

INTERVIEW

David C. Loucks

YEAR

2006

**GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

**NAME:** David Loucks  
**DATE:** June 21, 2006  
**PLACE:** Copeland, Kansas

**INTERVIEWER:** Joyce Sullentrop

**PROJECT SERIES:** Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

**BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:**

David Loucks was in California in the Coast Artillery at the time of Pearl Harbor. He had been drafted in '41. After training in Texas he was sent as a combat engineer to Germany via France and Belgium. An excellent storyteller, Loucks tells of this work as a mine hunter and bridge builder, many times under fire from the enemy. He was transferred to the Infantry in the Bulge where he served as a sergeant with a number of men under him. He came home after nearly five years to live with his wife and children in the Copeland community.

**SUBJECTS DISCUSSED:** Entering the service and training and life in the Bulge with a combat engineering crew. His feelings of horror at the losses in the war and his knowledge of the German citizens was discussed.

**COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:**

**SOUND RECORDINGS:** 2- 60 minute tapes

**LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:** 1 1/2 hours

**RESTRICTIONS ON USE:** none

**TRANSCRIPT:** 25 pages

**ORAL HISTORY**  
**Loucks, David C.**  
**Interview Date: June 21, 2006**

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**  
**Interviewee: David Loucks (DL)**  
**Tape 1 of 2**  
**Side A**

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**JS** - One of the first questions that we ask is: World War Two started in 1939 and you would have been twenty years old then. In '41, they bombed Pearl Harbor. Do you remember where you were when you heard the news and what you thought?

**DL** - I was in San Diego, California, in the Coast Artillery. I knew that would be the last time off the post for a long time so we stayed as long as we could.

**JS** - So you were already in the Army?

**DL** - Yes, I was drafted in January of '41.

**JS** - When you were drafted, you were sent to Kansas City?

**DL** - No, to Fort Leavenworth, that was close.

**JS** - Did you choose to be in the Army or did they just tell you, you were going to be in the Army?

**DL** - They told me I was going to be in the Army. In fact, they didn't ask us anything. The other day we saw some uniforms from World War One on television and they were like the uniforms we got when we got in the Army. We were the first ones drafted. They didn't have enough uniforms so I and one other fellow got slacks because we had legs that were too big for those tight fitting pants. By the time they got them big enough to fit our legs the waist looked terrible. That's all I have to say about that, I guess.

**JS** - Did anyone else from the area go with you?

**DL** - Don Marine went with me. He died several years ago.

**JS** - Did you stay with him as you moved along?

**DL** - No, we stayed together a couple of years in San Diego. The Japs weren't near as strong at this time so they decided to send us out. He went to Alaska and I went to Texas.

**JS** - Did you do your basic training in California?

**DL** - Yeah.

**JS** - Do you have anything to say about the basic training?

**DL** - It was tough, I can tell you that. It was sure tough.

**JS** - Was this your first time away from home?

**DL** - Yes, I had never been away from home that far, at least.

**JS** - Did you get homesick when you were out there?

**DL** - Oh yes, that's just one of the things that goes with being in the Army, though, especially when you are drafted. You have everything at home and you are wanting to farm and everything. All at once it is all taken away from you.

**JS** - Did you have family in the services?

**DL** - Yeah, Alva volunteered. He saw it coming up and he volunteered. He went to Fort Ord and then he went on to Alaska. He was in Dutch Harbor. He died a couple of months ago.

**JS** - Did he go in before you or after you?

**DL** - Before, he volunteered about two months before I went in.

**JS** - At the end of basic training did they say that you were going to be assigned to certain duty?

**DL** - We were just Coast Artillery; that was all. We were assigned big guns. That's what we trained on to start with.

**JS** - By Coast Artillery, you mean you would be stationed along the coast?

**DL** - Along the coast right there with the 19th Coast Artillery. That's where we got our basic training, and the old Army was still in charge there. It was pretty tough training. We weren't used to it.

**JS** - Was it a lot of marching?

**DL** - A lot of marching, a lot of gun drill, night out, obstacle course and every kind of imaginable thing. Lots of marching; we marched four or five hours a day.

**JS** - Was it difficult to take orders, live in a barracks or what about the food?

**DL** - The food was pretty good. We were so hungry it didn't make any difference if it was good or not. We would have liked to have a little time off. We almost got no time off the first thirteen weeks. We couldn't do anything, but just stay there and it rained and we were in new barracks. We spent a couple of nights sandbagging the barracks to keep them from washing away.

**JS** - Were there a lot of new people coming in?

**DL** - The whole group of us came in at one time from all over the country.

**JS** - Was that different or fun to meet people from other places?

**DL** - It was easy to make friends with them. They were nice people. Most of them were just like us and didn't know why they were drafted.

**JS** - After basic training, what happened to you next?

**DL** - Mostly we manned the Artillery and we had equipment there to service. We were assigned permanently to that base. Every company had guns that they took care of. We were at Point Loma and it sticks out in the ocean. They were all along that front. Later on when more guys came in they went on to Camp Cullen, that was about fifteen miles north of there, and also on the strand down toward Mexico. They manned one-five-fives.

**JS** - What was the difference between one gun and the other?

**DL** - On the one-five-five there is probably fifty yards. The twelve-inch mortars that we manned on the base were four to a pit so they weren't very far apart. They could fire high range.

**JS** - When you say a pit, was this dug into the ground?

**DL** - It was all cemented out and very well built, but the guns were so obsolete that their maximum range was about fourteen miles. A ship that got that close was in danger anyway and we were sure in danger. They could shoot twenty-eight miles. They were out of our range completely if they fired at us.

**JS** - You were stationed in one of the pits and were there three others in there with you?

**DL** - There was a bunch. I forget how many it took, but it took about a squad to manage one gun, about fourteen. We had fifty or sixty in the pit.

**JS** - That would be a large pit.

**DL** - It was big. It had powder magazines and lots and lots of rounds of ammo. Everything was all ready, but the problem was that they were just too obsolete. One of the outfits went to ten-inch disappearing rifles. They would go down below when they fired and then come up about fifteen feet over a ramp. It was quite a deal.

