

LEROY BASHOR

This is a portion of the Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940s Program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Counsel with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today is February 4, 2009, and we're here at TJ's Cafe in King City, Missouri, in Gentry County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. We're here to interview Leroy Bashor and he was born on Feb 22, 1924, lived during the 1940s, served in WWII in the army, and was a private first class.

Amthor: Okay, Leroy, can you tell us a little bit about your background, what did your parents do for a living, when were you born, where were you born, if you had any brothers and sisters? What was life like in the 1940s?

Bashor: Well, I was born in Union Star, Missouri, and I lived on a farm all my life. And my folks, they had, I had two sisters and one brother. My sisters lived in Topeka, they're younger than I am, and I had a brother 20 years younger than I am, but he's passed away. And I've lived there all of my life, you know – farmed.

Amthor: What was farming like at that point?

Bashor: Well, we went through the hard times. It was in the depression then. We got by. We didn't have a lot of things, but we made it.

Amthor: Now, did you enlist or were you drafted into the war?

Bashor: I enlisted. I was married before I enlisted.

Amthor: What year was that? How old were you?

Bashor: 20

Amthor: And what year did you go into the war?

Bashor: When I was 20.

Amthor: What year?

Bashor: 44

Amthor: Did you have any other relatives in the war at that time?

Bashor: I got a brother-in-law, you know, married my oldest sister, was in the service. He was in the Marines.

Amthor: What were you doing on the day Pearl Harbor was bombed.

Bashor: I can't answer that. The only thing I can remember about that is when I was born my Grandpa Bashor lived with us. And he was a bug on that radio and he heard it on the radio and he said, "It looks like we're in the war." That was the words he said.

Amthor: Do you remember any of the propaganda that was being said at that time about Europe and Asia or China?

Bashor: No. I wasn't paying no attention to it. I was doing something else.

Amthor: Did you listen to the radio much about the progress of the war or anything before you went into the war?

Bashor: Oh, some, not a lot, but some.

Amthor: Can you tell us about your basic training camp and your experiences there, where you were stationed and so forth?

Bashor: I was stationed at Ft Sill, Oklahoma, and I was in a mule pack. And we had a lot of mules. And, of course, when I was on the farm and was around horses and mules and I had a blast. Them guys come in there from New York and never seen a mule and they was put in a mule pack. And they'd lay in them cots of a night and gripe and groan and said they had sore feet and everything. Had a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun, really, in the mule pack.

Amthor: What is this mule pack? Can you explain that to us who don't know what that is?

Bashor: Well, when we'd go out to camp, them mules packed everything that we took with us. We took our guns. We put - it took 7 mules to carry a 75 Howitzer. And the other mules would have ammunition on them. And the other mules would have your canteens and stuff you used for pitch camp. And about the longest hike we ever took was 25 mile. But I kind of had a blast in that 'cause I was around that livestock and they thought I wasn't.

Amthor: How was the barracks and the food at those camps?

Baashor: Well, a lot of people griped about the food, but you know, everybody ate the same thing. And if you was heavy, you trimmed up. If you was real thin, you probably put on a little bit of weight. And they all looked alike when they got done. And one thing about the mule pack - all of - everybody that was in that was 5-10, or between 5-10 and 6 ft. They all had the same height because they had to put them guns and stuff up on them mules and they had to have people of a certain height to do that. And they was a pretty uniform bunch - you know, in weight and height, because you had to weigh so much to get in there. You had to weigh 150 and had be at least 5-10 to be in that outfit, so them little short guys didn't get in.

Amthor: Did you get much specialized training while you were there in a certain area?

Bashor: Well, I didn't there. I don't think. After that, after I left basic, then I went in to - they was going to put me in a wiring outfit, and I got blood boils on me and I had to go to the hospital and I was out of it too long cause then the outfit got ready to go overseas, so they put me back where I was. So...

Amthor: Can you tell us a little bit about your service now? Where did you go from there? Did you go overseas? Where were you stationed?

