

**Howard B. Etts  
Veteran**

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

**Interviewed on April 5th, 2011**

Q: Today is the 5th of April 2011. We are at the American Legion Post in Margaretville, New York. My name is Wayne Clark. I'm with the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York.

Sir, for the record would you please state your full name, date and place of birth please.

A: My name is Howard B. Etts and I was born in Fleischmanns, New York, June 10th, 1918.

Q: Did you attend school there?

A: No, my mother and father moved here to Margaretville when I was two. I grew up in this area. I went to school and graduated from Margaretville High School.

Q: Do you recall what year you graduated?

A: 1937. Things were kind of slow then. There wasn't that much work around. I went to Albany to enlist in the Air Force.

Q: This was what year?

A: 1937.

Q: '37. OK.

A: I wanted to be a fighter pilot. I loved to learn to fly. I went up to Albany up to the Army recruiting station. After everything was over with, they said you're not what we're looking for. I came home. A friend of mine had a job working on an ore freighter on the Great Lakes. He told me how to go about going out there and getting a job on the lakes.

I left here in 1938 and went out to South Chicago to the Lake Carrier's Association. I got my Seaman's book and I was eligible to work on an ore freighter. I shipped out for Pickands Mather, the PM Line out of South Chicago.

Q: This was on the Great Lakes?

A: This was on the Great Lakes.

I registered for the draft in 1940. At that time when I was supposed to register, I was right out in the middle of Lake Erie. We couldn't register until we got to Duluth which was about two, two and a half days later. As a result, I saw my rotation going into the service, I was the next to last one in Delaware County. So, I knew I'd continue work on the freighter.

Q: What was your job on the freighter?

A: I was a porter. I washed dishes, 1st Porter, and helped in the galley. It was a nice clean job and moved all over. It was beautiful. Anyone should see the Great Lakes. You don't realize what a beautiful country this is.

Q: Now you mentioned that you were on the Great Lakes when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

A: Yes. We were up in Duluth, Minnesota. We'd started loading and it took two hours, two hours and a half to load sometimes, it depends. We were heading from there to go down to Erie, Pennsylvania or Ashtabula , one of those ports to unload.

Q: What were you carrying. What kind of cargo?

A: Iron ore.

Q: Iron ore.

A: There were different kinds of iron ore. We took one trip to Wickwire plant east of Buffalo through the Welland Canal up the river, I think 14 miles up to Niagara Falls. Wickwire plant used to take a special ore. It was really a nice job. I'd see a lot of the country and met a lot of guys.

Q: So, you were telling me about hearing about Pearl Harbor. Was thins on the radio you heard it?

A: Yes. It was one of those Zenith portable radios I bought off a little... they used to call a bum boat. They used to come along side and latch up the side of the ship sometime when we were in port. They had all the stuff they wanted to sell. This radio was a Zenith radio with a portable antenna. I bought it.

I came back in my room after dinner and I turned the radio on. I got the news about what happened at Pearl Harbor. Then, like I said, I was saving up money to get a new Chevy truck. I knew from then, I would be going back into the service.

Q: Did you get drafted?

A: Yes. I was drafted. I had a perforated ear drum and didn't know it. Of course, the army knew it, I was limited.

Q: Now when did you go into the service?

A: I went in July the 8th, 1942.

Q: You were drafted into the army?

A: I was drafted into the army.

Q: Whereabouts were you drafted out of?

A: I came out of Utica. We went from Margaretville to Utica. Then from Utica, we went to Camp Upton way out on the end of Long Island. We were there, I think, 24 hours then I was shipped down to Camp Lee, Virginia.

We were there. I was there about six or eight months. I was shipped to Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Q: At Fort Lee, did you receive infantry type training there?

A: No, this was a quartermaster school. We had basic arm information learn all the things with the rifle, firing and stuff, manual of arms and military discipline and all of that basic.