**JS** - Who were you firing at?

**DL** - We just fired at targets. They would have some kind of an ocean going machine and would pull that target out there. You didn't want to fire ahead of the target or they would drop it and come back in. They were scared to death of your firing.

**JS** - Did you have a shift on for so many hours that you were there?

**DL** - After war was declared, it was a twelve-hour shift. On twelve hours and off twelve hours and someone would take over.

**JS** - Some of the people in there would be looking out?

**DL** - We had some with real high powered scopes and they were on turntables so they knew exactly what we were shooting at. If you picked up a target out there that wasn't identified, you had a red alert. Everybody watched that target and followed it with our guns. We never had to shoot at anything out there. They would always get far enough out of our range that we never did fire. That is why they weren't considered so important. San Diego, itself, put up a whole bunch of those dirigibles, balloons, you know. They were tied with a steel cable so that no airplane could fly in under five hundred feet. They had a lot of airplane factories there and they were well covered.

**JS** - When you said that some people went north to Alaska, they were doing the same thing in Alaska?

**DL** - No, most of them went as Infantry. They took more training and went to Alaska as Infantry. I went with Search Light to Texas. I didn't like the Search Light outfit at all.

**JS** - What was that?

**DL** - That was big lights and you had radar to watch for planes and would turn a light on them. I thought that would really be interesting. It wasn't, not to me at least. I simply could not run that radar. All you had was lines that went up and down, and you kept watching all the time for a tall one. If you got a tall one, you zoomed in on it. There were about a dozen of those. It drove me into another world.

**JS** - Did you ask to do that?

**DL** - Yeah, I asked to get into Search Light and told them I was tired of Artillery. I didn't like it when I got in.

**JS** - You were in Texas. Did they think enemy planes would come into Texas or what were you looking for?

**DL** - We really weren't looking for anything. We were just training. Most of the time we were in the Waco Desert. That is another thing I didn't like. There were sidewinders and scorpions and everything else. It just wasn't my kind of outfit.

**JS** - Did you ask to be transferred out?

**DL** - Yes, I finally got out and went to radio school at first. I loved that radio school, but I am just not a natural radioman. One time the instructor held up a piece of wire and said, "I've got a positive charge here and a negative charge here. What do you see coming through that wire?" I said, "Not a thing." I like to get killed. He said if I wasn't crazy enough to see it now, I would before I finished the course. I never did learn to see anything go through that wire.

**JS** - What was there to see?

**DL** - It is electronic that flows around the wire and not inside the wire. You're supposed to know how fast that is traveling and all that kind of stuff. I enjoyed that. We didn't go to school all the time. We had a lot of good training there.

**JS** - What kind of training would that have been?

**DL** - One thing I remember, they told us to go out and dig foxholes. Be covered because the tanks are coming. We did a pretty good job of digging our foxhole and they did bring a bunch of tanks in there and ran them right over us. You had to get used to that kind of thing, you know. You sure didn't get up and run.

**JS** - Was there a cover on the foxholes?

**DL** - No, they were about eighteen inches to two feet wide and those big old treads on the tanks didn't sink in.

**JS** - You would lay down in them?

**DL** - Oh, you bet you would.

**JS** - So they had to be as long as you were?

**DL** - Yes, they had to be at least that long. Sometimes they would join and they would be twice that long.

**JS** - What did it feel like when you were hoping it was straddling that hole?

**DL** - You hoped it missed it.

**JS** - Were they preparing you to go overseas?

**DL** - Yes, this was overseas training. Another time they had us go out in the field and said it looked like a good place to camp. They asked if anybody saw anything wrong with it and none of us did so we camped out. Pretty soon there were about fifty guys that got up behind a hill down from us. They were hiding there and really surprised us. We got through that training and from there I went to combat engineers. We went right overseas almost immediately, but I had lots of good training so I didn't mind that.

**JS** - What would a combat engineer do?

**DL** - All kinds of mines. Taking up anti-personnel mines and putting them down and building bridges. We built many, many bridges. The last thirty days of the war, we built thirty bridges.

**JS** - Is that when they were moving into Germany?

**DL** - Yeah, we went on into Germany. The reason it was so many is when we got almost to Berlin, we turned around and went back the other direction to get supply lines opened up. A lot of that work was twelve, thirty-six and forty-eight hours of work without ever stopping. Like when you started building a bridge across a big river like the Nile or the Danube, you didn't stop till you got it built, regardless of what went on.

**JS** - What was the bridge built out of?

**DL** - The one we used the most was a Bailey. It was one that was built on rollers. You had to have as much weight back here as you did out here. You just kept building heavier and each time you built ten feet, you would push it out ten feet. You would build another ten feet and push it out ten feet. There was a crew at the other end of it and when ten feet got off they would take that off and start building a bridge with it. We would finally get that bridge across there. Sometimes it would take thirty minutes to go fifty feet and sometimes it would take a lot longer. It depended on how much you were in the line of fire and everything and how straight across the river it was. There were always trees, it seems like. The bridge had to go straight. If the river curved a little bit and you sometimes couldn't go straight because of the trees it was bad. Being quiet was

always a priority. You didn't want anybody to see or hear you. They sure didn't like for you to build those bridges.

**JS** - If they knew you were building a bridge would they sometimes come back and bomb it?

**DL** - They would bomb it or shell it. A lot of times they would leave a small group behind to keep you from building a bridge. Eisenhower saved a lot of our lives because he made it the rule that no combat engineers could go ahead of the Infantry. We always had the Infantry up front to kind of watch after us. That was a good deal because while you are building a bridge, your rifle is too much in the way. You would lay it down someplace.

**JS** - Were the bridges just one lane?

**DL** - One lane.

**JS** - When you started to use the bridges, someone would have to be directing traffic?

**DL** - Yes, most of the time the traffic was just going one way. You would have a big line of tanks lined up behind you, usually. As soon as you finished the bridge they would start right across it. You had to maintain the bridge all the time until you built another one or two for two-lane traffic.

