

Fall 11-2016

Oral History Report: William Davis

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Student Interviewer's Name: Taylor Adams
Interviewee name William Davis

Time and Location of Interview:

The interview was conducted in one session on November 11, 2016, and lasted approximately 30 minutes. It was conducted at the Bradley Healthcare and Rehab Center in Cleveland, TN. Only the interviewer, interviewee, and the interviewee's wife were present.

About William Davis:

William Davis was born July 2, 1927 and lived in Knoxville, TN. He fought in World War II at the tale end of Battle of the Bulge and also helped liberate the Dachau Concentration Camp. Soon after he came home from the war, he married LuEllen Davis. During this interview, Mr. Davis provided stories of what happened as he was in the war. As well as his life after the war ended.

Interviewer: Taylor Adams (TA)

Interviewee: William Davis (WD)

Spouse of Interviewee: LuEllen Davis (LD)

TA: Ok, so I have some questions for you and I am going to start with some basics. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

WD: July 2, 1927

TA: Ok, and where were you born?

WD: Knoxville, TN

TA: So Mr. Davis, before you entered into the war, what were you doing? Like were you working or in college?

WD: I was, I was, I was, I was a grill cook.

TA: And what was that like?

WD: Well, I was just working in a restaurant and working the grill.

TA: Did you enlist in the war or were you drafted?

WD: I asked for immediate induction.

TA: Ok, and did you ever get married?

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WD: After the war.

TA: How old were you when you entered into the war?

WD: I was seventeen.

TA: And what year would that have been?

WD: What?

TA: What year did you enter into the war?

WD: 1943

TA: Which division did you serve under?

WD: Huh?

TA: Which division did you serve under?

WD: Oh, the 42nd infantry division.

TA: Ok, and what was that like?

WD: Um, very rough in the infantry. Do you know anything about why infantry is the worst one you can get in? They have the most casualties of anybody. I led some men through a minefield and the squad came through there and lost about 70% of their men with those little shoebox mines. It could take anywhere from your foot off to your knee off. Just a shoebox, you know, like a thousand shoeboxes. You just put it on the ground and you have the discharge on there so you just discharge it and it will just blow up, so if someone were to just fall on it, they could lose their leg or arm. In the minefield, you know? It's just terrible.

TA: It is terrible that that kind of thing happened. (Paused for several seconds). So what was your involvement in World War II?

WD: I was a Scout. I was the first Scout. I led the company on the push off in the resurgence of the war and pulled back after the Battle of the Bulge and in the resurgence, I led my company and, and my company led the division in the push off. So you might say I was the first in my company there.

TA: Wow! (Pause). Umm so you mentioned during our first visit together that you fought at the tail end of the Battle of the Bulge.

WD: Yeah.

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TA: Can you expand on what you experienced/ remember from that battle?

WD: Well, it was horrible. It was basically rifles against tanks. And you can't battle tanks with rifles. It was slaughter because we couldn't win.

TA: (Long Pause). So from the research I have on the Battle of the Bulge I saw that it took place from December 16, 1944 to January 25, 1945. Were you overseas during like the holiday season and if so what was it like being away from your family?

WD: No

TA: You weren't?

WD: I, I, I was, yeah during the holiday season I was overseas.

TA: And what was that like being gone during the holidays for you?

WD: Well, the war was over by the time the holiday season got around to us. That was '45. (Very long pause). Did you do any research on my division?

TA: On your division?

WD: Yeah

TA: No Sir, I'm afraid I did not do much research on your division. Would you like to tell me anything in particular about it?

WD: Well you should, you should know that it was the division made out of just regular soldiers, you know? It wasn't the division that made it, It was MacArthur's division from World War II. MacArthur commanded that division in World War II and it was highly decorated and you've got unit citations and presidential unit citations for Battle of the Bulge, which like I said battle tanks...there's not much you can do against them. You just can't do much against them.

TA: So you also told me that you helped liberate one of the concentration camps.

WD: Yeah, Dachau.

TA: Oh Dachau? What kind of things do you remember seeing?

