

ORAL HISTORY 2019-07 PT. 1

Cerene Jay (C.J.) Paul

April 1, 2019

Pete Haggland, interviewer

Fairbanks, Alaska

Pete Haggland said C.J. Paul was a World War II veteran. He is 94 years old. He was born in Pennsylvania.

C.J. Paul talked about his personal history. He was born on February 17, 1925 in the Millersburg area, Pennsylvania. When he turned 18 he had to register [for the draft]. He went in to register right away and told the board to put him on the March call-up list. He was called up and had a lot of training since he had never been away from home. He got into basic training at Camp Campbell in Kentucky. He learned a lot during that time such as splicing and stringing cable. He wound up in the 39th Signal Company. They ultimately supported the 7th Army in Stuttgart, Germany. They worked hard and did a lot of training of other troops. He talked about getting his immunizations.

Haggland asked if he did a little hunting back in Pennsylvania. Paul said he hunted from the time he was a little boy. He was always well behaved because he wanted to accompany his father hunting. Haggland asked if he enlisted in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania. Paul said yes. Paul talked about Fort Campbell located on the border of Tennessee and Kentucky. He said it was very large base. They went on maneuvers at Fort Campbell several different times.

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Haggland asked if they simulated war conditions. Paul said no. Haggland asked about moving to New York. Paul said they went to Camp Shanks in New York. They left from there for Europe. He didn't know how long they were going to be at any one location. They went on hikes with Signal Corps packs. At first they went five miles in an hour. The second they went nine miles in two hours and then finally 25 miles in eight hours. If you failed you had to do it again. The 25 mile hike was on a very hot day. The New York camp was a stop before they got on their ship.

Haggland asked about the ship. Paul said they were on a Liberty ship. It was the first Liberty ship that went direct from New York to France. Their unit crawled down the nets and got on a landing craft. They had metal devices on the beach to keep them out of the sand. They hiked up the beach and it was the middle of the evening. A number of troops got off their ship at a dock. They landed at Cherbourg. This was in September 1944 when they landed. He talked about scrambling down the nets on the side of the ship and just picking up any duffel bag. They spent some time in an orchard waiting and wondering what was going to happen. They took off in vehicles and ended up in another orchard. The wire team he was with had eleven men. He said they strung cable between Cherbourg and Calais. Haggland asked about the hedgerows. Paul said they encountered them right away and he felt sorry for the infantry going in there. Haggland asked about how they solved the problem of the hedgerows. Paul said it was really bad. When the tanks hit the hedgerows they would raise up and it was a wide open shot for the Germans. They ended up attaching armored stuff on the front of the tanks which allowed them to plow into the hedgerow and not raise up. Haggland asked about someone running into a high school friend after they left the ship. Paul said someone from their team ran into a high school friend who was in the Seabees. The friend had been on the beach during the invasion. They went underwater in the beach areas and nullified a lot of the mines that the Germans had placed. There were a lot of bodies in the water. Paul wasn't sure how many people died in the initial assault. He talked about grave registration individuals being responsible for laying out cemeteries, identifying individuals and burying them. Early on there were 35,000 individuals killed and buried.

Haggland asked about transportation. Paul said in the beginning the Germans had placed munitions where they were able to bring a moat up and shoot and then bring them down. There was no movement of their troops at that time. They weren't too far from the beach where they had landed. Paul talked about the Red Ball Express. They had recruited a number of trucks and drivers. They provided transportation for tons of supplies, men, and fuel. They were driving 24 hours a day. Saint- Lô was the name of the area where things were at a standstill. They rounded up all the artillery pieces in that area. They developed a "time on target"

to coordinate an attack. They had to do this to open up the roads. He said the artillery pieces exploded in the air and not on the ground. Paul said the Red Ball Express hauled them to their destination. The military had stopped and couldn't move forward because they didn't have supplies. Until the supplies made it through it was a stalemate. Haggland commented about the Red Ball Express. Paul said he thought there was a million tons of supplies delivered. They were working on it night and day. They had fueling places along the way. Broken down trucks were used for parts. They arrived at their destination in the evening. They were within artillery range. They saw the defenses the Germans had put up such as posts so the gliders couldn't land. Haggland asked if they ran into the flooded areas. Paul said they didn't see it, but the Germans had flooded areas. Paul talked about the tanks having trouble getting through the hedgerows. They had to put blades on the tanks to cut through the hedgerows. Haggland asked about the move to Saint-Lô. Paul said different outfits were ahead of them, but they were running out of food and supplies until things started moving again.

