

INTERVIEW

J T Cox Jr

YEAR

2006

GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: J T Cox Jr

DATE: June 21, 2006

PLACE: Dodge City, Kansas

INTERVIEWER: Joyce Suellentrop

PROJECT SERIES: Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

J T Cox was drafted and went to Fort Leavenworth for physical and induction soon after high school. From there, he went to basic training in the Airborne Infantry. He was trained as a glider trooper and paratrooper. He shipped out of Boston in 1944 for England. On the front lines in the Battle of the Bulge, he was wounded in the face by a German shell. After having his nose and teeth repaired at a field hospital he was able to return to his unit in Belgium. His leg and thigh were badly injured then and he spent 4 months in the hospital and was there when the war in Germany ended. He was on a ship headed for Japan when that war ended and he was sent home. After discharge in Missouri, he returned to the Cimarron area and has worked and lived in Dodge City since then.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Entering the service and training and life as a part of war zone front line action in Belgium and Germany. His experience as a paratrooper and his injuries and life after the war.

COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:

SOUND RECORDINGS: 60 minute tape

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 45 minutes

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: none

TRANSCRIPT: 14 pages

ORAL HISTORY
Cox Jr, J T
Interview Date: June 21, 2006

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)

Interviewee: J T Cox (JC)

Tape 1 of 1

Side A

JS - I want to know your Army name.

JC - It is gone.

JS - What is your real name?

JC - J T Cox, Jr.

JS - They wouldn't let you go by J T in the Army?

JC - No, I went to Leavenworth to be inducted. I had my birth certificate and everything. The guy looked at it and he said, "We can't go by that in the Army. If your dad's name is John, you are John."

JS - Isn't that something? It is because it was just an initial, I guess. That was a good introduction to you into rules, I guess.

JC - It is just one of these stupid things. I still have trouble with businesses in the computer age. These stupid people running the computer that say you can't just put an initial in. I know better than that.

JS - With a computer you can do most anything. They just don't want to do it. I have a series of questions that I will ask and sometimes we will branch off into other things. The first question is concerned with the start of World War Two and Pearl Harbor. How old were you? Do you remember hearing about the war and Pearl Harbor?

JC - I graduated from high school in '42.

JS - So you were a senior with Pearl Harbor. Do you remember what you were thinking or what your parents did?

JC- I knew I was going to have to go to the Army. I was drafted in '43. I was in there until October of '45. I got wounded twice.

JS - Was there anyone else in your family that had gone into the military?

JC - My older brother, Jim.

JS - When did he go?

JC - I suppose he went in '42. He is older than I am. I am 82 and he is 89.

JS - So you knew a little bit about the military?

JC - I wouldn't say that; you don't know anything about the military service until you get in it. That's my idea. It isn't like what some people tell you.

JS - Maybe that is good.

JC - He was in the Air Force. I was in the infantry in the airborne. I was a paratrooper and I was also a glider trooper. I went into gliders first and then I joined the paratroopers.

JS - You finished high school, were drafted, and did you choose to go into the airborne or did they put you there?

JC - I was drafted and they just put me in. I wound up in a camp in North Carolina.

JS - For your basic training?

JC - Yes.

JS - Could you describe your basic training?

JC - Tough, a lot more walking than I ever realized I was ever going to do. It was tough training. We were there a few months and then went to Tennessee on maneuvers and after that they came around and wanted everybody to join the paratroopers. They wanted us in the gliders and they are bad. I joined the paratroopers, but everybody didn't so we had to make up an outfit. The bad part about that was, I went through all that training again.

JS - The paratroopers and you had trained on the gliders before?

JC - Yes.

JS - How did they train you on both those?

JC - The glider was towed behind the C47s. We had to do the extensive walking. Jump training, most go to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. We did it in

Tennessee and they put mock up towers, etc. You have to jump out of those towers and go down, etc. Then you have to jump of course.

JS - Were you in charge of your own parachute, such as packing and all?

JC - No, we had packers. I was a Sergeant and had a light machine gun squad.

JS - Tell me what that means.

JC - That means a 30 caliber air cooled machine gun and I was the leader. I had five guys, a gunner and an assistant and ammo bearers.