They formed the 100th Division and we were sent - a couple of us come out of quartermaster school and went down to Fort Jackson and started the 800th Ordnance Company. It was about, I think, about ten of us. Then the equipment started to come in and everything else. Eventually, the 100th Division was formed.

That fall in '43 we went into Tennessee maneuvers. Then we came back to Fort Bragg. At Fort Bragg, we went into another training cycle. We shipped out to go overseas in October of 1944. We landed in Marseille, the harbor of Marseille.

Q: Do you recall the name of the ship that you crossed over on?

A: Yes. The *USS George Washington* - a troop ship. There was four thousand of us on that ship.

Q: Did you get sea sick at all?

A: No. I already had experience on the Great Lakes.

Q: Oh, that's right.

A: I knew what it is. It didn't bother me. The guys that I was with - we got out into the Atlantic and I felt this east wind in my face. I said to the guys we're going to get a big storm. We're going to get a big blow. They didn't believe it and we did. It was a small hurricane. They used to call me "old salty" after that.

Q: So, you landed in Marseille.

A: We landed in Marseille. The harbor was full of sunken ships. It had been bombed by the Germans. It was a French port.

I was glad to get off that ship because the Germans were bombing the Toulon naval base. That was a French base. The French fleet was in Toulon. We're out on the deck at two o'clock in the morning and they're bombing this French base.

They got the deck lights on and the first thing you hear, "Engineer on watch, pull the main switch." It seemed like it was an hour before they got that switch off. The Germans bombing Toulon but it was only a difference of about ten miles.

Q: They could see your light?

A: They could see out lights yes. We were glad to get off that ship. We went over landing nets down to and LCI then we hit the beach it must have been two or three o'clock in the morning.

Q: This was in the fall of 1944.

A: '44. That's right. We hiked about six, eight miles. We went out in this kind of field and we would sleep on the ground. We woke up and it was raining. We had the job of getting the equipment off of the boat. The 100th Division's equipment was all on the boat.

My job was carrying gasoline and the getting cars if the run out of gas or stopped or whatever, it was my job to get them going again.

Q: Were you driving like a tanker or something?

A: No. Our division was the 100th Infantry Division. We had armored, 10th, 12th and 14th Armored were attached to our division. So, it was a separate unit - armored was separate and the infantry was separate.

We were there a couple days and got everything. The thing you didn't notice was all the live ammunition laying around (unclear). Someone had been through there.

We took off up the Rhone Valley up to Lyon, Montelimar, Strasbourg. We were headed for Strasbourg. That was in the Vosges, French sector. We were going to be on the end of the line. The French would be on our right. The 82nd Airborne and, I think, the 101st was on our left.

Q: So, if you were in Strasbourg, you were pretty close to Germany, right?

A: Oh, yes. It was just a short ways across there. We went in there in the middle of the night all blackout conditions. It was strange. We got, actually, we got orders to move into Baccarat. Baccarat, France is in the Vosges. It's their big glass factory makes all specialized glass worldwide known. Still is. We got orders to go in to that plant and we did. We had the whole company and moved in with blackout conditions. I was driving the jeep. A fella by the name of

Grafton was on the hood with a white handkerchief under blackout conditions. If he wants you to turn left, he would shake to the left side with the handkerchief. This is the way you steer.

We got into the plant . We came the back way into the plant and the whole company. We were there at about two or three o'clock in the morning. We got orders to get out. We had to vacate. There was a possible chance that we were going to be completely surrounded. So, we got back out of there. This was December the 6th. The Bulge didn't start until before Christmas.

Q: What about your equipment at that time. Your clothing and that was it adequate? Did you have boots?

A: Yes. At that time it was in October, October and November. The weather wasn't that bad. We had combat boots. Later on we were issued rubber bottoms and leather tops like hunting boots.

Q: Yes.

A: We were lucky to get out. We could have lost the whole company. The company - there is 140 men in a company and very specialized people, very qualified people. We were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation after it was over with.

Q: When was the first time you were under attack?

