

**Sherwood Davies
Veteran**

**Interviewer
Wayne Clark
New York State Military Museum**

**Interviewed on
August 22nd, 2014
NYS Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, NY**

WC: Today is the 22nd of August 2014. We are at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs New York. My name is Wayne Clark. Sir for the record would you please state your full name and date and place of birth please.

SD: Sherwood Davies. Born in Syracuse, New York, October 20th 1917.

WC: And did you attend school in Syracuse?

SD: No, I moved to the Adirondacks my father developed tuberculosis

WC: Oh, okay.

SD: I started school in northern New York north of Saranac Lake.

WC: Alright

SD: Small community, Lake Wish Quarry

WC: Now did you graduate from high school there?

SD: I went, I bussed to Saranac Lake High School and graduated from high school in 1936.

WC: And Once you graduated did you go to work or go on to college.

SD: Nope, I went to RPI in Troy New York in 1940 and received a degree in civil engineering.

WC: And you graduated in 1940?

SD: 1940.

WC: And so you were working when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

SD: Yes I was working as a junior secretary engineer with the state of New York in Middletown New York. That was December 7th and I remember very well we had six inches of snow that day.

WC: Mhmm.

SD: Middletown New York.

WC: Now did life change for you right after that event?

SD: Not really I continued working for the state health department. And many of the staff got an exemption from the draft being with the state of New York inspecting summer camps.

WC: And what about rationing did that affect you at all?

SD: It did, yes it did. The gasoline rationing, and then I got married in 1941 and tried to get food. Coffee was, not very good I miss that.

WC: You ending up going into the service in 1943.

SD: 1943 yes, October '43.

WC: Now how did that happen were you drafted or did you enlist?

SD: No I the army was looking for sanitary engineers. In World War One the we had a loss of service by troops because of illness either from inadequate water, supply contaminated, water supply contaminated food, so the army then at that time uh established uh a sanitary core and recruited these engineers in purpose for inspecting food service water supply facilities etc.

WC: Now you received a direct commission?

SD: A direct commission I was a second lieutenant and I went through the medical field service school in Carlisle Pennsylvania for six weeks.

WC: Now did you have to go through a regular basic training first or you just went directly in and received a commission?

SD: went directly I received a direct commission but uh first day of duty I was at the medical field service school and started my uh training both for being in the sanitary core and the military indoctrination.

WC: Now what was that school like for you?

SD: Well it was rather intense program oh what you do in the military how you do it and then we have have quite a bit of training on uh what to look for in terms of inspectiveness so the inspected water supply and so forth.

WC: Now your job with the state did it involve any of the work -

SD: That's what I was doing I was inspecting summer camps and uh the hotels and the Catskill Mountains. Inspecting public water supplies waste disposal facilities.

WC: So you were probably ahead of your classmates then in that regard?

SD: Uh yes and no because in World War Two, World War One excuse me, they had a lot of illness due to consumption of contaminated food and contaminated water by troops and lost a lot of service so the army established the sanitary core to fulfil the needs of getting an adequate water, adequate waste disposal, adequate facilities, so it was a just a continuation of what I was doing at the time.

WC: Right and once, let me ask you this how many fellow officers were in that course with you?

SD: Oh god, there were dentists medical officers there were sanitarian engineers I would guess there must have been probably 50 or 60

WC: Now were they all second lieutenants?

SD: No there were some first lieutenants some captains and I think a major or two. Because the army was recruiting directly, there were some doctor's dentist's professionals.

WC: Once you graduated what happened next where did you go

SD: uh I was uh assigned to 12th replacement depo and we were located in uh North Carolina just outside of Raleigh. Camp Kilmer

WC: Camp Kilmer

SD: And it was a replacement depo, headquarters facility company and uh I was stationed there from well let's see November until February and I was shipped out overseas.

WC: And while you were you were there were you working in the field of sanitation?

SD: Yes and no it was primarily just a stop in the units in terms of the replacement depo because the third replacement depo was a cadre of officers and enlisted men and staff to uh process troops coming from the states uh to go into active duty

WC: Now how did you get overseas?

