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# Ray David Little oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, May 28, 2008

Ray David Little (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

**Michael Hirsh:** Could you give your name and spell it for me, please?

**Ray David Little:** My name is Ray, R-a-y, David, D-a-v-i-d, Little, L-i-t-t-l-e.

MH: And your address, please?

RL: ...

MH: And your phone number is....

RL: Correct.

MH: And your date of birth, sir.

RL: 12-13-25 [December 13, 1925].

MH: First, tell me a little bit about what was going on before you went into the Army, before World War II?

RL: Well, I had dropped out of school to work in a print shop. I started working there in junior high, a local weekly newspaper, and I'd learned a little bit. The situation, the foreign situation, got so severe that they couldn't find any printers of any kind. The guy called me and I was in school, and he'd heard that I was a good printer and I should come and work for him. It didn't work out, but I was too embarrassed to go back to school, so I wound up getting a job in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with a paper company in the printing department. I got married real young, and when I was eighteen, in December I immediately got my draft notice. Before the first of the year, I'd already been at the physical; I guess in January I went to Lawton, Oklahoma, Fort Sill (inaudible). Took basic training at Camp Norris, California—in weeks, infantry replacement training and I was assigned when I finished, I was assigned to the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. They were in Durham, North Carolina, Camp Butner.

MH: Which camp?

RL: Camp Butner.

MH: Butner, okay. Was this a new unit that was being put together?

RL: No, actually 89<sup>th</sup> Division was one of the earlier divisions; it came out of Fort Carson, Colorado. But they used them for a training, and they trained everywhere in the U.S. Some of the old guys, when I joined it, said that combat could never be as tough as what they'd been through. They trained in the swamps down in Louisiana and they sent 'em out to California, Camp [Fort] Hunter Liggett, I think it was called. And they trained them in the mountains. They were training them as a light infantry division, they had no vehicles. They backpacked everything, their weapons, their supplies, everything. So I guess it was kinda rough, from the way they talked.

Then, they sent 'em to Camp Butner, and they needed a lot of—they decided to make a regular infantry division out of 'em, which I think it was when they started, but they'd gone through all this experimenting with it. That's when I was sent as a replacement comin' in. Training school, but the good part was that we trained together as a unit. There—oh I guess from July to—well, I guess it would be almost six months, about five months, and we were sure we were going to the South Pacific. They'd issued us suntan stuff, khakis, and everything. We had gone through our vehicles, and I was made a weapons care driver and in a weapons company—with a machine gun company. We had twenty-one vehicles and twenty-one Jeeps in our company, and we'd gone through all of

'em, the brakes, wheel bearings and everything, and getting' 'em ready to go. And then, all of a sudden, we were restricted to base, and they took up our clothing and issued us woolen clothing.

MH: What kind of clothing?

RL: Woolen.

MH: Okay.

RL: So, we knew something was happening, something was changing. I think it was January 1, we actually boarded a train out of there and went to Boston, Camp Myles Standish, and from there we boarded a ship and went to Le Havre, France.

MH: And this was 194—

RL: That would have been forty-four [1944], yeah, forty-four [1944]. No, that would have been forty-five [1945], 'cause in forty-four [1944] I was in Camp Butner. So, that was in January forty-five [1945]. We went in a huge convoy, and good and bad in that. Hello?

MH: Yes, I'm here.

RL: Someone tried to buzz in here, I guess.

MH: No, I hear you fine.

RL: But we had to go slow as the tankers in the convoy did, about fourteen knots, I think; I believe that's what they told us. It was pretty slow, I know, and anyhow it took us a while to get there, but we were safe.

MH: No U-boats.

RL: No. We got terrible scares, and usually at night, for some reason or other, they would sound alarms and the Navy guys on the boat would all run to their battle stations and we tried to get out of the way. I mean, they had a whole combat team on that one boat, the USS *Uruguay*. It had been a cruise ship, they said, before the war; but they closed in the sun deck and everything, and that's actually where I was.

MH: Sleeping in a hammock?

RL: But anyhow, we—oh, they would drop depth charges, you know, kept us shut up a little. I'll always remember one night it was happening, and one guy—I think I'd been to a Catholic service there, right close to where I was living—and this guy said, "Man, I'll be glad when I get to land. You can't even get in a foxhole in this thing." But that—that was about the extent of it. We landed in Le Havre and they had bombed Le Havre just before we got there, so we had to go all aside and couldn't pull up to the dock. And they took us in landing craft, you know, to the docks to board trucks. Went to the cigarette camps, they call them, outside of Le Havre, and we stayed there a couple weeks until we got the rest of our supplies. And I know I went to—they took us drivers to Cherbourg, and without our weapons—I mean with our vehicles, I'm sorry—and got a brand new Jeep.

