a bomb shelter

46:12 digging foxholes to spend night in

46:36 sometimes a truck would meet them with their bedrolls, and they took whichever one you could find; seldom got your own bedroll

47:37 used helmet for bathing and shovel to dig depression and cover elimination

48:45 was occupying area around Bremen on V-E Day

49:29 once troops found a cache of spirits and drank so much that nobody came to relieve Wojtecki from his post

50:29 as occupation forces, their job was to be a presence in Bremen

51:07 most Germans accepted the defeat, but still a few pockets of resistance

51:40 mostly Wojtecki came in contact with civilian soldiers, some as old as 65 because Germany was desperate for manpower

52:49 Meyer tells story about a sergeant in 378th Company G coming across a wolf pack, letting them go, and then getting shot by one of the kids

54:30 Wojtecki's best friend in the war was Pete Gonzales, a rifleman and PFC from California; saw him frequently after the war

55:34 Wojtecki currently lives in Salem, Ohio

56:10 returned to Boston in 1945, while war was still on; Wojtecki was at Camp Shelby, MS when war ended

56:50 was about to start jungle training at Camp Atterbury, IN

57:08 was happy when bomb dropped and war ended; "Harry Truman was the man"

57:49 after war ended, sent to Camp Atterbury and was assigned duty of NCO in charge of army service separation center; in charge of sixty people

58:18 at Atterbury, earned rank of T3, noncommissioned administrative officer, with same pay as staff sergeant

58:45 his job was to process paperwork to discharge officers

59:26 then sent to Camp Stoneman, California, then sent overseas to occupy Japan

59:51 "It was pretty well torn down from the bombs. However, they were getting back toward normal."

1:00:21 US had prison there for Americans that misbehaved; Wotecki assigned to Judge Advocate Section of headquarters, Eighth Army, processing prisoner records

1:02:10 Wotecki doesn't especially like paperwork, but did it his whole working life

1:02:37 discharged from Camp Stoneman; never got credit for his assignment occupying Japan; son is working with Governor Kasich of Ohio to get him credit

1:03:15 Meyer mentions problems World War Two veterans in Bermuda have had getting pension

1:03:56 Wojtecki has three Bronze Stars, the EAME Theater medal and a Purple Heart

1:04:32 met wife Mabel after the war

1:04:58 would recommend military service to others, because it's a good hands-on education that will help you the rest of your life

1:06:06 future generations need to serve, because freedom is not free

1:06:50 Meyer explains how his favorite question "Tell me a story you've never told anyone before" was inspired by Ken Burns' producer

1:10:12 at the end of his service he was Eighth Army headquarters; left service May 23, 1947

1:10:35 end of interview

12:06

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