SD: Uh in February 1944 I, shipped me up to camp Kilmer and was there for a while and then finally they shipped us on the Normandy which is a large ocean vessel

WC: Now was that a converted passenger?

SD: That was a converted passenger one of the French main French lining ships terrific ship.

WC: Now did you go by convoy?

SD: No we went alone. It was apparently fast enough to avoid all the German subs. so we had a seven day trip over.

WC: Did you get seasick?

SD: Not bad but I really got seasick one day crossing the English Channel I was never so sick in my life. But uh –

WC: Now whereabouts did you land?

SD: We landed in Greenock Scotland. And we they took us by train down to Liverpool. They converted our money, it was interesting, they converted our money, American money, into English money pence, shillings, pounds, and a number of us got into poker games and we really learned the values of the British money. But then they shipped us from Liverpool over to Belfast Islands and then we were stationed there in Castle Dawson (?) Northern Ireland for about four or five weeks.

WC: Was there additional training there?

SD: No we were just holding it for the headquarters company and we had some training but it was short term stuff. From there we were then shipped north of south Hampton on Baring Hill Southern England and we received about three to four thousand troops and we were living in tents sleeping on the ground and, uh we it was really rough.

WC: What were the weather conditions like then?

SD: It was May in June and it would be real foggy in the mornings and some nights but it was not too bad.

WC: And how was the food there? Uh field kitchens?

SD: It was field kitchens, of course no refrigeration, uh they cooked the food and you had to consume it right away. It was rough in there. We had to have also our canvas pit, we had to have the water for the troops transported by a tanker truck and very interestingly we had about three thousand troops and the water consumption for the three thousand troops represented about one and a half gallons per day. That was the drinking, the food, the bathing. For a few weeks, rather a few months we were roughing it.

WC: Now as far as bathing did you have shower points?

SD: We did not for the first uh 3 weeks. Then we did get a mobile shower unit and that was part of my job to locate one, get it in, and set it up. Where do you set it up? Where do you get the water? You'd have to treat the water but that probably was a real pleasure to get a hot shower after 3 weeks on a hillside.

WC: Bathing in your helmet right?

SD: That's right! It can be done! I don't recommend it.

WC: Oh I hear ya. Ok so what happened next?

SD: Well I remember this was late April, May, and June. And of course June, I think it was June 6th was D day.

WC: Yes

SD: I happened to that night pull an officer duty and got a phone call alerting that they wanted about two or three hundred of our troops to be shipped down to South Hampton. So right away I said to myself and the friends that I was with that this was it. And it was. It was the start of the conflict. But these were replacement troops that were going to be shipped across over to France. Looking back now it brings back quite a few memories.

WC: Oh I'm sure. Now did you go over to France?

SD: I really didn't go over. I remained in Aylin with the replacement depo because we were receiving troops that were coming in from the West. Go up and across to the battle front. And we were receiving troops that may have been injured or hurt. Bringing them back and then shipping them back to the states so it was a transfer of troops. Actually we moved after D day a month after D day into the Salisbury with is a large British army post. We took it over completely. So we were processing troops all the time.

WC: Ok. And you were still working in an engineering capacity?

SD: I was still responsible for 7 or 8 different messes. The water supply, the waste disposal.

WC: Any problems you encounter?

SD: Oh yes, sometimes you'd have sickness mess. The kitchen did do why they were supposed to have done and you and you would get an outbreak. A G.I. outbreak.

WC: Yup

SD: But by large we were pretty fortunate to have kept the illness or sickness within reason.

WC: What about time off did you have much of that?

SD: Not much at all. We were lucky if we got well we were about sixty miles from London. And we'd get a two day pass maybe go with a friend or two into London and enjoyed looking at things. But that was the time of the twos and the B-1's being shot across the channel. I remember I went with a friend of mine and we had been roughing it. We managed to get a cheap hotel with a bed. We went to bed at two or three o'clock in the morning and all of a sudden the sirens went off. The girl's heels were clicking on the

pavement, ya know running for fallout shelter so I said to my friend “should we go to the fallout shelter?” And he said “let’s stay here it’s the first good night of sleep we’ve had in a couple of weeks. We survived.

