

**Ed Assenheimer & Phil Marriott (Marotta?)
Veterans**

**Mike Ridley, Interviewer,
Baldwinsville Messenger and
The Baldwinsville Public Library
Interviewed at Mohegan Manor in Baldwinsville, New York**

MR: I'm Mike Ridley, editor of the Messenger and I'm here with, at Mohegan Manor, with a couple of Baldwinsville World War II veterans and they are going to talk to us and tell us a little bit about what they remember about that time. Why don't you introduce yourself?

PA: Phil Marotta

EA: Ed Assenheimer

MR: Ok, I guess we'll just start out, Phil you can just tell us where you served and how you got in and...

PM: Well I went in the service in 1943, I was too young when the war broke out to go in so I had to wait til I got drafted, and I didn't, they didn't take me til March of '43. Then, I hit a few outfits here and there, jumped around, then I got into the 87th division down in South, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, in the early part of '45. By the November of '45, was it '45 or, no it was '44, and then we went to England, Thanksgiving Day, November of '44, yeah it was '44, right. And then we went by, we went over, across the channel on LST's and went up the same river to Ruron's (?), and from there we went down to Betts, started our cab at their Betts. Stayed there a little while then we went over to Germany for just, they were just jumping us here and there and then we were in Luxemburg in December '45 when the Bulge broke out, that's how we ended up going at Christmas Day, we were on our way to the Bulge and we stayed, we were with the 3rd Army Patton and we stayed with him spearhead at the, or was it the 3rd Army, I think. We ended up in Czechoslovakia when they surrendered there in Europe. I was in the artillery and, first I was in the communication section which we used to, 105 Howitzer Battery, and we used to supply the phone lines to the guns for the coordinates of the firing and then I also for a while handled ammunition, ammunition for the guns, and they used to pack two of them in the box, and they weighed about, they were from 100 to 105 pounds each..

MR: Wow

PM: Well I was young, that time it was nothing to pick one of them up

MR: Yeah

PM: And we got, one time there in the bulge we got countered attacked with a group of the Germans there, we worked all night long, just hauling ammunition back up to the guns, but outside of that I didn't do very much, I was just a Private all the way through, nothing much, but I still was in there. Did my part there.

MR: How long were you in combat?

PM: Well we, our Division went in, we were in for 90 straight days, and never got a relief for that, and they claim that was record at that time, I don't know whether that was true or not. We were one of the last divisions and then when the war ended we got sent back, they sent three divisions back, that were on their way to the Pacific but, and then they gave us 30 day furloughs, by the time, I was home when the Japanese surrendered. Then we went to Fort Benning, Georgia and they, after replenishing all our troops and everything, bringing our division up to par there, they decided to deactivate the outfit. We were the first division to be deactivated after World War II.

MR: When was that approximately?

PM: In a, 1940, around September of '45, and then from Fort Benning, from there they shipped me to Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, till I got my, they lowered my points and I got out in January of '46.

MR: To come back to Baldwinsville afterwards?

PM: No, I just stayed around. I'm not originally from here. I was, been here about 20 years now.

MR: Ok. Ed, what unit were you in?

EA: I was a pilot in the Air Force and I, my overseas work was with the 8th Air Force in England during the, 1943 and 1944. I spent a lot of months over there. I would say the most memorable experience I had was D-Day. I flew two missions on D-Day. The first mission, the clouds obscured the view and we had to bomb elsewhere. But, late afternoon, they scheduled another raid for our group. And I got in on that and I went strictly as an observer, now I did not pilot a plane on that one, and it's the best trip I ever had because the clouds had disappeared over the, over the bay and I saw nothing but ships, airplanes and ships going into the coast and France. And I said at that time, when I come home, that I could walk from England to France, one boat at a time, one step on each, and it was fantastic! And what a lot of people don't, never realized, about the invasion, Germany has no air craft over the invasion what so ever. I think there was two fighters got in where we had eight thousand planes over it. The Germans only got two fighters and both of those got shot down. But they took a circle of about 175 miles and for two or three weeks they bombed the German airports. And bombed them and bombed them and then, starting the night before, our fighters went over and wouldn't let any of their fighters off the ground and this, THIS a lot of people just don't realize. There was no fighters.

MR: Now what kind of a plane did you pilot?

EA: I flew B-17's. I originally went over as a co-pilot, and I flew six raids as a co-pilot. Then I checked out and they gave me a new crew and I flew thirty, twenty-five raids as a pilot. Probably as a good a raid was, I'm not sure whether it was

either the first or second raid on Berlin. I was in the lead group, the lead squadron, and the lead division and we were the first planes over Berlin. But what was so thrilling about it was when we turned around to come home, we flew just 180 degrees and we watched the rest of the 8th Air Force coming in and we past our planes going in there for forty-five minutes to bomb Berlin. This was, we were just flying away from the target and seeing all these planes coming in after you, it was really fantastic!

