

BOB SCHOTTEL

This is a portion of the oral histories of Northwest Missouri of the 1940's program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support of the National Endowment of the National Humanities. Today is February 2, 2009, and we are here at TJ's Café, in King City, Missouri, in Gentry County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley, and we are here to interview Robert E. Schottel and his birthday is June 6, 1923. He was in the Army and he was a Private First Class.

Joni: Do you care if I call you Bob?

Bob: Everybody else does.

Joni: Okay Bob, could you tell me a little bit about your background? Where and when you were born, maybe something about your parents, and if you had any brothers and sisters.

Bob: Yes, I had two sisters, both of them are gone. My dad and mother are both dead, I think they were both born in Gentry County, Dale and Mary Schottel. Mom's maiden name was Holman. Now anything else you need.

Joni: What did they do, what was their occupation?

Bob: They farmed for years and then they bought the store in Whitesville – ran a grocery store there in Whitesville.

Joni: Tell us about your life in 1940. What was it like?

Bob: Well it wasn't the best. I had just started farming when they drafted me.

Joni: Were you married?

Bob: Yes, I had one little boy.

Joni: Who did you marry and when did you get married?

Bob: Katherine Ellis and it was December 10, 1942.

Joni: Do you have any other family members who participated in the war?

Bob: No.

Joni: We are going to talk a little bit about propaganda. What did you know about the war in Europe or in China? Did you hear anything about what they were saying about the war?

Bob: Well, no not really, we had to do it, that's about all I realized.

Joni: How did the United States portray the war? What were they saying?

Bob: We didn't have much of a choice the way I understood it anyway.

Joni: How did you learn about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Bob: I don't even remember where I was to be truthful.

Joni: Do you remember how you learned about the progress of the war, how the war was progressing, any details

Bob: Not too much, no, where we were.

Joni: Didn't have any radio?

Bob: At home, yes but after I was drafted why you don't really know what is going on.

Joni: Let's talk a little bit about your early service. You mentioned you were drafted.

Bob: Yes.

Joni: Tell us about that.

Bob: I didn't have to go, I could have got out being as I was farming and had a little boy, but I went anyway.

Joni: How old were you?

Bob: Well, I was 21 on the 6th and I think I was sworn in on the 7th.

Joni: What year was it?

Bob: That would be '43 or '44 – 44.

Joni: And what branch of service?

Bob: Army.

Joni: Tell us about your basic training camp memories.

Bob: Well, we took our basic in Florida, at Camp Blinding, Florida

Joni: How was it, where were you, did you stay there the whole time or did they send you any place else.

Bob: No, no. We took 17 weeks training there and then we were sent over seas.

Joni: Did you have any specialized training; did you have a special job?

Bob: Not really, until when they shipped us to Italy down there and we got I guess you'd call it machine gun training down there, then we were sent to France.

Joni: How did you adapt to military life, what were your duties, how was the barracks, what did you eat?

Bob: I guess it was alright.

Joni: Can you describe any of that?

Bob: Not really, that's been a long time ago.

Joni: Let's talk about your service, your war time service, where did you serve, you went to Europe; you said you went to Italy, where did you go in Europe?

Bob: Well we were in Italy for, I don't know how long, several days and then we were put on landing crafts and sent up the coast to France, went into France on through into Germany. I was put with the 8th Armored Infantry Division in Germany. We were put over seas as replacements, wherever they needed us.

Joni: Can you tell us about any combat duties or special missions you had.

Bob: Oh nothing in particular.

Joni: What was a normal mission like? What was an average day with you?

Bob: Well, there was never an average day; nothing was ever the same two days in a row, no.

Joni: Did you see any casualties or destruction while you were there, how did you handle that?

Bob: Well, pretty hard.

Joni: Did you form a lot of friendships and camaraderie while you were in service?

Bob: Oh yes, yes. When I got home we had a little discharge paper and photo in our billfold and I lost my billfold and I lost all that and I had all my buddies names in a book in there and I lost it too.

Joni: How did you stay in touch with your family and friends?

Bob: Oh well, they wrote me every day.

Joni: What entertainment did you have in the service?

Bob: They had several USO shows we saw, which were awful nice.