WC: How close did the rockets land?

SD: I can’t. We could hear them land but it was a tradeoff. Either we wanted a good night sleep in the bed or ...

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WC: Spend the night in the fallout shelter

SD: Think about being preserved, quite interesting.

WC: Ok. And did you see any celebrities? Any of the USO shows?

SD: Uh we saw quite a few. I remember we were on the hillside in tents and Joe Lewis stopped by and it was quite a treat to see him close by. But we did have quite a few different shows and a lot of British artists would stop by.

WC: Ok and what about the winter?

SD: Oh foggier than hell and at night if you go out at night you had to have... the Jeep has slits and it was very difficult to see where you were going but the drivers knew the roads pretty well. We pretty much survived.

WC: And of course we’re heading for 1945, do you recall hearing about the death of President Roosevelt?

SD: I sure did. Yes, that was unfortunate. But apparently he was a sick man at the time so. But I really have a lot of thoughtful memories of Harry Truman. It was Harry Truman that got us back home.

WC: Yes

SD: I remember at the end of the war we were supposed to be shipped to the Pacific and the major discussion among the troops and friends was will we be shipped by the Panama Canal? Or will we be shipped through the states? We would like to see our family.

WC: Sure.

SD: And having been overseas for a couple of years. So when Harry Truman ordered the dropping of the atomic bombs, two of them on Japan. Japan sure for peace. I have a lot of fond memories for Harry. And he had that little slip on his sign on his desk “the buck stops here”. I give the guy a lot of credit for what he did at the time.

WC: Yes. Now how often did you hear from your family back home? Did you get mail on a regular basis?

SD: My wife would write about every day or every other day.

WC: Oh you were married then?

SD: Yes I was a married man.

WC: When did you get married?

SD: Oh boy I'm glad she's not here *laughs*. I got married in 1941.

WC: Ok. And how did your wife feel about you going into the service?

SD: Well, everybody else was going. She had so many friends that were leaving, so many friends that were ya know so she just accepted it. And she got a job at the post office in Washington.

WC: Oh okay.

SD: So she worked there and I was overseas for over 2 years.

WC: Now did she have family down in Washington?

SD: She had an aunt and uncle down there and she lived with them.

WC: Oh okay.

SD: Which was a nice arrangement.

WC: Yes.

SD: Very nice. My mother was still living at the time. She was in northern New York.

WC: Okay, and your dad had passed?

SD: My dad has died when I was 8 years old, tuberculosis.

WC: So how often did you hear from home?

SD: my mother would write about a couple times a week and my wife would write every day or every other day. It was Vmail?

WC: Yes the Vmail, the little-

SD: Yes, that's right.

WC: Now, um-

SD: I remember this one story. We officers had to monitor, take a look at the Vmail to make sure they don't convey any information that may tell where we are located and so forth and so on. This friend of mine was looking at the mail, he read a couple of the letters, and he put them back in the envelope. Below and behold this poor soldier had written to his girlfriend and also his wife at the same time. And the officer had

transposed the mail, the wife got the girlfriends letter, and the girlfriend got the wife's letter!

WC: Oh my god. I'm sure all parties were not very happy.

SD: They were not happy at all. What can happen?

WC: Now when you did get your mail, did you get several letters at a time or were they lite or?

SD: That would happen many times. We'd get many 5 or 6 at a time. They would come in bunches.

WC: What about packages from home?

SD: We would get those but it took a while. If they sent any cookies most of them are stale by the time they got there. They were still edible.

WC: I would get cake from home when I was in Vietnam and a lot of times the cake would have mold at the top of it.

SD: *laughs* But take the mold off it was still good cake.

WC: Sure, definitely. Now, when Germany surrendered that was May of 45'.

SD: Yeah April or May of 45', right.

WC: Now was there a lot of celebration when that happened?

