

**Stephen T. Deane
Veteran**

**Ken and June Hunter
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on April 22, 2009
at the Stratton Veterans Hospital
Albany, New York**

Q: This is April 22, 2009 at 9 a.m. We are interviewing Stephen Deane in Albany, New York. He served in the United States Army from December 27, 1940 through July 17, 1945. June and Ken Hunter are conducting this interview. Please tell us your full name and when and where you were born.

SD: My name is Stephen Thomas Deane. Thomas is my middle name. I was born in Hudson, New York on September 14, 1919. I have a twin brother who was born the same time. I don't know who came out first, but we are both still alive yet. I was born at home, not in a hospital with the aid of a midwife. We lived at 222 Robinson Street in Hudson until I was seven years old. I went to St. Mary's Academy at the time.

My grandparents lived in Germantown, New York and they had a tenant house that they lived in. My mother married a Hungarian, George Deane. He went to an agricultural college in Hungary, immigrated to the United States, and got a job at U.S. Steel in Pennsylvania. They transferred from Pennsylvania to The Portland Cement Company in Hudson, New York, formerly The Atlas Cement Company which was a subsidiary owned by U.S. Steel. There, he met my mother and they got married. She was living in Germantown, New York at the time and going to high school in Hudson so she boarded out in Hudson. She bore five children all together, all boys.

Q: Did all of you go into the Service?

SD: The oldest one went into the Service and received a medical discharge. The next one, Peter, was a farm boy and he stayed on and took care of the farm. Joseph was killed in an auto accident at the age of 21. When I was 21, I was down on the farm already. We moved down to a farm when I was seven years old and left St. Mary's Academy.

My grandfather had a farm in Manorton, New York. He could no longer keep it up, so we moved down there. It was about an eighty-acre farm, but we had not bathing facilities at that time. This was way back in about 1926.

Q: So you were all trained when you went into the Army on how to live in the field! (laughs). Did you enlist into the Service or were you drafted?

SD: I was called into the Service, called in for a physical, and classified as 1-A. In other words, eligible to go, to serve. I had no choice, there was my twin brother and my brother Peter at home.

So I was obliged to serve, someone had to serve on behalf of my family. They took care of the farm.

Q: Then, when you went into the Service where did you start your Basic Training? I know you have quite a record in the Service, and that is what we would like to hear about.

SD: Although I lived in Hudson, I was inducted into the Service here in Albany, New York in 1940. There was a group of us draftees, I think that was what they called us in those days. I signed up for three years instead of the one year they wanted you to serve. I opted for the three years because I wanted to get in a location which was close to home and be able to go home on weekends. I did not know at that time, but they signed me up as an Infantryman in the 1st Division of the 18th Infantry Regiment.

Q: At what facility did you have your training?

SD: Our first training was at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, New York for thirty days in Basic Training.

Q: What kind of training did you have?

SD: Just the Short Order Drill Training, mainly drill instructions. No weapon instructions.

Q: What happened after the thirty days? Did you get orders for another station?

SD: After thirty days, I found out I was in the 1st Division which was stationed in Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Previously they were at Fort Riley, Kansas. I was put into Company A- 18th Infantry, that was my Outfit. We did all kinds of training there. We did eighteen-hour hikes eighteen-mile hikes at night and in the daytime. We did hikes with a compass, all manners of training. We went through a gas chamber and tested for mustard gas. We took bayonet practice.

Every weekend we had a parade drill on the parade grounds. We would have a full dress parade with a band and all. Every weekend, there was always someone, a General of some sort that we were obliged to show our colors to. I was an M-1 Garand Rifleman, that was my weapon for about six months. Then they put me on their BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle). I was only a Private at the time, then I rose to Private, First Class while I was there. Then I was drilling the troops in my Company, they put me on as a Drill Instructor drilling them. Also, we went through a period of taking the guns apart while blindfolded and putting them back together again.

We had all kinds of training including Military Training. We were very seldom at Fort Devens, we were always out on maneuvers. We went off the coast of Carolina on a ship, the U.S.S Ettrick was one of them, where we boarded at Brooklyn Army Base and went down off the coast of North Carolina.

We unloaded onto the Higgins Boats from out in the sea. We could see the land, at one moment, that boat was even with your feet as you went down on a net. The next moment the Higgins Boat was ten feet below you, so you had to wait as the waves would come up at the boat and that was the time to jump down into the boat. (Stephen smiles) So we got on the boats and headed to shore and to Fort Benning, North Carolina. And practiced fighting, we did military exercises, with the troops in Fort Bragg. Planes would come over us and drop bags of flour as we ran through. It was regular military exercises.