Joni: Was there any headliners that you remember?

Bob: We saw Bob Hope's show once.

Joni: How about Axis Sally or Tokyo Rose, did you listen to them on the radio?

Bob: We didn't have much radio to listen to them, we heard a little of it, but very little.

Joni: What did you do for recreation and leisure?

Bob: There wasn't much of that.

Joni: Is there anything you can tell us more about your missions when you were there? How long were you in Europe?

Bob: I couldn't tell you, I don't remember. That's been too long ago. We went into France, then Germany and after the war was over we were sent to Czechoslovakia and we were there awhile and then we were sent back to France before we came home.

Joni: What about "D Day", do you remember what was happening on "D Day" where you were located?

Bob: No, I don't remember.

Joni: How did you feel about the dropping of the Atomic Bomb?

Bob: I think it was great. Because, if I hadn't been out in two theaters of operations I would have been down there somewhere, but they couldn't send us to the third one so I didn't have to go to the Pacific.

Joni: What was the other operation that you were in?

Bob: Italy and South Africa.

Joni: So you were in Africa too.

Bob: Well, that area.

Joni: Do you think that President Truman should have ordered the bomb to be dropped?

Bob: You bet.

Joni: Where and what were you doing when you got news the war was over.

Bob: Well, we were doing nothing really in Germany over there at the time, just occupation.

Joni: So what was Germany like at that point when you were there?

Bob: It was all pretty calm and pretty hard on the people that were there.

Joni: How did you get home?

Bob: We came home on a luxury liner ship.

Joni: How was that?

Bob: Oh that was a lot better than the one going over.

Joni: What did you go over on?

Bob: Well, it was an Italian ship, I forget, the Monticello was the name of it, but we were in a troop convoy, I don't know how many hundreds of ships, but a lot of them.

Joni: How was that experience, going across seas?

Bob: Wasn't good.

Joni: Was the food good?

Bob: I don't know I was sick most of the time so it wasn't very good.

Joni: Were you given a reception from your family and friends when you returned home?

Bob: Oh, I imagine I was, yes.

Joni: How did the people treat you when you returned home?

Bob: Oh, great.

Joni: Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life when you returned?

Bob: Oh no, not really. See, I had a son born while I was in Germany and he was, well, I got home in the spring and he would have been 1 year old in July.

Joni: That was a nice welcome home.

Bob: Yes.

Joni: Have you ever contacted and stayed in touch with the people you served with?

Bob: Yeah, I had one buddy that I served with from New Jersey, we kept in contact a long time but I lost him.

Joni: Did you join the American Legion or VFW?

Bob: Oh yeah, I've gone to the Legion

Joni: Are you proud to be a veteran of World War II?

Bob: Sure.

Joni: After the war were you concerned about the Soviet Union's spread of Communism?

Bob: Oh, not as much as a lot of people were, no, I wasn't too worried about it.

Joni: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill for education?

Bob: Yes, I took a little of a farming deal.

Joni: So how was farming when you came back?

Bob: It wasn't nothing like when I left.

Joni: What was different about it?

Bob: Everything was about double in price to what it was when I left. Because I had to sell what I had before I went and when I came back it was a lot higher.

Joni: Did you have livestock?

Bob: Yes.

Joni: What do you think are the differences between today's war and your war?

Bob: Oh, I don't imagine there is anything at all like what we did. I don't imagine it is, I have no idea, but a lot more sophisticated than what we had.

Joni: Is there anything that you would like to tell us, did you have a funny story or a story that is memorable to you that you would like to share with us?

Bob: No, not really, there weren't very many funny things that happened.

Joni: There is no significant thing that you would want to talk about?

Bob: No, not as I really know of anyway.

Joni: When you went to Italy and then to France and Germany, what were some of the locations that you went through?

Bob: I have no idea, when we left Naples, Italy down there on landing craft and came up the shore and coast and they put us in somewhere in France, I don't know where it was at, I have no idea.

Joni: What time of year was that?

Bob: Well, it was still cold weather.

Joni: Did you ever see nice weather in Italy and France?

