

Michael Sharon

WWII



When did you enter the military?

“June 21 1941”

“You know that’s ancient time, how many years ago was that? 70 yrs”

How old were you when you entered the military?

“21 yrs old”

How long were you in the military?

“4 and ½ yrs”

What boot camp did you go to?

“I went out of New York city. They sent us a card that you are to report to the first available office for recruitment. I had a rank that I was eligible to go to war. Some of them were in the f division and were not physically able to go to war. Some people had physical conditions such as a bad heart or cripple that made them unable to go to war.”

What boot camp?

“We really started out on an adventure. The first day went to the statue of liberty and we took the oath of allegiance at the statue of liberty. We took a ferry back to NY and we boarded a train to go down to Fort Brag North Caroline. That was a boot camp that was basically marines. The army was just a basic camp. Boot camp was a term used for the marines; the army just had a camp.”

How long were you there?

“We spent two days. The first day we went through a complete physical. I was naked, completely honestly. Then we got injections, all kinds of injections we were supposed get. I don’t remember most of them. But the injections you had to have if you have if you were going to a foreign port, for anthrax and all these things, Malaria, small pox.”

Did you go to a second one?

“Oh yeah; a year on in It’s quite a long story. Remember I was in for four and one half years. The second one, wait a minute, we aren’t done with the first one. The training that we had... You have to get the chronological time straight. We went to the first camp and my choice was, they gave us a choice because I volunteered. When you volunteer you can choose the outfit that you want to belong to, artillery, infantry, signal corp. I chose the field artillery. They sent me to fort brag in Carolina. I had the basic field artillery training for six weeks. I have to add to that. After six weeks we were sent to a regular outfit. Remember we were in basic training and you had to go to a regular outfit that is either artillery or something. I went to the third artillery observation battalion. This was observation for locating the enemy artillery.”

What you said you joined voluntarily?

“Yes”

What made you join the military?

“I will give it to you very quickly. I was a teenager, maybe 19 yrs old. At the library I got a book about West Point. I don’t know what I was looking for, but I picked up the book about west point and read it. All of a sudden I got a little patriotic. Aside

from that my brother had a friend that was in the National Guard also in artillery. He would come around in his full uniform and it was very impressive. Don't forget I was only 19 years old. When they sent me the form to fill out to go to my recruitment office, I chose field artillery because of that."

What branch of military were you in?

"The field artillery; this was a branch of the field artillery that was observation. What we would do was locate the enemy guns and send it back to the field artillery. How much math have you boys competed? In trigonometry you would have, do you know what a flash incident is? It's like a tripod with 360 degree, you could turn it 360 degrees and you could get an angle. This is surveyed in and called it the flash division. he looks through that continuous at the enemy line when he sees a flash he looks at the coordinates. What degree is that? Ok, and then he raises his transit and he gets a Nazareth, a height and sends that information by phone. Now mind you all this information in ww2 was sent over wires. There was no electronics like today, no texting. You had to lay down the wires and the enemy just loved to send over mortars and blow it up. That's how the information got to the headquarters of the field artillery. Every time they made three or four locations on particular gun they send that information to HQ. When that information was analyzed the division would decide how much fire they would send out over to the enemy and that depended how many readings they got. It took 35 minutes per reading to analyze. You could imagine the Germans could have moved the guns, anything could happen. There are a lot of technicalities. I don't want to get too technical, this is just basic. If I was in the infantry it would get technical too because the infantry does not just have a gun and a bayonet."

What equipment did you use on a daily basis?

"Now that comes to me personally. IN the mean time while everyone was learning their part of the gun location the transits the flash and sound, I was learning the 50 cal machine gun. Did you ever hear of the term nomenclature? Nomenclature was the book with the names of the parts of the gun. You had to memorize all the parts of the gun; you had to take the gun apart. They gave you a

little hand book to read about it and then went out and had training on it in the field. They give you real bullets to shoot.”

What rank did you achieve?

“Corporal, that’s a fully fledged corporal there were several ranks in my realm. There was a t 5 technical. This was a technical rank where you were not a noncommissioned officer. You were just doing the technicalities of whatever you had. I could give orders to my subordinates. Then they had sergeants and the on and up. I will tell you why I was only a corporal. They had four machines guns and they couldn’t make everyone a sergeant so they made four corporals. That’s how the army saved money; in our case anyway. I couldn’t get out of my rank unless I gave up the machine gun. As long as I kept the machine gun I was a corporal. That’s a noncommissioned officer. “

Were you ever wounded?

