

**Frank E. Gibbs
Veteran**

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Interviewers**

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Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth please?

FG: Frank Edmund Gibbs Jr., Woodville, NY. February 25, 1918.

Q: What was your educational background prior to going into service?

FG: Seventh grade was as far as I got. School was not easy for me.

Q: Do you remember where you were and what your reaction was when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

FG: Well, I was working at the Mocle Farm there in Ellisburg, at that time. He told me, after it happened, if I didn't want to go into service-as long as I worked for him he could have me deferred. It was a big farm. Maybe you've heard of him, [unclear] Mocle. He lived in New York City. He was president of the Niagra Mohawk in Syracuse. He had 6 farms there in the town of Ellisburg. And I worked for him, on one of 'em. He had me in his office 2 different times. If I changed my mind or not, whether I was going in the service or not. He said I can have you deferred out 6 months' time out if you're working for me. I said well, I figured I should go. I'm young, single and everything [unclear]. Well, he said, if you change your mind, let me know.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

FG: Drafted.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

FG: Down to Georgia. Fort Benning.

Q: Was this your first time that you were away from home?

FG: Yes.

Q: How did you feel about it?

FG: Well, it bothered me a little bit-for a while.

Q: When were you drafted?

FG: April 15th, 1942.

Q: Okay, did you receive any specialized training at all?

FG: Well, at a lot of different camps, yes. I was in the [United] States for 2 years or better, moving from one state to another for different kinds of training.

Q: What was your specific training?

FG: Machine guns, and rifle shooting, and mortars. Well, several other things- I don't remember now just what they were.

Q: What unit were you assigned to?

FG: 811th Tank Destroyer.

Q: What infantry division?

FG: I went to the front lines. One platoon, I would say, attached us to the 106th infantry.

Q: You went over as a replacement then?

FG: We went in, yea, they sent us up to the front lines with the 106th infantry.

Q: How did you get over to Europe?

FG: On a big ship.

Q: Were you under convoy?

FG: Yes.

Q: When did you arrive in Europe?

FG: It was 10 days going over. Just 10 days. We left on Labor Day of '44. Left from Boston, Massachusetts. It was ten days later we landed in France.

Q: Okay, and, you were assigned as a replacement then to the 106th?

FG: Well, we weren't assigned to that though, just before I was captured. Cause' the 811th Tank Destroyer- we were outfitted by ourselves. Until they took 1 platoon of us and shoved us up to the front lines with the 106th infantry. Moved us in at night, and the next morning we were surrounded.

Q: Were you given winter uniforms? Winter gear?

FG: [Shakes head no]

Q: You didn't have any winter equipment at all?

FG: [Continues to shake head no]

Q: Did you have an overcoat?

FG: [We] had on just what we had on when we shipped over. Ordinary clothes.

Q: What kind of weapon were you on? Can you describe the vehicle, the tank destroyer vehicle?

FG: No, I was a Jeep driver for the company commander, for the Platoon's Commander. He was a lieutenant, a 2nd lieutenant- and I was his chauffeur. [I] drove the Jeep. Then we had a machine gun right between us on a sprocket like that [gestures]. A .30 caliber machine gun, in between him and I. I was here and he was here [gestures], and the machine gun was right behind us, in the back seat.

Q: How was your unit surrounded? Was this your first action?

FG: Yea, during the night, they moved us into a wooded area. And come morning, we woke up and we were surrounded by Germans. Evidently, they had opened up a trap somewhere, and we and the officer walked right into it. And you know, I didn't know where I was going. I was just going where I was told. At daylight the next morning, we started moving around and then the artillery started coming in. We discovered we were surrounded... by Germans. So, the next thing I knew, we were losing 'em right and left. Mortar fire and everything. Troops... lost a lot of boys there.

Q: How were you treated by the Germans?

FG: I was treated alright. I didn't have any problems with the Germans. I did just what they told me and I got along fine with 'em, personally. But the trouble was we didn't have anything to eat. They didn't have any food.

Q: Where were you taken after you were captured?

FG: We were on the march for 2 or 3 days, through the woods and hiding us in box cars. Shipped us way back into Germany into a wooded area were the camps were. There were POW camps back there in the woods. Part of the camps were full of Russian boys, and the others were the American boys. Russia had a bunch of troops in there... prisoners.

Q: Were they separated from the Americans?

FG: Yea, a fence between them. Yea, the snipers kept them from the Russians.

Q: Do you remember which Stalag you were in?

FG: Stalag 9B Bad Orb, Germany. I've got pictures of it at home.

Q: How long were you there?

FG: 3 months.

Q: Can you describe your life in the POW camp? What it was like?

FG: Well, I was laying around the bunk most of the time. There was nothing to do. You didn't have any energy to do anything cause you're so darn hungry. No food. I lost 60 pounds while I was there... due to lack of food. We couldn't do anything 'cause we were weak. I wouldn't have lasted too much longer. I was sitting down like this [gestures] and would go to stand up and everything would turn black in front of me before I could see. I was losing strength the whole while.

