

**Frank Milton Darling (FMD)
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke (I)
Interviewer
Mr. Dietz, Family Friend (Mr. Dietz)**

**Interviewed on August 26, 2015
Saratoga Springs, NY**

Q: Today is the 26th of August, 2015. We are at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, NY. My name is Wayne Clark. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and date and place of birth?

FMD: My name is Frank Milton Darling. I was born in Saratoga Springs, NY, December 2, 1916.

Q: 1916. Okay. Did you grow up there?

FMD: Well, no. I call it my home because I lived there longer than anywhere else. My father was going around, so... I started my school in Warrensburg and I transferred to Ballston Spa, NY where I finished my high school and then soon after that Uncle Sam says, "We need you." So, this is 1942.

Q: You were drafted?

FMD: I was drafted. That's right.

Q: And you were drafted into the army?

FMD: Yes.

Q: Now let me go back just a little bit. Do you remember where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

FMD: Yes, I was up in Warrensburg at the time, 1941, yes.

Q: When you went into the army, was that your first time away from home?

FMD: Actually, yes. That far away from home that I ever gotten was to go to Long Island to see the...

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

FMD: It was Camp Polk at that time in LA. I think it's called Fort Polk now.

Q: Fort Polk, yes. And what was that like for you?

FMD: That's where they initiated me into the army. What they had to do. We had... When I had been in the infantry, they had us go up and oh, I don't know, do the training you do.

Q: A lot of marching?

FMD: We had a lot of maneuvers at that time through all the swamps in LA and all that stuff and then from there...

Q: Let me just go back a little bit. Being that you grew up in the country, were you familiar with guns before you went into the service?

FMD: Oh yes, I [unclear] rifles before I went in the service. I was familiar with guns, but not the army stuff.

Q: Now, when you went away to basic training, was there anyone there that you knew, from Warrensburg?

FMD: No.

Q: Now did you encounter a lot of snakes down at Fort Polk?

FMD: Everything else. A lot of hogs and stuff. A lot of [unclear]. And from there, about that time, Rommel was raising Cain in Africa, you know, and they decided to send a division out to CA to get wider space for maneuvers and stuff. You could spread your army out further there. We got through that and then we came back east and just waited our turn to go overseas.

Q: Now, you had completed your basic training. Did you go on to any kind of advanced schooling after that, before you went on maneuvers?

FMD: No, not really.

Q: So, you had all infantry-type training?

FMD: Yes.

Q: Now, when you went overseas were you already part of a division or were you a replacement?

FMD: Yes, I was part of the division [unclear].

Q: What division was that, Sir?

FMD: 7th Armored.

Q: Do you recall when you went overseas?

FMD: Yes, matter of fact, on D-Day our unit was leaving NY Harbor on the Queen Mary. Of course, it took about seven days to get over across.

Q: Now you went single ship or convoy?

FMD: Well, there was a convoy out for a while, but then the ship was so fast, they left the convoy all by herself. We go this way and that way.

Q: Did you get seasick at all?

FMD: No, I don't recall getting seasick, no. Well, they let us out on the deck once in a while to get some fresh air, you know.

Q: Do you recall where you landed?

FMD: In Glasgow.

Q: Scotland?

FMD: Yes, and we turned back down by – what was the name of that place? Tidworth Barracks was the name. Tidworth Barracks.

Q: Whereabouts was that?

FMD: Down near the coast of England. That's where we were when we got the orders to go across the Channel.

Q: Now, how long were you in England before you crossed the channel? Just there for a month or two months?

FMD: Well, let's see.

Q: That's all right. Did you have any contact with the English people at all?

FMD: No.

Q: Strictly training?

FMD: Yes.

Q: And when you crossed the channel, I take it you went to France?

FMD: Yes, that's right.

Q: Do you recall where you landed in France? Was it LeHavre?

FMD: No, I don't know where it was at.

Q: Okay. That's all right.

FMD: There was about three places...

Q: You can speak up [talking to Mr. Dietz].

Mr. Dietz: Cherbourg.

