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Interview with William Ledford

William Ledford

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview #103
LEDFORD, William**

LEDFORD, William

WWII Veteran, Army's 29th Infantry Regiment

Interviewed: November 30, 1980

Interviewer: Anne Ledford

Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Length: 01:08:55

Abstract: In his November 30, 1980 interview with his daughter Anne Ledford, William Ledford remembers his service in the Army during WWII. In particular, Ledford details his basic training and journey through Iceland, England, and France. Ledford shares his recollection of the Battle of the Bulge and the aftermath of WWII. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Army, Prisoners of War, POWs, Nazis, Germany, SS Troops, France, England, Iceland, Correspondence, combat, training, Battle of the Bulge

Interview Session (November 30, 1980): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Interviewer's Introduction/Start of Interview*

00:00:17 *Question:* When did you enter service? *Answer:* June 12, 1941 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Fort Bragg. Basic training 13 weeks long. Assigned to the infantry school.

00:01:00 *Question:* First time to come home? *Answer:* December 5. On December 7th, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. WL remained at home for 15 days. Returned to Columbia, SC. Began combat personnel training at Fort Benning.

00:02:05 *Question:* How long at Fort Benning? *Answer:* Able to come back home at regular intervals – furlough. Personnel training for 22 months. WL assigned for combat, went to Fort Jackson, SC. At Fort Jackson – more training on how to act in combat. From Fort Jackson, shipped to Boston, MA. Sent to Iceland – 29th Infantry Regiment.

00:03:35 *Question:* Friends with you the entire time? *Answer:* Yes. A few of the men WL was with in the training battalion. Shipped out as a unit.

- 00:04:45 *Question:* Exchanging letters with your girlfriend/now wife? *Answer:* Able to receive two or three letters. WL's wife sent WL letters every day. Received letters from his mother and sister.
- 00:05:44 *Question:* How often did you get mail? *Answer:* In Iceland and England, WL received mail every day. In combat, it was different.
- 00:06:45 *Question:* Limited in what you could write in the letters? *Answer:* Yes. All letters were censored. Letters weren't sealed. Soldiers carried them to headquarters.
- 00:07:45 *Question:* Letters condensed? *Answer:* Soldiers issued sheets of paper. Then copies of paper were made to be sent home to reduce the amount of mail sent.
- 00:08:39 *Question:* What were the conditions on the ship to Iceland like? *Answer:* Travelled on the SS Mariposa with 55 men plus navy personnel. Soldiers allowed two meals a day. Quarters were nice. No sickness. The SS Mariposa was capable of 30 knots. Arrived in Reykjavik – very cold, but soldiers adapted to the weather.
- 00:10:34 *Question:* Duties in Iceland? *Answer:* Maintained the bases there. Unload and bring in supplies.
- 00:11:30 *Question:* England? Responsibilities? *Answer:* On the 5th of February, preparing to leave, hit rough seas. People sea sick. Went up the Clyde River, the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth came along from New York. Got off at Greenock. Went to London, Plymouth. Set up in Plymouth – came under first air attack. Bombs dropped. Describes the air raid.
- 00:15:16 *Question:* Jerries? *Answer:* Referring to the Germans. Talks about how to spot a German plane.
- 00:15:45 *Question:* Set up bases in England? *Answer:* Yes. Came back from Plymouth and set up bases for D-Day. Set up 24 camps in South Hampton – occupied by British, American, and Canadian troops.
- 00:17:12 *Question:* Did all of your regiment stay? *Answer:* Stayed in England until August maintaining these camps.
- 00:17:50 *Question:* Ships? *Answer:* Various vessels that came with. On a ten thousand ton ship. There was a convoy of 60-80 ships in the channel.
- 00:18:35 *Question:* When you crossed into France, did you stay at Normandy? *Answer:* First day, arrived in the evening. Made way into Le Mans, France – large communication

- center. Called out to go South.
- 00:20:08 *Question:* Did you come in contact with the French people? *Answer:* Yes. In contact off and on throughout the days. Later dispatched out to protect gasoline and supplies for Patton's forces. Engineer left WL and regiment stranded between towns.
- 00:22:20 *Question:* What did you carry? *Answer:* WL drove a company truck. Sometimes hauled the mail. Carried a tank gun, which also carried ammunition.
- 00:23:15 *Question:* What did most soldiers have? *Answer:* Guns – describes gun types.
- 00:24:30 *Question:* Did Army supply stationary? What kind of personal things did they give you? *Answer:* Limited to a certain number. Army supplied shaving articles, brushes, razors, etc.
- 00:25:40 *Question:* Fox holes? *Answer:* Dug many. Germans also dug many.
- 00:26:10 *Question:* Recreation? *Answer:* Services provided entertainment. Saw latest movies. Had USO shows – including Bob Hope, Glenn Miller Band.
- 00:27:02 *Question:* Go to town? *Answer:* Went to theaters in England.
- 00:27:35 *Question:* Church services? *Answer:* Had own church services. In England, soldiers allowed to go into English churches.
- 00:28:40 *Question:* Did you run supplies to other places than France? *Answer:* Supplies went to US British forces.
- 00:29:40 *Question:* Allied forces in contact with? *Answer:* Royal Canadians – some of the first ones to hit the beaches. Specialized in blowing up harbors – allowed US forces to get in.
- 00:30:35 *Question:* Knew Patton? *Answer:* Was at Fort Benning when WL was there.
- 00:31:00 *Question:* Any other contact with famous military leaders? *Answer:* Yes. At South Hampton, WL met Ike and Montgomery.
- 00:32:09 *Question:* How did your officers travel? *Answer:* Platoon officers moved along with jeeps. Had radio connections.
- 00:32:42 *Question:* Were all of the soldiers issued maps? *Answer:* WL picked up maps along the routes for his own personal use.