“Well it was an accident only. We used to go, while we were training. I have to go back to Fort Sill, from there I was. We were in the mohair dessert training for the African invasion. By the time we got finished training in the dessert. The African campaign was defeated with General Patton and then everything was sent up to Europe. While we were in the dessert we were able to get passes to go into Palm Springs. It out there in the Mohave dessert with scorpions and tarantulas, side winding rattle snakes and you name it. What we were doing was locating the so called enemy which was another artillery gunner. They would fire their guns and we would try to locate them. We would get passes to go into Palm Springs. I got a pass I come off a diving board into the pool, I came very close to the center of the pool where it was narrow. I sprang up on the board I went a little too high and went sideways and hit my jaw on the side of the pool I was laid up for about a month and a half. That was the extent of my injuries in four in a half years in the army. No purple heart.

After that have you heard about fire , gun fire coming from the enemy there are bullets wizzing all around you and the artillery shells in they go over your head, they go...if they burst over you they go shwoosh shwoosh swoosh if it

misses you, you were lucky and I was lucky. I had to learn how to duck. This is the truth, everything they had you threw at you. I was one of the lucky ones.”

Were you in any famous campaigns or battles?

“Well actually as a group, you had to consider us a group and not just one person. My machine gun was mounted up and there was a turner. Do you know what a six by six is? On a truck we got a turner up there were you mount the machine gun. I was the assistant driver of the truck that holds all the machine guns. While we were traveling, the Germans were very smart. There was a dog fight there the Americans were chasing the Germans; the Germans would come down low. Over the tree tops, that’s where we came in with the fifty caliber machine guns. Usually they travel in groups of four. If they came down like that that was the end of them. Because every tank every movable vehicle had a 50 cal machine gun and there was also quad 50 calibers. A group in the service in the army that had 4 mach guns mounted. Have you seen the pictures of the machine guns, they had quads mounted on the pickup trucks.

Getting back to make you understand that it took 25 minutes to 35 minutes to analyze, today it just takes a second to pinpoint a target and fire.”

Once again were there names of famous campaigns you were in?

“I will read them off to you.

European African Middle Eastern campaign metal- that’s the one we were training for in the Mohave dessert.

Normandy, we landed in Normandy: and northern France. That was part of Normandy all the way up to Paris; and then we took central Europe which was Alcase-Lorraine and going into Germany. Finally we ended up in the Rhineland, Rhineland is Germany. We ended upon Salzburg Austria. That was the end of the war in 1945. We were in almost every campaign that went from Normandy to the end of the war.”

Did you receive any awards or metals for your service?

“Well these are all medals; the biggest award I got was from France, the liberation of Normandy. This was after we got home and we all had groups / reunions and stuff like that. That’s when they gave us the metal. It was done by one of our snipers whose son was a congressman in DC and he was instrumental in getting us that medal. Then this is just a good conduct metal that’s it, an American Campaign metal, The American defense medal, and The Victory Medal. All these medals go on my uniform, (he points to above his heart left side of chest).”

American Defense Service Medal

The American Campaign Medal

The European/African/Middle East campaign Medal

Good Conduct Medal

WWII Victory Medal

The French Government- for the battle of Normandy, actually for the liberation of Normandy”

Did you land on the beach of Normandy?

“We came in, the infantry came in June 6th we came in July 15th.with the artillery. By this time they had to set up the beach head so we could unload the big trucks. You remember the 6x6? And the big guns did you ever see one of the 155 millimeter guns? It’s a monster of guns you had to have good facilities. They built pontoon bridges and things like that, so you could unload the trucks and then as we were going up... did you see the longest day? Did you see Patton? When the infantry finally got to the beach head there was a pathway going up the hill and all those crosses there. This is what we saw when we went in. All those crosses of the infantry men buried there”

What was normal or average day while you were in the military?

“First of all you spent half the day digging fox holes, I’m not joking then you cut down with a saw. YOU had to set up shelter for the machine gun so you had to cut down trees and make a shelter there were a lot of mortar shells coming. Then the

training sections, you have orientation sections, what we are going to do to today and what we are going to do tomorrow, where am I going to put my machine gun?. I had to know that. I had a machine gun officer for the four machine guns giving us locations that we could put our gun. Our main job was to protect the command post that was receiving the information from the field men. That were getting information for the flash instruments and I forgot to mention the sound instruments. They would bury a microphone underground and it would pick up sound. Did you ever see sound waves, trigonometry and Doppler waves? “

What was your most common routine in the military, like you woke up, you had breakfast, what did you do every day?