**JS** - Were these metal bridges or wood?

**DL** - These were metal bridges. Bailey is all metal except the tread way. The tread way was wood. We built quite a few pontoon bridges, too. That is a floating bridge. We had plenty of trouble with those, too. When you wanted a bridge quick, that is what you used.

**JS** - Did you land in England or on the Normandy coast?

**DL** - We landed in Marseilles, France. We came clear up there. We were in sight of Paris when they made that Normandy landing, but it was so foggy we couldn't see anything, almost. We saw a lot of people. The Germans ran a lot of the Frenchmen down the road we were coming up. They were just thick everywhere. We had to take off-roads when we got there because we had some bridges to build right up from that.

**JS** - You brought the stuff that you were going to make the bridge of on the ship with you or what?

**DL** - They had a depot. You went and looked at the sight first and then came back and ordered a bridge that you thought the bridge would be the right one; a floating bridge or whatever. The depot would bring it in.

**JS** - What kind of equipment did you have to build that bridge? Was it manual labor?

**DL** - Most of it was manual labor. We had a bulldozer and some big equipment. I forgot what you called the big trucks we had. Almost all of it was manual labor.

**JS** - You had quite a few men?

**DL** - What was so amazing about it is each squad had a dump truck, a two and a half ton. When I tell people that, they just don't believe that, but we did. We didn't do any walking, you might say. All our work was mobile.

**JS** - Wasn't your work one of the most important? \

**DL** - It was very important. One time we were trying to figure out a pattern for mines. In those days, whenever you laid a minefield, you were supposed to have a pattern that you would follow to take it all up. The Germans had laid the minefield and we couldn't figure out the pattern, but so many of them were booby trapped. When you found a booby trapped one, you would look for another one. We were having a terrible time figuring that out and a German came over there. He was jabbering and carrying on something terrible. I could understand some German so I decided he was trying to tell us something. I went over and talked to him and he could talk better English than I could talk German so we ended up talking English. He said, "This is my potato field and I want every mine taken up." He said he lived across the river and watched them. He had marked every one of them. I told him to show us and I handed him two colored flags. For a mine you put a green flag and a yellow flag for a one that was a trap. He grabbed those flags and started taking three steps this way and three steps that way and he had that whole thing before long. We decided he was right and started taking up mines before he was through. It wasn't long till we had that whole field cleared. I listened to the Germans. They were good people to tell you what was going on.

**JS** - There were mines and what is a booby trapped mine?

**GL** - That is one that had another device like maybe a tight wire that went ten feet out here. If you hit that wire, you broke it and set it off. It might be a loose wire, that when you tripped over it would pull it off. A lot of them just had three fingers sticking out and if you stepped on that it would set the mine off.

**JS** - As you were approaching the mine field, what could you see that made you know there were mines there?

**GL** - Nothing, they did a good job of covering the mines. At the last they didn't have time. They did a lot of running and sometimes they just left the mine right out in the open in hope that somebody wouldn't see it and run into it. That was mostly tank mines. They were big mines and about four inches deep and full of TNT. A device to set them off took about 400 pounds so you didn't need to worry about stepping on one of them. You didn't if you could help it. It had a ring around and if you stepped inside of that it would go off.

**JS** - They had smaller mines for people who were walking?

**DL** - Anti-personnel mines, yes, and they had lots of those. The smallest one was what we called Holtz mine and they had a quarter pound of TNT and were about three inches by three inches by six inches, maybe. The top just hinged on it. The only metal thing on it was a striker so you just about couldn't find them with a mine sweeper. It was so easy to step on one of those. They had what we called the Bouncing Betties, and they went under the ground and had a shotgun shell. It blew them up in the air eight feet and then they would explode. We sure did dread those. They were bad ones. We didn't lose so many to mines; we were just lucky that is all.

**JS** - You had two or more duties; to sweep mines and build bridges?

**DL** - We also laid mine fields and back there in the Bulge they put us in the Infantry. We had to fight the enemy. We hated that. We would always get the worst spots because we had come into the outfit and they would put us in the worst spot there was. I tried to tell them they were not going to have any engineers left if they didn't watch it. It didn't worry them any. We had a lot of close calls.

**JS** - It seems like you had a vast number of experiences, more than many people.

**DL** - I'll say so.

**JS** - No one has ever told me these things about the mines and building the bridges.

**DL** - Most of them didn't do that work.

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**

**Interviewee: David Loucks (DL)**

**Tape 1 of 2**

**Side B**

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**DL** - It was a pretty fast life, I'll tell you.

**JS** - When you were in the Battle of the Bulge, did you go into Germany?

**DL** - We were already in Germany. We had to back up for maybe fifty miles. It was so crooked with trees and hills that it was hard to tell. We backed up for awhile and then we set still awhile and then started our big drive that finished the war.

**JS** - The rivers that you were building bridges over, are they in France or Germany?

**DL** - Most were in Germany, like the Rhine and the Danube. We had a sign painter in the outfit and he painted a sign that said, "You are now crossing the beautiful Blue Danube courtesy of twelve-seventy-first combat engineers." A general came along and, boy, that sign came down. He said, "We are not advertising here. This is a work outfit."

**JS** - When you were building the bridges, were they where there had been bridges that had been bombed out?

**DL** - Sometimes, we tried to avoid those if we possibly could because they had the Artillery set for those places. If we could go up or down stream a little ways, that was better. That is why we always checked to see what we were going to need.

**JS** - As you were moving, the Infantry was ahead of you?

**DL** - We were usually ahead of them except for a few. One time we were digging foxholes. That was in the Bulge and it was all froze solid. We had to use TNT to dig those foxholes. We could see the Germans a way up the hill from us. We were very nervous about it. Pretty soon, three guys came down toward us and we didn't know if they were Germans or somebody else. Another sergeant and I lay down till they got pretty close and we hollered at them. They were with Infantry and that was all that was left was those three guys in front of us. We didn't have much protection there. As soon as anything happened they would just run back to us. At least someone was there.

