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## Interview with John Chester

John Chester

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

**Interview VHP # 080  
CHESTER, John**

CHESTER, John

*Enlisted:* 1943 June - 1946 January

*Interviewed:* April 3, 2008

*Interviewer:* Kristin Malone

*Index by:* Kristin Malone

*Time Coded by:* Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

*Length:* 00:25:44

**Abstract:** In his April 3, 2008 interview with Kristin Malone, John Chester details his service overseas in Europe during WWII. Included are stories of interactions with German soldiers and the rules and regulations of the United States Military. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

**Keywords:** Europe, Army, V-Mail, food, French civilians, Germany, France

**Interview Session (Full Date): Digital File**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
00:00:00	<i>Start of Interview</i> /Interviewer's Introduction
00:00:13	Question: What branch of service were you in? Answer: I was in the US Army. I went in June 1943 and discharged honorably in January 1946. So I served the states in training and such. I went overseas to England. Landed in Scotland. I spent my 19th birthday on the ship going over. In convoy you know? From then we were stationed in .... I went into limited service because of my vision. I got in regular later, I made sharpshooter. I was stationed in Wales and went down to Weymouth on the coast. They kind of lost us for a while, so we didn't go in on the invasion. We went a few months afterwards. I think it was Utah Beach. After it was taken. I went to Le Mans, London, Paris then Luxemburg. April 1945 we got stationed in Germany and I got up in the morning and there was the Rhine River. President Roosevelt just died. I went on detached service to Germany. I spent some time in Belgium and France. We stayed in France until the end of the war. We were in Luxemburg during the Battle of the Bulge. I remember that we had signal equipment and they brought in tanks all shot up from the bulge. They put me and two other guys on patrol. They gave us a bazooka and

two shells. I was the only one who knew how to shoot a bazooka. They said if you see any Germans fire the bazookas. I told my buddies "if we see any Germans we fire both bazookas, empty our rifles and all of our pistols then we run like hell." We never had any problems. We looked in the forest and could see all kinds of tin foil they dropped all over the ground to riddle their radar. I remember the whole time I was in France and Germany I never saw one enemy aircraft in the air. We shot them all down. I spent some time in France and went to Reims Cathedral and there were all kinds of sandbags from the war. We went back to Germany then back to France. The Rhine River was mentioned in Longfellow's poem...the German's hour. They had all kinds of things out there. We had to go out in pairs in case we were attacked. I never met one Nazi when I was there. They all were Nazi's, but they didn't admit if they were Nazi's. I had enough points so I was discharged to Belgium and came back to the states. I remember the day, we crossed the English Channel and got into the ocean and came back to the states and I was discharged. I got back to Akron, Ohio where my hometown was. I received the G.I. Bill and continued my education at Akron U in engineering. It was really interesting.

00:06:37 *Question:* Were you drafted or enlisted? *Answer:* I was drafted. At that time, you couldn't enlist.

00:06:48 *Question:* Were you scared when you were drafted? *Answer:* No, I wasn't scared. In fact, I wanted to go to the Marines. They had my records. First, you went through the Marines, into the Navy, then the Army. They saw my vision and said "Next".

00:07:20 *Question:* Do you remember any instructors and what they were like? *Answer:* No, they were just regular army sergeants and such. I went to NTO school.

00:07:35 *Question:* What's that? *Answer:* A school where we did specialized training. Everyone met up and we marched to dinner and marched to classes. We marched to the University of Michigan fighting song. I never dreamed I'd go to Michigan and I did.

00:08:05 *Question:* Were you able to stay in touch with your family when you went overseas? *Answer:* Well, you sent letters home. Just some were in France, some were in England and some were in Germany. They were censored of course.

00:08:20 *Question:* Really? *Answer:* Yes, Nazi's might have found the mail and they could find out what troops were stationed where.

- 00:08:43 *Question:* Was there anything special you did for good luck or superstition? *Answer:* No. I just knew I'd come back.
- 00:09:02 *Question:* Do you remember any strange, unusual or funny events that might have happened? *Answer:* I remember in Le Mans we got out there and it was about August. And we had bad bees. We were eating canned food and fruit and stuff and the guy lifted the lid pushed the bees out of there and fed us the food. The French ladies would come by and wash our clothes for us, but we paid them you know.
- 00:09:50 *Question:* Did you keep a journal or diary or anything? *Answer:* No, No.
- 00:09:58 *Question:* Do you remember the day your service ended and how you felt? *Answer:* Yes. I made up my mind I wouldn't even join the boy scouts. I was technician for Model T sergeant when I was discharged. Technician fourth grade.
- 00:10:31 *Question:* What were your job responsibilities? *Answer:* Nothing special really. Just got promoted and made more money.
- 00:10:45 *Question:* Did you have any friends who were in the army with you? *Answer:* No. The only ones I had were overseas. I remember they told us to stay in the barracks, but I wanted some ice cream so I asked if we could go get some. I went and got some ice cream and came back. I was downstairs in the barracks and they were upstairs so I said "I will see you guys in the morning" and the guy asks "Is your name Chester" and I said "Yea." And he said they want you bagging baggage out in the... so he got my stuff and that was the longest night I ever felt because I never saw those guys again I went to the baggage and they took away all my old weapons and they gave me winter clothes and a rifle and I shipped out.
- 00:12:20 *Question:* Did you join any veteran's organizations? *Answer:* No, I never did. I've been meaning to but I just never did.
- 00:12:34 *Question:* Did your military experience influence how you feel now about the war? *Answer:* Well, as far as I was concerned, that was a good war defeating the Nazi's. I can see the need of going to war to protect our country because there's a lot of evil out there you know.
- 00:13:07 *Question:* Did the military have any reunions for the vets? *ANSWER:* Just one minor one right after the war. I had too much to do. I was taking care of my mother. I was working and going to school. I just didn't have any time to do it.
- 00:13:35 *Question:* How do you think the service and the experience you had affected your life? *Answer:* I can't truthfully honestly say how it affected my life, it made me realize you never appreciate the United States until you have to leave it.

