

Audio log

Narrator: Willis Young

Interviewer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

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Transcriber: Carol Slezak

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Log compiled by: Teresa Bergen, May 2021

Track 1

- 00:00 Introduction
- 00:58 Young joined the 95th Division at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania in January 1944
- 01:50 discharged November 29, 1945 at Camp Plauche, Louisiana
- 02:10 born Knox County, Illinois on March 8, 1925
- 02:23 was in Company B, 377th Infantry, 95th Division; highest rank was corporal
- 02:50 was a prisoner of war and sustained service-related injuries
- 03:05 gives current address in Arizona and phone number
- 03:54 parents were George Edward Young and Inez Taylor Young, farmers in Illinois
- 04:29 two brothers, Ralph and Keith
- 04:43 growing up during Depression –tough to feed three boys
- 05:13 looked about fourteen when he joined up at Fort Sheridan, Illinois
- 05:40 brother in Europe was flying bombers already
- 05:53 unbeknownst to Young, his uncle had gotten him a deferment because he wanted Young to stay home and work on the farm.
- 06:47 hearing about Pearl Harbor on radio in kitchen while mother was preparing Sunday dinner; local boy from Yates City, IL went down on USS Arizona; “You just couldn’t imagine such a thing happening”
- 08:03 signed up for Army Specialized Training Program just before program folded up
- 08:54 assigned to be mess sergeant in officers’ mess, quite a good job

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- 10:45 got job because his predecessor contracted TB and was shipped to Arizona
- 11:46 but three days later, Young was suddenly shipped to Indiantown Gap, PA where he went to basic training and ended up in Company B
- 14:00 camouflage school on a mountain west of Indiantown Gap; Young's fox hole so well camouflaged that a major fell in.
- 18:43 West Virginia mountain maneuvers, learning to rappel
- 19:55 Young was a buck private at Indiantown Gap
- 20:10 oldtimers at Indiantown Gap treated him fine
- 20:53 after D-Day, 9,000 infantrymen crossed ocean unescorted on USS America as backup for troops in southern France
- 22:35 whale watching from ship: "Spouting water and they was putting on a regular show. And they was big rascals."
- 23:11 slept on deck instead of in his bunk in case they got torpedoed
- 23:58 went around Northern Ireland, docked in Liverpool, met by troop trains, went through London and down to village of Barton Stacey
- 24:23 describes buzz bombs, which sounded like Briggs and Stratton engines
- 25:16 spent three weeks in Barton Stacey, then took rundown ship Llangibby Castle with goats and sheep running loose on deck
- 26:21 landed at Omaha Beach, no docks because temporary docks had been destroyed
- 27:05 transferring from ship to LSTs, water so rough that only thirty-nine men got off ship the first day
- 28:15 B Company always had to do everything first: "I guess they thought if we could do it all the rest could"
- 28:37 climbing long sand hill with heavy duffel bags
- 28:57 government driver's license required to drive on Red Ball Express
- 29:44 set up base in apple orchard, where Young was first scout
- 30:20 hardness of old biscuits aboard ship

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- 31:25 didn't enjoy rutabaga soup or blue grass soup in German prison camp, either
- 31:48 finished getting 1st Battalion guys off ship, sent by train to Belgium
- 32:37 plans changed, General Patton's 5th Division got the heck kicked out of them and he needed troops, Company B sent to Nancy, France
- 33:20 Young picked to take injured man to first aid station a mile away through enemy fire in the Vosges Mountains because he was a farm boy who could find his way around a rural area
- 36:54 Young had to shoot five people to get to first aid station, where he had breakfast
- 39:02 Was able to shoot them because they made him mad shooting at him first, and he was about 700 feet above them up the mountain
- 39:47 turned out the hillbilly who needed first aid was wearing such tight leggings they cut off his circulation
- 40:16 after that, the company commander sent him to do all the dirty jobs
- 40:40 sent to Maginot Line with 28th Division, where he stayed in an old castle and drove men back and forth between pillboxes and front line.
- 44:15 tricking Germans into shooting each other with machine guns by getting his men to throw grenades from two directions at once
- 45:25 captain amazed he survived, because nobody had made it three days in that job before; Young figures varying his route saved his life.
- 46:40 captain had lost his men three times over, survived by protecting himself
- 47:20 two days after Young was captured, Patton announced officers would now lead from front, not back
- 47:51 in October 1944, B Company was crossing the Moselle River right where it ran together with the Vosges Canal in paddleboats operated by the Corps of Engineers
- 49:12 met with German machine gun fire, then a rising river as Germans blew up a reservoir to flood the Moselle so the bridge the Corps had built wasn't long enough to cross enlarged river.
- 51:30 whenever Free French shot a German, the Germans would retaliate by knocking on thirteen random doors and killing whoever answered