WD: Oh, I told you that before. Stacks of bodies just stacked up like cardboard and you would see a lot of places where they took showers or where they were supposed to take showers and they would turn the gas on and kill them. Then they would take them out and stack them up like cardboard and then they would burn them.

TA: If you don't mind me asking, how did seeing these things make you feel?

WD: Huh?

TA: How did seeing these things happen make you feel?

WD: Um, I was ... I was really angry. Because especially the women, you know, they abused the women all the time. They would use hot irons up in their crotch, you know, seeing how long they could take it, and the men would hang on the wall and they would tease them and pinch them. Then they would turn them loose and then run up and grab them and pull his penis off. It was horrible. (Long Pause). And I lost my best friend.. and I saw him laying next beside of me. The boy comes from Alabama, Willie Burke, and he would sit and sing "Alabamy Bound." He had about three kids, I think. I often wonder why they took him and not me (long pause). And I think I told you about the time we went into (Unidentifiable Word) and an airplane motors was in there and built airplane motors and there was hundreds of them lined up. If they would have ever gotten them on, on the field... we would have never won the war. They would come in and they would shoot you and they would turn the motor back on. We never figured out how they had done it. It took us a while to figure out how they done that. Because once you turn the jet off, it was already started back up, so they had something in there and then they would fire it back up. And like I say, that one day these two B-38's crossed right in front of me. They laid fire right in front of me. Then we had Carter come over every night and he would come over and check and see if we were moving or anything... No rest for the wicked.

TA: So when did your service in the war end?

WD: When the, uh, war was over and my service for the war ended when I got out of service. I got out of the regular Army and went into the United States Army. I didn't enlist in the United States Army. You see, the U.S. Army was draft and the U.S. Army was volunteer, and I volunteered. So I got discharged on July the 9th and married July 10th. It will be seventy years next July.

TA: What is your wife's name?

WD: LuEllen

TA: That's a beautiful name.

WD: Yeah, I think it is... Kaitlin Murray is my granddaughter.

TA: Oh, really? Well, how many children do you have?

WD: We have two boys and we have four, five,... six grandchildren, three great-granddaughters, four great-granddaughters,... and one granddaughter. She's studying to be a CIA agent. She took criminology and she's going to a college in Georgia. She's a tough girl, I worry about her because she's got to be prepared for anything. I mean, I was in criminal investigation in the Army myself for a year and a half... escaped prisoners and stuff like that... I thought I seen a star back there (Pointing to the other side of the room).

TA: So what was it like working in criminal investigation in the Army?

WD: Well, I would go hunting down guys that was absent without leaving, AWOL, and I ask them permission to get the authorities not to have to go hunt them down. I had one guy ask me, "What would you do if I started running?" I told him I would hate to have to carry your dead ass all the way down to the Jeep. That's the only thing that I hate is that we took a jeep as far as we could go in a mountain. They took the boy back to his mother and said, "when the MPs come after him tell them to bring a hearse behind them because they'll never come back."... My buddy come up and we went in the house and he had shotguns and pistols all hanging on the wall and he made sure he didn't get no hands on them. I said, "that you have got to be kidding me." He said, "as tired as I am and he made threats on my body, me and my buddy had said, I would say just go ahead and run." But I said I would hate to carry that dead body all the way back to that Jeep, but I said that I will.

TA: Do you feel like after your experience in the war was an experience that affected the rest of your life?

WD: Well, I will never forget it. I mean you get close to guys, I know Willie Burke, well, I will never get over Willie. He would sit and sing "Alabama Bound" every night and that's bad. You know you share every meal and everything with them and you talk about home and everything. He had three kids, I think, and I never did find out exactly where he was from in Alabama. They didn't have any name of it... no Willie Burke. Are you going to be in on this presentation tomorrow?

TA: Am I going to what?

WD: Be in on this presentation tomorrow?

TA: Oh, this is not a presentation. I just have to type this out for a report.

WD: Well, will you give me a copy of it?

TA: I most definitely will.

WD: Thank you.