MH: Not the ones you had prepared.

RL: No, none of those, because none of those was—of course, we spent days and days cleaning the heads. They put all of our weapons and machine guns and everything in cosmoline, and spent days cleaning them up. And then we get some training, marking, mostly, and keeping us fit, I guess. And when we got our weapons on the vehicles, then we took off for Luxembourg. And our first night in Luxembourg, we were close enough that we could see the cannon flashes and hear noises, hear the guns.

MH: This was Bastogne?

RL: No, this was in Luxembourg. Yeah, this was after Bastogne happened.

MH: It was after Bastogne, okay.

RL: Yeah, I've always assumed—I guess my own interpretation, but I always assumed that was what caused the change was Bastogne, when they had to break through—when the Germans got down to that town, they hit a fence right there. And it resulted in

Bastogne. That's why they took up our clothing and sent us to Europe instead of South Pacific. I don't know, that's what I—that was my interpretation of it.

MH: You're lucky they changed clothing on you; I've heard of some guys that were sent over there with summer uniforms.

RL: Well, we had woolens, but we didn't have overshoes and stuff like that. And there was mud up to your knees, and that camp—after we landed there, when we went there first, there was snow on the ground. The tents were set up, but they weren't tied in corners and all that. They were in about three inch or four inches of snow. Well, after we were there a few days, that began to melt and here would come (inaudible)—it was a mess. But our first combat was at the Moselle River. And we jumped off from Luxembourg and to there, and we didn't have a long—we were lucky, we didn't—when we got there, the worst was over, of course. They were mostly on the run. I don't know if you have any history from our division or not, if you've seen any of it. But there is a website 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry—actually was set up and maintained by some guys as part of the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Society.

MH: I've looked at it; I haven't read everything that's on it.

RL: Well, it's stuff—there's some stuff about Ohrdruf, the camp that we—And I didn't know about that until I made the last, the last really—in Washington, D.C., in aught-four [2004], and that was the only one I made because I didn't learn about it until about a year and a half before that. I didn't meet anyone from my company, but I met some guys from my battalion and we enjoyed the time. Of course we got some recognition at the Holocaust Museum there in Washington, D.C., of our involvement in that Ohrdruf.

MH: What led up to your finding Ohrdruf or your getting to Ohrdruf?

RL: Well, like I told you in the e-mail, I was not actually involved in that liberation part of it.

MH: Right, but you were there the next day, you said?

RL: I was there the next day.

MH: That's close enough for government work.

RL: We were assigned—I read my (inaudible) a little bit yesterday after I talked to you, and we were, we were destined to go there, but the day before, they changed it and sent us to another town; Arnstadt, I believe it is. But it's near there. But my company, of course we were always broken up, being a weapons company, in a battalion, three bit battalion, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion in a regiment. Usually one company'd be in reserve and two of 'em would be on the line. My company would be divided, a weapons company with two platoons of machine guns, both squads in each platoon and one platoon of 80mm mortars, and there was six squads. So, we were divided, usually a couple of squads who would the rifle company.

MH: Were your machine guns .30 caliber or .50s?

RL: They were .30s. They were two .30s. The rack man carried an air of cooled .30s, but ours were water cooled and had heavy tripods; and we set 'em up and had supporting fire. You could fire over the heads of our people when you see stuff like that, you know. But I didn't really know about Ohrdruf until the next day: for some reason, they sent me and another PFC [private first class] in there and told us just to patrol that camp, and to keep down any disturbances.

MH: Did they tell you what kind of camp it was?

RL: No. Well, I guess I knew something about it, because we did some investigatin' while we were there and found the corpses. Most of them also had been cleaned away by the time we got there the next day, but we found skeletons out in some leaves and trees at the end of the camp. We did a little, you know, investigating, I guess, the next day when we had spent the night driving mostly, then got a little sleep; the next morning we kinda looked around that camp. Underneath the room we were—the building we were in—there was an underground, and it was full of electronics. I've never known for sure what that was all about, but it looked like it could be a telephone exchange or something.

MH: It's really interesting that you say that, because I interviewed a man yesterday who was actually a retired one-star general, who was the battalion commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division that found Ohrdruf, I guess the day before. And the reason they were in the area, they were heading east toward Czechoslovakia, and they were turned south to go toward Ohrdruf because they were told that there was information that there was an underground communications facility in the area that was built by the Germans in case they had to leave Berlin, they would have another communications place.