A: Well, we were back far enough we could see flashes, we had flashes on three sides. We were almost completely surrounded. We find all of this information comes out years later. The infantry, the 397th Infantry, from our division actually held their front. They were the only ones that held and it saved us.

It's funny, I was in a little town of Sindelfingen. It's in Alsace-Lorraine. The civilians knew more about what was going on that we did. It's funny, half the time we never knew what was going on.

We got orders to put up roadblocks. We had two roadblocks up. They had logs and stuff that the engineers had dropped off. We setup the roadblocks. I'm up on this field. It was a beautiful day. I had the funniest darn feeling to get out of there. We moved out of there and just a few minutes later a Me109 - A German pursuit plane - came in and dive bombed and hit a French column moving. It hit this French column. There was two or three guys killed there with their faces all blackened and stuff.

We were there, I guess, three or four weeks. We got reports they dropped paratroopers behind us and it was cold. The weather set in. There was eight or ten inches of snow on the ground. We got the report that they had dropped the paratroopers.

They figured that it was best to go looking for them in the daylight. They didn't want any flashlights around or anything. The next thing we put a crew out and made a big sweep and didn't find them but some of them had been found. We held. We were very lucky. It could have been a lot worse. But, I don't know.

Q: Were you there for the Battle of the Bulge?

A: Yes.

Q: Was that part of it?

A: The 100th Division, 397th held there. It was the only one up there that held. They had us on three sides.

Q: Were you dug into foxholes?

A: Not so much. We had the roadblocks. We were in a different area . We had the roadblock. You always have rifle covering it. They don't know where you are and you don't know where they are. When they come through, when a vehicle comes through, you challenge them. Germans can't pronounce "w's" so all the passwords and the counter signs always had a "w" in them.

Q: I see.

A: So, you could always tell if they had the proper password.

Q: Yes.

A: And if they don't...

Q: Were there any Germans that tried to sneak through?

A: No, If they did, they could have. I thought later, the ambulances or the red cross had a lot going on up there and sometimes they let them through without challenging them - especially the Red Cross. They could get a hold of a Red Cross ambulance you know. Well, you did a lot of soul searching. I'll tell you.

Q: Now, after you guys moved out of there, where did you go next?

A: Let's see now...

Q: That would have been about February or so.

A: January or February. January and December was the worst. Of course, the weather was a bad thing. We couldn't get the airplanes up.

Q: Right.

A: We didn't have much cover until the weather changed and then what a sight. You wouldn't believe the amount of airplanes that were in that area. You could see the bombers going over. Vapor trails.

Q: Did you get into the Hurtgen Forest at all?

A: No. From there, we went to Manheim. We crossed at Manheim. Sometimes I'm thinking was a dreaming or wasn't I. I can remember seeing miles and miles and miles of vehicles going with the lights on (unclear).

Q: What was it like crossing the Rhine?

A: I drove across in a Jeep. I had a couple of buddies with me. It was kind of like it sinks down, and you move and it sinks down. It was fairly smooth, the pontoon bridge. As we crossed the Rhine, it was sort of a big plateau like - no trees. We had a couple of barrage balloons over the bridge to protect it from dive bombers.

We setup in German anti-aircraft area. We setup in there and we stayed there.

Q: Were you receiving any resistance at all?

A: No. They broke through. Let's see, where we went from there. We went through the Ruhr. Part of our job was looking for G-2 intelligence equipment. There were a lot of sightings. It was different. It was all different. Most of their manufacturing and all the stuff was made in that Ruhr area and that was blown up pretty bad. I went in with four or five guys looking for their special equipment and anything...

Q: Was that when you looked in the building and saw the flag with the swastika?

A: No, that was later on. Let's see, I was just trying to put this together. We crossed the Rhine and went into the Ruhr. There had been a big tank battle in there. Three or four of our American tanks had been knocked out. They say that the armor will hold shells. The German shells will go right through an American tank. I have seen both turrets and right out the back.

