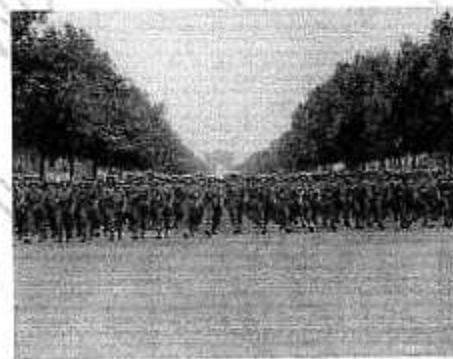




Matt Keleshian
May 23, 2002
Ms. DeGulis
AP US History

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Where Heroes Were Born



Introduction

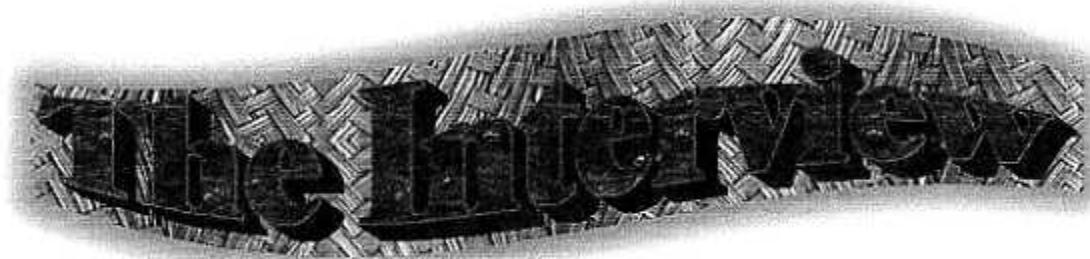
My great Uncle, Benedict J. Mucha, served for the United States army in the European Theater during the second world war. He served with the Medical Detachment of the 42nd Infantry Division as a medical aidman for six months, who assisted in the treatment of the sick and wounded. He worked directly with the combat infantry, took care of battle casualties, and he contacted the ambulance and means of transportation for men to be moved to rear areas for treatment.

Mr. Mucha was taken prisoner in the line of duty on January 18, 1945. He was held hostage in Fallingbommel, France until they were liberated on April 16, 1945.

The United States joined in the bombings of the European continent in July 1942. Leaders such as Dwight D. Eisenhower and George S. Patton lead American troops to great success. Great army campaigns such as the Battle of Stalingrad, D-Day, and the Battle of the Bulge made the European Theater of Operations the main battleground during the Second World War. The defeat of Hitler and Benito Mussolini respectively led to the liberation of Europe. The liberation of the European Theater was a major turning point in the war. On Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945, the free world celebrated the defeat and surrender of the German army.



Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945, a day of celebration!!!



The Interview

Matthew Keleshian

APUSH- Ms. DeGulis

WWII Interview

Benjamin Mucha → relation: Uncle

4916 Emmet Rd.

Lyndhurst, Ohio 44124

216-382-2724

Date of interview: March 3, 2002

Role in war- described in interview

Q- Do you have any documents from the war which I will be able to share with my class?

A- (hands me Separation Qualification Record and papers of Honorable Discharge)

This is all I got and that's the only thing you have to hang on to. They tell you don't ever lose it, and if you lose it, you don't get a second chance.

Q- How old were you when you entered the war?

A- Well I was born on February 17, 1918 and entered the war in August of 1943, so I was about 25 years old.

Q- Did you enlist or were you drafted?

A- Oh heck no, I am no hero. HAHA. They drafted me, I'm sorry. I was hoping they would lose my number, haha. I wasn't Audie Murphy (spc), he won the war by himself. I don't know, I always wonder about these great heros. Are they really normal, or do they do dumb things at dumb times. Because I know when we were taken prisoner some of 'em just couldn't take it.

Q- Where did you serve?

