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# Roger Maurice oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, September 5, 2008

Roger Maurice (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. Scratching noises occur during the recording.]

**Michael Hirsh:** Your name is Roger, R-o-g-e-r.

**Roger Maurice:** Yeah.

MH: Maurice, M-a-u-r-i-c-e?

RM: Right.

MH: And you live at....

RM: Yes.

MH: Your phone number is....

RM: Yes.

MH: What day were you born on, sir?

RM: I was born on April 17, 1926.

MH: Nineteen twenty-six. And you were with the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

RM: Yes I was in the 99<sup>th</sup> Division.

MH: 395<sup>th</sup> Regiment

RM: Yes.

MH: Company K.

{{{0:00:30.0}}

RM: Right.

MH: So, tell me what you recall about the concentration camp you got to in the war.

RM: Well, the thing is, we came to this concentration camp, and the officers told us to guard the outside and not let the prisoners go, 'cause they wanted a first-hand look at them. So, the thing is, we tried to keep 'em in, but some of them were getting out, whether we wanted to or not, and I was too civilized to kill a man that was starving. So, the thing is, some of them got out and they went down to the village. And they brought back a hundred pound—some potatoes in a cloth bag. I helped them get the cloth bag into the camp, and some of them prisoners were so hungry that they were reaching through the wire and getting blades of grass to eat. And then another one, another prisoner, came back, and he had a live sheep on his shoulders. So, I helped him get the sheep into the camp, and that was the end of the man I seen.

MH: You didn't see them kill the sheep and eat it?

RM: No, I didn't—I didn't see them kill the sheep and eat it.

MH: How were these emaciated people able to carry that kind of food?

RM: Huh?

MH: These people were skin and bones, right?

RM: Yeah, they were pretty well skin and bones.

MH: But they could carry the potatoes and the sheep?

RM: Yes, they could.

MH: What—when you got to the camp, were the Germans gone?

RM: Well, we took 'em prisoners. We took some of them prisoners, and some of the others was able to get away from us.

MH: Was there shooting?

RM: There was—no, not too much.

MH: Did you have to shoot?

RM: Yeah, but I didn't hit anybody. I don't think I hit anybody.

MH: Where were the people you were shooting at?

RM: Oh, they were leaving. They were walking across an open field. Yeah.

MH: And those were the SS guards?

RM: Yeah, I think they were the guards.

MH: Do you know the name of this camp?

RM: I'd have to look it up.

MH: Or what village it was near?

RM: I think it was Hemen, Germany.

MH: Hemen or Hemer?

RM: Yeah, something like that. I'd have to look it up in my—I got a pile on it.

MH: Okay. If you could do that, I'd appreciate it. How long did you stay at the camp?

RM: We just stayed about—maybe about three, four hours. And then they got us and we had to follow the squad leader, you know. Yeah.

MH: Was this the only camp you came to?

RM: Yes. You see, I'm a disabled vet. On April 29, I got hit, to my left shoulder out through my back, a bullet. And that was the end of my career, 'cause May 7, they declared V-E Day. So, the thing is, I went to the hospital, and I was in the hospital until I went home.

MH: So, you were at this camp obviously before you got hit, right?

RM: Yes. Yeah. We had that camp much before we got hit.

MH: What did the camp look like?

RM: Well, there was barbed wire around it, and I don't remember too much about the camp itself.

MH: Were the prisoners men and women?

RM: No, just men.

MH: Just men.

RM: Yeah. I think they were forced to work in the—I forgot if it was a mine or something.

MH: Well, was it a stone quarry, by any chance?

RM: Huh?

MH: Was it a quarry?

RM: Yeah, it might've been. Yeah.

MH: Did you talk to any of the prisoners?

RM: No, I didn't talk to any of 'em.

MH: So, you couldn't tell if they were there because they were Jewish or because they were political prisoners, or why they were there.

RM: No, I couldn't tell you. 'Cause I didn't talk to them, and they didn't talk back, so—

MH: You didn't happen to take any pictures there, did you?

RM: No, I didn't take any pictures. Of course, I didn't have no camera, you see. When I went in the service, I wasn't well off. I didn't have very much money.