Bashor: Well, I left Ft Sill – we went to Camp Swift, Texas, and that's where I joined the Tenth Mountain Division and they come from Camp Hale. But they went to Camp Swift and I wasn't there very long, maybe, seems like maybe about 2 months, maybe, and we shipped overseas. We left Camp Swift and went to Newport News, Virginia, on a train and Christmas Day we was on the train but they stopped the train and we had Christmas dinner. And we was headed, and we got to Newport News and we wasn't there just a day or two and we got on a ship and went overseas. And we docked at Naples, Italy, and we got on the LCI and went up the coast there and we went on the line at Florence, Italy. And after we got over there, we never seen a mule. They transferred us to 105 Howitzers - motorized. Well, we thought we was in ?????, but the guns were enough alike and it didn't take but 2 days 'til we was ready to go. They trained us 2 days on that when we went motorized. But I never seen a mule after that.

Amthor: So did you go – is that the last place you were at or did you go- have other stations?

Bashor: Oh, we went on the line there. It was in the middle of winter – cold as the dickens. I said I'd never complained about being hot after that. But we was in the mountains –we was in the Mountain Division - and we was there 'til it was over. When we got through the mountains, then we went into the Poe Valley from there. And then they blew up a bridge on us there and we stalled there awhile until we got a temporary bridge put in – Poe Valley there.

Amthor: Did you stay there until the end of the war – in that area?

Bashor: No, we got across that river. We went as far north as Argo. That's the northern part of Italy, but we didn't go through the pass. And when it was over, they declared it over there.

Amthor: Can you tell us something about your combat duty – your missions that you were involved in?

Bashor: Oh, well, when we hit the Poe Valley, I know one night we was going up there one night and we run into 'em, Germans, right there on the highway and right before that they had hit a truck that was in our convoy – they hit the gas tank direct, and, of course

that set that on fire and blew that up and the ammunition we had on there – it went off for a long time. But, then the next day our planes was ????? them and they was retreating there and they had some horses that was pulling our artillery pieces back and they killed one of them. There was a horse loose there, so we went and caught this horse and there was a wine - winery there full of wine. So we traded this horse for that winery. We had more wine on the truck than we had ammunition then.

Kelley: Did you get to sample some?

Bashor: Oh, yes!

Kelley: How was it?

Bashor: It was good! When we'd go take a town – we'd go through a town – them women would give us bread and wine. Yal, they'd throw it up to the truck to us. Yal. They was glad to see us, you know. And it was good. They'd make good wine. Of course, we was glad to see it, too.

Amthor: So the Italians were good to you?

Bashor: Most of them, Yes, I'd say they were cause they was glad to see us.

Amthor: Now the other parts. You mainly stayed in Italy. So did you venture out to France and Germany at all?

Bashor: Well, after they called the war over there, there was five of us got a pass. And we didn't have no money, but we got a - had a weapons carrier and so we bummed all the cigarettes off the boys we could bum and – and we filled up all the gas cans there at the depot and we started out – we was going to France. Well, we'd get someplace and we'd try to sell that gas and we'd sell that gas for a dollar a gallon and back then that was a lot. Well, we'd go into a restaurant somewhere and get that owner and they would buy it from us and we could sell cigarettes. So we got enough money to get to France. And we'd come to where we could get gas at a US depot. Then we filled up all our cans again. So, we managed. We got to Nice, France. Picked up the Stars and Stripes, that was a paper over there. “Tenth Mountain Division is headed for the states. Leaving immediately.” Here we was in France. Well, we didn't stay in France. We headed back to our outfit to catch it so we could go home. They had the stuff packed when we got back there to come home. Well, that was about it over there.

Daughter: Didn't one night you wake up your sergeant and tell him that you'd better move them?

Bashor: Huh?

Daughter: Didn't you wake up your sergeant one night and tell him he'd better move them?

Bashor: Oh, yes.

Daughter: Tell them that.

Bashor: One night we'd moved into an area and they was shelling us awful hard and I was on guard duty. I went over and told our sergeant – I said - I think we'd better move. What's the reason? I said they're zeroing in on us. You could tell they was shell go over– shell go short. That's the way they zeroed in. So he said go get them up. And we moved – didn't move very far – but we moved over the side of a hill the rest of that night then and got away from it. You know – cause that artillery shell – you know – The closest I ever was probably to getting wounded was when I was in the Poe Valley - when I went forward to dig in so we could move our Howitzers up and I was up with the infantry. And we had a net – a camouflage net up – and we was putting up sandbags. That's what two of us was up there doing. And I dug a fox hole first thing and I put a shelter half over half of my tent and the next morning I had a hole in it. And that's probably the closest I everyou know.

Amthor: So how were those fox holes?

Bashor: Hum?

Amthor: How were those fox holes?