A- European Theater of Operations. See we can't pinpoint where, because the enemy is wanting to know where our troops were being shipped, and we moved around to keep the enemy off balance, because if they knew where we were they

would notify their submarines to shoot the ships down. We didn't know where we were going.

Q- How did you serve in the army?

A- Medic. I was a combat medic. That means I was picking them up as they were being shot down.

Q- What countries did you serve in?

A- We landed in France, Marseille, down in the Mediterranean. I remember that night on the Mediterranean Sea. The moon! Of course there wasn't any submarines in that Mediterranean Sea unless they were at the bottom. It seems the second time I went over with your Aunt Irene, it seemed like a small lake. It seems smaller than Lake Erie. You could go on the north side of Europe, like Spain, and on the shore there is an incline and on a clear day you could see Africa. The prisoner camp was at Fallingbommel. When we went there the second time we got on the autobahn when we were on the buses they pointed to Fallingbommel, so it must have been an economic center or in other words it probably was a hub.

Q- So you were captured?

A- Yeah, we had a dumb colonel, that son of a gun.

Q- Where were you captured at?

A- Sessenhiem, France. It was supposed to be a French village. Don't let them kid you. That was as German as I can think of. I didn't realize how lucky I was. I was talking to a sergeant and he said they caught 10 of our guys and sprayed

them. This one guy had three wounds in him but they didn't hit any of his vital organs. He played dead. That's how lucky you are.

When you take a prisoner, he is a prisoner. You don't shoot him because he is a prisoner. You take him to the back, and then he has to be given the same rations and everything. I was talking to the guard after I was captured and was like "How about some meat?" He laughed, and said hell they weren't even getting good food.

Q- So you were captured by the Germans?

A- Yeah. Well the best treatment we got was right there. The guys that were doing the dirty work know each other's position. In other words they knew it could be them. Say if we were captured by them, how would they treat us. Then they were using us as propoganda. They would march us down through cities, right down the middle of cities, saying boy we were winning the war. It was for morale purposes. I knew what it was for, I could sense it right away.

Q- How was the food? Living conditions?

A- They give you a little loaf of bread and so many men were allocated to one loaf of bread. For eight men, they gave you a loaf of this bread. Then we get this thin soup, and it had some weed in it. Maybe it was celery. Who knows what it was. They used to bring a big kettle over and they would give each man his share. And then one day I had a piece of meet, I don't know but I think it was horse meet. We were on a train one time, and we stopped at one place. We had no water, we tried to get water on the roof. You will probably hear the expression "40 and 8s." 40 and 8s means forty men or eight horses is the capacity for a car. If you go to

the Holocaust museum in Washington you would see a 40 and 8s car. Those are the kind of cars we traveled in.

Q- What do you remember about some of your friendships during the war?

A- No, I didn't have any. I was a loner, I sort of kept to myself. I didn't want to get involved in anything. In fact, as a medic I should have bitched about the soup. They would take these guys out on a work detail and they would come back after the guys in the barracks got their food. Then the work details would come in an hour or two later. I should have said, "Hey lets heat that soup again." It probably got all the damn bacteria in it. After they ate it all the guys were in the toilet.

Q- What do you remember about the fighting?

A- Oh man, I'll tell you. The first day, when they opened up on us. You know 88s are 3 1/2 inches, 25 mm is an inch. So 88s are 3 1/2 inches. They were trying to kill us. I thought in war you would get shot with a bullet. Hell, they had 3 1/2 foot shells. I was so scared and I hoped no one got injured because it was my job to see that they wouldn't bleed to death. That first day you get paranoid. You can't do anything. They made a mistake. They were in the woods when they attacked us. That's the worst place you want to be when you are attacked by mortars. Mortars are those shells you would throw down a pipe. Well them dummies. Apparently they didn't have a very good leader because he would have gotten them out of the woods. Our Mortars would hit those limbs up there and explode all over them. They were bound to get more wounds. If you were going to wound a bunch of soldiers the tree top detonation was the best. They didn't stay there too long. Then of course I got two patients, two German soldiers wounded.