Q: Cherbourg?

Mr. Dietz: That's the first port we cleared.

FMD: Yes. Well, anyway, all the fighting was all over by the time we got across the channel. So, all we had to do was just get our equipment and start through France one place and another.

Q: When was the first time you were under fire, do you recall?

FMD: I think it was sometime in August. I think it was August. I think so. We were on the move most of the time, so...

Q: Now was that still in '42? Or was that '43?

FMD: It'd be '43.

Q: And what was that like for you, the first time you were under fire?

FMD: Scary. But I don't know.

Q: Now did your unit suffer many casualties at that point?

FMD: I don't know. I don't know about that, you know, because we're on the move all the while.

Q: What was your position? Were you a squad leader?

FMD: Yes. Rifle Squad Leader.

Q: How long did it take you to attain that position?

FMD: Well, let's see, I became a buck sergeant before we left the States but when we went overseas, they put another stripe on your sleeve for stature.

Q: Well, they must have thought a lot of you to promote you that quickly.

FMD: Well, I got along with all of my, you know, captain and first sergeant. We were all good friends. Matter of fact, when I was thought to have been captured, they weren't sure, but first sergeant would find that out and then call my mother, you know, and tell her that I was captured.

Q: Now, can you tell us when and where you were captured?

FMD: Yes, Saint Vith.

Q: What led up that? Can you tell us what you were doing?

FMD: You were supposed to fill up a line; the Germans and the Americans, fill up an opening in a line. We were supposed to, as a division, hold that for several days. But at that time there was no firing going on but the Germans were fighting and somebody found out and break through the lines, so... On December 21st, they let loose with some cannon fire. I was right beside the forest. At this forest, the Germans had... I don't know how they got all their tanks in there without being noticed but on the 21st of December all hell broke loose. They just broke through the woods, knocking down trees and everything else. We had no chance of doing anything about that with what firepower we had. So, they just kept right on running through there. This was all night time. We had an area so we could get out of the way. That dark, you don't know what's what. We were supposed to have an avenue of escape, [unclear] but somehow or other things got all screwed up and my unit, I think there were about five of us, we kept together and we ended up in Saint Vith. Now this was held by the Germans already.

Q: So, there was just five of you together?

FMD: Yes. And then we were, I don't know, but come daylight, we saw a little tavern and we said, "Let's go inside this tavern and figure out what's going to happen next." Apparently the one who owned the tavern, sometime before daybreak he apparently shot up, unbeknownst to us, he shot up a flare and the next thing we know, that whole village, that area was covered by Germans. What are you going to do? That's when I was captured.

Q: Now, were you captured without incident? Was there a fight or anything? Was anyone injured?

FMD: No.

Q: So, they took all of you intact.

FMD: Well, they could have wiped us out. I don't know. You do things funny sometimes, quick, you know.

Mr. Dietz: All he's telling you was part of the Battle of the Bulge. That's where all this occurred. Up in Belgium.

Q: Were any of the other groups that you were with, were they captured too?

FMD: I really don't know. You never knew whatever happened to the rest of the company.

Q: Yes, I was just going to ask if you had run into any of them in the POW camp.

FMD: I heard later that our company had withdrawn back to a certain town back there and just waited and sometime after that they decided to bring up our unit back in the same position and then continue on in to capture Saint Vith. [Unclear]

Q: After you were taken away to the camp?

FMD: That's right.

Q: Where did the Germans take you at that point, once you were captured?

FMD: Well, they marched us across one of the bridges and had already prepared [unclear] but they have... We went across the bridge and into a railroad yard where they just kept us in there until they could get a number, 40 - in WWI, they called them forty and eights.

Q: It was a railroad car that held 8 mules or 40 men.

FMD: Just about, yes. One [unclear].

Q: Now, were there other prisoners that were put in that car, people that you didn't know?

FMD: Oh yes. Oh God, yes. Just had to wait because all the trains stopped being loaded up by you know, our forces.

Q: Sure. Were you transported to Germany?