Bashor: Oh, it depends on how you made them. They wasn't bad if you could make them big enough. We even made them big enough that we could put a door or something over the top of them and then get in there and two or three of us could play cards. You know – just depends on what you done, where you was at, what was going on, too, made a lot of difference.

Amthor: How about entertainment while you were there? Did you have USO?

Bashor: Yes, Red Cross was there.

Amthor: Did you see anyone in particular that came?

Bashor: Oh, I don't know now names. But if we'd get a leave and go back to town, you know – get a leave, you know, ever so often you'd get a pass – if you wanted it or try to get it. We went back to Florence one time, I remember I did, I think I sent mom and Loarine and them all– I went to a store and bought them all a pin, I think it was, yal, and sent it home.

Amthor: Did you get a lot of care packages from home?

Bashor: Oh, yal, if I needed something, I'd write home and they'd send it. One time I wrote home and said, "I need lard." you know. We'd got stationed in a potato patch and

didn't have no way to cook them. So I wrote and, by gosh, they sent me some lard. And I had a gallon can there and we cooked them potatoes in that can.

Kelley: How long did it take to get your requests?

Bashor: Well, it didn't seem like it took too long. But we got it.

Kelley: And you like fried potatoes?

Bashor: Boy, they looked awful good over there. Them C rations didn't look very good – K rations.

Amthor: How was that?

Bashor: Oh, some of them are pretty good and some of them aren't. Now pork and beans was real good. Some had hash and, boy, I didn't care for it, you know. You know, oh, you can live on it and you ought to be thankful we even had it, you know, really. But I always had some extra in my pack. I always had some extra of them in my pack. I never did go without food.

Amthor: How was your sea trips back and forth? Because I've heard... Did you ride...

Bashor: We were in a convoy going over and a convoy coming back. Pretty rough.

Amthor: How was the food on those ships?

Bashor: Oh, I didn't care for it.

Amthor: You didn't have sardines, did you? There was one person who had sardines all the way over.

Bashor: Oh, I don't know about that. I've forgot what we had, but I know it wasn't very good. I know we didn't have much food, it didn't seem like. They fed you twice a day. When we got to Italy, they put us on an LCI. We went up that coast there to land us up there around Florence or west, or east of Florence, I guess it was. And we got in a storm on that darn thing and we was supposed to make it in a day. We was five days getting there. The storm – that there waves higher than that little old boat. We was stationed in that back end. And they had all the food in there. You talk about food. We opened up the food. We had plenty to eat then. We got hold of some fruit, you know, in cans, and that was really good. That was really a treat.

Amthor: Tell us about your uniforms – how many – what did you have – as clothing-wise for your troops? Did you have more than two outfits or – did you have a dress uniform and a regular uniform?

Bashor: Well, you had kind of a dress uniform, and you had your regular khakis you wore, you know— I suppose you had about - I forgot about that - two of them, maybe , I don't know, and one dress uniform, maybe. I don't know.

Amthor: Did you have washing facilities? How did you care for all of the uniforms?

Bashor: No, not very good. I know when I was stationed in Colorado, we boiled them in a bucket to wash them and hung them up in there.

Kelley: Did you go to Colorado so they could train you in mountains more since you were going to...

Bashor: No. Okay, when I come back from overseas, that's where they sent me 'cause we was headed to Japan. We was one of the first outfits to leave Europe - our outfit. We was the last outfit - probably one of the last divisions over there, but we was one of the first divisions to leave 'cause they was shipping us to Japan. Yal.

Daughter: Tell them what you did in Colorado.