Bob: No, when we were in Italy it was winter time and not where we was at was in Valle Tournia Valley, it was their winter, it was not too cold, it snowed but it never got very cold where we were at.

Joni: So you were in a valley, so that wasn't very high elevation, right?

Bob: No, we were at the foot of the mountains.

Joni: What mountains were those?

Bob: Oh, I couldn't tell you.

Joni: Farther south and farther north?

Bob: The Mountains were north of us. We weren't at the front; we were back down there as replacements. They didn't need us so they sent us somewhere else.

Joni: Were you on a ship over to France?

Bob: Oh yes.

Joni: How long did it take to get there?

Bob: No, we went from Newport News, VA to Italy and went in to Naples there. I don't know how many days, it was a long trip.

Margaret: How about just from Italy to France?

Bob: Oh, that was a terrible ride on landing craft, because that was a flat bottom boat and we had a storm going up there.

Joni: So those were some of the unpleasant experiences.

Bob: They weren't good, no. Yes, even the crew was sick on that landing craft going up there was so bad.

Joni: And then when you got put out of France, how did you travel there.

Bob: On foot. Well after we was in there for awhile we went on trains. They had a lot of train rides, know what I mean, they sent people on trains everywhere.

Margaret: Did you see damage throughout the countryside

Bob: Oh yes.

Margaret: What was that like?

Bob: It was terrible. When we crossed the Rhine River, there was a town just across the river, of course we crossed on a pontoon boat or bridge and there wasn't anything – we was riding in the back of a truck-there wasn't anything in that town that was as tall as we were. They said it was a big city to start with but the Royal Canadian Air Force had flattened it. It's hard to believe what they can do.

Joni: War can be very destructive.

Bob: Oh yes.

Joni: Were there still civilians around in the areas you saw?

Bob: Oh yes.

Joni: How did they live?

Bob: It was pretty rough on them. They were pretty nice people everyone we met.

Joni: How did you meet them?

Bob: Oh, we didn't talk very good German, but they tried to talk to us. After the war was over I was one of the older guys left in the outfit and they put me to driving the jeep so I didn't have to get out and walk and stuff like that. I went and traded with the Germans a lot for food and stuff. We didn't have fresh potatoes, but they had a lot of stuff that we didn't want, the cooks did. I'd go out and trade with the Germans.

Joni: What kind of stuff did they trade?

Bob: They had some orange marmalade, stuff like that and some split pea soup, canned stuff; they had a surplus of it and wanted to get rid of it anyway.

Joni: Did you have to learn a little bit of German?

Bob: Oh I learned, I got to where I could talk a little bit to them and they understood what I was talking about. But they tried hard to understand what we were saying.

Kelley: The stuff that they had, had it been saved through the war or had they already restarted their gardening.

Bob: Every one and place we talked to they had potatoes and stuff but I guess they had places they could store it.

Joni: What was it like traveling there, I mean between the United States and Europe being Europe, what was it like?

Bob: We didn't do much traveling. It was all on foot. Well we went from northern Germany down through clear to Czechoslovakia, well convoy, half-tracks and stuff like that. About 20 – 25 mile an hour speed, long ways. I don't know why they sent us there; we were there probably a month or two. Met a lot of people down there, some of them talked a lot better English than I did.

Joni: I think Europeans, they probably learned how to talk.

Bob: Well this one boy especially went to University of Prague and he spoke perfect English but he didn't understand half of what the GI's were saying their language wasn't perfect English.

Kelley: What was that boy doing there, what was his

Bob: I have no idea, he came there where we were at every day and talked to us, and he wanted to know what things were like here.

Kelley: What did you tell him?

Bob: Well about everything we could. It was kind of interesting to talk to people like that. The language the soldiers used when they were playing ball and stuff wasn't English, it was slang I guess you would call it and he couldn't understand what they were talking about.

Kelley: Did you play ball then?

Bob: Oh just among ourselves.

Joni: What type of ball did you play?

Bob: Baseball.

Arleta Pulley: Where did you get your equipment for your baseball?

Bob: Well the Army had stuff there, about everywhere we went. I don't know who had it or what but we had plenty of equipment.

Arleta Pulley: Did you have your family back home while you were there, when you went to war were you married before you left.