FMD: I was in Germany at that time. So, they transported us to this place called Stalag IV-B and that's where they divided us all up into our nationalities and what grade you were in and stuff like that.

Q: Were there strictly Americans there or were there other...?

FMD: As far as I know they were all Americans.

Q: Were they all from different divisions?

FMD: That I couldn't tell you. I don't know. But anyway, they kept us there in Stalag IV-B until the Russians were getting pretty close. Whoever decided what to do had us all fall out and start our march towards our own lines so we kept that up from about, I think it was Valentine's Day, February.

Q: Ok, let me just go back a little bit. How long were you in the POW camp for before you left on the march?

FMD: Probably a month or a month and a half.

Q: What was the food like there?

FMD: Well, they had some kind of a soup they stirred up. [unclear] Course we did get some Red Cross boxes or whatever they called them but...

Q: Now, did you lose any weight?

FMD: Yes, but the biggest loss of weight was on the march after we left that place and we were on the road from, I'd say, last of February till the day that – was it June 13th, was it, the person died or something like that?

Q: You were on the road marching all that time?

FMD: Yes, every day, every day.

Mr. Dietz: The Russians were closing in. The Americans were closing in. So, they kept moving them.

FMD: They moved us toward the American lines.

Q: Now, you were, obviously, on the road, during the winter weather. What kind of clothing did you have? Did you have any kind of blankets?

FMD: When we were captured, they took several of our clothes themselves. Anyway, we had enough to keep us warm. These huts that we were in did have a little stove and we'd find some wood somehow. Keep a little heat going, you know. Of course, the Germans never had anything anyway. They kept being bombed out and everything.

Q: Did you lose anybody along the way during the march, people that just couldn't...?

FMD: We were all strung out along the road there. The guards were with their dogs trying to keep us in line, but some had to just fall out, you know. Some tried to run off and hide somewhere. They'd send the dogs after them.

Mr. Dietz: Tell him about the rutabagas and stuff.

FMD: At that time of year, the farmers had those rutabagas piled up alongside the road.

Q: Like a turnip, right?

FMD: Yes, and we'd make a dive for those and they would shoot at us or send the dogs to get us back in line. We weren't in line; it was just a scattered mess of people. How many ahead of me, I don't know. How many behind me, I don't know, doing the same thing.

Q: Now, did you hear of any rumors of people who fell behind getting executed?

FMD: No.

Mr. Dietz: How about your bread?

FMD: Oh yes, they had prisoners putting loaves of bread alongside of our units, marching along. We'd get a loaf of bread between five men; we'd get a loaf of bread. That's one of the instances. Another instance we came across a German training center. They had taken us in and we had some kind of a soup, I don't know what it was, but it was delicious. Anything would be delicious at that time. Then, another time I guess we were so damn lousy and looked so bad, they took us into another training area, took all our clothes off. We had a shower. That was the only shower we had on the whole damn trip. They washed our clothes. Some said, "Yes, they washed them, but they didn't kill all the lice in the seams." Stories you hear everything. But all that trip, there's just one [unclear] shower,

boy! That time, I was coming down with yellow jaundice and I had an ear infection, my ears were running, besides losing weight. That's the way it all ended.

Q: When were you liberated or freed? Were you freed by the Russians or the Americans?

FMD: During the night all the German prison guards and their dogs left. About that time, we were in American hands. They'd run into us when we walked into them. That was on the 13th of June. They said, "Yes, we lost our President today."

Q: What were your thoughts on that? He was probably the only president you really knew.

FMD: Yes. You had to wonder what's going to happen next. Anyway, from that point, we were trucked to another place where we all had to be examined to find out where a guy might have to have special treatment in order to go home, but I was so underweight, I had the yellow jaundice and an infection in my ears. I ended up in Paris General. I was there until I was well enough to go back to the States. From there I went up to Glasgow and they flew us in to [unclear] and then from there I was sent up to Utica, where there was a camp filled up for returning soldiers and stuff and where I could get some treatments.

Q: So, you were still under a doctor's care at that point?