Bashor: Oh, well, I come home – I left Europe and come home – I was stationed – they sent me to Camp Carson, Colorado. That's where our outfit was going to reorganize and go to Japan. We were supposed to be the division to invade Japan. But when we was coming home from Europe, we was outside the east coast about one day and they dropped the atomic bomb. I never will forget I was sitting on the steps on that ship with - there was a Lieutenant named Sharpie from Texas and he said, " Roy, you know, this thing may be over." when we heard that. 'Cause he said, " You know where we're headed?" And I said, "Yal, I've got an idee where we're headed." Then we landed. Then, before we got to Kansas City on the train, they had dropped the other bomb. Well, it was over, you might say. Hell, when we got into Kansas City I couldn't even get to the bus station. Everybody was celebrating. Well, an older guy come to me and said, "Where do you want to go?" I said, " I'd like to get the bus station, but there ain't no way." He said, "You come with me and I'll get you there." And he took me through the alleys and got me to the bus station so I could come home. I was home for 30 days and then I went to Camp Carson. So then we started training there to go overseas. And then they split us up and shipped part of us – I ended up at a place named, I believe, north of Denver and we was stationed there awhile and guarding German POWs. Well, we was guarding there in camp and we was - they was working – people would go in and hire them from the government to pick corn or whatever. Well, they sent me out with a bunch of them to guard them picking corn. Them guys wasn't going to work. They had it good and they knew it. So, I said to that farmer that had them, I said, "Do you care if I pick corn, too? I'll just pick – I don't know what they're getting, but – I'll – I'll leave a gun right here on this cab and I'll be the inside one. All right?" Well, that makes them feel better that I'd do that, I think. One day, I had a chance – there was a few pheasants around there. We ate with them – the guards was there. We ate right with the prisoners and they was cooking it. I asked them, "Would you cook a pheasant if I'd get one?"

“Yal.” I said, all right, I’d take them in a pheasant. Then after that they sent me to Fitzsimmons General Hospital in the hospital area. Well, there was a compound there for prisoners and we stayed in an old school house. And there was a good friend of mine, James Morgan, lived at Buffalo, Wyoming. Him and I was real good friends, and he said, “Roy, we’ll go to that Denver stock show when it comes on and, I’ll tell you what, we’ll drink beer and we’ll have a ball ‘cause, he said, I know all those guys that’ll be there.” I said, okay, we’ll go. Sure enough, we went and he was right. They was all there and we had a good time. But we’d guard them POWs and they would go and work in this hospital area – worked in the hospitals in different places, some would wash dishes, some of them would run the pool hall, or whatever - laundries – anything there in that hospital area. Them POWs worked there. But we’d have to take them around and deliver them around to each one of them places every morning and then that evening we’d check ‘em in to their compound. And we guarded them with dogs. You talk about something good. I could go get that dog and I was his master and James would be his enemy. My friend was that dog’s enemy. He’d eat him up. And we tried our damndest to get in that shack so that dog could stay in there with both of us. But, that dog didn’t like it. But whoever didn’t have that dog, you were the enemy of that dog. He’d take you. And them Germans didn’t want no part of that dog either, and I don’t blame them. But them POWs that come back there of a night and check in and if one of them was going to cause trouble – they- our first sergeant, he was a German, and if something was wrong, he’d tell us, and if one of them Germans in that compound was going to cause a stink, they would squeal on him. And they didn’t want bread and water when we got done with them.

Daughter: Tell them about that one making that ring.

Bashor: Yal, I had – I don’t know where it’s at.

Daughter: I don’t know either, but he made it.

Bashor: He said, “Roy, give me a half a dollar and I’ll make you a ring - one of them Germans - POWs. And he made me a ring just perfect. And you could read on there – half a dollar –on that ring after he got it made. Yal, he was good. I don’t know how he done it, but he done it there in the compound.. But he made me a ring out of that half a dollar.

Amthor: So, how did you feel about President Truman when he dropped the bomb?

Bashor: We thought it was great. If you think you’s headed for Japan, you’d think it was great, I think.

Amthor: You were already home, basically, when the war was over.

Bashor: Well, I was on the train when they dropped that last one.

Amthor: So, did you get a big reception from your family when you got ...

Bashor: Oh, yal, good gosh, when you got to Kansas City, you couldn't go nowhere. Everybody was out celebrating.

Amthor: Did it take you long to adjust back to civilian life?

Bashor: Oh, no, not me.

Amthor: So did you go back to farming?

Bashor: Yal.

Amthor: What was farming like at that time? Did you have to buy land? Did you have already the land you were farming?

Bashor: Well, my dad owned where I lived – where I farmed. Yal.

Amthor: What were some of the prices during that time for crops and livestock?

Bashor: I don't know about – I can't remember exactly what they was. I know that ...I don't even remember what cows was worth.

Kelley: Did you still work with the mules and horses then back home?

Bashor: No, I had a team of horses, but I got a tractor right after that. In fact, my dad and I bought a tractor just as I went into the service. He took it. But I bought one when I got home.

Kelley: What kind did you buy it?

Bashor: Mine was an International. The first one dad and I bought was a John Deere, but the one I got was an International.

