

ORAL HISTORY 2019-05/06
Cerene Jay (C.J.) Paul
September 8, 2017
Fort Wainwright, Fairbanks, Alaska

C.J. Paul gives a speech at the 539th Composite Truck Company (L) at Fort Wainwright.

C.J. Paul thanked everyone for inviting him to the event. He said it was great to be among them. He enlisted in 1943. He went into New Cumberland, Pennsylvania. There were several busloads of them. They went into one end of the building as civilians and when they left at the other end of the building they were G.I.s. They traveled by rail to Camp Campbell, Kentucky. He said he was lucky because he had volunteered to be drafted. The Army was organizing a Signal Battalion. He ended up in the Signal Corps and was in for twenty years. He said being in the Signal Corps kept them from being shot at too often. They learned to splice wire and cable and climb poles. He would end up in the 39th Signal Company. It supported the 26th Infantry Division with all the various kinds of communications. Before they knew it they were out in the field on maneuvers. They ended up in South Carolina. From there they went to Camp Shanks, New York. They departed on the 26th of August on Liberty ships. They had about 1500 guys on their ship. They had six to eight different ships in their convoy. Their ship were located in the middle of the convoy. They landed at Cherbourg at Utah Beach on the 7th of September. They crawled down a net, got into landing craft and were hauled onto the beach and then hiked up the beach. As they were coming up the gangplank one of his company members ran into a high school friend who was a member of the Seabees. This man had been involved in D-Day. They had been underwater dealing with the mines the Germans had put down. He told them about the ships which were hit. Ultimately grave registration people had to be there. In the first two months of the battle there were 34,000 people buried. The Germans were prepared for attack and had put mines on the beaches and other areas. They also had poles they buried in the ground.

The French had hedgerows which were deep and thick. The tanks were not able to go through them. When they plowed into the hedgerow the tank would go up into the air and be targets for the German gunners. They ended up putting on blades similar to ones on bulldozers. The blades were attached to the bottom of the tanks. When the tank went into the hedgerow it could plow the hedgerows out of the way. The war moved on. At Saint-Lô the Germans had built tunnels and put artillery down on hydraulic lifts. Their troops were unable to move forward. He talked about synchronized explosions from the Army which enabled them to move forward. Once the road was opened up they could deliver supplies. He talked about the Red Ball Express. The armed forces needed supplies. The war had come to a halt because of lack of fuel and ammunition. The Red Ball Express delivered supplies. They went to nearby units and rounded up all their trucks and men. They all had to be trained. They had 600 vehicles in the operation. They hauled supplies for 83 days and delivered close to a million tons of supplies and food. His outfit rode up on the Red Ball Express to where they were going to be situated. At the time they were within artillery range.

General George Patton was their Third Army commander. General Paul was the 26th Infantry Division commander and Colonel Scott was the 101st Regiment commander. Patton set up his headquarters in Nancy. General Patton's armored car went by with his bodyguards. Patton refused to ride in it and traveled instead in a jeep. He went right by and Paul could see Patton's pearl handled pistols. Paul said Patton was fighting the war to win.

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They were relieved from the line and they ended up in Metz, France. They had to string wire. One day he was up in a tree tying off a wire and he could hear a bullet go by. He climbed out of the tree and gathered his wits. Every time they got off the ground they realized they were always a target. Every time you got off the road there was the danger of mines, too. On the 8th of September their first attack took place. They went down a gradual hill and the Germans were up on the hillside (Hill 310) and they could see his unit coming. They got into the town of Moyenvic. It had been shelled from both sides. There were no intact buildings or roofs. They got down into a cellar and had artillery from the Germans. Right in the midst of the attack the warrant officer came in and told them the radio equipment wasn't working and they needed to get a line back in service. It was his turn to be out troubleshooting. He was sure he was not going to live. They managed to fix the line. They returned to the cellar again. The next day they needed to be moved. The sergeant and the officer went looking for another place. While they were out surveying the place the

Germans started lobbing artillery. They moved to the edge of town. He talked about one of the trucks hitting a mine and the injuries to some of the men. He later met up with one of the men involved in the accident 60 years later at a reunion. Paul had accompanied one of the injured men to an aid station. They wound up in Metz. They had to string wire for communication. He was up in a tree and heard a bullet. Someone had shot at him. (This may be a repeat of the earlier story)

The Battle of the Bulge broke out. They drove all night. There were aircraft flying all around them. One of the aircraft had strafed a convoy. They had to mark their vehicles so they could be identified by their pilots. He was always looking for a place to be safe. Not far from where they were the Germans had overrun a bunch of their installations and captured 84 of their men. The Germans lined up the captured men and murdered them.

They moved forward to another location. During that time their field kitchen set up and prepared a turkey dinner. They were still in artillery fire range. They found an undamaged German plane in a field. He took a piece of the propeller. Paul said it was bitter cold. They didn't have clothing for the conditions. They had to be out at night with guard duty. They were required to put on paper that would detect poisonous gas. They put this on their uniform as an identifier. If you didn't have it on you were considered one of the enemy. They entered one home and had the family go to the cellar. They had leave there for a few days. The team that stayed there didn't have the family go to the cellar and when they were gone a piece of shrapnel went into the building and killed the family's five year old. After the weather cleared the Air Force came in with relief for the people who had been trapped in the Bulge. They dropped supplies and food. The pilots were able to see the Germans and they were dealt with. It helped to bring the conflict to an end. They crossed the Rhine River and entered Germany. They came upon about 2,000 prisoners who had been marched all the way down from Poland by the Germans. The prisoners were given very little to eat along the way. When a prisoner fell then the SS troops shot them. There were some Englishmen in the group. Paul's unit wound up in Czechoslovakia. It was the 7th or 8th of May and the war had come to an end. They saw about 5,000 Germans who had surrendered because they didn't want to be under the control of the Russians. He talked about the Russians, Berlin and the dangers of communism. He said his experiences were scary at times and he is happy he survived.