**JS** - That seems bad to be out there without protection.

**DL** - It was, when you had to work, and you just simply couldn't watch everything and still work.

**JS** - You said that sometimes you laid minefields. That was if you knew the Germans were behind you?

**DL** - The only time we laid any was during the Belgian Bulge. We were backing up and wanted to slow them down as much as we could. We didn't lay many of those. We were usually backing up too fast to do much of that.

**JS** - When you were discovering the minefields and taking the mines out what did you do with those mines, explode them?

**DL** - We usually blew them. We had what we called a cat-o-nine-tails. We had about six hooks on a rope and we liked to find a hole or something where a bomb had gone off and we would put them in there. After we got a bunch of them in there we would set them off. It was easy to set them off. All it took was a piece of TNT thrown in there and they would get started blowing and then they would all blow. It wasn't bad to get rid of the mines.

**JS** - Did you think that the training that you had received in the United States before you went over was adequate?

**DL** - Oh yes, I had a lot more training than a lot of the guys that were there. When you got a new guy in for replacement you had to watch every move he made for awhile. He would learn pretty quickly whenever those shells went to bouncing around. You learned a lot faster than you did in the States.

**JS** - Were you nervous when you were working?

**DL** - You bet I was nervous. I was a sergeant and had fourteen to thirty men under me all the time. I was very nervous; you had to keep your guard out at all times. One time we were building a bridge and there was a shell hole right next to where we were building the bridge. It was just right and we all took our gas masks and rifles and put them in that hole so if we were attacked we could run and get them. Once we got a big scare and made a run for that hole and the bulldozer had covered it up.

**JS** - All of your equipment?

**DL** - All our guns, gas masks and everything. We had a real supply officer. We weren't long in getting more equipment. That was a terrible feeling. No hole there to get into.

**JS** - You said a gas mask. Was that a real fear?

**DL** - It was at times. Whenever we got too fast for our guns to keep ahead of us, we every once in awhile would have a call, "Smoke in the area." You wanted your gas mask close. I think that only happened three or four times. I was a sergeant so I had to carry my mask more than the rest of them did. I was sure where mine was, and they said there was some mustard gas coming in on this

cloud. I ran to get my gas mask and it was gone. I couldn't find that thing. I finally got to where our truck was. We had some extra ones in our truck.

**JS** - You said since you were a sergeant you wore your gas mask more than others?

**DL** - I was supposed to carry it, more as a good example for the men.

**JS** - Because you, basically, were more important because those men were under you?

**DL** - Yes, they watched what I did so they knew what they needed to do. You have seen these picture shows where they don't follow the sergeant, but they did there, I guarantee you. I never had one bit of trouble with those guys following orders.

**JS** - How old were you when you were a sergeant? Were you older than the people under you?

**DL** - Well, kind of mediocre. I was twenty-four when I was overseas. I was a sergeant for four years. I couldn't get any advancement because for one reason, there were no openings. There were all these little places in the United States where they were training soldiers. They would give them all ratings and when they went overseas they took the ratings with them and that didn't leave any openings. I don't think we had a single opening all the time I was overseas.

**JS** - You were there when we were crossing the Rhine and went on into Germany. Was that when you went down to the Danube?

**DL** - I can't remember just how all that went, but I know we had a lieutenant that wasn't very good. First time we were called to build a bridge across the Rhine, it was the first time we had built a big bridge. We were nervous enough about that and the lieutenant called us and said, "This is it now. A lot of you aren't going to come back on this deal. We got to look good." I thought, the guys were so scared before they got to that bridge, I didn't think they were going to be able to build a bridge; everybody was shook up so bad. In a little while they calmed down and we never were fired on at that first bridge. The main bridge across the Rhine was about five miles from there, I'd say. We got in quick enough to get the wires cut on that and saved that bridge. Their concentration was up there and we built this bridge down below and never had a bit of trouble. They didn't know we were building it, I don't think.

**JS** - When you say you were able to move in and cut the wires, was it because the Germans had wired the bridge to blow it up?

**DL** - Yeah, we never built a bridge without it. Whenever we built a bridge, one of the first things we did was wire it up to blow. In case you had to fall back you could blow the bridge. We didn't want them using our bridge.

**JS** - I hadn't thought about that. You had people in your unit that knew how to do that?

**DL** - It wasn't very complicated then. We were trained on that, of course.

**JS** - As you were moving in and the war was winding down, you maybe didn't know it?

**DL** - We didn't know it, but it wound down quickly while I was over there.

**JS** - Were you in a position where Germans were taken prisoner?

**DL** - Oh yeah, fact is, what we liked best of all, when the war was about over there was a German outfit of combat engineers. You might say we took them over. They just quit and we didn't know what we were going to do with them. We thought we had to guard them at first. We found out they didn't want to leave. All we had to do was feed them. We got by real well with them. Then when the war was over we used them. We let them do our work. They built a lot of railroads and such. We would have to have the supplies for them and we didn't do any of the work after that. We let them do all of it.