We were in this one plant. There again, we were an advance party looking around for the G-2 stuff. It started getting dark. We were going to stay there in the same area. The thing you do is you kind of hide yourself. If they find you, you hear them before they hear you. We always put out a guy who was always awake. You got used to it.

This one night we were in this area. We were in this building. The town had been taken that day. There were still fires going on. We stayed in this one building. The wind came up and the building caught on fire. We were inside the building and it was burning. I hollered to the crew. We had a JU-88 - a German bomber. I guess it was a bomber. They strafe and everything. This bomber kept flying around looking to the light. He could see the light from the fires. He was flying right around and five of us are inside. We can't get out of the place. It was on fire. I hollered at a guy "Don't look up". When you look up they get the reflection of light off your face and they can see.

This JU-88 kept flying around and around getting lower and lower and lower and we're in there trying to dig into the cement trying to get cover. You never forget it. It made its last pass then took off. We were very happy.

Funny, I had a funny thing happen. We moved in this town that had a lot slave labor in them. A lot of manufacturing - German's making whatever. We moved into it and we liberated the slave labor. "DP's" (displaced persons?)

Q: Were they Jewish people?

A: There were everything. There were Polish. There were everything. Everything. There were men and women about two hundred. We figured about two hundred. When we got there, we let them out and, of course, gave them k-rations.

Q: Were they in pretty sad shape?

A: No. Not particularly. They were always glad to see you. We let them out. In the closure where they were, they had them locked up. It was like a big pit. Around this pit was a lot of German civilian houses. When we let them loose, we let them go. All of them left except one little Polish guy. He started throwing rocks through those windows. You can imagine they were throwing garbage at him when he was locked up. So, we let him have his fun for awhile finally we said we'd better stop.

Q: Did you liberate any other camps at all or concentration camps?

A: No, that was the only one. This little Polish guy, eventually, we had to put him in a Jeep and took him out eight or ten miles towards Poland and dropped him off.

Q: You mention going into Dachau though.

A: Yes.

Q: You want to tell us about that?

A: Well Dachau. The war was over then (unclear). A buddy and I had a Jeep and we'd heard about this concentration camp and we went over. The first thing we came in on the lower end, there were a lot of box cars. The bodies were piled up as far as the eye could see on this box car.

We went into the different building and it seemed every building had something different. One of them had big barrels full of coins. Another would be shoes. Another would be clothing and it was systematically piled up. I think I remember one big pit in the center where they had buried hundreds. I couldn't believe it really. It kept going through my mind. How could a man if he has children how could he kill any other kid. It just didn't make sense.

Q: Were there any German guards left there?



A: When we got there, they were all gone. From Division, from my buddy, they said a lot of the guards changed clothes with the inmates. This actually happened. The Americans shot them for that. It was unreal. There was a program setup later on Eisenhower where civilians had to walk them through to see it.

Q: You mentioned that this was after the war. During the war, towards the end of the war, when President Roosevelt died. What was your reaction to that?

A: That was...I was in a foxhole. We had a report had seen by some guys. It's strange, it was in an ammunition dump. What the devil we were doing in there, I don't know but here we are in an ammunition dump. There was somebody running somewhere or something so they put a big pit out in front of the company - they dug this down - and four of us were on guard duty down in this pit. About two or three o'clock in the morning, the sergeant comes crawling out. That pit must have been a couple sizes of this (room).

When the sergeant came out he said that Roosevelt just died. They got the report that Roosevelt had died. If course, the Germans thought we were going to give up because our leader had just gone. We heard that several times but it. A lot of them expected it because of the pictures you see of Roosevelt (unclear)

Q: Now where exactly were you when the war ended in Europe?

A: Stuttgart. That's a funny feeling. That's funny because you could hear the birds. In the guns and flash they go. They're gone. You don't hear them. You don't see them. Everything's quiet.

Q: Did you see any Germans surrendering their weapons?