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- 52:20 surviving members of Company B managed to claim a hill, but due to miscommunication eight men wounded by their own artillery
- 54:00 Young captured in Bertrange on November 14, 1944, description of geographic location
- 56:20 Operation Casanova, an attack by the First Battalion 377th from November 8-14 at Uckange, as recorded in history books, but Young says only Companies B and C were there
- 57:14 Young stayed in trench in the cold and rain for six days, trying to shoot Germans: "I don't know how many different times they shot at me with that machine gun, and I cleaned them out I think three times in the nine days."
- 58:44 platoon sergeant stuck a former air force sergeant who'd been demoted to private in the trench with Young; the guy was a nervous wreck
- 59:40 Young killed a German colonel with a grenade
- 1:00:47 the former air force sergeant got so scared he jumped out of foxhole, kicking Young's gun away
- 1:01:14 Young got shot in ammunition belt, still managed to throw grenade that blew up the Germans' machine gun
- 1:01:58 former air force sergeant ran away, was listed as missing in action
- 1:02:36 mentions book the 377th put out that lists names and medals
- 1:03:05 Young's medals include Legion of Honor from France, two Bronze Stars, two Purple Hearts, ATO, Good Conduct
- 1:04:25 after being in a foxhole full of water for six days, Young's feet were so swollen he had to be carried to a first aid station; description of trench foot: "And they stink, just like you're dead"
- 1:06:43 when Germans captured them, brought a big ambulance to load the thirteen people who couldn't walk
- 1:07:14 American soldiers carried him to a first aid station, a barn in Bertrange.
- 1:08:07 Piper Cub airplanes had been supplying the soldiers with rations and ammunitions; tried dropping mortar shells on a town to see if they'd explode
- 1:08:52 waking up in barn to find Germans had arrived to capture them

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- 1:10:55 taken to a German army hospital in Luxembourg; German reaction to Young killing German colonel with a grenade
- 1:11:55 a German colonel talked to Young about wanting to surrender
- 1:12:47 Young believes car crash that killed Patton was not an accident
- 1:13:20 Young and other POWs transported on Red Cross trains; train drove right into an air raid; injuries sustained by people on train when a machine gun gets hit, including two pieces of shrapnel in Young's leg
- 1:16:30 train went a few more miles, picked up a pilot who'd been shot down and had double compound fracture in his leg
- 1:17:15 Young taken to Ludwigsburg, where Germans protected area with enormous naval gun mounted on railroad cars
- 1:18:10 Young taken to Stalag 5A in Stuttgart; Germans knew all about the individual American soldiers. "They didn't have computers, but they knew about us."
- 1:19:07 medical treatment for leg in camp, Young refused to sign papers allowing amputation

End Track 1. Begin Track 2.

- 00:00:00 1400 soldiers from the 106th Division were captured just before the Battle of the Bulge and wound up in the same prison camp with Young. They were told, "'Surrender or die, boys. You got five minutes.' Well, they really didn't need five minutes"
- 02:59 prison camp moved from Stalag 5A to Stalag 7A in Moosburg, where he wound up with English, Canadians and Royal Dutch Marines captured at Dunkirk
- 04:35 Young sent on work details, such as putting down railroad ties and rails; injuries from dropping a rail; Young's back broken.
- 07:10 liberation of Moosburg by 42nd Infantry Division, German Army evacuated
- 08:44 POWs were transported to work in railroad cars; at the end, when Americans were taking Munich, POWs left locked in the boxcars
- 09:45 their guards let them out, yelling, "Run, the SS is coming to shoot you!" Hitler had put out order to shoot all POWs

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- 11:10 POWs set off for Munich, took over building called American Apartments; found Red Cross parcels intended for POWs hidden in basement
- 12:30 a colonel tried to get Young to come with him as an interpreter, but Young insisted he was starved, injured, filthy and in no condition to go
- 14:12 at Dachau: "We got the distinction of getting a shower in those same showers that they smoked the Jews in;" explains how the cyanide gas was administered
- 15:33 at Dachau, corpses stacked like cordwood
- 15:54 after liberation, Young went to Camp Lucky Strike, where first thing that happened was everybody stripped and showered. "By the time we got a shower and came out the other end, they burned our clothes! Holy hell it was full of wood ticks and fleas, and everything else."
- 16:37 Young dropped down to around 100 pounds while imprisoned
- 17:15 candy was locked up at Camp Lucky Strike after liberated soldiers dropped dead from eating candy bars; starved systems couldn't process it
- 17:46 starvation conditions in POW camps
- 18:20 American bombing of trains north of Munich
- 19:42 locals denied knowledge of Dachau camp. "Patton said, 'I bet every damn one of you got a lamp shade made out of somebody else's tattoos.'"
- 20:32 learning things while a prisoner: about President Roosevelt's death, and about the Battle of the Bulge days before it happened
- 21:33 hardiness of German tanks
- 23:27 George Patton was the most important military person to Young, because he was the only fighting general
- 24:15 Young had "an awful poor bunch of officers;" never saw anything above a lieutenant on the front lines.
- 26:50 the military has changed since Young's day: "I didn't ask anybody if I could pull the trigger. Now they've got to check with some officer: Can I shoot that sucker that's a-shooting at me?"
- 27:27 advice to soldiers of today: Shoot before you get shot
- 29:00 Japanese blame US for causing war

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- 29:49 has participated in conventions of guys from 95th and prisoners of war
- 30:51 Young had fever of 104 when he got on the boat to go home, later found out he'd had diphtheria
- 31:45 voyage home with a convoy of more than 100 ships taking far north route—submarines and icebergs
- 33:04 got back to the US June 3, 1945, had a 66-day recuperation furlough
- 33:30 Young sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri, with group of 800 ex-prisoners; friction with commanding officer who had paltry war record
- 35:30 was sent on train to Camp Plauche, Louisiana where he trained Puerto Ricans who were getting combat pay since they were overseas in US. "I just about had a stroke when I found that out." They stole everything, and some ran off before finishing basic training.
- 38:02 wrap up, goodbyes

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