FMD: Yes.

Mr. Dietz: What was your weight?

FMD: I don't know.

Mr. Dietz: In other words, he was, most of them were put on hospital ships, but he was flown...

Q: Oh, you were flown.

FMD: Yes, I was a patient [unclear].

Q: Now, you left France to go to the States or did you leave from England?

FMD: No, we were up in Glasgow. Iceland and Newfoundland and NY. And then, in NY, they had to take some people somewhere else. I ended up over in Utica. It's all they were, just barracks, but that's where I got medical treatments.

Q: Now were you able to see your family at all during that period?

FMD: Yes. The family came to see me.

Q: How long had it been seen you'd seen them? Probably since you had left for overseas?

FMD: Well, I was there on a furlough before I went overseas, so a couple of years anyway.

Q: How long were you in Utica for?

FMD: I can't tell you.

Q: Were you there until you were discharged?

FMD: Yes. Well, I was there until... You might say that.

Q: Once you left there, did they send you to Camp Dix to be discharged or Camp Upton?

FMD: Yes, that was it.

Q: And when were you discharged?

FMD: '46? I've got it all on a paper there.

Q: You were discharged January 18, 1946.

FMD: Okay.

Q: Now, let me just ask you this. When the war in Europe ended, whereabouts were you at that point? Were you stateside?

FMD: What date was it?

Q: Or were you still in the hospital overseas? The war in Europe ended sometime in May of '45.

Mr. Dietz: The 8th of May, my birthday. I can't forget it.

FMD: So, I must have been in... Maybe I was still in Paris.

Q: So, you were probably... you weren't involved in any of the celebration, I'm sure, when that happened?

FMD: Oh no.

Q: Were you given good care?

FMD: Yes, I would say so. I was pronounced cured when I left Utica, I guess.

Q: Now, how long did it take you to regain your weight?

FMD: I couldn't tell you. I don't know.

Q: When you were discharged, you were considered fit for discharge?

FMD: I was fit for discharge, but I wasn't fit to go to Japan.

Q: Did you have any residual effects health-wise? Did you have to...?

FMD: I think I was pronounced cured. I don't think I was... Like I say, I had to get my weight back up.

Q: You've got a couple of things there I'd like to get on film if I could. Could you first hold up that photograph of yourself and just put it close to your chest and I can zoom in on it.

FMD: [Shows photo]

Q: Now when and where was that photo taken, do you recall?

FMD: That was before I went overseas.

Q: Also, can you hold up your POW ID tag? [Holds up tag] I don't think I can read the lettering on it. But that's what it looks like. I had never ever seen one before.

Mr. Dietz: Cheap piece of tin.

FMD: It is.

Mr. Dietz: That's all you were worth.

Q: I wouldn't say that. When you were discharged, did you go to school? Did you go back to work?

FMD: I went to ... My wife...

Q: Were you married at that point?

FMD: At that point, no. I was married later. My wife and I got work down in Philadelphia. That's where I went after discharge.

Q: Now how and where did you meet her? Was she from...?

FMD: Well, I met her before the war.

Q: You did?

FMD: Yes.

Q: So, you had corresponded?

FMD: Yes.

Q: When you were in the POW camp were you able to send letters?

FMD: Yes, we could send out those little...

Q: So, obviously she knew that you were a POW? You weren't listed as missing in action or anything?

FMD: Yes, she knew about it because the first sergeant kept in contact. He and I were talking and I mentioned her, Jeanette's name and her address. He would contact her and he did. They contacted back and forth for quite a while. Then he got out of the service. I guess he went to the State Police in Arkansas. Since then, of course, he's passed on too. But the captain, I don't know whatever happened to my captain, Captain Jim, whatever happened to him.

Q: You were a lot older than most of the other fellows.

FMD: Well, I was 27 when I went in the service.

Q: I'm surprised they drafted you at that age.

FMD: Well, they needed some good men [laughs].

Q: I guess they did.

FMD: I don't know why. I got that notice when I lived up in Warrensburg.