We did that three different times, on three different ships. We left off the coast of Little Creek, Virginia and made an amphibious landing there. We also did maneuver exercises from ship to

shore at Fort Benning, Georgia for a couple of weeks. We drove back by truck convoy all the way from Georgia to Fort Devens. Once we went down for maneuvers on Pullman train cars. We ended down in Florida at Camp Blanding and stayed there for a while. From there we went to Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania, where I got my orders. I had applied for Officer's Training School.

When we had traveled by convoy, we camped overnight at Gettysburg, PA on the hill where the Battle of Gettysburg had been fought. We pitched our tents there overnight. When I woke up in the morning, it was underwater! It had rained all night long, came down the hill and soaked us all. It came on quickly. (laughs)

Q: Can you recall where you were when war was declared?

SD: When it was declared, we had left Indiantown Gap and went over to England on the Queen Mary ship. It had not yet been converted into a troop ship, it was still a luxury liner. I had gotten orders that I had been accepted for Officer's Training School. The Company Commander called and said my orders were down at the Headquarters and would be sent up to me before long. Anyway, I never received them because we moved out and headed for England. We went down to the Brooklyn Army Base and went on the Queen Mary. We were stationed at (@19:26 unclear) outside of London. We maneuvered out from there to Scotland with the British up in the moorlands.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan was when we first heard about the war. But we were already on route from England to North Africa. We heard the President's announcement speech over the radio that war had been declared with the Japs. We were aiding the British, and our destination was North Africa called Operation Torch. We invaded North Africa and Algeria. It must have been about eight hundred ships in the convoy from England. We had destroyers, Liberty Ships, submarines, everything. We had all kinds of protection going down.

It took us a long while to get down there. I think we left in June, and we got down there in November. We went through the Mediterranean Sea, passed Gibraltar and down to Algeria. We were off the coast of Algeria. I was on a Landing Craft and headed for the shore in Operation Torch in North Africa. I was in the turret of the Landing Craft because I was a BAR gunner and I was on watch out. Other fellows were huddled down behind the opening gate and ready to take off.

When the landing craft got to the shore in Algeria, we had no opposition whatsoever. It was the funniest thing, we got off and the water was almost waist-deep. When we got to the shore we found no opposition, nobody was waiting for us there. We could hear gunfire up to the left of us, north of us. That was Company B, I was in Company A. They had hit opposition, Company B.

We went inland, it was about three o'clock in the morning when we made the invasion. We went through a small town and it was quiet. All you could hear was dogs barking, it was a little town called (@24:56 confirm name Apple?) and then we kept on going inland. All of a sudden, we came across a family living down there. I didn't know if they were connected with our invasion or not. But they came out and gave us instructions about what laid ahead of us. There was a town called St. Cloud that was ahead of us and meanwhile, there was a French (@25:50 unclear) that came alongside our patrol on a motorcycle with a sidecar. They came through,

and saw us but got so scared they ran off the road, you know? So we captured them.

Q: Now these Frenchmen, were they allied with the Germans? The Vichy French?

SD: Yes. The first troops we came to were the Italians and they surrendered right away. They were tickled to death, in other words, they did not want to fight. So we took them to the back of the Lines. As we went forward, I was at the head as a Point Man to observe as we went along. Soon we came to the town of St. Cloud and immediately, they opened fire. Oh my gosh! They pinned us down, we could not do anything. We couldn't move because we were pinned down.

The only vision they could see would be from this church tower overlooking the road, the highway, all the way down. So we figured that was where all the fire was coming from. We were losing men right and left. So we called back for Artillery fire and we got a response from them. But they did not get the right azimuth (distance) and the Artillery was landing right amongst us. So then we had to give them another reading. They were firing on us instead of the enemy.

They then fired more rounds of Artillery and we got to a cemetery that was outside of St. Cloud that offered us a little protection. But we still received gunfire and our Captain was wounded. Our First Lieutenant was killed (@29:20 confirm Taft), he was fresh out of the Academy. He was right up in the front and he got killed.

It was almost like a dream, you know? You could hear the fighting, but the only visible thing you could see was the church because the town of St. Cloud was all enclosed with a concrete wall. All they had were porticos/doorways that they could fire from. You could be firing at the doorways and not know if you hit anybody or not. So I had to concentrate on the steeple, on the church.

As I was going around the turn around the city, I was about maybe three hundred yards outside our perimeter. When I got there, it was almost like a storm of bullets over my head and going past me. As I was going around, I never looked on the ground. But there was a bunch of wires and I tripped over one and the gunfire stopped. They had me in their sights, and if it wasn't that I tripped, I think they would have got me with a shot. So I just laid there and looked around. I listened to where the gunfire was coming from and for the safest way around it.