SD: There sure was. There sure was, it was a big deal. It was interesting, right after that, the Germans surrendered. Eisenhower ordered that all of his troops, both officers and listed men, look at a one hour film of the Nazi death camps. Which I thought it was very revealing. It made a, to me, it made a hell of an impression. In other words it was saying essentially this was one of the reasons why we're over there.

WC: Yes.

SD: And it was very very very revealing.

WC: Now when you were in England, did you hear and rumors at all about the concentration camps?

SD: We heard about it yes and there would be some German civilians that would be passing through ya know. And you would hear the rumors but it was nothing like the shock that you saw when, they were really gruesome.

WC: Oh I could imagine.

SD: They were really gruesome.

WC: Ya.

SD: It really said that this is one of the reasons why you're over there.

WC: Now you ended up in Germany too didn't you after?

SD: Oh yes, I was after, right after the war I was shipped over to Germany. I was there after the war.

WC: Did you see any of these concentration camps while you were in Germany?

SD: No I didn't. No I didn't.

WC: And what did they have you doing in Germany? The same type of work?

SD: I was again sanitary officer for the 3rd replacement depo and we were in Marbury, Germany. And then I was assigned to the supreme headquarters which had a lot of expeditionary forces which was located in Frankford Germany. Which was Eisenhower's headquarters. Very interestingly, speaking with the Germans and some of the Natives, we were, our officers were in the IG Fireman building which was a 6 story, large building, just on the outskirts of Germany. It wasn't touched my one darn bomb. Where most of Frankford, Germany received a lot of damage. And I kept asking people and they said "well apparently this IG Fireman building was selected ahead of time and the US was told to avoid bombing it because they wanted that for Headquarters. Whether it's a rumor or not, I don't know but I could believe it.

WC: I could believe it.

SD: It would be the truth because it was the best building in the whole Frankford area.

WC: Now how were you treated by the civilians?

SD: I would say very well. The language was the difficulty but I used to have a cleaning lady come in and I would communicate with her. You get a little background, a little input into what they went through. And they suffered too. And knowing, having seen the city, Frankford. It was really a tremendous amount of damage.

WC: How long were you in Germany for?

SD: I was in Germany from 1945, May of 45' until January of 46

WC: Ok so you were there close to a year.

SD: Yeah but well I didn't have enough, well if you remember, you had to have points.

WC: Points system yes.

SD: To get discharged. I had been overseas quite a while then. But I was married but I had no children. My specialty was the sanitary engineering so they sort of wanted to keep some duties for you. In fact it was interesting because so many communities in

Germany received tremendous damage from bombs. It damages the water supplies, the waste treatment facilities, and when our troops moved into Germany to occupy it and in the cities. We wouldn't let the troops drink the city water until it had been approved and you had to have water from blister bags and canvas, 30 gallon canvas bag. You carried the water on your hip here. And we had to make sure that the city water supply was satisfactory for consumption of our troops and we didn't really look at it in terms of residents but only our own interests.

WC: Now, the time you spent in Germany you went, well from the time you went in until the time you were discharged you rose through the ranks to major?

SD: I was promoted to first Lieutenant in the replacement depo and then Captain. And then I joined the reserves.

WC: Ok you made major after, back in the states?

SD: When I was discharged from the service, they automatically promoted you to the next best rank, so I was promoted to major.

WC: Oh I see. Ok.

SD: And then I joined the Army reserve and I served up until June of 1950.

WC: Ok.

SD: And I was that close to Vietnam.

WC: To Korea?

SD: Korea I mean. They decided to retire me, which I happily did but a week later the Korean War started. My M.O.S. the medic specialty number resulted in they wanted these type of people over in Korea so I just lucked out. Having been able to get out of that service.

WC: Ok. Now when you left Germany, you obviously had the points that you needed. You went from Germany directly back to the states or did you leave from England or?

SD: No I shipped from Germany, let's see I went up to Brandenburg an der Havel (?). No I went through France into Marcy I believe. Then ship back by boat.