Q: You went down to Philadelphia to meet up with your girlfriend. And you guys got married down there?

FMD: No, I went to school. I started schooling from Philadelphia. Drafting school.

Q: Did you use the GI Bill for that?

FMD: Yes, I did. I think I was only there for maybe a year or so and my wife got transferred up to Bridgeport, CT.

Q: Now, what kind of work was she doing?

FMD: She was teenage Director of the YWCA. And then I applied for a job with Elliot-Fisher, the typewriter people, in Bridgeport. They took me on as a trainee for drafting there.

Q: And this was a typewriter company?

FMD: Yes. And then they moved up to Hartford, CT. I didn't want to go up to Hartford, CT, so I left that and I went up to Ballston Spa. I applied for drafting at GE, but that didn't work out, I guess. Then I put in for the Department of Transportation. I put in for that. The Bridge Bureau took me in and that's where I ended up as a job.

Q: You stayed there until you retired? How many years did you have in?

FMD: 22 or somewhere around that. I got credit for my service too.

Q: Now when did you get married?

FMD: That was July 27.

Q: Was it a couple of years after the war?

FMD: Yes. I got married up in Middle Grove - a Methodist church there. My in-laws were there, the Brown family.

Q: Did you have any children?

FMD: No children. I'm the last of the thing, right now.

Q: Now, when did your wife pass away?

FMD: 1994.

Q: So, Mr. Dietz has been a good friend to you?

FMD: Sure has. You know he was in Normandy on D-Day.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that. We'll have to do an interview with him.

Mr. Dietz: These guys didn't come over until after we got to shore [laughs].

FMD: Yes, he had to clear the shore before I could come over there.

Q: Well, that was nice of him.

FMD: That was nice of him. We've known each other for a long time.

Mr. Dietz: Well, we belonged to the Ballston Spa Country Club for 30-some odd years and when you belong to leagues, men and wives' leagues and mens' leagues and seniors' leagues you get to know a lot of people and that's how we met. Our wives met in a womens' league and we developed a friendship from that, I think. I'm not a native here. The job took me here with the federal government. That's how we met and established... I knew nothing about him before the war or during the war.

Q: That's right. I never saw him before.

Mr. Dietz: All I know is we landed on my birthday, May 8th. I think, Frank you covered everything pretty well there, as far as what you have been telling me. I was trying to think of anything you might have missed. I don't know if it's interesting for you to know this, but his wife attended Skidmore and she was a teacher and guidance counselor, I guess,

which would be part of your after-the-war experience. A lovely couple and lived a nice life in Ballston Spa.

Q: Let me ask you, did you stay in contact with anyone you were in the service with?

FMD: I did for a while. The first sergeant, but then he up and passed on. That's about the only...

Q: Did you ever attend any kind of reunions, unit reunions at all?

FMD: No, I never did, but it wasn't long after that though they gave it up because the participants were too old to travel. They gave up the division thing.

Q: Did you join any veterans' organizations, like the VFW or the legion?

FMD: No, I never did.

Q: Never?

FMD: I never did.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life? Most guys say they grew up pretty fast.

FMD: You had to do that.

Q: But you were already 27 when you went in.

FMD: Yes.

Q: Do you think you would have gone on to school or college or your drafting school had it not been for the GI Bill?

FMD: Once I got established in the Department of Transportation down in Albany, that Bridge Bureau, that was all drafting in there, you know. Then I went from drafting to something else down there and then that was it, I guess. Stayed there until I retired.

Q: We didn't touch on it, but before you went into the service, what kind of work were you doing?

FMD: Laborer, you might say. I worked for a construction company and I worked for ... Where I lived, my father was second in charge of this place. Maybe you've heard of it – Peck Forest, Warrensburg, NY.

Q: What was it?

FMD: Peck Forest. A parcel of land was deeded to the College of Forestry in Syracuse and the students and forestry would come out in the spring and do their work, their studying, planting the seeds, growing and cutting the timbers, following the timber to the sawmill and all that stuff.