Amthor: So which one did you think was better?

Bashor: Oh, I don't know. They are both good. Today, probably, if I bought one, I'd buy a John Deere, but back then International was good. But a lot of them got John Deeres around home now, so I'd say, if I was farming, probably...

Amthor: Do you stay in touch with the fellows that you met over there – that you served with? Are you still seeing some of them?

Bashor: No, the closest one I had was James Morgan and I went up there – what year – to see him - and I didn't know it – when we went to Buffalo. You wasn't very old.

Daughter: To Wyoming? I was 4. 1960

Bashor: 1960. I went up there to see him and he'd already passed away and I didn't know it. He was in a car wreck. I went to see – I called and couldn't find his name nowhere, but I finally got a hold of his folks. And they told me what happened, but they told us to come on out and we went on out there and stayed all night with them. But we did hear from her for awhile – his mother – but eventually didn't hear –I don't know -she must have passed on or something 'cause we never heard no more. She was a school teacher, his mother was.

Amthor: Did you join the American Legion or the VFW?

Bashor: Yes, well, my dad was an American Legion member and I joined, too.

Amthor: Were you proud to be a veteran?

Bashor: Oh, yal. Dad was a 60 year member down there when he passed away and I'm a 63 year member now.

Amthor: Were you worried about the threat of Communism – the spread of it?

Bashor: Ah, you'd better be, I think. I think you should be.

Amthor: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill when you got back?

Bashor: Yal, I went to GI School. Yal.

Amthor: Did you go in farming?

Bashor: Yal, agriculture.

Amthor: So what do you think are the differences between the war of today and the war that you fought?

Bashor: I don't know. Too many wars today, it seems like we don't finish them.

Daughter: Technology

Bashor: Just like the Korean War, it never was settled, really, I don't think. I don't know as the Vietnam War was ever really settled. That's what I can't understand. And the one we're fighting now. Is it going to be settled? I don't know about that.

Amthor: Is there one thing that stands out in your mind that made a difference when you were in the war or during that time period - the 1940s– that made a difference in your life, do you think. Any one thing that really stands out?

Bashor: I wouldn't know what it'd be.

Daughter: Gee, you got married.

Bashor: Well, I was married before that though.

Amthor: Well, it was during that period – the 1940s.

Bashor: Yal, well, OK. Yal, OK.

Amthor: If you could give advice to college students now about life and with war in the 1940s, what would that be?

Bashor: Well, today, just like schools, and a little bit of everything else, they haven't got enough discipline. I don't think. They took it away from the teachers. And their folks are a little bit to blame for that, too. I think that's one of the big problems right there. But I may be wrong. They don't think so.

Amthor: Is there anything else that you'd like to ask? Did we miss any stories that you'd like to share?

Daughter: The way you communicated home with V-mail. Those little letters. Maybe you could talk about that.

Amthor: Yal, your communication home. Could you tell us about your V mail?

Bashor: Well, I sent V mails all the time. I don't know.

Amthor: Weren't they a little smaller than your regular letters? They kind of shrank them or something.

Bashor: Oh, yal.

Daughter: They'd block out what they couldn't say. So he'd try to write things that ...

Amthor: Kind of a code?

Daughter: He'd say they were headed up to the town east of King City, like we were headed up there. Well, Berlin is out east of King City. So that Mom knew they were headed north toward Berlin, but they never got there.

Bashor: I told Mom, though, where I was going to be by code.

Amthor: So you kind of created some kind of code?

Bashor: I did on where I'd be. Yal, I told her.

Amthor: That's kind of different in today's army. You know they're using their phones all the time and talking about where they are. And you couldn't even tell anybody where you were. You weren't supposed to.

Bashor: Right. But, heck fire, they knew when we got overseas where we were. They knew exactly where we was and what we was doing.

Amthor: Did you listen to Axis Sally?

Bashor: Yal. What was her name? Rose?

Amthor: Tokyo Rose. What were some of the things they'd say?

Bashor: Oh, I don't remember now. They might fly over ????? and try to weaken you or talk big. But that didn't have much effect on us.

Amthor: Unless there's another story you'd like to share with us. It's the stories that really make a difference. It's those personal moments that you remember and somebody else might remember something else and it all comes together. So it's the stories that really make a difference because those are the things you don't hear about. I appreciate you coming in. Thank you. It's been a joy.

Bashor: Thank you.