**JS** - Of course, do you remember where you were when you heard that the war was officially over?

**DL** - I sure do, it was a terrible place. They blew off the side of a mountain. We needed to get past there real bad and of course we were under fire all the time. I know one time a shell landed right behind the guy that ran the bulldozer. We had to push in holes so we could get our trucks in there. The back end of that bulldozer jumped up in the air and settled back down. I thought that I hoped the driver wasn't hurt. About that time he wheeled the thing around and went right to filling that hole. It didn't seem to bother him at all. Of course, by this time we were pretty prone. He filled holes and we got up there and there were a lot of German vehicles. I imagine it was half a dozen of them on the other side of that blowout. We didn't think there was anyway for us to build a bridge across that gap because it was on a rounding deal. We fretted and stewed and I decided if we could get to those German vehicles and push them off of there and down below we could land a bridge there and go on across. We tried it and we pushed the last vehicle down there. Man, it looked good and we were scared to death to touch those vehicles in case they were mined. We didn't have any alternative so we did. Everything was just right and all at once rattle, bang, and clang they went down the mountain. So we had to figure out another way. We kept cribbing up, sneaking the rollers on the bridge on over. It was only about a thirty-

foot gap, but it was sure straight up and down. I said, "Men, we have got to get this bridge built before daylight or we've had it. There is a valley right down there and I know there is a bunch of guns pointed at us. As soon as they can see where they are shooting, we are in trouble." There was no place to go up or go down. We were just in trouble. We did work hard trying to get that bridge built before dawn. We didn't make it. It got dawn and pretty soon I looked down there and there were those guns. I could just imagine what was down there and I could see the soldiers around them. I thought, "How in the world they must want this bridge built for their purposes." So we went ahead and built the bridge and some of the guys said they have to go down to see what the deal was. There were about three of the guys that decided to go down. They went down and talked to the Germans and the war was over. We didn't find out till about eleven o'clock the next morning that the war was over. Of course, we were a long ways from communication, then.

**JS** - What were your first thoughts when you found out the war was over?

**DL** - Let's go home. I was ready.

**JS** - How long, then, did it take you to get home?

**DL** - I don't remember exactly. I don't remember just when the war was over.

**JS** - It was over May fifth of '45.

**DL** - It must have been quite awhile because I didn't get my discharge right away. I was on my way home on my birthday, September 15<sup>th</sup>. I had four years, twenty-two months and ten days when I got discharged.

**JS** - That was a long time.

**DL** - Way too long.

**JS** - When you heard that the war in Europe was over, did you ever think that you would be going to the Pacific?

**DL** - Yeah, that was what we were trained for. Just as soon as the war was over they went right to training us for the Pacific. I didn't want to fight those Japs and I still hate them just because of that. They were just different. The Germans were more like us, you know. We could kind of understand what they were thinking about. The Japs taught us they could see better at night and they could run faster than we could, and they could run longer than we could. They could shoot straighter than we could, and in other words they were just superior to us. You really had to be on your toes if you want to come home from that war.

**JS** - That is how the training was different?

**DL** - That's how it was different. We were taught to think before we shot and not shoot at the first sign of anything.

**JS** - Were you on the ship going home when you heard about dropping the bomb? That would have been August sixth or ninth.

**DL** - No, I was still in Germany. In fact, we were scared to death we would get our shipping orders just any minute. We just knew we were going to have to go to the South Pacific. When they dropped that bomb, it was the most welcome thing that ever happened.

**JS** - When you went into the Army, did you ever think that you would be in for that long?

**DL** - Oh no, we just went in for a year. When Germany got so much stronger than we had expected, I didn't expect to be sent to Germany. I thought I would be sent to the South Pacific, but I wasn't. I went to Germany. That's where I wanted to go. The Mediterranean was our first big surprise. That is so much bigger than you ever imagined. I forget how many days we sailed past the Rock of Gibraltar that we didn't see land. Of course, we were going real slowly to avoid any problems. We landed at Marseilles, France, and the first thing we did was marched up on the hill. We had gone through Marseilles and there was a man hanging on the light pole. I didn't like the looks of that and I said, "Let's just cut him down." Oh, no, you didn't dare do that, not until sundown. You didn't dare touch that man till sundown. He was well guarded. He was what they called a collaborator. He had given the Germans information on the French.

**JS** - I know that you were busy doing everything that you were doing, but as you moved through, did you have a time to say, "What is going on here, where am I and how am I going to get out of here?"

**DL** - I don't think so. I really didn't have any time. As a sergeant, I was always thinking of where we were going and what we were going to do next. When you have that many men under you, I know one time our lieutenant got a piece of shrapnel in his elbow and he got shipped to the States. We had lost so many officers that we didn't have any more to go. So they came around and the first sergeant they offered a battlefield commission. He said, "I'm not fit." And he wasn't, he was a real good leader as long as it didn't get too rough, but when it got rough, he cried like a baby. He just couldn't handle it. When he said he couldn't handle it they came to me and I said, "Man, I can't take it, I have all the men I can handle. There's no way." Sergeant Beeler said, "How about Lieutenant Tabor?" He was a supply sergeant. He said he didn't know the first thing about building a bridge. Beeler said, "We'll build the bridges; all you need to be is our officer." Tabor said he would be tickled to death to take it, and from there on we had a good officer. Man, he was good.

**JS** - Was it hard moving through and seeing people that didn't make it, that were killed? How did you deal with that?

**DL** - I don't know. They all knew it was dangerous. Somehow or other they just took my advise whenever I said anything. I, so near, got in trouble one time because it was the lieutenant's birthday. It was after the war was over. I invited him down and we were back, kind of on a rest. We were probably ten miles back from the front. The lieutenant told us to take off and celebrate his birthday. They just never let you take off. You got up at six o'clock every morning and cleaned the gutter in the road if nothing else, but you nearly always had something worthwhile to do. That was when we were finding all that money over there. We knew where there was a big old cave in the mountain so the captain raised hell. He said we had better be there working. He said he was going to come and check on us. The lieutenant said, "He'll come and check all right, but when he does, you will be all through. Wait till he goes and just be working like hell. As soon as his vehicle gets out of sight just go right on doing what you want to." We loaded as soon as he left. We went to that cave, but there was not one of us that had nerve enough to go in that cave. It was dark in there and we didn't have any way of lighting it. To go in a dark cave when you knew that the Germans probably were hiding in there was something none of us could do. We found a '38 Ford truck there. It was a nice one and I was kind of a mechanic. I said, "Let's take that thing." The tires and everything were just like new on it. Speedometer was in kilometers, but it didn't have many kilometers on it. We went to try to start it. The motor was locked up and we tried everything in the world to unlock that motor and we finally just gave up and decided to go back to camp. We went back to camp and they were all loaded up and ready to go. Oh, they were really looking for us. It was just getting dark; we thought we were perfectly safe.