MH: Where did you live before you went in the service?

RM: Well, I lived in Leominster, Massachusetts.

MH: What's the name of the city?

RM: Leominster.

MH: Leominster, okay.

RM: L-e-o-m-i-n-s-t-e-r.

MH: And were you drafted or did you enlist?

RM: Yes, I was drafted.

MH: So you had finished high school?

RM: Huh?

MH: You had finished high school?

RM: No, I had not finished high school. It was just after the Depression. My father had five children; we were five children in the family. So, the thing is, of course, I did work—I worked around Leominster and Pittsburgh.

MH: What kind of work were you doing?

RM: I was a fireman. The thing is, I fired boilers. I wasn't putting out fires, I was running boilers.

MH: And when did you go to Europe with the Army, do you remember?

RM: I'm not sure about the day. But the thing is, we—you see, the thing is, when I got drafted from Fort Devens, they took me down to Camp Crowder, Missouri. And there I took up my basic training, and then I had a spec number, 641, which was pole lineman, field lineman and switchboard operator. I got about halfway through when the captain assembled the company, and he gave us a big speech on the infantry and he asks for any volunteers to take one step forward. Nobody took a step forward. So, the thing is, he dismissed the company, and about a week or two later, he reassembled us and he had a roster of names, which he read, which included my name. And he said to take one step forward. We did take one step forward, and he said, "You have now volunteered for the infantry."

So, the thing is, he—in a couple days, they put us on the troop train, and we went down to Camp Livingston, Louisiana. And we took six weeks advance infantry training, and then we were told that we had a delay in route up to Fort Meade, Maryland. I went home, and then I took the train back to Fort Meade, Maryland, after my delay in route, and there we stayed about a week or two, and then they took us up to Fort Shanks, New York. We were there a couple days, and then they took us and put us on the *Queen Mary*, the ship the *Queen Mary*. We sailed across the ocean in about seven days. We landed in England, and from there they took us on the troop train over to Southampton. And there, we got on the ship and we crossed the English Channel over to Verviers, Belgium. No, I mean Le Havre, France.

MH: Le Havre, France? Okay.

RM: And from Le Havre, France, we took a train up to Verviers, Belgium.

MH: You were riding inside the boxcars?

RM: Huh?

MH: You were in the 40-by-8 boxcars?

RM: Yeah. There, they issued us our rifles and ammunition, and then they loaded us on the truck and they took us up to the front. They put me in the 99<sup>th</sup> Division, and about a week later, we crossed the Remagen Bridge. And we went from there, where we had to establish a defense position on top of the river, and from there we went on to different places.

MH: Did you ever run into a soldier named Curt Whiteway?

RM: Huh?

MH: Did you ever run into a soldier named Curt Whiteway?

RM: Yes, I did.

MH: In Europe? Or back home?

RM: No. No, it was over here.

MH: Over here, okay. I know he was in the 99<sup>th</sup>, but I'm trying to follow some of the places that he went to.

RM: Yeah. Well, one man that was with me in the 99<sup>th</sup>, in the same squad I was, was—oh, let's see—I can't remember the name at the moment.

MH: So, you got hit on April 29. The war was only going to go on for another week.

RM: Yeah. I was hit the 29<sup>th</sup>, and May 7, the war was over.

MH: Where were you when you got hit? What was going on?

RM: Well, we were crossing an open field, and there was a slight raise in the land, about 100 yards from us. And there was a village, and we were going to that village, and some SS troopers were held up in that rise, and that's where we got shot. There was two other men shot besides myself. It was a second lieutenant who had just come on the line, and he got shot bad. I think he was dying. And they took me, and they gave me my sulfur pills and they put my dressing on my back, and then they, we—I was able to get to a house where they were able to take care of me. They gave me a shot of morphine, and then they took me by Jeep over to the first aid station. There, they rearranged the bandage on my back, and they sent us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Evacuation Hospital. And there, they did the surgery. They gave me a sedative, you know, to knock me out, and they did all the surgery there: you know, cut the loose flesh and all that. And I was out, of course. They had given me some sedatives, so, of course, that knocked me right out. And they tell me that General [George S.] Patton came by and put the Purple Heart on my litter.