MR: Now this here is a picture of...

EA: That's a picture of a plane from my squadron, my group, in England, and the original painting is down in the Smithsonian Institute, and I, I'm not in the plane as it's depicted but I have flown that airplane myself.

MR: Now, what was your experience prior to going in the service, what led you toward becoming a pilot?

EA: Well, I don't know, when the war started, we all knew it was, I was there within two weeks to join up but I had to take tests and I passed all the tests to get into the Air Force but I failed the physical for high blood pressure. So I went home and I doctored my blood pressure for three weeks, three months and then finally got in. Then that got you into pilot training and from there you just keep stepping up.

MR: How long were you in training?

EA: Oh, nine months. Now as I say that's pilot training. It takes about nine months to get through pilot training, and then they send you out, put you together with a crew and then there's a couple more months as a crew and then we were shipped overseas.

MR: Then you were stationed in England the whole time?

EA: England for eleven months. Actually I came home just a month after the invasion, the D-Day, and I instructed here in the States for the next seven, eight, nine months and then I put in to go on B-29's and that's where I was when the war ended.

MR: Did you ever get sent out on that?

EA: No, no, I was still in Albuquerque, New Mexico when the war ended and we were just, I was just checking out B-29's. That's what I went there for.

MR: What do you remember about Europe from the perspective that you were seeing it from?

EA: Well, you really don't notice too much on the ground. We were flying twenty-one, twenty-two, three thousand feet and you have a lot of your planes around, your B-17's, you have your fighters around you and this is where your attention is drawn to. You're looking for the enemy, you're looking for flag. But occasionally we'd see the ground. I saw the ground one time coming home on a

raid and I had, was knocked out of formation and over Belgium, I dropped down to the deck so they couldn't shoot at me, and then I'm coming down through, was it, Brussels in Belgium and I dropped right down over the city so the guns couldn't shoot at me. And I can remember I was actually looking up at some of the apartment houses there where they had guns on the roof but they couldn't get their guns to shoot at me (laughter)

MR: That's a pretty big plane to be taking down that...

EA: Well, as I say, it was very all unexpected for them, so I'm very lucky. Coming out, one of the things that I remember, coming away from the coast on one raid, up head of me I noticed a 17 pulling out of formation. And he had one engine failure and then pulled out a little further and I told him I, my crew, and we were going to follow in case he needed some help. And we followed him out, we were probably fifteen miles off the coast of Belgium and this fellow feathered two engines and then he made a landing in the ocean which was very calm at the time. And he made a very beautiful landing. And five men come out each side of the plane and they brought the dinghies out and five men got in each, one went around and they tied the two together. And I kept circling over the dinghies for about four, three and a half minutes to four minutes and my radio man kept sending in a signal for the English to pick up. And after, as I say, about four minutes, I climbed up and I headed back for England. And within about two and half minutes I passed one of their Coast Guard boats on the way to them and two minutes later an air craft air/sea rescue went in right after. I just thought that was terrific. There was no doubt in my mind that they were right on line. But that makes you feel good. (Laughter)

MR: Were there any other close calls or times you got hit?

EA: We all had close calls. I lost an engineer that flew, had his hand on my shoulder, and a piece of flack cut his air supply and he just fell out of the turret up above us and we couldn't save him. But you lose engines, you lose parts of your planes, it can get pretty messy.

MR: What did you think of the plane as a...?

EA: It, for the job, there was never a better plane in the war for 17, for bombing, and it was a, it did a tremendous job. The crews were well trained and I knew at this time, that time, I had, thinking about it, that the time would come when they wouldn't need an army, that the Air Force could destroy enough that they reduce the enemy to nothing. And the only reason for an Army could be to send in the police outfit to take care of it. And from what has happened here the last three-four years this is definitely happened. I don't think our Army now is anything, anywhere near what it used to be.

MR: Did either of you have family back home that you married or anything like that during the war?

PM: Not me, I was single.

MR: Yeah.

PM: Just my family.

MR: Did you have much contact with them or?

PM: Oh yeah, I used to write every couple days. I have three other brothers that were in at the same time as I was.

MR: Oh really? That must have been kind of...

PM: One in the Navy, one in the Air Force and one in the Army, who was in the tank division. We all came back with nothing, but I had one brother, the one in the Air Force, he got hit there and they went to Switzerland for the duration, but he was home before the war actually ended, even over there. Outside of that, all four of us came back.

MR: No injuries?

PM: No injuries what so ever.

MR: Ed, you got family?