**JS** - When you said that they were finding money around, you mean where the Germans had pulled out and people were finding where they had left it?

**DL** - A whole gob of money. It was the big shots that left the money. Hitler was making all that money faster than he could spend it.

**JS** - During that whole time in the service, did you get any furlough, anytime that you got to come home?

**DL** - Let's see. After I was in the Army six months, I got fifteen days and then I didn't get another furlough because war was declared soon after that. Just before we went overseas we got a long weekend off to come home. I was home twice in four years.

**JS** - Were you able to write home while you were over there and could you receive mail?

**DL** - We could write home, but it was V-mail. You would write a letter and then they would put it down and look for bitty stuff. Anything that you wrote that they didn't exactly like, they just marked a line through it. You couldn't really write what you wanted to. You couldn't say anything about where you were or what you were doing or anything like that.

**JS** - When your parents wrote to you, were they able to tell you how the war was going or did you know how the war was going?

**DL** - We kind of knew how the war was going because we had Stars and Stripes, a newspaper that was printed by the Army. We could keep track with that. We were pretty well versed on what was going on. Of course, there was Tokyo Rose.

**JS** - You could listen to a radio?

**DL** - Yeah, the Germans had lots of radios and we could liberate one once in a while. So we nearly always had a good radio around.

**JS** - When you were over there, you had no free time and no time that you could just relax?

**DL** - Very seldom, in the Infantry every so often we'd get a time like that. We very seldom had one. Like that time I told you about, we thought we were going to be there for a week and we were there for twenty-four hours.

**JS** - As you were moving in Belgium, France, and into Germany, you probably couldn't even gain an impression of the countryside or anything.

**DL** - No, not much, whenever you would go where there was a battle, there would be a whole bunch of dead American soldiers. It just upset you so bad you could hardly stand it, but when you would get on the other side there were always all those dead Germans. There were at least twice as many dead there as there were on this side. Then you always felt a little better.

**JS** - Did you run into anyone from Kansas or from this area while you were there?

**DL** - One guy, Marvin Unruh, came to see me one time. It was one of those deals, I was combing my hair. We had come to this town and we were going to rest a little while. We pulled into this town. That was the first house we had in I don't know when, but it was a tumble down one. It had floors that were broken through and stuff, but we cleaned it up and fixed it up to where we could feel at home in it. I was combing my hair and a guy stepped in and said, "Just as I thought, you're combing your hair." It was Marvin Unruh. We had gone to school

together and so he was in the Infantry. He wanted me to go back with him because they were way back there resting. I got permission right quick to go back with him. I saw a picture show, the only one I saw while I was over there. It wasn't much of a picture show, but it was a picture show, anyway. We fooled around there until time to go back and we went back.

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**

**Interviewee: David Loucks (DL)**

**Tape 2 of 2**

**Side A**

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**DL** - I didn't have my rifle. I said, "Marvin, what the hell am I going to do?" It was too close to the front to be without a rifle. He said, "Oh, don't worry; you won't need a rifle before morning. You can get another one by then." I said I knew it, but that was morning. He went on back and I sneaked into this house and it was empty. There was nobody there. You don't know what chills went through me then. I didn't know whether they had been run out of there or what had happened. It was dark and I wasn't about to light a match or anything to see if I could find any blood left there. I remembered where the truck was. We had a regular place where we kept the trucks. That was one thing; we always had to have them in the motor pool when we stopped. I sneaked and looked and they were there. The sergeant had decided that house wasn't good enough for us so he found a better house. We had extra rifles in our truck so I felt all right then. I slept in the truck that night and next morning it sure did feel good to have everything right.

**JS** - You don't know what happened to your rifle, if someone picked it up or what?

**DL** - It didn't make any difference. It was just in another Jeep. Marvin had it and he just had a different Jeep from when we went.

**JS** - How did he know how you were there?

**DL** - I don't know how he found out. I never did learn. I saw him here awhile back and I didn't get to talk to him about that. He still teases me about combing my hair. I don't have much to comb now.

**JS** - Most of the time would you be sleeping out?

**DL** - Most of the time we were out, yes. We had pup tents; we had to carry with us, but we very seldom set them up.

**JS** - Did you sleep in a foxhole?

**DL** - Not usually, we would find a ditch or something like that to sleep in. We had our sleeping bags and we never took off our clothes, but once a week. When it got warmer we did, but not while it was cold. We had very little time off. They wouldn't give you any time because they knew it would be tough on you if you stopped to think.

**JS** - You agree with that?

**DL** - I sure do. That was a good idea. I didn't agree with it then by a long ways. I thought we should have some time off.

**JS** - Did you ever get sick or did the men around you get sick?

**DL** - I don't remember anybody ever getting sick. We got quite a few guys wounded.

**JS** - What would happen when they were wounded?

**DL** - There were always medics around. You had medics in your outfit, one man with a white cross. He could recommend the hospital and it wasn't long till there was a vehicle there to take you to the hospital. It was sometimes just a makeshift place like a tent. Sometimes they had a hospital to work out of. Most, like that lieutenant that got the shrapnel in his arm. It was a pretty good-sized piece of shrapnel and they sent him straight to the States. They tied that arm up so he couldn't move it and sent him straight to the States.

**JS** - Did you all have basic first aid training?

**DL** - Yeah, we had learned all the pressure points and we carried a first aid kit with us at all times. If somebody got hurt, you didn't mind tearing the kit open because you could always get another one.