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TA: You are very welcome... So whenever you returned from the war, what was it like being reunited with your family?

WD: huh?

TA: What was it like being reunited with your family?

WD: Well, it was the most beautiful thing in the world is seeing the Statue of Liberty coming over the island seeing it get bigger and bigger. That's the most beautiful thing in the world. We didn't get no welcome like the early guys did... The most beautiful welcome I had was the air flights for World War II veterans. They took them to Washington and they brought the fire trucks out and the fire water out and they had a band and everything in there. After everything, they took us to dinner to the best buffet I have ever seen. I'm not too keen on buffets, but I met the sweetest people there. The girl who was in charge of my plane, her husband was a medic and he was on the plane too and he worked for the fire department there in Cincinnati and he got to come on the plane. I think he was in the reserve... I've tried to forget most of them, but it's hard to forget. I used to have a few nightmares, but not anymore. (Long Pause).

TA: Did the war in any way change the relationship you had with your family when you returned?

WD: Oh no, we're tight!

TA: You're tight (chuckles)?

WD: Oh Yeah! Me and my boys and the whole family are tight. They are coming down here for Thanksgiving. I love my boys. I love my family. But like I said a bunch of girls, a bunch of boys and the boys are all grown just about. All the girls are left. (Mr. Davis' wife walks into the room). That's my baby. (Kisses his wife). That's my baby.

LD: What are you doing?

WD: Not much. I'm just giving an interview here. This is my wife.

TA: It's nice to meet you!

WD: She's with the school and making a report. There going to kind of honor us.

LD: Oooh, how nice!

WD: And she's going to type me up a copy of this.

LD: That's beautiful! How nice? I really appreciate that.

TA: You're very welcome!

LD: Do you want me? Well, I will continue to let you have your moments with her.

WD: No, it's alright.

LD: I can sit here if it's ok?

TA: Yes ma'am. So my last question for you is, how did serving in the war shape who you've become today?

WD: How did what?

TA: How did being in the war or the experiences you've had shape you into who you've become today?

WD: I'm afraid I don't understand it.

TA: Like when you were in the war did it help shape your character?

LD: I would say he turned out to be a pretty solid guy. I was on the end of that.

WD: She met me when I was still in service.

LD: He came out one day and we got married the next day. He is pretty solid.

TA: I'd say so!

WD: I told her the first day I had with her that I was going to marry her. She thought I was bull crapping, you know? But then I took it seriously and carried through with it. We've been married seventy years.

LD: Honey, did you tell her about the end of it? When you were MP and

WD: Yeah, I told her.

LD: Did you?

WD: Told her stories and stuff.

LD: Just answer her questions, honey. I'm sorry!

WD: Yeah I closed one case where the FBI, they were hunting this guy for two years, and I found him. I felt real good about that because they couldn't catch him, and I caught him. (long pause). That's my baby (pointing toward his wife).

TA: Well, I appreciate your help so much! Thank you for taking the time to help me with this project.

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Original Questions

1. When and where were you born?
2. Before you entered into the war, what were you doing?
3. Did you ever marry/ have kids?
4. Did you enlist in the war, or were you drafted?
5. Where were you stationed?
6. How old were you when you entered into the war?
7. What year would that have been?
8. Which division did you serve on?
9. What was it like serving on that division?
10. What was your involvement in World War II?
11. You mentioned during our first visit that you fought at the tail end of Battle of the Bulge. Can you expand on what you experienced/ remember during the battle?
12. The Battle of the Bulge took place from Dec. 16, 1944- Jan. 25, 1945, did you have to experience any holidays overseas?
13. What was that like, being gone during the holiday season?
14. You told me that you helped liberate Dachau Concentration Camp. What kind of things do you remember seeing?
15. How did seeing those things happen make you feel?
16. When did your service in the war end?
17. Do you feel like after your experience in the war that it affected the rest of your life?
18. What was it like being reunited with your family?
19. Did the war in any way change your family relationship when you returned home from your service?
20. How did serving in the war shape you into who you have become today?