

Eleanor Peinkofer
Narrator

Mike Russert
Wayne Clarke
New York State Military Museum
Interviewers

Interviewed on August 23, 2006
Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society
Buffalo, New York

MR: All right, this is an interview at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, Nottingham Terrace, Buffalo, New York, 23rd of August 2006, approximately 2:30 pm. Interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you give me your full name, please?

EP: Eleanor Peinkofer.

MR: this is an unusual interview. You're doing a third person interview of a soldier that you maintained correspondence with during World War II.

EP: That's correct.

MR: how old were you at the time that you were writing these letters?

EP: Maybe ten, eleven or twelve

MR: how did you end up writing letters to this soldier from LeRoy, New York, which is outside of Rochester?

EP: At, school in Buffalo, we had an opportunity to what they called "Adopt A Soldier" and I'm not sure how the names were selected or where they came from- but it came from the Red Cross to the school and I was given the name of Frank Brown.

MR: what did you know about Frank Brown?

EP: Initially, nothing, other than his address and that he was from LeRoy.

MR: from information prepared by his brother (younger brother) William Brown, Frank Brown was born May 27th, 1917 in LeRoy, New York. He

was a graduate of vocational school there and entered the US Army on May 15th, 1941. how many letters did you exchange with him?

EP: Over a period of time, probably, twenty.

MR: Do you still have these letters?

EP: I do.

MR: What did you two write about in most of your letters?

EP: Well, basically, he would tell me about his family and himself. My letters to him are more ground, I suspect. I just told him what I was doing in school or girl scouts or about my family.

MR: When did you start writing to him?

EP: Not sure.

MR: I would imagine, after the war started he went in.

EP: I would think about 1941 or '42.

MR: Well, he sent you some photographs of himself

WC: You can explain, where there were taken. I'm going to focus in on the bottom one first.

EP: I know it was taken according to his letters outside of his barracks in Camp Gordon, Georgia, and he inscribed it, "To: A good soldier-
From: The old sarge" and that was done in '43.

MR: Okay.

WC: And then, the photograph up top.

EP: I know that was taken by a professional photography, in Augusta.

MR: From the information, he was a staff Sargent in company C, 12th infantry, motorized with the 4th division. Do you know what kind of assignments he had, what he did, at all? He didn't tell you in his letters?

EP: He did and it had mostly to do with weapon training.

MR: Now, he enlisted prior to Pearl Harbor in May of 1941. From reading

this he had a couple close friends.

MR: Which one is Frank?

EP: Frank is the one on the far right.

MR: These are his two friends, can't see their names [chuckle].

MR: The friends are Vic Santiangelo on the left and L. McDonald in the center.

WC: What were their names again?

MR: Uh, this is Frank Brown on the right.

WC: Right.

MR: This is L. McDonald is in the center, yes, and Vic Santiangelo here.

WC: Okay.

MR: This is also a photograph sent with Frank Brown with his brother, Billy, who had sent us the information, on his shoulders.

WC: Okay.

MR: That photograph was taken at Fort Niagara in 1941. How long of a period did you write letters? Do you know?

EP: Yes, it was eight months to about two or three years that we exchanged letters and the last letter that I had sent to him was dated June the 3rd, 1944. I hadn't heard from him for a while and then I kept writing to him, nonetheless, and this is when it was returned to me, it was marked that he was deceased June 26th, 1944.

WC: How did you react to that news?

EP: I was very upset and I did send a note to his parents and his mother had invited me to come down to LeRoy, to visit them but my parents thought that I was too young to become too emotionally involved. I never did meet him nor his family.

MR: According to the information that his brother sent, his parents, Jack and Nelly Brown, received a letter from Frank's friend, L. McDonald on Red Cross stationery, which is in this folder I have from them, in which he said he was recuperating from wounds he received in combat on June 8th, 1944, and he said that, "Words cannot express my feelings on the recent loss of your son and my pal," and the parents had not received anything.

EP: Apparently.

MR: When they wrote a letter to the war department, the war department in a telegram on July 6th, 1944, which is also included, said that Frank W. Brown was not on the casualty list and that there was a possibility he could be a prisoner of war.

William Brown said there were a total of twenty-three letters written by Frank's mother to him, between June 8th and August 4th, 1944. All of which were returned stating that he was deceased and finally, they received a telegram on August 6th, 1944 stating that Frank had been killed in action on the 13th of July, in France. Yet, later accounts say that he actually died on the 8th of June, 1944 and the telegram said, "In this action, Sargent Brown displayed bravery and courage that is not found in a common man; that is, indeed, a thing to be remembered." have you, stayed in contact with the family? Or you established contact?

EP: Yes, we established contact with the family and towards the end of New Year 2003, my husband and I were on a trip with our church to LeRoy and we had stopped in, at the LeRoy Historical Museum which is adjacent to the Jell-O Museum in LeRoy and I began telling this woman about Frank because in the meantime, I had found the letters that I was saving and this was after I retired and I had a little bit of time and I start thinking about him a lot and wondering whatever happened to his family.

So, the woman in the museum, ask me if I would write that all down so they could keep that as part of their records Which I did and shortly after that I received a call from a reporter in the LeRoy Penny saver, who interviewed me over the phone and I related the story to her and then when the story ran in the LeRoy paper, a niece of Frank's had read the story and was really excited about finding some connection to her uncle after all these years and was of course, whom she had never met and had relayed the information to William Brown and he did contact me. I sent him copies of all the letters that I had and any information that I had and since then we'd gotten together and

continued communication and it's been a really great experience for me and I know for him as well.

WC: Do you want to hold that up?

MR: Now, where is Frank buried?

EP: He's buried in Saint Francis cemetery in LeRoy and when my husband and I went down to locate the grave, we looked and searched for, probably, a half hour. The cemetery's not all that large and we couldn't find it, couldn't find the grave so, that's when we drove the car around and I was walking, towards the entrance way and as I was walking there, a car came up, alongside me. The woman in the car asked me if she could help and I told her who I was looking for and she says, "Oh, I know where that is!" So, she says, "Hop in." So, I got in her car and we drove back towards the rear of the cemetery and as it turned out, that woman's family plot was it, right next to the Brown family. So, she took us right to the grave site.

EP: My husband and I go back there, regularly, just to pay our respects and put some flowers on the grave.

MR: Now, does he have a military stone.

EP: He does.

MR: On his grave?

EP: Yes.

MR: Is it a part of the cemetery that's not taken care of?

EP: Oh no, it's bone and cane cemetery.

MR: okay.

EP: We just didn't know exactly where we were looking.

MR: okay.

WC: Would you like to add anything else or?

EP: This was when I noticed the same photo that came from their church directory that indicated that he was the first soldier who was killed from their parish and [inaudible 00:14:03] And I know he did work at

the Jell-O plant, as well and we did find a monument there at the Jell-O factory for him with the names of the people who had served during World War II and his is the only name with a star, indicating that he had been killed.

MR: Wonderful. Thank you very much.