- 00:13:55 *Question:* What were different culture shocks you experienced?  
*Answer:*(laughs) Especially when you go to the bathroom over there. I remember one time in Luxemburg we were going to the urinating room and we started going to the bathroom and the door opened and it was a lady. She was cleaning. They don't have a problem with girls going to the guy's bathroom or anything, but over here of course we think differently.
- 00:14:55 *Question:* Do you have a most memorable experience or something that sticks out in your mind? *Answer:* I remember one time when we were out me was watching people eat out of garbage cans. People in France and Germany had no food. You'd see them out there digging through garbage cans. We'd give them food as much as we could, but you know. And of course demonstrations that's just a general impression of my memory. One time we went to Germany and they asked if we wanted to see a picture about Wilson, Woodrow Wilson. So we got in the jeep and we were getting ready to go out and see it, and they stopped us and said "you guys gotta wait here because we are bringing in some prisoners. We waited for two hours and watched them bring in an entire German army....Machine gun runners..., first was the guys dressed in all black. That was the S.S. regular troops you know. Two hours. They brought in whoever they captured. That was a big impression on me because I told my buddy "there by the grace of god that could have happened over here" But we won you see.
- 00:17:00 *Question:* Did you ever hear about sacrifices like women going into the workforce because the men were fighting? *Answer:* My mom worked in the plant and she made a lot of money. Do a little overtime. A lot of people were upset the war ended because they weren't going to be paid anymore.
- 00:17:48 *Question:* What was your training like? *Answer:* Basic training. Marching, parading, and learning how to fire a rifle
- 00:18:10 *Question:* How was your first time shooting a rifle? *Answer:* That's when I became sharpshooter. (laughs) I remember one time when I was there, they dug these pits and we'd have to get down in them and it's easier for the tanks to come by because they run right over you and we couldn't get scared and get up and run. They said if you're in a foxhole and hear a tank coming that's the safest place to be. Don't get up and start running because the tanks will shoot at you.

- 00:19:00 *Question:* Where there any casualties in your unit. *Answer:* No, we were a service company we were close to the lines but we were never attacked until the battle of the bulge.
- 00:19:21 *Question:* Were there entertainers or anyone who came overseas? *Answer:* Yes, USO but I never saw any Hollywood stars like Bob Hope or any of them. Red Cross was there and gave us some entertainment like coffee and donuts.
- 00:19:50 *Question:* What did you do to entertain yourself? *Answer:* Different towns we were in, we got a pass.
- 00:20:05 *Question:* Any fun moments from any nights on the town? *Answer:* Paris. We saw the tomb of Napoleon. I saw the Louvre, that's the art place you know.
- 00:20:30 *Question:* What was that like, I heard that was huge. *Answer:* Fantastic. We saw all the old stuff like weapons and stuff like that. When I was in...we saw barbed wire left from the first world war. It was strung up there for a long time. A lot of history. A lot of history.
- 00:21:40 *Question:* Where you nervous watching these videos? *Answer:* No, I kind of liked it because I got to relax. I didn't have to go out and march or do anything you know. We could rest.
- 00:21:54 *Question:* Where there any consequences if you went into the towns and met somebody or talked? *Answer:* In Germany, we could not associate with any Germans. If you get caught dating any German women you'd be fined. Just the rule that's all. That's the enemy until the war was over. I remember a train we were on going from... to Europe to get on the boat to go home and the civilians were selling liquor but the sergeants told us not to drink it because they were trying to poison us you know.
- 00:22:55 *Question:* Wow! Really? *Answer:* Yep, they put poison in it and tried to sell it.
- 00:23:05 *Question:* So, what happened after you came home? You said you went to University of Michigan? *Answer:* I went to Akron U. then got my Masters from University of Michigan.
- 00:23:22 *Question:* What did you do as your career? *Answer:* I was a civil engineer for Goodyear Tire. Worked there 35 years.
- 00:23:33 *Question:* How'd you get that job? *Answer:* I just went in one day and applied for a job and they asked if I had a degree. I said "I got two!"

but they needed a civil engineer so lack of them or whatever you want to call it.

00:23:55 *Question:* And you stayed for 35 years? *Answer:* I did a lot of design work for them. They were looking to expand all over the world and country. A lot of plants and buildings and design work. A lot of those drawings probably have my name on them, you know. Approved by.

00:24:42 *Question:* When you were overseas did you guys pull any pranks or tricks? *Answer:* No, we were too serious for that.

00:25:08 *Question:* Those are the only questions on here, is there anything you'd like to add or anything I forgot to ask. *Answer:* No just that I wouldn't take a million dollars to go through it again. And I won't take a million dollars to not go through it. I really appreciated the experience I got and what I saw. I wouldn't want to go through it again, but I'm grateful I got to go through it. For the country you know?

00:25:44 *Question:* Would you encourage other people to enlist in the army? *Answer:* Depends on their circumstances. The army can make a lot of good for a lot of people. They teach them a lot more than they taught us. But they give you money for education and things. If the guy wanted to go I wouldn't discourage him.