JS - Then you would jump into an area?

JC - Yeah.

JS - Was it hard for you to take orders when you went into the Army?

JC - Not really because I had an idea what it was going to be like. We had a pretty nice cadre of older guys. I was in the 82nd Airborne and they came in and were our cadre, the top sergeants.

JS - You were away from home for the first time, basically?

JC - Yes.

JS - You were in with young men from all over. Was that easy, difficult, or interesting?

JC - It is just like any other situation. Some guys are nice guys and some guys aren't. Maybe I wasn't a nice guy, who knows? Some guys liked me and some guys didn't. That's just life.

JS - That's true. Did you have free time during basic?

JC - Yeah, we had time off, especially on Sunday. At first we couldn't go into town so all we could do was go to the beer garden and get soaked up. After basic training we got to go into town, various towns around there in North Carolina.

JS - When you went to Tennessee did you get to come home after Tennessee?

JC - I came home between North Carolina and Tennessee. After we went through maneuvers, out there in the woods moping around, etc, we were given a furlough.

JS - Were you homesick at all?

JC - I don't know. I guess I was, but I never really dwelled on that part. I guess I am a survivor.

JS - You knew what you had to do and you did it. After you were trained in Tennessee what happened?

JC - We stayed there for not too long and in August of '44 we shipped out of New York and went to England.

JS - That was after D-day had happened, after the Normandy Invasion?

JC - Yeah, we stayed in England and the Bulge got fired up then in December, I think it was. We were in England, just waiting, you know. They flew us into France and we walked, I think, ten thousand miles getting to the Bulge. I always said it was mud that was six foot deep, but it wasn't that bad, it was only a couple or so. I got wounded on January 7th of '45, got hit in the face. Of course, I went to the hospital and laid in there for a little bit. They patched my nose up and stuck me some teeth in my mouth and sent me back to the outfit. March 24th, we jumped the Rhine at Brussels, Belgium. I got hit in the leg then.

JS - When you said you went to the hospital, that was in England?

JC - It was just a field deal. It was a field hospital there in Belgium or France or wherever. I don't know where it was, I didn't plan on writing a book.

JS - When you were shot, you were what, clearing out an area?

JC - We were making an attack the first time and I got shot. A German 88 shell got me. It hit me in the face. It wasn't all that bad. I lost my teeth and as a matter of fact, I still have shrapnel in my nose, five little pieces shiny in there.

JS - Were you surprised that they sent you back to your unit?

JC - No, I knew they would. I wasn't all that bad, but it was bad the second time.

JS - When you got shot in the leg?

JC - It hit me in the left knee and the right thigh. We were across the Rhine and we were in the middle of everything. They finally got some pontoons after about two days and let me back across the Rhine into Belgium. I was in Lees, Belgium, for four months or so in the hospital. While I was in the hospital, of course, the war there was over with.

JS - That's where you were when you heard it was over?

JC - I guess so.

JS - Can you describe the Battle of the Bulge, what that was like, moving up?

JC - Walk with a machine gun on your shoulder, ammunition, snow and cold, bad.

JS - You had your food with you?

JC - K-rations. K-rations and so forth, it was not nice.

JS - Were you marching on roads when you were moving across the country?

JC - Mostly paths and maybe some roads, I didn't know where the hell I was.

JS - Were you still in charge of a certain group of men?

JC - Yes.

JS - Someone would be telling you where to take them?

JC - Yeah, our platoon officer was a Second Lieutenant and we had a platoon leader, etc. on down. I just was lucky to make Sergeant, I got more money. That's the reason I joined the paratroops, to get 50 bucks a month because glider pay didn't pay anything. About three weeks after I finished jump school, they started paying glider pay.

JS - By the time you got over there, they had done away with the gliders?

JC - No, they still had them.

JS - Gliding would not have been as easy as jumping from a plane?

JC - There is nothing easy.

JS - Once you hit the ground during the Battle of the Bulge did you still move on?

JC - We were on foot going in the Bulge. There was snow and everything. We walked all the way in there.

JS - I know you were injured. How long did it take you to get up to the Rhine?