WC: Ok. Now what kind of reception- oh coming back across you didn't get seasick or anything?

SD: I did. I did get seasick for a couple of days.

WC: Was it a regular troop ship or Liberty ship?

SD: It was a troop ship yes. It was a troop ship.

WC: Ok. What kind of reception did you receive- obviously you probably pulled into New York?

SD: We pulled into Brooklyn.

WC: Brooklyn. Ok.

SD: See this was, I shipped back let's see I came back in January. This was after, 5 or 6 months after the war ended in Germany and after the Japanese.

WC: Yeah so that would have been 47' yeah.

SD: 47' right. So there was not the same celebration that- it was a routine type.

WC: Whereabouts were you discharged from?

SD: From Fort Dicks. I think it was January or February and then I joined the reserves, in the reserve until June 1950 after the Korean War.

WC: Well I bet your wife was happy to see ya!

SD: See was very happy to see me. Yes indeed she was very happy.

WC: Ok. Now before joining the reserves once you get home, you were discharged, did you make use of the G.I. Bill at all?

SD: I did. Yes, I did. I was very fortunate. I got a loan on one house that I bought in Cornell. And another house that I bought later when I transferred.

WC: Now did you go back to work for the state?

SD: Yes I did. And I remained with them until I retired in 1980.

WC: Oh alright.

SD: Well the state sent me to the University of Minnesota, I received a master in public health. And then I became a director of the Bureau of Neurological Health. Which involved inspecting x-ray machines, licensing radioactive material. Very interesting job.

WC: Ok. And did you join any veteran's organizations?

SD: I joined the veterans of foreign wars but then I joined the American Leagues and I've been a member there for 58 years.

WC: And did you attend any reunions at all?

SD: Not really no.

WC: Did you stay in touch with anyone you were in service with?

SD: Only for a few years ya know. Time changes things

WC: Yes.

SD: Ya know I did keep in touch with friends.

WC: Ok. Now when you went into the reserves you were obviously doing the same type of work or was it an active type reserve?

SD: It was an active reserve. I just attended meetings and they require that you take a certain amount of training. And that became rather difficult when I had been assigned to Cornell to work. Then I had to travel to Elmira which was 60 miles away and that became a chore so I elected to try to get out and I was successful in getting out.

WC: Ok. I've been to Cornell that's kind of in the middle of nowhere.

SD: *laughs* The boondoggles. You're right.

WC: How do you think the time in your service changed or affected your life?

SD: Well I think I have a little different perspective on where we were and where we were going. I don't know and looking at today's news it's troubling to me. It really is and I'm thinking out of myself but down the road.

WC: Next generation. Next generation, yeah the world is definitely changed I'm sure since you were a young man.

SD: It has. It has.

WC: Alright are there any other stories or incidents anything you'd like to mention or?

SD: No, I'll tell you I have a little something that I'd like to give you. I think this is pretty close to one of a kind and I don't think you'll find it anywhere. Let me just, here.

WC: Ok let me just see that, I'll have you hold that up and then we can zoom in on it.

SD: Because I don't think there is any more sanitary core.

WC: If you hold that up right in front of you I think I might be able to zoom in on it.

SD: Ok. Alright.

WC: Bring it back towards you a little more. This may work, it may not. Because usually if I get too close its will- okay I think we're going to get it. Okay and there's an "S" there for sanitary.

SD: This is a Savior for the medics in the Army. But then they superimposed on this medical insignia "S" which is sanitary. But today as far as I can determine it's abandoned the sanitary. So I suspect this might be a...

WC: And you'd like to donate this?

SD: Absolutely.

WC: Ok. Well thank you. Now is there anything you would like to ask me?

Random Speaker: No I'm very impressed with how much you got out, I Learned a lot!

WC: Ok!

Random speaker: I thank you!

WC: Alright, My pleasure!

Random speaker: You are really experienced differently.

WC: Well we've been doing this for years.

SD: I assume you have!

WC: Alright well thank you sir. It's been an honor and a privilege.

SD: Well Good.