EA: I got married after I come back from overseas and I had a brother that was also in the Air Force, he was not over there though. But this, I just remembered something that might be of interest. We had glide bombs, these are very heavy bombs, and they put wings and tails on them. And they develop these glide bombs that would, we could release them about eighteen miles from the target, then we did not have to go over the anti-aircraft. And the way we first used them on the whole 8th Air Force, went along as our cover. We had quite a few generals along, in fact the general flew with me, and they had all the fighters the Americans and English had, and we released these bombs about eighteen miles from Cologne and we watched them go in, you could see them hitting. Well the thing I have always said about that particular raid, and I'm being a little comical, one of the bombs nicked the 8th wonder of the world, which is the big church in Cologne – was called the 8th wonder of the world and I still claim it was my bomb that nicked the church. (Laughter) But my mother, I was in contact with my mother during the war, and she would pick out notices in our papers when something happened and invariably she picked out one where I was. Now I mean there has to be some, I didn't tell her, somehow she knew, and she'd send me, she sent me a notation from that paper on that Cologne bombing too. (Laughter)

MR: Wow

EA: But you got to have some humor to it.

MR: Now that, your family was in Baldwinsville, or where were they?

EA: No, at that time we lived, my mother had a farm about 6 miles north of Baldwinsville. Actually I grew up in Brooklyn, but we came up, we used to come up here in summers, but we moved up in '39. And my brother is younger and he went to Fulton High School, but I moved into Baldwinsville in '48, so I've been here quite a while.

MR: Did either one of you get called up again or were you done after World War II?

PM: Well when I got out, I stayed in the reserves and I got called up for Korea, but I happened to be out of town at the time and by the time I got back home to take a physical and everything, my outfit took off and they transferred me to a non-ready outfit. I was fortunate I didn't go to Korea.

EA: I spent time, seventeen, eighteen years in the reserves, and I finally quit after I figured that what I could do, I couldn't fly anymore after that, so I just, I left the reserves. I volunteered for Korea but they just weren't using B-17's anymore.

MR: Did you, have you flown at all since then?

EA: I go up once and a while in one of these little planes but that's all. My son flies one and has one and he come up and take me up. I love flying, but it's too expensive.

MR: Yeah, it's an expensive hobby. Alright anything else that you remember, just popped in your head about those days?

PM: I didn't have a very exciting time in the service. I was just, just one of those, waited it down low persons, you know? When where they told me, I did what I was told and that was it. I never got into anything heavy or anything. The worst part of my own time was at the Battle of the Bulge. That's outside that.

MR: Do you remember the feelings or people, talk when the war was over or any, or what you were thinking around that time?

PM: Well, I don't know, to me, I just took everything in right in stride. Just the only thing on my mind was when will this ever end. It was just one of those deals, like you went to work every day and you know that was it. Finally it came to an end, you know. Always waiting for this or waiting for that. We went into occupation after the war ended for a short time there, we were over in the, the time before they split up Germany. We were in the part that was going to go to Russia and I'll tell you those German people were panicked then, they didn't like the idea of living in the Russian zone.

MR: Ed, do you remember the end of the war and?

EA: Oh yes, I was in Albuquerque, New Mexico checking out on B-29's and the day that Japan surrendered, the next day I was on, second man on the list to get out of the service. (Laughter) Actually they moved me by the end of the week, I was moved back to Atlantic City.

MR: And that was on the points system?

EA: Oh yeah, yeah, I had enough points.

MR: Yeah, you went in right after Pearl Harbor so...

EA: Well I went in July of '42, June, July of '42.

MR: Phil you went in when?

PM: I went in March of '43, so it took me a long, I didn't get out til January '46 because of my points.

MR: Uh huh.

EA: Well they gave you, they gave us a lot of points. If you were in combat you got points.

PM: Yeah but I mean...

EA: That's where the most points would come from.

PM: Like I said we were in for ninety days and that was all, you know?

MR: Ninety days straight though!

PM: Straight, it was straight.

MR: Yeah.

PM: It wasn't so bad where I was in the artillery, it's the poor infantry guys, you know they were up there all the time, they were never getting relieved, they was just, the only relief they were getting was new replacements. But it worked out pretty good, though, I mean. I lost a good friend of mine, he was a foreign observer, and he got killed over there. Had a couple buddies, I've never seen since then.

EA: I have one thing to add, he hasn't seen too many of his, but our group has a reunion every year. I only go about every third one, but our last reunion, which was May, first of May or April this year was down in Savannah, Georgia, which was our 50th reunion and we had over three hundred fifty, three hundred fifty-four there, so we still have contact.

MR: Yeah.

EA: My old navigator and bombardier. I just got a picture, his wife sent us a picture that was taken down at the reunion.

MR: Oh.

EA: They don't look like soldiers to me. (Laughter)

MR: Well a lot of years have gone by.

EA: Yes.

PM: I got a reunion coming up the end of September in Louisville, Kentucky and I'm looking forward to going to that one cause one of the, my very good buddy's in the service lives there and I've met him only once since, since the war. I think I want to go down and make sure I see him.

MR: Well I think we'll wrap it up here and thank Ed and Phil for talking to us. And we'll be back with the next installment.