JC - After I went back to the unit, we were in Belgium someplace and we just sat there until we crossed the Rhine.

JS - Were you aware of what was going on in other theaters of the war as you were in that particular place?

JC - Once in a while they would tell us what was going on. I wasn't in constant day-to-day war. That was not the airborne objective. We were just a shock troop and you just jumped in or flew in or whatever and you were there for a little bit and you leave at that time.

JS - Were you receiving letters from home and sending letters home?

JC - Once in a while.

JS - They probably couldn't tell you anything that they knew about the war?

JC - You couldn't write anything. They would scratch it out. Everything was censored, coming in and going out.

JS - You crossed the Rhine and eventually got back to a hospital. What was the care like that you got; the medical care?

JC - Pretty good, we had a German war prisoner as a ward guy. My right leg way up on my thigh, it just cut all the meat out to the bone. They were letting it grow out. I got gangrene in there and that set me back quite a bit. On my left knee, it sawed off part of the bone and I had a hard time learning how to walk then.

JS - There wasn't any thing they could have done for that?

JC - Not a whole lot.

JS - How long were you in that hospital?

JC - About four months and after I got out of there everyone was in Germany so they sent me back into Germany to the outfit. I wasn't there two or three weeks and of course, the war was over. They broke the division up and what was left of the 17th they sent to the 13th Airborne that was over there. They were sending the 13th Airborne to Japan. In August when we were on the ship headed for the States, luckily that war was over. When I got to New York, what do you do with a guy? They didn't want me. They sent me home on furlough for a month and a half or so. Finally they sent me into Camp Crowder, Missouri, and I was discharged.

JS - Do you find it interesting that they would send you back to your unit and you would be on your way to Japan? How could you do that?

JC - I wasn't going to Japan anyway, I had too many points.

JS - You weren't capable, really, were you?

JC - No, I couldn't walk very far. It was just a dispersal deal.

JS - How did you gain the points for discharge?

JC - Time and injuries and Purple Heart points.

JS - Because of both times you were injured?

JC - Yes.

JS - Did you receive that at the time or when you got out?

JC - I got the Purple Heart over there. They gave it to me there. The second time was not a Purple Heart; it is an Oak Leaf Gold`Cluster. You just put that with your ribbons.

JS - You were discharged and you were in basic training for two years?

JC - Two and one-half years, from April of '43 to October of '45.

JS - We will back track. When you got over there did you feel that the training that you received over here was adequate and that you knew what to do when?

JC - I hope so.

JS - You survived.

JC - I was lucky.

JS - Skillful, also.

JC - Lucky I didn't die. You either kill or are killed. That is just like this deal now. Some guy goes out and shoots some civilians, they say, over there. They cry and say they were unarmed. How do you know? That's my theory. You shoot first; you never want to shoot second.

JS - Yeah, you might not be able to. You did what you needed to do to survive and you wanted to live.

JC - That's the name of the game.

JS - Were there people who didn't have that attitude?

JC - I don't know about that. I think everybody wanted to live and did what they could. Like I said, some guys were unlucky.

JS - You think luck played an important role?

JC - I do.

JS - As you were marching up, how would you be protected at night? Did you dig foxholes or find buildings?

JC - I remember on my birthday, the 31st of December, we were still walking in there. We slept in an old barn that night.

JS - Good way to celebrate your birthday. Do you have other particular memories of a particular person or a particular incident of that time?

JC - Not especially, we were all in the same boat. You just do what you have to do to survive.

JS - To survive physically, but also as.....?

JC - Mentally.

JS - Is that the hardest part, do you think?

JC - It probably is. I knew guys that shot themselves, couldn't stand the pressure. Some guys just went off of it.

JS - If you had a time where all these thoughts just flooded in, how did you get yourself where you could cope with them? Did you have ways of putting them out of your mind?

JC - I would probably go to the beer garden and get drunk and go back and shape up and here we go again.

JS - That was probably an adequate way of doing it.

JC - What else would you do?

JS - I don't know because most people have not been in situations like that. Most people do not know what war is like. That is the purpose here; we are trying to understand how you all survived that.