One was in the leg, I tried to remove his boot but it was too painful so I took out my knife and cut it off. Our lutenants are all doctors and you didn't see one of them come out. But boy the minute I took care of those two Germans, I think what they were waiting for is to see how our men would react to me taking care of the enemy. If I took care of these two German soldiers and no one would squash about it, then they would join in. Which they did. Jee, he had nice boots on. He was in his forties, an older guy. I had to take care of the worst wounds first. Like the doctor said, boy you guys are going to see wounds doctors here would never see.

Q- How did you keep in contact with your family/ friends back in the United States?

A- Oh, write letters.

Q- Where were you when the Battle of Normandy took place?

A- That's a good question. Where was I? Oh, in the states I think. The battle of Normandy took place in June and I didn't go over until after Thanksgiving. We had our Thanksgiving meal here, and then we boarded the ships. I can't remember how long it took us to get to Europe. I know it was warm climate, because when we left here it was cold. I think the name of the ship was the Marine Fox. Then we landed in Marseille. Then we went to Gibraltar.

Q- What are your memories about VE-Day?

A- Well it was quite a celebration. Everybody was happy that the day of reckon was coming and they could end the war and go home. We were in the states! And we didn't go over until after VE-day. VE-day was in June and we left here after thanksgiving that same year.

Q- What is your opinion on the dropping of the two atoms bombs in Japan?

A- Oh thank god. We would have lost millions of men if we didn't do that. And don't kid yourselves. Those Japs would have done the same thing to us. Truman did the right thing.

Q- What are your memories of VJ-Day?

A- Well, I was happy. I was halfway across the United States. I was in Missouri ready to go to Japan. See they would shoot a guy, and wound them, then they would wait for the medics to come and shoot the medics. I think they would arm the medics in the pacific, but they didn't arm us in the European Theater. I never had a gun the whole time I was in Europe. Medics are not combat soldiers. They are people who care for the wounded.

Q- What training did you go through prior to the war?

A- Regular soldier training. We would go through barbed wire. And they would shoot machine guns over the top of our heads. They got a report back that when these guys were ambushed they froze. So we had training with surprise attacks. They would have us go through a course where people would sneak up on you and scare the hell out of you. They taught you not to freeze and shoot the enemy.

Q- Where did you go for basic training?

A- Oklahoma. We were treated pretty much like the regular soldiers, however we would have special classes. The infantry would go out on tactical defenses, and being a medic I always got to be in charge of ammunition. We would have special classes on how to distribute narcotics and all the pressure points in the body, they would teach you how to give shots. We did this all under the

supervision of a doctor. Every six months we had to take tetanus shots. They are only good for six months.

Q- How are you still active as a post-war veteran?

A- I joined the POW and VOW. That's about all. I was thinking of joining the American legion. Anyone could get in the American legion as long as you had a uniform on. The VOW, you have to be out of the country for 30 days, and the POW you have to be a POW. The POW's, they are a pretty sharp bunch, I tell you. When they have a convention, you could tell there were brains there.

Conclusion

The European Theater of Operations was truly a place where heroes were born. Individuals such as Patton, Eisenhower, and the great soldier, Audie Murphy, were able to become heroes and lead the United States and the Allied Forces to victory in Europe. The American soldiers sacrificed their life to preserve the free world, and prevent world domination by the Axis. My Great uncle sacrificed his life so that I may live today, along with my fellow generation, in a free capitalistic world. The European Theater was the main area of battle during the war. Such battles as Stalingrad, D-Day, and the Bulge characterized the stifle for victory across Europe. The liberation of the European Theater was key in the liberation of the rest of the world and victory for the Allies.

I have learned a lot throughout this project. I was able to learn a very important story about my great uncle's war experiences. I not only learned a story about my families history, I learned a story I would treasure for the rest of my life.