RL: Well, that makes sense, because I've always felt that's what that was, but I never had any verification of that.

MH: What did it look like?

RL: It was just a large room, just banks of electronics. Like I say, like the closest thing I could liken it to would be a telephone exchange.

MH: How big would you say the room was?

RL: Oh, there were several rooms.

MH: Okay, how big are they?

RL: I would say oh, ten [feet] by twelve [feet] or something like that size.

MH: And how many rooms?

RL: I dunno exactly how many, but I know there was more than one.

MH: And these were completely underground?

RL: Yes, right down a stairway. We were just lookin' around, you know. You know how guys, how kids will do.

MH: Right.

RL: That's what we really were, and we just went down into there and found that.

MH: And this was in the camp itself?

RL: Inside the camp, yeah. The building that we actually—they put us in—that was our billet there, that building. After everything quieted down around midnight or so, we all just—we went to bed. But that’s where—that was the building we were in.

MH: What do you guess that—I mean, what did it look like?—the building above ground was used for?

RL: Probably office space.

MH: But it wasn’t one of the buildings that they’d found bodies in.

RL: No, uh-huh.

MH: That’s an amazing story, I mean, because it just fits with what I was told yesterday. So, you found all this electronic stuff; did it look like it was connected?

RL: I could not tell. It looked like it was usable. I didn’t know enough to know whether it was connected, but it looked to me like it was just sitting there. Nobody was runnin’ it, but it was perfectly capable of being operated.

MH: It had switchboards?

RL: Yup.

MH: Just like the old telephone switchboard where they’d pull the cord up and plug it into a hole?

RL: Well, not exactly. I don’t recall it that well, about it, but I don’t recall seeing that. But there was just a mass, walls of wiring and switches and stuff. I don’t know about the—I’ve seen pictures; in fact I guess I’ve seen—where they’d pull those wires—I’ve seen business switchboards. I didn’t recall it being just like that; it was obviously complicated electronics.

MH: Right. Did you talk to your CO [commanding officer] and say, “This is what we found down there?”

RL: No. No, we did not. They never—in fact, I don't recall that we reported back at all; we just went back to our company when we left there. And there's no one we had to report to or anything like that. "How did everything go?" "Well, okay." The people, obviously these were not the inmates from that facility; they were displaced persons that they had brought into that facility, because they were able to get around, you know.

MH: How many days after liberation do you think this might have been?

RL: I'd say the second or third day.

MH: And they were bringing DPs in there?

RL: It was full of 'em. And the first night, they said that was the problem, that some of them had gotten out and they'd gotten some schnapps and they'd gotten the rifles and they were gonna go out and kill some of the Germans, you know. So, they—that's when they sent us in there, to keep 'em calmed down. And I just—I guess just our presence was about all it amounted to, because we didn't actually do anything. We didn't need to. But they—we did cover all the streets, just constantly, and I remember one intersection: they had built a bonfire, and they were dancing, these Russians. You know how you've seen—I've seen movies, that's all I've ever seen—of how they dance squatted down, you know, around it. Man, they were going at it. They were having a ball. They were really enjoying their freedom. And I guess they'd been fed, too. I didn't actually see that part of it, but obviously they weren't lookin' for food.

MH: Could you tell what language they were speaking?

RL: No, they were all types of people in there, all nationalities.

MH: But they looked like they had been fed. These were not people who were starving to death?

RL: No, these people were not. They were—and of course days after this, why, we'd—that was one of the problems we ran into. They were massing on the highways and goin' every which direction trying to go home, you know. Pulling their stuff in every kind of conveyance they could think of, from baby buggies to wagons, one pull and one push and stuff like that. And everything they could get their hands on they had with 'em, and I

suspect much of it left on the side of the road. I saw that happen. You know, you get more than you can handle.

MH: Were these men and women?

RL: Men and women, yes. All various directions.

MH: Had the bodies in the camp been totally disposed of by then?

RL: I didn't see any bodies. I have photos that one of the guys in our outfit took, and he made a series of prints of them and after we got back to Le Havre—V-J Day or V-E Day I mean, we all went back and took the whole division back to Le Havre and spent the summer there. And while we're there, he went to Rouen, I believe, and had these prints made, and I got a set of 'em. I've still got 'em.

MH: What do they show?