I laid there, and they stopped firing at me. After a while, I got up and raced across. I knew the wires weren't there anymore. I went around the other side of the town and when I got there, the French had given up to the other part of our Group and surrendered.

The next day we had to go back and pick up the dead and the weapons, whatever we could salvage and move on from there. We captured all the French, they capitulated in that town. In other words, they gave up. We took the town over. There were only a few Germans there. They were instructing the French soldiers what to do.

The African Corp were not there at the time. We contacted them later. We had to go to Morocco, there were French troops still fighting there. They did not know the war was over for them. We had to go and stop them, they surrendered over there. We came back to Tesseræ

Pass, below Tunis.

There was a road highway headed up toward Hill 709 they called it, outside of Tunis. On this road, you could see for miles straight ahead. As we approached this Tesseræ Pass, the British Troops were withdrawing from Hill 709 because they just could not do it. They had been fighting the Germans all the way up 709. You could see along the road there was a wrecked car, tanks and all kinds of vehicles.

We did not have any water in our canteens, so we had to drain the water from these demolished cars and put some chlorine tablets in to purify it so we had something to drink. All the while, the British were coming back saying “Good luck fellas! Hope you make it” as they were withdrawing, and it was our turn to go up and try to take Hill 709.

So we got together and started up that road through an olive grove. I was promoted to Corporal after the Battle in St. Cloud. They had lost so many men and had to replace them and that was when I was promoted to Corporal. We parked our gear and everything in an olive grove outside of the Hill 709. Some bombers came by, German bombers and dropped some bombs, but they were way off target and nowhere near us. We were bivouacked (temporary camp without cover) there for the night.

I had to take a Scouting Group out and we came upon an orange orchard. It had beautiful, great big, oranges as big as grapefruits. On one end of that orchard was an area where a guy sat with a gun on his lap, he was fast asleep. I told the guys to fill up their shirts up with oranges and we’ll take them back to camp. So we did. That fellow never woke up, so he didn’t miss anything! (laughs) Oh, those oranges were wonderful!

In the morning, we were supposed to attack Hill 709, this was December 23, 1942. We dug foxholes up at the base of that Hill that we were supposed to go up. It was terrible! All night long they were bombarding us with Artillery shells and water fire. Luckily, we were close enough to the mountain so that all the shells would go beyond us. In that way we were lucky.

At two in the morning, we got orders to advance up the Hill. It was nice and clear down in the valley where we were. But as we went the Hill it started to get foggy, the fog started moving in. We kept going up and going up. Our Squad was one of the first Squads in our Company to go up. As we went up the Hill, we could hear gunfire to our left. (@41:48 unclear) had met resistance but it was still so foggy you could not see. You did not know who was who.

As soon as we got up to the top of the Hill, they had no choice, we got captured. My buddy next to me was only about five feet away from me and got a bullet right through his helmet. Right into his skull and turned blue. He was killed instantly. I was going to go over to his side and check on him but another shot rang out and grazed my cheek (Stephen touches his left cheek) I could feel the heat of the bullet as it grazed my face. I looked up and here was a gun, ready and poised to shoot again.

He was one of the Africa Corps Germans, you could see the insignia on his uniform. He muttered something, I guess it was “give up” or whatever he said in German. I laid my gun down because I saw it was useless to resist. So he led me up the Hill. We got to the top of the Hill and all you could see were just silhouettes. You did not know who was up there. That was

why we could not fire from down below because we thought we would be firing at our own men.

The air was just thick like pea soup. So we had no choice. We had to hold our fire and hide behind big boulders as we went up. After I got captured and they lead me up to the top of the Hill, then I saw the rest of my buddies that were still alive. They were all captured already and the Germans had them lined up.

They had a monstrous canon inside this mountain on the top of Hill 709. It was about thirty feet long that could shoot right down that highway if they wanted. That was some armament they had up there! They got us all together, this was early in the morning, and we had to march all day long. We did not get to Tunis until about eight o'clock at night.

Q: This was also Christmas time?

SD: Almost, I was captured December 23, 1942.

Q: How long were you a Prisoner of War?

SD: I was a POW for nine months. I was missing in action for three months. My Mother got a telegram. It took about three months for the communication to arrive in the United States.

Q: How did they get you to a prison camp?