A: I didn't then not so much. I remember a couple of the towns that we went through, the German Mausers were stacked up outside the buildings and stuff. I told the guys, you know, if they counterattack, they're going to grab those guns so we just destroyed them - hundreds of them, bent their barrels around a pole or something and throw the bolt away. The bolts match up see.

Q: Yes.

A: You throw them away, they don't work.

Q: How were you treated by the civilians when the war ended?

A: This, I thought to myself. I used to tell the guys look, treat them with respect. Someday you'll be damn glad we got them and actually, it did happen. From what I saw of the Russians, there was a consulate in there and they were never really friendly at all. You'd wave to them and they wouldn't pay any attention.

Q: Was there much celebration when the war ended in Europe.

A: No. very quiet. You would just look at each other. Within ten days, the Germans had the trolley cars going. We used to ride the trolley cars. I can remember I was the only soldier on this trolley car with a bunch of German civilians. I was the only one in there and that's a funny feeling.

Q: How did they react toward you?

A: Very quiet. You'd catch them looking at you out of the corner of your eye. They don't make eye contact really. I can remember getting on it was a double trolley car - two cars. The operator was up here and the conductor was back here. I got on there and I walked up to the conductor. I'm going to pay. He wouldn't take any money. But, that 's a funny feeling to be the only GI on the whole thing. The best thing you could do was to dress nice and take good care of yourself and show them an impression.

They couldn't quite understand how us - they used to say you guys go buy cars, you go buy trucks and you've got your feet way up here or hanging around here or something no military discipline whatsoever. They couldn't understand it and we were never on time on our parades. You probably heard that before.

Q: Was there any talk about you guys going to Japan at all?

A: Yes. In Stuttgart where we were, we got reclassified. We got a physical again and we were put in a certain class. My job was - they took over the Mercedes-Benz plant. My company took over the Mercedes-Benz plant. This was strange because Eisenhower let the French go in at take Stuttgart. The 100th Division had Stuttgart surrounded.

We took over the Mercedes-Benz plant and like I said, Eisenhower let them in there but what they were doing they were taking all of the machine tools. That's what they wanted from the Mercedes-Benz plant. They were stripping all of that.

I got orders with the company commander to move a couple ten ton prime movers into Bad Cannstatt where the Mercedes-Benz plant was to go in there. The French were in there. Eisenhower told them to get out. They didn't get out. It took almost ten days before we got the French out. We wanted to go in there and (unclear) the tools too. That's what it was.

I moved in with the company commander and two big ten ton prime movers and the French were in that plant. I remember the company commander they couldn't find the plant. It was in the middle of night. It was dark. Finally, we got into the plant and we were in there with the French. We were scared. We didn't know what they were going to do and they didn't know what we were going to do. We were in there three, four, five days. Eventually, the French got out of there.

We were up for the Croix de Guerre, the French citation. We never got it. I think it was part of the reason (unclear) the Mercedes-Benz plant.

Q: When did you end up heading back to the states?

A: Well, I got shipped up to Heidelberg. Detached Services set up a pool there. I was up there most of the summer. I was there when they dropped the atomic bomb. It came out in *Stars and Stripes*. We used to get the paper. It was funny. Guys were quite then too. They were quiet at that time. No celebration or anything. They knew they were going home.

Q: So, when did you go home?

A: I transferred over into 36th Division. I was a high point man. They took all the high point men and they transferred you into the 36th. I went home with them. I went right back on the same route that I came up in up the Rhone Valley into Marseille. I got a Victory ship there. It was 1500 of us in the victory ship.

Q: When did you get home?

A: Around the first week in December.

Q: December '45.

A: Yes. '45.

Q: Whereabouts did you get discharged from?

A: Camp Dix. I was at Kilmer. I was in line there in Kilmer. I happened to look up and there was a fella that I knew when I went to high school.

Q: So you made it home for Christmas then.

A: I made it home for Christmas.

Q: How long had it been since you had seen you family?

A: It was almost two years or something like that.

Q: How did you get home? Did you take the train or hitch hike?

A: We took a train over from Trenton over to New York. From there, I went home. I went to work the next day for my dad.