Q: By chance, do you know the Baker family in Warrensburg? They had a sawmill there.

FMD: No, I don't recall. We had a sawmill and a [unclear] home on this place I was just telling you about. I helped there quite a lot. My father was a good woodsman.

Q: Was your father a veteran?

FMD: No. He was a college graduate from Michigan. He got into this forestry thing.

Q: Did you have any other family members that were in the service?

FMD: No. My sister and I were the only ones... She was in the service for a while down on Long Island, but she got out of that, health wise or something, I don't know.

Q: What branch of the service was she in? WAVES or WACs?

FMD: I don't know. It was down on Long Island somewhere that she was in the service, but it wasn't for any length of time to speak of.

Mr. Dietz: Was she a nurse?

FMD: Yes, she was a nurse. She was a nurse up in Saratoga and I guess she had something to do with the prisoner thing up in Wilton. She was a nurse for those guys up there. That was her last job and she retired from that.

Q: Now, is there anything else we missed or anything you'd like to touch base on, any other recollections of your time in the service?

FMD: Well, one thing that I would like to find out. Maybe you don't do this, but I was given a rifle with a scabbard and bayonet on it after I got home from the service. I belonged to a rifle club up in Warrensburg. Now this is an old gun, now, I think it was used before WWI and after the flintlock. It was a...

Q: Was it a Civil War rifle?

FMD: I think it was used in the Army. It has a bayonet on it and a scabbard. I fired the thing.

Q: Did you?

FMD: Oh, yes.

Q: Did it take a cartridge or did you have to pour the powder?

FMD: It takes a cartridge. Single shot, of course, one of these you open up and pull the hammer back and [unclear]. It's something. They had to be men, boy, to carry that thing.

Q: I know they were heavy.

FMD: I don't know if you care to have anything like that or not.

Q: Oh, I'm sure, the curatorial staff, we have our own arms room down there. I'm sure they'd probably be interested in or at least looking at it to see if it's one that they have or don't have.

Mr. Dietz: It was manufactured over here in the Springfield Armory, which was a small one in the center of that country at that time, up until after WW2 and now it's closed. We were discussing this and we thought if you would like to have it as part of their mementos up there, he would donate it rather than put it over a fireplace.

Q: If you wanted to bring it in, we could have the staff look at it. I'm sure it's something they'd probably be interested in.

Mr. Dietz: We can do that someday. What else did you want to donate, a blouse or something?

FMD: I've got a blouse, similar to that [shows photo].

Mr. Dietz: He's wondering if that would be interesting.

FMD: Just a blouse, I have no trousers or anything.

Q: Does it have the unit insignia or anything?

FMD: It has everything, yes.

Q: Okay. They would have to look at it. The only problem is we have taken in so many WWII uniforms, unless it's something really unusual, they probably wouldn't take it. But it doesn't hurt to bring it in and they can take a look at it.

Mr. Dietz: You can bring it in with the rifle at the same time. It's just something he had saved and he didn't know if it would be of any interest.

Q: Yes. Definitely. We'd like to see it.

Mr. Dietz: I'd like to have you say one thing. You were telling me one time about being abused and the one thing he told me was they had very little food, one loaf of bread for five men and all this sort of thing, but he says he wasn't really abused even though they were full of lice and losing weight because the men guarding him didn't have any better food either. You know, Germany was getting down to its last... That was a last-ditch push, was the Battle of the Bulge. So, I think that would be something to say. He wasn't tortured or anything. That's what you told me.

FMD: That's true.

Mr. Dietz: Even though the food and the bathing facilities and that were nil, they didn't have any... The old men, they were old guards, soldiers.

Q: Yes.

Mr. Dietz: They didn't have any better for themselves. That's what he told me. Which is good to know because there are some other things that have happened in some other instances that were torturous.

Q: Yes. Okay, anything else in closing?

FMD: No, I can't think of anything else.

Q: Thank you so much for your interview.

FMD: I've had to [unclear] speeches.

Q: You did an excellent job. Thank you again.

FMD: You're welcome.