**JS** - Was there a chaplain?

**DL** - We had a chaplain that followed us all the time. I don't think he had a special religion. One time we were on the front and that was when the Germans were coming down at us during the Bulge. They put us up there; I didn't like this position at all. They scattered us out across an opening that came down this mountain side. It wasn't a straight mountain; it was sloping. That was the very kind of place the Germans liked to attack. They put us up there five miles from nobody and said to dig in and if the Germans came they would help us. They went back five miles down the line and relaxed and had a good time. We set on the mountain five miles up there with no transportation. We took lots of machine guns and things with us. It was just fourteen men of us. We had a good line of pits there and we had a machine gun at each end. All night long we would try a burst or two with those machine guns, just a short burst. We didn't have that

much ammo so we would fire short bursts just to let them know we were still there. Every so often a guy would take a shot at a light or spark he saw. The Germans used a lot of signal lights. We stayed there and waited for those Germans for a week. Finally on Sunday morning the Infantry came back up there and they were ready to go to work. I was never so glad to see anybody in all my life. I said, "Those Germans are right up there, we can see them every once in a while. We are just waiting for them to come down." He said, "If they come down, we will sure take care of them." I told him it was a heck of a lot different to have a battalion to defend it than just a squad. We loaded up in a truck and went back down the hill and I said, "If we find a nice church along the way, would anybody object to stopping and going to church?" They all said they wouldn't and I had atheists, Catholics and everything else. Here we went back, about fifty miles from camp, and all at once there was a church that had a cross on it. I don't know what kind of church it was. It had a cross on the top. No vehicles around, we stopped anyway and we went. They said, "Who's going to guard the truck?" I said, "If anybody steals the truck from a church, we will just walk the rest of the way." We went in and I was really surprised. There were more coats hanging on that wall than I ever saw. They had a sort of place in front where they had a metal door on each side and I couldn't figure all those coats out. We stacked the rifles and gas masks in that place. I looked in this one door and that church was full. There wasn't a seat left on that side. There were just enough seats on the other side so we could sit down. I was in the second row from the front. I was the last one. It was real quiet. There wasn't a sound in there. We just walked in and sat down. Pretty soon a boy came in with his incense and the preacher came right behind him. He preached in German and we couldn't understand him, but we got the feeling. After church we all got out and got around our rifles, but we didn't really know what to do and the people weren't getting out of our way any. They were just standing there. Pretty soon the preacher said, "If our own soldiers would have come in, they would have shot up the place and hurt some of us. The enemy comes in and worships with us. Which one is really our enemy?" Then they all were inviting us to dinner and everything, but we had to go home. We had to get there for our noon meal. Were they ever glad to see us? They were scared, when we left, that they would never see us again. That was one time overseas that we had a warm shower. It was set up for us and a grand meal.

**JS** - That is a good story. There you were at the enemy church and what he said to you just said it.

**DL** - We sure enjoyed it and I never heard a single complaint about it. Not a one of the guys ever said a thing. I had one guy that professed to be an atheist. They say there are no atheists in the Army, but he pretended to be, at least. I don't think he was. I believe he believed in God.

**JS** - That would be the time to figure out if you believed in God or not. Were you single when you went to the Army?

**DL** - No, I was married before I went into the service. I got married just before I went to the service, in fact. It was December 26<sup>th</sup> and I went to the service January 8<sup>th</sup>. Of course, she was pregnant and she had a baby. She went to California and stayed out there with me for awhile and she got pregnant again. We had another little boy. When I was in Texas, she came down there for awhile and got pregnant again. When I went overseas, I got a letter from her, a V-mail. It said our son had died. I had no idea which one. We knew that the new one was going to be a son. She didn't say; she just apologized for it. He was born without an esophagus. Somebody fed him. They had told them that if anybody fed him, it would kill him immediately. He just lived three days, I believe. Two weeks later the Red Cross got around to telling me and told me his name. Oh man, that was a tough two weeks.

**JS** - Did she go home when you went overseas?

**DL** - Yes, she stayed with my folks and her folks.

**JS** - It couldn't have been an easy time for either of you.

**DL** - Oh no, it sure wasn't.

**JS** - When the war was over and you were coming home and getting out, did you get out because of points you had earned?

**DL** - Yeah, I forgot how many it was, but I had enough points to get out. They wanted me to stay and offered to make me a first sergeant and I would get more money when I got home. Even three days were too many to stay.

**JS** - I was going to ask if you ever thought of staying in.

**DL** - No, I was so anxious to get home.

**JS** - What about being in the Reserve?

**DL** - No way, I tried to get as far away as I possibly could. I never made any noise. It was sure tough. It was hard to get along without a weapon, too. You had carried weapons so long. I had a little twenty-five caliber pistol and I carried that in my pocket until I got to Dodge City. I just couldn't stand putting it away. I finally said if I am ever going to do without, I have to do it now. I was on the train coming up there and I put it way down in the bottom of my bag. I came home with it and I have still got it. I never went back to it. I wanted to, but I never did.

**JS** - That is because you were so trained to have it before?

**DL** - Yes, it was so long that I felt naked without it.

**JS** - Did you know when you were coming home, what you were going to be doing?

**DL** - I had no idea. I had sent home some money and thought I would have a month or so to decide what to do. I got home and my younger brother was just going to the service. He was working for Security Elevator and he said, "It's a pretty good job, why don't you try?" I said I would love to have it so I went to work for Security Elevator.

**JS** - Here in Copeland?

**DL** - Thirty-seven dollars a week

**JS** - Compared to what?

**DL** - Army pay, that was like I was a millionaire, I declare. Of course, I had everything to buy and that is when it started to get to me. I went to Montezuma. I said, "I need a lot of furniture. I need it awful bad, but I don't have any money." He asked me where I worked and I told him what I was going to do and everything. He said they could let me have a stove, refrigerator and I don't remember what all. There were three or four things that he let me have, right off. Made us look livable. It was coming into winter so I had to have a heating stove, too. He sold me that. When I was paying him off, I said, "How in the world can you do business like that? How can you collect it?" He said he didn't have a bit of trouble collecting. He said most of the collecting is done when we sell it, but if you sell to the right people, it is no problem.

**JS** - You had rented a home?

**DL** - Yes, we had rented a place and were going to get to farm it, but that deal fell through. I never figured out why, but it did.