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Paul said General Patton had made Nancy his headquarters. He was their commanding general and they loved him. He was a general who was fighting the war to win. He recommended reading The Killing of Patton. Haggland asked about going up to Moyenvic. Paul said this town had been bombarded from both sides. There wasn't a roof intact. They strung wire in there for Colonel Scott. The shells and artillery kept coming. They were down in a basement. A warrant officer said the wires were down and had to be repaired. It was Paul's turn. It was a scary situation. He said you hoped you didn't run into the enemy. They left the town and found a brink in the line and repaired it. The Germans had withdrawn and they were up on the hillside. The regimental signal officer moved forward into a courtyard to see about a place to stay. The Germans lobbed off some mortars and they exploded and hit the major. He died from his injuries. They went up towards Metz. They ran into a situation. They were stringing wire and the regiment was moving forward. They laid wire across a hillside. Right on the edge of a little town a driver backed into a mine. One of the men ran out of the truck yelling for a medic and disappeared down the road. Paul met up with him sixty years later at a reunion. All the men in the truck were wounded. Paul had the job of accompanying one man in the back of a truck to the aid station. They never heard about the injured man again. This happened before they got to Metz. They were on the opposite side of the river to the regiment. They had to improvise a way to get wire across the river. One of the individuals had a rifle and a grenade launcher. They took the grenade device off and used the remainder of the unit. They shot a small wire across the river. He was the main climber. He was up in a tree and he could hear a bullet go by him. There was a sniper on the other side of the river. He scrambled down out of the tree. They knew they were in harm's way every time they climbed up in a tree.

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Haggland commented on the Battle of the Bulge. Paul said they were thinking they were going to be there for some while. After only several days they loaded up. There was traffic in one direction only up towards Belgium and Luxembourg. They rode all night and arrived at daybreak. It was the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge. They were moving forward to get in position to get their wires strung to have communications for the troops. It was bitter cold. They didn't have any arctic gear. They started seeing aircraft flying around in the area. One P-47 had strafed a convoy and killed a captain. They were told it was a German flying the plane. They came up to a flat area and there was a German plane on the ground. Paul said this was a German pilot who wasn't going to die for Hitler and he was going to get out. They went to Dunkirk. It had been obliterated by artillery. They were staying in a farmhouse. They told the owners to go down into the basement because it was the safe place. They left this place for a brief time. When they left another team moved in and that night an artillery round came in and exploded on the roof of the house. Their little girl was killed. The other team didn't tell the family to go to the cellar. There was artillery all up and down the valley. They were close to the line. They could see firing and shooting going on ahead. They were given paper to wear on their uniform to identify them. A German outfit had overrun an outfit and captured them not far from where they were. There were 84 of them captured. All of them were murdered by the Germans. They did their best to identify who was responsible for this.

Haggland commented about their Christmas dinner. Paul said the cooks fixed a turkey dinner for everyone. It was a dangerous area to be in. You were always subject to enemy fire.

Haggland commented about a platoon that was down to four men and an officer. Paul didn't remember that. He said the 4th Armor Division was one of the outfits that was stymied and they relieved them. He said the Patton movie shows a battle of armor. In the same area where he saw the truck blown up there was a whole field of equipment that had been destroyed. They didn't even think of going off the roadway because of running into mines. You could never be sure if an area had been mined.

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Haggland commented on the weather conditions. Paul said it was bitter cold. He couldn't imagine how the infantry guys sustained their body. They were close to being overrun so they didn't even light a cigarette because it would attract fire. He has tried to find out how many people died in that battle. He said there were casualties from people freezing to death in addition to casualties from being shot. There were many casualties in the Battle of the Bulge on both sides. He said there were many articles about how many people died in the Battle of the Bulge. Paul talked about crossing the Rhine River. The bridge had been destroyed. They had pontoon bridges. They approached the bridge at night. They had anti-aircraft fire up and down along the river. If an aircraft appeared in and around the river area all the anti-aircraft would begin to fire. Everyone had an assigned area to fire into. The resistance eased up. They ultimately liberated about 2,000 individuals who had been slave labor of the Germans. They had marched all the way down from Poland. The Englishmen in the group told them their story. There were 2,000 to start with. The Germans would shoot anyone who couldn't get up. He saw a number of them along the roadway. They got across the Rhine OK. He has a photograph of the pontoon bridge they used. They proceeded across Germany to Austria. Paul said on one occasion after the Battle of the Bulge Patton decided to move forward. The Germans surrounded them. Patton decided to go forward. Patton captured a bunch of high ranking German officers and troops. Eisenhower and Montgomery did not like Patton. Paul ended up in Czechoslovakia. On the day the war ended there were many Germans surrendering there. They didn't want to surrender to the Russians.