MH: But you don't remember seeing Patton.

RM: No, I was completely out.

MH: How long before you got hit were you at the slave labor camp? Days, weeks?

RM: Oh, it must have been weeks. Yeah.

MH: And then they evacuated you back to the States?

RM: No. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> Evacuation, they took me by plane over to England. I was in the 149<sup>th</sup> General Hospital; I was there for about a couple weeks, and then the war was over. They shut down that hospital and they transferred me over to the 154<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in England. And there, I started getting a little better and then they took us after a month or so, they took us and put us on a hospital ship. And we crossed the Atlantic and landed at—I think it was North Carolina. And there they took us by hospital train up to Camp Edwards on Cape Cod, Buzzard Bay.

MH: So, that's getting you almost back home.

RM: Yeah. 'Course, I still lived in Massachusetts, so I was able to go home on a convalescent leave. And while I was home on a thirty-day convalescent leave, they dropped the atom bomb and declared V-J Day. Japan surrendered. So, I was in that rehabilitation camp, and I finally got discharged from there.

MH: When were you discharged?

RM: October 11, 1945.

MH: Forty-five [1945]? What was your rank when you were in the war?

RM: In the war? I was just a private.

MH: You were a private?

RM: Yeah.

MH: And you got the Purple Heart.

RM: Yes, I got the Purple Heart and I got the Bronze Star.

MH: How tall a guy were you when you were in the Army?

RM: How tall? I was about 5'6", somewhere around there.

MH: So you weren't a big guy, then.

RM: No, I was not a very big guy.

MH: When you came back, did you—what did you do, once you got discharged from the Army and you recovered?

RM: Well, I stayed home for about a month or so, and then I retook my old job, which was oil burners. I didn't have to shovel any coal, 'cause I couldn't shovel coal or do any hard work. And later on, I came to Springfield and I worked on the time near Christmas, and the post office hired me to handle the mail. I did that for a couple of years, and then the thing is, on the third year, they tried to make me load the mailbags on carts and transport them here and there. I had to quit the job, because my back was killing me. So, that's why I couldn't do any very hard work.

MH: So you—essentially, you were disabled by that war wound.

RM: Yes, I was disabled by that. When I came out, I had 50 percent disability. And then after three, four years, they cut me down to 30 percent. I was at 30 percent until about last year, when they reexamined me, and I think they raised my disability, maybe. I'm not sure what I got now, maybe 40 percent or so.

MH: Did you get married?

RM: Yes, I got married when I was in Springfield here.

MH: You have children?

RM: Huh?

MH: Children?

RM: No, we have no children at all.

MH: Any chance that you have a picture of yourself from World War II?

RM: I think I may.

MH: What I'd like to do is send you an envelope, and if you could mail me the picture, I'll scan it into the computer and then send it back to you.

RM: Yeah, okay.

MH: Okay?

RM: Yeah. That man I was telling you about, he was in the squad with me. And his name is Mac McGuinness.

MH: Mac?

RM: McGuiness. And he lives at Colorado Springs, Colorado.

MH: You don't happen to have a phone number, do you?

RM: I got it somewhere, but I'm not sure.

MH: Well, I'll send you the envelope and you can send me the picture, and if you find the phone number, if you could send it to me.

RM: Yeah, okay.

MH: And if you have a picture of yourself—you know, a recent picture, too—I'd like that to be able to use in the book. I'll send you an envelope shortly.

RM: Yeah, okay.

MH: Thank you very much, sir. I really appreciate your time.

RM: Wait a minute.

MH: Yes, sir.

RM: What's your name?

MH: My name is Michael Hirsh, H-i-r-s-h.

RM: Fish?

MH: No, Hirsh. Like Hershey bar, but Hirsh.

RM: Oh.

MH: H-i-r-s-h.

RM: Oh, okay.

MH: Okay?

RM: Yeah.

MH: All right, thank you very much.

RM: Okay, you're welcome.

MH: All right, Bye-bye.

RM: Bye.

*End of interview.*