- 00:33:30 *Question:* Battle of the Bulge? *Answer:* At this time, WL still carrying up supplies to Patton.
- 00:34:22 *Question:* How long were you in the Battle of the Bulge? *Answer:* Approximately a month and a half. Describes the loss of men.
- 00:35:22 *Question:* Could you send or receive mail at this time? *Answer:* Yes. It depended on how well they could get supplies up to special units. German attack – demoralizing, not damaging. Stayed in fox holes until enough units got together. Describes US attack. The town was destroyed.
- 00:38:34 *Question:* Did civilians ever shoot at you? *Answer:* Germans were surrendering – had German prisoners. Germans tried to break out – increased security and maintain twenty thousand prisoners. Germans were getting tired of combat. Germans killed their own horses during the Battle of the Bulge for food. Called the Germans “krauts.”
- 00:40:25 *Question:* How did the German prisoners surrender? *Answer:* SS troops were dedicated to their services – US forces handled them harshly. “The only good German we knew was a dead one.” Other prisoners were more cooperative.
- 00:41:32 *Question:* What did you do with the German prisoners? *Answer:* WL describes the process.
- 00:42:15 *Question:* Were civilians glad to see US forces? *Answer:* German people – some glad to see US forces, some not.
- 00:42:59 *Question:* Learn any German? *Answer:* Enough to ask for water and where things were. Just enough to get by.
- 00:43:30 *Question:* When you got to Germany, do you think German soldiers realized things were coming to an end? *Answer:* Not at that time, but later on. Germans came over to knock out pontoon bridges – buried gun crew – still alive. Forces shot down a German plane – men tried to get souvenirs. Rhine River. Children in battle. Children killed. Drove into enemy territory – supposed to go on guard duty with a friend – tells story about friend putting WL and regiment in danger.
- 00:51:28 [no question] Continues talking about going into enemy territory. President Roosevelt died. WL recalls the feeling among the unit.
- 00:53:18 *Question:* Did you feel that the Lord had spared your life? *Answer:* Yes. Soldiers prayed and thanked that they were safe. WL recalls close calls. Little protection on the river.

- 00:56:25 *Question:* What were the feelings of the troops when Germany surrendered? *Answer:* German troops were then cooperative. SS Troops were still hard to deal with. The American Troops felt good and felt like they could go home. WL had been overseas for close to 26 months. Soldiers given points for their work – points could send them home. War wasn't over in the Pacific.
- 00:58:15 *Question:* A part of Army Occupation in Germany? *Answer:* Yes. Wound up fighting just outside of Austria. Many bridges and roads destroyed – prisoners used to repair this infrastructure.
- 00:59:45 *Question:* Were you able to keep up with what was going on in the Pacific? *Answer:* In Europe, soldiers had *Stars and Stripes* – Army newspaper. Soldiers had radios and telephones.
- 01:01:00 *Question:* Concentration camps? *Answer:* WL saw a lot of prisoner camps. WL did not see concentration camps. In the Battle of the Bulge, personnel were taken and forced to walk in the snow without their shoes – these people were “skeletons.” WL and regiment freed a lot of prisoners of war. Prisoners were jubilant when freed. WL remembers prisoners eating food after being freed.
- 01:04:25 *Question:* How did you feel when you were told you could go back home? *Answer:* Soldiers rejoicing at heart. Experiences were thrilling and scary.
- 01:05:25 *Question:* Did you come back on a ship? *Answer:* Yes. WL details his trip home to the United States.
- 01:06:35 *Question:* Where were you sent when you came to Hampton? *Answer:* Sent back to Fort Gordon, GA. Received discharge and came home.
- 01:07:05 *Question:* When did you receive your medals? *Answer:* Issued along during service. Received four battle stars.
- 01:07:50 *Question:* Kept in contact with Army buddies. Do you enjoy reliving experiences of WWII with them? *Answer:* Discuss combat engagements.
- 01:08:55 *End of interview*