Bob: Oh yes. Bill was just a little over a year old, no, he wasn't quite a year old when I went in. After Katherine died, I don't know where all the papers and stuff, she kept all of that and I don't where all of this disappeared to and I lost my discharge papers and stuff and so the kids, a year or two ago decided they were going to try to get it and for some reason or other when they got the discharge papers back they didn't have my combat infantry badge on it and Jim's been trying to find out why. I remember the combat infantry badge very well.

Joni: What does that stand for?

Bob: Well at that time I was still on \$19.00 and something a month pay and it give me \$10.00 more a month. That's how I remember it.

Kelley: When did you receive this?

Bob: I have no idea. Somewhere over in Germany fighting.

Joni: You said you had some training with some artillery, what did you train on?

Bob: When we were down there in Italy they had to have something for us to do and they trained us on the machine gun there. But I never used it; I kind of stayed away from a machine gun if I could. Because where we were at, if automatic weapons, that's the one that they was shooting at.

Joni: Was there any other type of artillery you used, any type of gun other than a machine gun?

Bob: No, nothing in particular, just regular Army.

Joni: How was the barracks.....?

Bob: Oh in Florida it was alright, of course Florida's winters are not bad, it was summer when we were there and it's not too bad in the summertime even because they open sides out on them but before we left down there, of a night it was getting cold.

Joni: I think we had someone talk about rats in a barracks, did you ever have any circumstances where there was.....

Bob: No, our barracks was nice, what I mean as far as that's concerned.

Joni: Over seas did you have any problem with pests?

Bob: We didn't have much of a place, no place in particular where we were at. We just most of the time wherever you were at that was where you was at when night come.

Joni: So whether it was outside or....

Bob: Oh yes. When you were fighting you formed your own protection of a night. I've seen a lot of the country over there.

Joni: And what was it like?

Bob: Oh, a lot of it was pretty country. France as far as I was concerned we didn't see much of the country that was left alone, it was tore up so, it wasn't much good, didn't look like.

Arleta: While you were gone who sort of kept things going at home?

Bob: Well, Katherine stayed at her folks and my folks about all of the time, back and forth.

Joni: She took care of your farm?

Bob: No, everything went when I went to the service.

Kelley: When you came back did you work for your parents and in-laws or were you able to purchase land again?

Bob: No, I worked for Andrew County, run a motor grader for a couple of years.

Joni: How much was the price of land back then?

Bob: Before I went to the service, you could buy all the land you wanted for about \$35.00 an acre but I don't know what it was when I came back, I didn't even check because I didn't think I was going to farm. My Dad had turned a tractor over on himself he had his arm tore up and he finally give up that he couldn't farm and we bought the store in Whitesville.

Arleta: When you came back was rationing and all of that was that still going.

Bob: No, I missed out on all of that. Before I went to service it got pretty rough trying to buy cars and stuff for vehicles, there was no rationing yet then.

Joni: Was there rationing on gasoline at that point.

Bob: Not for us anyway. We didn't have that problem. I guess they did after I was in the service, I don't know.

Joni: Was there a part of the country that was worse off than the Midwest?

Bob: I don't have any idea. I know people are talking right now about the depression, they don't remember the depression back then in the 30's. I remember it but of course it wasn't my responsibility back then, I was just a kid.

Joni: So do you see anything resembling that time period to now, what the current situation is, you know, the war, the economy.

Bob: People are hollering hard times now but you go to town, they all have money, it isn't like back in the '30's, they didn't spend any money because they didn't have any money. We went to Island City once or twice a week in that little old country store and whatever the cream and eggs brought that's what groceries they bought. Dad had a car but he couldn't afford to buy gas for it so he sold it. People now they've got money to buy gas. They may be hurting but that isn't anything like they were back then.

Joni: Unless there is something else you would like to talk about we do appreciate your time coming in to talk to us about the war and I know that not being there it is hard for us to

understand what you had to go through but listening to your stories helps us try to get the bigger picture where you were and what you were doing.

Bob: Well, the war was kind of rough, it wasn't good, but most us survived it anyway.

Joni: We thank you for coming in, it was really nice meeting you.

Bob: Thank you.