JC - You have to have guts and you have to be lucky. Everybody says God saved them. They have to be lucky. There is nothing wrong with God, but you need luck.

JS - Did you use the paratroop training once you got over there?

JC - The part about that is that it makes you physically fit. If you aren't physically fit and hate the enemy, you get to thinking too much about home and so forth, you are sunk.

JS - Were there people who were not physically fit that didn't make it through basic training?

JC - Yeah, I know a guy in the other machine gun squad; he shot himself. We thought the guy was all right. Some guys were just a nervous wreck and various things. I don't know how come I wasn't that way.

JS - You are tough. Your attitude seemed to be the right attitude to have. When you left the United States you were on the ship with hundreds?

JC - Oh yes.

JS - Do you remember what you were thinking as you were heading out across that ocean?

JC - We were on an old luxury liner and the weather was perfect. It was just like being on vacation except all these other ships were there.

JS - You were in a convoy going over?

JC - Yes.

JS - How long did it take you?

JC - I don't remember. It was several days.

JS - Did you have duties while you were on the ship?

JC - Just eat and sleep.

JS - Eat and sleep and be on vacation. You landed in England; did you undergo more training there?

JC - We were training constantly. You don't ever let up. We stayed in training constantly.

JS - Did you have some free time where you could see things in England?

JC - We were outside of Windom and we went to London when we could. We were pretty well confined at that time.

JS - Really, the bombing of London was past?

JC - Oh yes. We were lucky; we weren't in on the worst part. We didn't go in on D-day. Luckily we were younger.

JS - From those that did cross the channel and then move on could you see the ravages of war and what it had done?

JC - All over the place.

JS - Do you have any thoughts on that?

JC - It was hell.

JS - I know when you were in the hospital there was a German prisoner of war there. Did you have others?

JC - No, we had nurses. They were spread pretty thin at that time. This German guy just emptied bed pans and swept floors and things like that. He didn't do any medical stuff.

JS - As you moved across, did you come in contact with the Belgian or French people?

JC - Sure, we saw them all.

JS - Then you moved across the Rhine so you weren't really in Germany a long time?

JC - Of course, we jumped into Germany, but I wasn't in Germany, but two weeks at the most.

JS - So you weren't in on all that activity with the Germans?

JC - With the Germans, we were non-fraternization. We weren't even supposed to speak to them. They were enemies. We were not having any personal contact.

JS - Did you hear scuttle-butts that maybe the war was winding up and the Germans were getting to a desperate point? Did you hear any talk about that or did you just think it was going to go on?

JC - You mean the war go on? No, they were falling back all the time. We knew it was going to be over sooner or later because they were just running short.

JS - There were Americans moving in and out of your unit. One person told me that toward the end, there were older Americans coming in.

JC - Yes, and kids. I was 19 when I went in. They were either real young or 40.

JS - That was because that was what we were down to here?

JC - Yes.

JS - Is there a fellow soldier, maybe, an officer that you remember well that you kept in contact with that you could talk about?

JC - I haven't kept in contact. I came from here. I am from Western Kansas. The majority of the guys were from Ohio, Pennsylvania and back in there. A lot of them were from back there at that time. We were all basically about the same age.

JS - Did you ever run into anyone from Kansas or from this area?

JC - There's a man out here by Ensign, Arnold Hartnett; that was in the same division. He was in a different company than I was. There was another guy, Charles Weimer, but he died.

JS - So you didn't encounter very many people that you knew while you were in there?

JC - No, in my individual company there, I didn't know anybody.

JS - You have said where you were when the war in Germany and the war in Japan ended and how you came back. When you came back did you have an idea of what you were going to do?

JC - I guess not, I didn't have any idea. I chose not to go to school. Probably I should have gone to school.

JS - On the GI Bill?

JC - Yeah, but I didn't so I just went on and worked.

JS - Before, were you on a farm?

JC - Yes, I was born and raised north of Cimarron on the farm.

JS - And you came back to Cimarron?

JC - Yes, that is where the folks were.

JS - You have been here ever since?