“You cleaned your equipment. This is what you spent a good two or three hours on; keeping you equipment oiled and clean. Then you got material to read. Then came the guard duty. How would you like to have guard duty two hours on and four hours off twenty four hours a day? This is from the time we landed on the beach until the war ended. That was also my job because I had the machine gun. Someone had to stay on duty at night too. I was the good guy, being as I was the corporal I would take the night shifts and give the other guys the day shifts. “

You said you were given material to read? What were some of the books that you read?

“First of all we read the nomenclature book of the machine gun. We read it because you had to know the names of everything and how they went together and how to use the machine gun. The main thing was you didn’t waste and the target practice, the training that you had in both Fort Brag and Fort Sill with the machine gun gave us that ability to fire the gun. Did you ever fire a gun?”

Yes

“You have to look at the target, and you can’t aim at it you have to aim a little below.”

What fire arms did you use?

“The carbine. This you carried around with you, this was an artillery piece. Infantry had their own guns; they had all kinds of guns. But artillery had the carbine, A multi... 15 shots, magazine with 15 bullets. This was for your self defense. In case you were over run. I couldn't carry the machine gun around with me”

So the machine gun was?

“A fifty caliber”

Was the fifty caliber heavy weapon artillery?

“Yes, remember what I said about my outfit. Our equipment was the transit and sound machine and we had a few bazookas, 50 calibers, 30 calibers in the outpost. Usually a four or five men group out in their own to locate the enemy and kill them.”

What helped you to pass the time at war?

“Telling each other jokes and reading the stars and stripes; it was the magazine that the army had printed for us with as much information as they wanted to give us.”

While you were at war what helped you get through the hard times?

“Prayer, you prayed all the time. And also I think every incident that happened was funny to relief the pressure or anxiety. We found everything funny. Every time one of the other guys would do something that was normal we would make jokes out of it.”

Did you ever get care packages?

“Yeah, from my family; I don't know how to explain this. The mail men would come and all the packages would come. There were spies all over the place wanting to see who had the biggest packages. If you walked away with that these guys would follow you. If they didn't get a piece of it you were in trouble”

Did you bring a picture?



“That’s me. I haven’t mentioned anything about the twin guns that’s a long story”

Was this picture taken in U.S. soil?

“We were not allowed to take pictures during the war. These pictures were taken after the war was over.”

Was it in foreign lands?(showing picture to camera)

“This picture was taken in Bavaria just before the official ending of the war. Part of Germany.”



Were you not allowed to take picture?

If you got captured they could use the picture against you. This is our group. All of us had different jobs, radio operator machine gun operator. If you look each of us has a wine bottle. We were raiding Hitler's wine cellars in Berchtesgaden. This is the end of the war."

What was your favorite wine?

"Riesling but they call it Vineshrucker or something like that. But it was Riesling. They had bottled liqueur but I didn't like those. The older fancy ones the sugery liqueurs they had loads of that stuff. Now if I may, this is part of the war too. We got into the wine cellars, they were dungeons. You had to get down into the tunnels to get into the dungeons where the wine was. You knew there was wine there because guys were coming up with the wine. It was dark, no electricity. So guess what we did for light? Someone got the idea to wrap a rag around the sick and stick it some gasoline and light it up as a torch and you go down the wine cellar that way. Well guess what? Gasoline makes smoke. And the smoke rises and you go down and you have to stoop over cause you can't stand up. If you were tall it was worse for you. You know what duck walking was? You gotta duck walk. You bent down you got as much wine as you could, you know no body brought a knapsack to put the wine bottles in, you had to figure out how to get them in your clothes and each time you went down the smoke got heavier. Now you got down there and by this time they had dropped so many bottles on the floor there was about three inches of wine on the floor from all the bottles they had dropped. The last time we went down we almost had to duck walk the entire way because the smoke was more than half way down and you couldn't breathe any more. So that was the saga of the wine cellars."

Was there anything we missed that you would like to tell us?

"Yeah, we were in Saltsburg for nine months after the end of the war. We got discharged according to how many points you had. Married men had the most points because they had children at home so they got sent home sooner. Young fellas like myself, we just had to wait. There were millions of soldiers that were

coming and going. On the way home we went back by truck from Salzburg through Germany again we saw all the ruins and everything and part of France. Reims France was our disembarkation preparation point. Once we got all set-up there we went on the train did you ever hear of the 40 x 8 trains they are the ones that have no windows from Reims France and boarded our liberty ship to come home.