**JS** - How old were your children when you got home?

**DL** - I think Sheryl was five and David was three years old.

**JS** - They really didn't know you?

**DL** - No, they didn't know me. They had been told so much about me that they thought they did. They came running out to the car. They had told them what it was going to be like. I was in my uniform. Sherry just jumped up. She never did know a stranger. And David ran right up to me and he turned and went the other way. He was sure surprised.

**JS** - It wasn't hard coming home?

**DL** - It wasn't hard at all.

**JS** - There are a couple of questions I would like to go back to. Was there a fellow soldier or an officer that you have a memory of and why do you remember a particular memory about him.

**DL** - Sergeant Beeler and I always worked together and he was the best leader I ever saw for men. He simply could just handle men, but when it got down to the nitty-gritty, he wasn't worth a hoot. I would have to take his place when he was gone and I didn't feel capable of handling men as well as he did. He was sure good. I never have heard from him since.

**JS** - Did you keep in contact with anyone?

**DL** - No, I didn't. Well, there was one guy, Stocking. He was a very religious man and I wrote to him for quite awhile. He had really tough luck. He came home and his daughter was married and they had a family and she got a divorce. They helped take care of her kids and out of the clear blue sky, she died. That left him and his wife to take care of the children and they took care of them for about a year and then his wife died. He had them all by himself. He took care of them for quite awhile and he wrote to me that he was not a bit well. The next thing I got was from his kids. They said he had passed away. They had all passed away, but the kids. That was sure tough. I went to see him and I had another guy I liked real well. He lived in San Antonio, Texas. I went down there with another couple with the express idea of looking him up. I told this guy that was with us and he said, "If you do, I won't have any more to do with you." I don't know why he said it, but that is just the way he said it. I got the feeling that he meant it so, I thought about that awhile. I thought it just wasn't worth it; I could come down to San Antonio later.

**JS** - That was strange.

**DL** - That was very unusual. That is the first time I ever had anything like that happen.

**JS** - Last question. Do you think that the many years of experience changed you? Did it make you aware of things that you look back at?

**DL** - I don't know if it was beneficial or not. I feel like it didn't hurt me at least. I was able to take it mentally. Probably the experience was good for me. One thing I didn't like about it is the World War One Veterans weren't in near as long as we were and they got all kind of gifts from the government and stuff. We didn't get squat. Well, I did too. I got about four hundred dollars from the government.

**JS** - After you got out?

**DL** - After we had been out, we went to GI School at Ensign. We got some tools. We had to pay for the tools and everything, but they managed to get them for us. It was hard to get good tools then. Every month you had to keep your books and if you had more than a hundred dollars income you took that off what you got from the government. About that time we bought a well rig, my brother and I. We went to drilling wells and there wasn't a time we could have drawn any money so we just quit. I think it was four months. We had a lot of fun while we were going to that school anyway.

**JS** - There were other GIs there?

**DL** - Yeah, Cary Barrett and Joe Howard were there. These guys are all dead.

**JS** - That's why what you are telling is so important.

**DL** - Howard Stude is still living and me and my brother, Walt. There is one more, but I can't think who it is. We sure enjoyed it.

**JS** - Did you bring any souvenirs home?

**DL** - Very few, when we got discharged we were supposed to get discharged at Leavenworth and they were snowed under. They said if we would go to Camp Crowder, Missouri, we could get discharged faster. It would be a least three days before they got to us. It would be three days of discharging later and that was too long. We headed for Camp Crowder and my wife and I and another friend went to Camp Crowder. We were supposed to stay there, but my wife was in a hotel so I came back and stayed with her and he got a hotel room and got up real early the next morning. It was cold and I went out to warm up the car. I knew I had parked it on that side, but there was no car there and I ran all the way around the motel and I couldn't find it, anyplace. I came back. This guys name was Ryberg and I said, "Our car must have been stolen, I cannot find it." He said he had to go back to camp and I told him to go ahead. I would try to find out what happened to it. I called the police and they wanted all the license numbers and everything on it. It had HAS written on the door. That was the guy that had it before I did. They said, "We have your car, but it was wrecked. A patrolman saw the car come down the street without the lights on and he turned around. The patrolman took after him and they hit a dip his hood flew up. The patrolman said for a minor thing like that he would just let him go. He stopped to put his hood down and heard a crash and the guy tried to turn a corner and ran into a tree. It just had the front end dented up some, not too badly. I asked where it was and he said it was in the shop. I told him to have them just fix it enough so I could drive it home because I have a repairman at home. He said I would have to come and see about it. I said, "I have to be discharged just this morning." The chief of police said, "Do you want your car or don't you? If you want your car

come and get it this morning." I went down there and paid the car and went to the police station. He said, "I don't know what you had in there, but that guy must have taken it all out. They said they had caught him with the lights off. They took everything out of that car and put it in a small room in the police station and everybody had gone through it. I had two cartons of cigarettes in there and there wasn't a cigarette left. All of my valuables that amounted to anything were in that car. It was all gone. My class A uniform and anything you think of was gone.

**JS** - You wouldn't think people could stoop that low.

**DL** - Not at a police station. I said, "I want to see the guy that stole my car." I left right there.

**JS** - I got back at noon and I was in the most trouble I was ever in in the Army. The captain came in and ate me out some more. He didn't know I had left camp the night before. He just knew my car was stolen and I had gone to check on it. He said I couldn't get discharged for three days. They said if you can find somebody to catch you up you can go. I looked around there. Everybody was new to me and most of them had no combat experience at all. Finally I met a sergeant. He asked me what was wrong and I explained my problem and he said, "What have you missed?" I told him a half day and he said just to sign this paper that you don't have any medical problems whatsoever, I can catch you up. I have wished a lot of times I hadn't done that because I had teeth trouble and I finally lost half of them.

**JS** - Is there anything else that you want to say?

**DL** - One time I told my nephew that I worked with some of the combat stories. Thank goodness that tape thing was not working. It makes me nervous to talk about it. For a long time I wouldn't talk about it at all.

**JS** - Because it brought so many memories?

**DL** - Yes, you think about how it was at that time, you know.

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**

**Interviewee: David Loucks (DL)**

**End**