Q: Were you given any food at all?

FG: Well, all we had was... they called it tea. Colored water... we got that twice a day and that was it. No solid food at all.

Q: What were sanitation conditions like inside the camp?

FG: They were very poor. No hot water. Cold water but it was cold, and no heat. They wouldn't allow us to have any heat.

Q: Did you stay inside of buildings?

FG: We were inside the whole while.

Q: Were you given blankets and so on?

FG: We had blankets enough, yea. On the bunks there. And you can imagine... our clothes that we had on, we wore 'em for 3 months and I never had an exchange.

Q: Did you ever receive any Red Cross packages at all?

FG: Yea, after a while, the Red Cross got in there. Brought cigarettes and small packages of small foods... packaged foods.

Q: Did you smoke your cigarettes or did you use them for exchange?

FG: Well a lot of the guys would use them to exchange for food. I did some.

Q: Did you ever have any contact with the Russians at all?

FG: [Shakes head no]

Q: Were you moved at all around to another Stalag or did you stay at that one the whole time?

FG: Well, they took us out once... out of there. They were going to move us back. They got back so far, they ran into problems and they had to bring us back to where we were. Cause they ran into the, I don't know whether it was Russians or American troops. They couldn't get to where they wanted to go with us, 'cause they were cornered off.

Q: How were you liberated?

FG: Americans liberated us. Our own troops liberated us. Just like, well same as the [unclear]. It was the last day of March, Easter Sunday, '45. We went to bed that night and the Germans were in the towers. We got up the next morning and our own MP's are in the towers. They had changed during the night! The Germans were gone... the guards. Our own MP's were in there, guarding us. They didn't want us to take off. They kept us there until they got the trucks and stuff in there to truck us out of there. But the Airforce was just a little way from us there. They had planes and they had trucks to send down the road a ways to the airport. They put us on planes and sent us back in to France where there was a hospital tent. And I was in there for about 3-4 weeks until we were well enough to take the trip home. And of course the Germans... We were halfway home on the ocean, and the captain announced that the Germans had surrendered. They had surrendered on the way home.

Q: Now as soon as you were liberated, when you had found that the MP's had taken over, did you get food right away and fresh clothing?

FG: Yes. The kitchen trucks started coming in. The tanks come in first. All the guys climb onto the tanks to get to them C rations. And they threw them out to the boys. Well, what they had on the tank. It was later that afternoon where the 2 or 3 kitchen trucks came in with food.

Q: How were you able to handle the food?

FG: They cautioned us. Take small amounts. Eat more often but small amounts, 'cause our stomachs were shrunk up so. But you read this [gestures to document] and I think you'll get most of your answers answered out of that.

Q: Where you hospitalized when you returned to the United States?

FG: No.

Q: Were you discharged?

FG: No, not 'til the war was over. Waited 'til after Japan surrendered. When we got back to New York Harbor, in New York City there, they put us in a big theater.

The General gave us a big speech. He said "you fellas are going home for a furlow." They gave us a 62 day leave. Just as soon as we got to the [United] States we went home for 62 days. Two months we were home. And of course I had 4 months pay coming... and they paid us our money that we had coming.

Q: Now were your parents aware that you were a POW?

FG: My wife got the notice.

Q: Oh, you were married when you were in service?

FG: Yea. Well a year after I got into the service I got married. She was notified shortly after I was taken prisoner that I was missing in action. Then shortly after that she got another telegram that I was a prisoner of war.

Q: After your leave, did you return to a military base then?

FG: Yea, I ended up in Lake Placid. The government took that place over during World War II. All that recreation up there in those places. I was up there for a couple weeks for recreation when I came back. I had been home for 2 months... and that was the boys' recreation place. Then I was shipped out of there into Georgia to finish up, 'til I got discharged in October... that fall.

Q: Where you being trained at all to go to Japan?

FG: No, we were done. As soon as we got home we were done, we didn't have to worry about any more war.

Q: What was your reaction when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

FG: I don't remember right now, to tell you the truth.

Q: Did you have any reaction when you heard about the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan?

FG: Yea, they said the second one was all they wanted. The second one really, I was told had done a lot of damage, and it didn't take 'em long before they surrendered.

Q: When you returned out of service did you join any veterans' organizations? Have you joined any now?

FG: I'm belong to the VFW. You know, and Save American Vets. Yea I belong to those two.

Q: Do you belong to the POW organization?

FG: [Nods head yes]

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone that you were in service with?

FG: No.

Q: How would you say your military service changed or affected your life? Do you think it had any effect on your life?

FG: Well I don't know whether it did or not. It's something you never forget. I'll never forget what I went through. I'm sure of that.

Q: Did you ever use the GI bill to buy a house or anything?

FG: No.

Q: How about the 52-20 club? Did you ever make use of that?

FG: No.

Q: Alright, well, thank you very much for your interview.