SD: They had us in a stable in Tunis on Christmas Day. We had a fifty-gallon drum with a cow's head boiling inside it. That was our meal for Christmas Day. It was a soup. The next day we were interrogated by an Officer on either the 24th or the 25th. The Officer who interrogated us knew who we were, what Outfit, and everything else. All you had to give was your name, rank, and serial number. But he did not even care about that because he said "I grew up in the United States, out West. After we win the war, I want to go back, I like it out there." They were not rough, or nothing.

Q: So you were taken from Tunis, and put on an Italian destroyer?

SD: From Tunis, we were on a tin can is what I call it! This Italian destroyer took us over to Messina, then Sicily to Camp P.G. 98 (Prigione di Guerra -Prisoner of War) up in the mountains for twenty-eight days. From Sicily, they took us back into Italy by boat. From Italy, we went by cattle car, up past Rome to Servigliano, Prison Camp, P.G. 59 which was where I stayed as a Prisoner of War for nine months.

Q: During that nine month period as a prisoner, did you ever have any visits by The Red Cross?

SD: Yeah, after three months they came in. We got maybe a couple of Red Cross Parcels. It took three months for them to discover where we were. They came in and gave us some parcels, but the Guards got out what they wanted and we got what was left which was maybe a pair of socks or a candy bar, very little. In other words, they rummaged through it before we got a hold of it.

Q: I assume you had hard labor continuing in the Prison Camp?

SD: Yes, this was in the spring. We were knee deep in mud carrying large boulders and we had to build fortifications around the Camp. We had to carry these large boulders and if you stumbled or anything, they would butt you with their rifles. While we were doing that, one of

the guys got Spinal Meningitis or something. They had to inoculate us, but instead of a needle in the arm, they would give it to us in the breast so we could continue working. They gave us some purple stuff that they stuck on our tongues. I don't know what it was for.

Q: Was the Camp run by the Germans or the Italians?

SD: It was run by Italians, but I think it was supervised by the Germans.

Q: So your treatment was much easier than if it was strictly under German control?

SD: Oh yes. Yes, they were pretty lenient except for the three months. Once The Red Cross moved in, that was when the worked stopped. They stopped us from doing any hard labor.

Q: I understand it was the Italians who had a part in helping you to escape? They came in and gave liquor to the Guards?

SD: They got the Guards drunk! (laughs) I was in Hut #1 and at night, the bedbugs were so thick, they crawled all over you. And in the daytime, they all disappeared. You didn't see one of them! But at night they came out in droves. We were fed once a day, it was a bowl soup made out of some kind of greens. They gave that to us with a loaf of bread which was made out of sand and (@53:54 glass/grass?). They stuck everything into it. I have a recipe of it here somewhere. (Stephen is looking down at something off camera)

Q: You took off from there by yourself? How many men escaped, over one thousand?

SD: Well, I'll tell you what happened. After nine months, the Germans were finally being driven out of North Africa. They were coming in from Naples, Italy and wanted to empty the Camp out. People got wind of it, that news travels fast. Then they found out the Germans were headed for Naples. Well they got the Guards drunk and opened the gates up on September 14th, my birthday.

We all took off and headed for the hills, every which way! I was so weak, I only got about two miles. One buddy of mine, he was from Brooklyn, he could understand Italian which I couldn't, and he was from Italian descent. We got to a farm house and that night they gave us some bread and cheese then told us to move on because they were afraid of the Germans.

The following day after we escaped, we could hear gunshots down in the Camp. So Pete and I each went up a tree and stayed up there all day long. The Germans were picking up the poor guys who could not find cover. They were marching them right beneath our trees, but they never looked up. Then toward nightfall, we escaped and saw a house on a hill. We went up there, and they told us there was a German Officer in the house during the day looking over the countryside with binoculars. They gave us some food and they advised us not to stay, to keep moving on.

Q: Eventually, you met a British patrol and they helped you get back to the American Lines?

SD: Right, that was nine months after it happened.

Q: So you were on the run for nine months?

SD: Yes, we stayed with an Italian family, I had a hole in the ground where I stayed for three months. One night I woke up and it was pouring rain. I was under water and the rain washed me right out. I got out and that hole caved right in as soon as I got out! Luckily, there was a little hunting shack in the woods, six feet by six feet with a (@58:57 patroni? unclear) he used

to hunt pigeons. He was the boss that owned all this land. Then I had to dig me another hole and jump into it every time the Germans combed the area.

Q: Unfortunately, our time is running out. I know that after your Service there, you served at the White House and you mentioned how the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt would invite you over to the White House when you were off duty for movies and refreshments. You have been awarded several medals and decorations. I know there is more to your story, but unfortunately time runs out. I want to thank you so much serving our country. It was an honor to meet you.

SD: You are welcome. (Stephen smiles.)