

Video Recording Log
Veteran Kermit Harden

Name of Interviewer: Harriet Williamson

Name of Veteran/Civilian: Kermit Harden

Birth Date: 10/26/1924

Recording format: Mini DVD

Estimated length of recording (in minutes): 58 minutes **Date of recording:** 10/26/2007

Location of recording: WILL AM-FM-TV, 300 N. Goodwin Ave, Urbana, IL 61801

Recording log:

00:00 Introduction

00:55 Background, family—farm, father also worked in mine

02:00 Attended University of Illinois 3 semesters—enlisted after Pearl Harbor attack in December, called up in March

02:55 Studying to be Math or History teacher

03:10 Pearl Harbor brought war into focus

04:18 Camp Robeson, AK—basic training—pulled out after 3 weeks to go to Carnegie Institute to study to become engineer—there 3 semesters, recruited because of placement test

05:13 Carnegie Institute—studied mathematics and engineering like a regular student—was to become officer and go into active duty after graduation—Army curtailed program before education ended—did not need a lot of engineers, needed infantry

06:15 Back to infantry—never took basic training

06:35 Camp McCain, MI—advanced infantry training division—marksmanship, patrol, mock battles—there March to August, 1943

07:50 Took a train to New York then sailed to Europe on Queen Elizabeth—ship held 18,000 men—took 5 days—ate in shifts, slept on bunks or on deck in shifts—first went to Edinburgh, Scotland

09:39 Took a train to Chippenham, England —there 4 weeks—D-Day had been previous June, knew was going to France

10:15 Correspondence with family—friendships with men in company

- 10:48 In September went across English Channel, waded ashore on Omaha Beach
- 11:28 Division moved to Lorient, France—also some sent to Brassiere, France
- 11:45 There to hold 65,000 Germans that were cut off in that region of France—had just been cut off a few weeks prior to him arriving in this region—they were not POWs, just cut off
- 11:38 Returned to Europe 4 times since War—visited sites where he fought—invited back to location where was kept prisoner in Lorient
- 14:30 Attended reunions after war
- 14:45 Not combat, only duty was patrol
- 15:15 On patrol with 50 men, surrounded and captured—5 men killed, 23 wounded—fought 9am to dark, then surrendered—American troops tried to help but could not
- 16:20 Taken into Lorient—stayed in prison which was converted manufacturing building—interrogated for one week
- 16:55 Taken on boat to Ile de Groix—small island 3 miles out—big fort there with new prison set up—were about 146 Americans, also some French, English—some Americans were wounded and stayed in hospital
- 18:03 Hungry—in 45 days lost 40 pounds—French would smuggle food sometimes—learned to steal food in various ways
- 19:26 Escape was not a good idea
- 19:48 Segregated by nationality—played bridge
- 20:23 Hauling food from dock to fort, stole food
- 20:45 No communication with outside world while POW—declared missing in action—mother wrote 3 letters which he did not get until exchanged in December
- 21:20 Red Cross assistance
- 22:18 Communication with guards—older German men—taught him to play chess—older men, bored, not a difficult job to guard the Americans
- 22:45 Red Cross man got word from French that American POWs were starving--orchestrated exchange of prisoners and supply of cigarettes and candy
- 25:04 Exchange—rank for rank—called truce 9am to 5pm, exchanged in Etang du Ter—officers went in café and worked out terms—went well until Germans refused to be

- exchanged—started giving more Germans per one American—German doctors giving physicals to make sure trading able-bodied for able-bodied
- 28:03 Deloused—difficult to eat for a few days—rested for 5 days then passed physical, sent back to division
- 29:10 Went on patrol and caught one of his old German guards
- 29:20 Training in New York
- 30:44 After Battle of the Bulge started, drove 3 days straight to join front lines
- 31:20 Describing Battle of the Bulge—cold temperatures—last week in January, became frozen from the waist down—in the hospital for 30 days
- 32:25 Laid in bed on back, legs exposed—had to restore circulation
- 33:00 Residual health problems—now considered 100% disabled—only considered such after new legislation passed a few years ago
- 33:35 Circulation restored, declared fit, sent back to active duty
- 34:08 Traveling by truck—Germans on the run—Americans chasing
- 34:28 Fighting before hospital—fighting house to house—town of **Ninning**—back and forth capturing between Germans and Americans
- 35:00 Americans removed dead from town after battles—Germans left them laying in the streets
- 35:10 Officers were fair and equal to American soldiers—getting replacements daily
- 35:45 Left **Ninning** to take nearby hill—15 of 50 men remaining at end of day, all replaced next day
- 36:55 Losing men, getting replacements—warn replacements about things
- 38:00 Germans—at Battle of the Bulge—very young and very old soldiers
- 38:30 Had little contact with Germans that were captured
- 39:15 Went to **Lubechoffen** on Rhine River—when got there, Germans running
- 40:00 No serious battles until crossed Rhine in March—Germans not avid fighters at the time
- 40:55 Rhineland battle—fighting in the woods—helped to have a tank
- 42:25 In Rhineland area when war in Europe ended—became police

- 43:00 Ended up in Czechoslovakia—met Russians to keep them on their side and not let them come any further West
- 43:40 In Czechoslovakia—contact with civilians—very bitter against Germans
- 44:50 Some people had cooperated with Germans during war—after war caused fights
- 45:10 Not a lot of contact with locals in France—could not trust them because they could run between lines—one Frenchman stole an American body and stole its clothes before returning it to the American camp
- 46:30 His best friends from the war were those he was captured with—12 got together for documentary later—he was the only one that went throughout whole war without getting disconnected from division
- 47:28 Hit by a mine—gap in hedgerow—cat ran through trip wire—blew up and got shrapnel in his face—in hospital 3 days
- 48:45 Medals: silver star, bronze star, purple heart
- 49:10 Points to go home December, 1945—rode trucks from Czechoslovakia to La Havre—took a ship to New York—home for 30 days leave, found out received Silver Star, which gave him enough points to be discharged
- 49:40 Discharged at Fort Sheridan, IL after end of leave
- 49:50 Contact with family after POW
- 50:15 Discharged—attended University of Illinois next semester—one of the first veterans to return to campus
- 51:50 Studied Math, graduated 1946—eventually received Masters from Bradley and PhD. in 1972
- 52:25 Married in 1959, had two children
- 52:38 Involvement with War helped him to not worry about the small stuff in life
- 53:15 Wrap-up
- 53:38 [Video of medals, photographs, letter]