RL: It shows much of what you've seen in—you saw any of the fiftieth anniversary, several magazines printed, they printed one picture—and this was the first time I ever saw Ohrdruf mentioned, and I always wondered about that. They talk about all the camps but you know, we've been there and we knew it was there but I never saw a word about it until that, when that fiftieth anniversary. *U.S. News* had it. I saw it in newspapers; I saw that picture four or five different times. And the interest—the central interest of that picture, of course, was that was the first place [Dwight D.] Eisenhower saw this atrocity. He was there with [George S.] Patton and I think [Bernard] Montgomery, I believe. Not Montgomery—Montgomery might have been there. But that's—

MH: [Omar] Bradley.

RL: He and Bradley and Patton were there, and I remember in one of the stories I read Patton got sick.

MH: Right.

RL: But that's where he made the statement that he wanted all the pictures made and all the correspondents he could get to come and look at it, because somewhere down the line, they would deny it. And of course, that has happened.

MH: That has happened. This was—these were pictures that your friend took?

RL: No, but this picture that I'm talkin' about was put in all these different publications.

MH: Right, I'm familiar with the picture.

RL: That was made in that camp. And these pictures I have were similar to what you saw there, or more graphic, more dead bodies. One of the ones I have showed this guy who'd just been killed, and I think there's one of the Americans that was there. They found him; he'd been killed. And of course you've read the story I'm sure that they brought the *Bürgermeister* and his wife in there and were going to bring them back the next day, but when they went to their home, they had hung themselves.

MH: Right. Not a moment too soon.

RL: Yeah.

MH: You still have those pictures?

RL: Yes, I do have them.

MH: I wonder if it'd be possible to get copies or look at them, with an eye toward using a couple of them in the book?

RL: I think I could send you an e-mail attachment, you know, and send you one and see if you could use—

MH: If you could send me a JPEG attachment, that'd be great. What I'd like to do is look at it, and then if it's something we want to use, I'd probably want to get the original that you had so I could make a real good scan of it—or I'd actually have the publisher make a good scan of it—and then return the original to you.

RL: I think I can do it, (inaudible). I think I can copy those. I'll see what I can do.

MH: That'd be fine, and there's no particular rush. I mean, this is not something I need instantly.

RL: Well, we're trying to get away in the morning, and we've both turned up ill this week. I'm in pretty good shape, and I have sore throat, but my wife has an intestinal thing, so she's iffy. But we're supposed to fly out of here in the morning, going to Kansas City, 'cause my grandson's graduating from school, from college there. He's at Kansas in Lawrence. So we're bound to be there.

MH: And then you're coming back to Hobbs?

RL: I'll be back—we'll be back late Sunday. Sometime next week I'll get this together for you.

MH: That'd be terrific. Let me ask you a couple more questions. You never saw any of the other camps or other people?

RL: No.

MH: Over the course of the years afterwards, what'd you do when you came back to the States?

RL: Well, when I came back, I had an eighteen-month-old son that I'd never seen, and I went to work, started to work for the weekly newspaper that I started in, when I first started printing. I worked there a couple of years, and then I moved up to a larger town, to a daily, and worked there for a while. And then around in 1950, I came out to New Mexico. My younger brother had come out here and he'd gone to work for a weekly paper that had a job shop in it, and that's what I was doing after—I didn't work very long at the newspaper there, because I couldn't find a place to live. Everything's booming (inaudible), and a guy called me from this commercial job shop and said, "I've got a six-room apartment that you can have if you come work for me," so that's what I did. I worked for him for a couple of years. My brother then went to work for a place here that had a weekly paper and a job shop in it. And they needed a job printer, so I—the Lord led me here, but (inaudible) and the two boys, moved out here to New Mexico,

November fifty [1950]. I worked there for a couple of years, and then I moved down here to the daily newspaper here in Hobbs.

MH: Where is Hobbs, exactly?

RL: It's in the southeast corner of New Mexico, about 95 miles from Midland [Texas], about 105 from Lubbock [Texas]. Heck, I worked there at that paper, that daily, for six and a half years, and then an opportunity came along. Small job shop; a friend of mine had a little money and he went with me and we bought it, and my wife and I operated it. After about four or five years, I bought him out, and we operated it for forty years. I sold it in November ninety-nine [1999]. It's still operating, the same name.

MH: Did the impact of the things you saw at Ohrdruf ever come back to you in later life?

RL: No, I wouldn't say that it did. The biggest impact I had from the whole thing was that I got back to here and people would complain about how tough it was and everything, and I'd think about all those people I'd seen over there and what they had gone through and it kind of ticked me off, you know. I had a real resentment about that, but nothin' major, no.