Q: What type of work?

A: My dad had a meat market right down here in Margaretville.

Q: So, you didn't take advantage of that 5220 club?

A: Yes. I was in on the 5220. That's the only thing I did take. I didn't take unemployment or none of that.

Q: Did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

A: I was going to take the GI Bill and go to Cornell University but I changed my mind. I had been away from home for so long. I said no. I didn't go to college.

Q: Did you use the GI Bill to buy a home or anything?

A: Yes. I did in Fort Lauderdale. We lived in it for three months then we gave it up.

Q: When did you get married?

A: I was married before I went in.

Q: OK. Did you have any children before you went away or after?

A: I had one boy who was born on D-Day.

Q: That must have been really hard on your wife.

A: Yes.

Q: With you overseas. Whereabouts was she?

A: She was here with her mother and father.

It was good experience. I don't know how these wars start. It seems every twenty years somebody does something like this.

Q: You mentioned that you stayed in contact with some of the guys and you belong to the 100th Infantry Division Association.

A: Yes. I've got pictures.

Q: Do you want to show some of the pictures that you've got.

A: These are the guys I was with. We were getting ready to go home. We were going to leave Stuttgart.

Q: Whereabouts are you in the picture?

A: I happen to be right there with my jacket open.

Q: Just point. Oh, that's you right there.

A: This was taken in right there Stuttgart. I was going to leave from there to go to the 36th Division.

Q: You've got some other photos there?

A: Here's one we had taken about six years ago at a reunion.

Q: These are reenactors?

A: These are French civilians in American uniforms that duplicate. They had a jeep, a three quarter ton Dodge and a two and a half ton truck.

Q: All those fellas in the background. Are all those guys you served with?

A: No, these were part of the 100th Division. This was taken inside the building.

Here's my buddy.

Q: What's his name?

A: Beetler (sp?). We always call him Beetler. He's from down in Pennsylvania. I think we were about less than 100 miles.

Q: You've got a nice big photo of you in uniform.

A: Yes. This was taken in Miami, Florida. I went down to see my mother and dad.

Q: When was that taken approximately?

A: That must have been taken in October, I think.

Q: Of '43?

A: '43. It's got to be '43.

Q: Oh yes, tell us about..

A: This is unusual here. This captured German flag. That flag. I moved in with a bunch of guys, four or five of us to pick a billeting area. When I was looking around, I saw this building with a big glass door in the front. I looked in and could see this flag was covering a blackboard. It must have been a German school or something. It was all kinds of paraphernalia in there. I looked at it. I didn't dare to open the door because I didn't know if it was booby trapped or not. So, I didn't touch it.

This thing ended up - some fella found it in a museum in Rochester, NY. I think what happened was my buddy went back later and took the flag off and brought it back to the company and everybody signed it. I checked off the ones that I knew that were with the company (points to

picture of flag in magazine and article). It's funny how that thing worked out. This (points to magazine) He was Polnar, Walter Polnar. He was from Connecticut. He's dead now but put his name on there. All these one I crossed here, their names are on that flag.

When this thing came up , I hadn't been in touch with anyone from the company on this thing but there was a fella who wrote a letter to it. He wanted more information so I am going to correspond with him. It's funny how it worked out.

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

A: I don't know. I think I got more respect for the individual. From what I have seen, I know what guys are capable of doing and the different pressures that they have to go through especially in war time I guess. The American soldier is a hell of a soldier. They take things so easy in certain situations. They'd always find a joke - something funny. I have a lot of respect for the American soldier.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to add in the final moments?

A: No, I think I shot my mouth off (laughs)

Q: You did an excellent job. It was very interesting.

A: Thank you. I have been wanting to do this. I'm always concerned from what you see on television - that these slave labor camps never existed. It was very true. If anything comes out of this, make sure that people aren't able to lie and get away with it.

Q: Everyone knows they existed. That's for sure. Alright, thank you again for your interview.

A: Thank you very much.