JC - I left Cimarron in '51. I was working for a dirt contractor. We leveled land and I moved to Dodge then because he was out of here. I have been here ever since.

JS - Your injuries were significant in the choice of work that you could do. Were services available to you through the Veteran's after that?

JC - Yes, I draw fifty percent disability.

JS - I know we hear a lot about the fact that soldiers aren't served well by the Veteran's Administration. I didn't know if they had that in place after the war or not?

JC - I found out fifty years too late that you have to just ride them and then they will give you something. That is what I did.

JS - You learned that, did you?

JC - It was too late. Before that, I didn't have time. I was chasing and running and taking care of my domestic life and so forth.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)

Interviewee: J T Cox (JC)

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Side B

JS - I just didn't know if it took awhile to get that in place or not. If you needed medical care, you could always go somewhere?

JC - I go to Wichita to the VA. They have been pretty good down there. If you just stay after them, you get results.

JS - When you came home were there other young men in the community that had served and were coming home at the same time?

JC - Right at first when I came home there just was hardly anybody around. I was lucky again, I got discharged right away. Then some of those that I was friends with, and ran around with there in Cimarron, started coming home. Things got back to kind of normal again.

JS - If it ever would have been normal again? You were born in '23. The '30s were the depression and the dust bowl and the war. When you came back from the war had those living conditions and availability of products eased? Was there still a period where it was hard to get maybe cars or tires and things like that?

JC - There were hardly any cars. I never had a car. Things were better, the dust storms were over and they were raising crops. I know my parents had pretty good crops and things were looking up. Then about the middle '50s there was another disaster. I remember when I was leveling land; the dust was so bad you couldn't see the radiator cap on the D8 Cat. That was just out in front of you. It was tough in the middle '50s there. We go in cycles.

JS - Seems like there might be another dry cycle now. I was raised at Ingalls and I saw a lot of that.

JC - You know about that then.

JS - It was filthy. My dad was raised by a grandmother and they had lived through the depression and maybe that really formed people.

JC - Made you tough.

JS - How do you think the training or the experience in the war and the injuries changed you or do you have any reflections on that?

JC - I do know the training sure makes you physically fit. I never was much for physical fitness when I was young. I didn't play any sports, but it does do that. It makes you think.

JS - If a young person came to you and said, "I think I am going to join the Army." What would you say to them?

JC - Let your conscience be your guide.

JS - Is there any other piece of information, any other interesting thing or private thing that happened that you think people might want to read or need to read if they were reading the memories of the World War Two veterans?

JC - Personally, I think that just things put together that have really no meaning in this day and now because it is over. What is over is over. Myself, I didn't try to remember every little detail that happened because I didn't dwell on it. I just look for the next day all the time. As far as memory of where I was at over there and everything, I didn't try to remember. I never even thought about it. I got home and thought, "I'm home, go for it."

JS - When your older brother was in the service and you went in, what did your parents think about both of their sons being in the service?

JC - What was there to think? I don't know what they were thinking. I'm sure they were thinking they didn't want me to go.

JS - Did your brother get discharged about the same time as you did?

JC - He was in the islands and he got malaria. They brought him back to San Antonio, I think it was. He was in the hospital a long time and not in good shape at that time. He got out before I did. They released him before the war was over.

JS - Because of the malaria. When you were drafted, there was no other Cimarron person going at that time?

JC - No, however Hartnett and Weimer, from Dodge were going at the same time. I really didn't know them. I hadn't spread out that far yet.

JS - I don't think we did out here. We just stayed in our own town. Any comment on the living experience, the food, sleeping arrangement, the equipment or your fellow soldiers?

JC - I got along fine with everybody as far as I know. I never had any problems. The food was some days good and some days bad. The only time the food is really good is just before you go in.

JS - What kind of equipment would you have had as you were taken overseas and marching in? You would have had a pack and a rifle?

JC - I can't remember. I carried a '45 and a machine gun and maybe I would have a rifle.

JS - The pack would have included what?

JC - K-rations and stuff.

JS - That is it unless you have something you want to say.

JC - Only thing I have got to say is I am very lucky.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)

Interviewee: J T Cox (JC)

Tape 1 of 1

Side B

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