And I work—I didn't get my education: that was the biggest mistake I made. Many of the guys went on to college and so forth, and I didn't. I went right in to work, but I guess it was intended to be that way. It all worked out. We raised four kids, two of 'em turned into lawyers. One of 'em works for computer—he works for Symantec; he worked for Controlled Data for twenty-nine years and they went out of business, and he's been with Symantec now for several years. So one, the youngest daughter, is in Austin; she's an accountant.

MH: Sounds like life was good to you.

RL: It has been, yes.

MH: That's a good thing.

RL: And I have—I really didn't go through bad times. You know, time was different. We didn't have another child for six years, but we finally got everything settled, I guess, and we had three. So, they were about three years apart.

MH: Good. Do you happen to have a photo of yourself from World War II?

RL: I have some photos. I've got some snapshots, (inaudible) some friends. I've got, like, a studio photo that was made in Camp Butner, North Carolina that I sent home to my family. Just a head shot, you know.

MH: If you have time, you could scan that too. I'd appreciate that.

RL: I can do that.

MH: And anything else that I didn't ask you about?

RL: No, nothing. My division, we did make an assault crossing the Rhine. From there we hit, we almost got to (inaudible) when they shut us down, and we stepped out for two or three weeks. We were gonna set up a final protection line, you know, waitin' for the Russians. 'Course, when the Russians—we never saw the Russians, but we saw a lot of Germans coming from—getting away from the Russians.

MH: Right.

RL: We saw 'em in conveyance again, kinda like the displaced persons were; they were riding horses and anything that moves they could get on, and it was pretty amazing, 'cause they surrendered to Americans and not the Russians.

MH: Not to the Russians. When you were at Ohrdruf, you were Company M, 355<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division?

RL: Yes.

MH: And what was your rank at that time?

RL: PFC, as high as I got. I was the Jeep driver. I was a weapons carry driver.

MH: Thank you very much, I really appreciate it. It's just an amazing coincidence that you told me about that underground place and I just heard about it yesterday from the retired general, and he said that's the reason they went looking for Ohrdruf.

RL: Well, I just always felt it had to be some reason. That was the one—they had spent a lot constructing there. And it had some basis, some meaning. I never knew exactly what it was.

MH: Would the cables going in and out of that place have been all underground?

RL: They must have been underground, 'cause I didn't see them outside.

MH: Right. And Ohrdruf was in the woods someplace, wasn't it?

RL: It was a wooded area down there, yeah. We—even in that camp there was some woods, 'cause the other guy and I were lookin' around and in some leaves back there there was a human skeleton—

MH: Many of them or just a few?

RL: Just one. Yeah.

MH: That has to be a bizarre discovery.

RL: Well, that whole thing was bizarre. That was—I don't know if you've seen it or not, but there's a couple of letters in the 89<sup>th</sup> Society that I have copies of 'em that two guys who escaped from—they were actually being marched from there to the bigger camp. And that evening—and of course the guards, they were all very frightened, I'm sure, 'cause they knew we were right close to them. Anyhow, after dark these two guys slipped away from the column; one of 'em was a priest, and they are at Society's conventions, many years later, of course. And they wrote, and I have copies of the speeches they made, telling about their experience there—not in the camp so much as how they got away and all that, how they were treated there all right. So, if you could find that—or I could make you copies of that, too.

MH: I'd be very much interested in reading it, if you could do that.

RL: There's another thing that I've got that I always felt I was impressed with; in fact, I took it down to the newspaper here four years ago, I guess, when I first got it. This was a—kid must have been about eight or nine years old when we came into his town, and I think he went to Australia or somewhere down in that area at work. He's retired and came back to Germany, and he sent this letter to the Society telling about his experience there when the GIs came in. And I took it down to the newspaper; I wanted him to print it, 'cause I thought it was interesting. Well, it wound up—instead of doing that, they printed a special of me with my picture on it, in the newspaper. That wasn't what I was after, but that's what I got. I never did get this article in the newspaper.

MH: Do you have a copy of the special thing?

RL: I'll do that, too.

MH: I think my address is on the e-mail, but I'll send you another email with my address on it in case you just want to mail it. Well, thank you very much.

RL: Well, I know I can scan that and send it to you on the email.

MH: Okay, whatever's easiest, whether you want to snail mail it or email it.

RL: It was just interesting because these kids—yeah, it was so foreign to him. I think his final line in there was he decided to—with American kids had right, something to that effect. But anyway, I thought it was interesting. But I'll send it to you.

MH: Thank you very much, and congratulations on the graduation.

RL: Well, thank you very much.

MH: And have a safe trip.

RL: Well, thank you.

MH: Okay. Bye-bye, sir.

*End of interview*