

**Oscar Osborne Jr.
World War II Veteran**

**Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on 11 January 2005
Four Points Sheraton Hotel
Manhattan New York**

Q: Alright this is an interview at Four Points Sheraton Hotel, Manhattan, New York City. It is the eleventh of January 2005, approximately 12:30. The interviewers are Wayne Clark and Mike Russert.

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

OO: Oscar Osborne Jr., April 27, 1923, borne in Sumter, South Carolina.

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering the service?

OO: Eight grade.

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

OO: I was in South Carolina at the time, and I was sitting at home listening to the radio, and I heard the announcement on the radio.

Q: Do you remember any feelings or reaction when you heard this?

OO: No, I was very young and really didn't make too much difference; it was just news. I would've never dreamed that it would be as big as it was until I got a little older and began to realize.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

OO: I was drafted.

Q: And you entered the army?

OO: In the army, yes.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

OO: We went to a small camp outside of Chicago called Camp Ellis Illinois.

Q: How long were you there?

OO: We were there approximately three, four months.

Q: What kind of training did you receive?

OO: I received some infantry training and that was about it; general basic training.

Q: Did you get any specialized training at all?

OO: No, none at that time.

Q: Where did you go from there?

OO: We went to San Bernardino, California. From there we went out into the deserts of Arizona. We stayed there approximately six months, then they shipped us back east and sent us overseas.

Q: What kind of training did you receive in Arizona in the deserts?

OO: Infantry training.

Q: So you went in this hot, dry climate, and then you were sent into Europe?

OO: Yes.

Q: Did you go with a unit or did you go as a replacement?

OO: We went over as a unit.

Q: What was your unit?

OO: I don't remember the unit name, but we were [unclear].

Q: How did you go overseas? In a ship?

OO: Yes, in a convoy.

Q: Where did you go from the United States?

OO: We went to England and we stayed in a place called Kettering, England until shortly after D-Day. After the beach was cleared out in France, we went over to France in a plane around [unclear].

Q: Do you know when you went into France?

OO: It was probably June or July of 1944 because the beach had been cleared out there and [unclear].

Q: What was your assignment there?

OO: I was a quartermaster bakery outfit and they were baking bread for the troops.

Q: Did you bring portable ovens with you?

OO: Yes.

Q: Could you describe setting one of these units up? Did you have to set your own up?

OO: No, I don't set up; I didn't have anything to do with the setup. I was driving a truck.

WC: What kind of truck did you drive?

OO: Two layer truck.

Q: What did you do? Deliver supplies around?

OO: Picking up supplies and delivering bread to the troops on the front line.

Q: How long did you move from there?

OO: I stayed with them until December 1944 after the Battle of the Bulge. General Eisenhower lost so many men at the Battle of the Bulge and he didn't have replacements in air or sea to replace this men that were killed. He called for volunteers from the black troops and there were four-thousand five-hundred sixty-two black soldiers that volunteered to go to the front lines.

Q: And you were one?

OO: I was one of them out of the four-thousand five-hundred sixty-two. I think they only used about two-thousand two-hundred twenty-one of us in the actual fighting. We were integrated into an all whit infantry offense division.

Q: What unit were you assigned to?

OO: I was assigned to the 39th infantry [unclear] division.

Q: So you were put in with a white unit?

OO: Yes.

Q: How were you accepted at the time?

OO: You didn't know the difference. Everybody considered the hostilities that were going and we needed the gun power, fire power. You were just another soldier.

Q: How many black troops went into this particular unit?

OO: I think it was about forty or sixty of us that went. They had one company because the [unclear] started calling us the 5th platoon and we didn't stay in the same quarters as the white troops, but we were part of the unit.

Q: Now this was after the Battle of the Bulge?

OO: Yes.

Q: Did you get any specialized winter gear?

OO: No, we had no specialized winter gear. We just had our regular army [unclear] and underwear, pair of shoes, gloves. Nothing special.

Q: Could you tell about your combat experiences? What was it like the first time you went into combat?

OO: It was a fear, but we knew what we were up against. We knew we had to be killed or killed and we faced it with some sense of reality. We went around the Rhine River up into the [unclear] Valley and into the Hürtgen Forest where I got wounded.

Q: Could you describe the Hürtgen Forest? From what I've read it was a very horrible battle.

OO: Yes, it was, but nothing much I can describe about it other than the trees. The forest itself was just a thick forest, heavy trees, and we had to fight in there.

Q: What kind of weapon did you use?

OO: M1s.

Q: You carried an M1. So you were wounded in the Hürtgen Forest?

OO: Yes.

Q: Would you describe that?

OO: On the morning of April 5, 1945, as we were going through the forest marching [unclear] I was shot in the upper left arm and it left me with a partial paralysis of the left hand.

WC: Was anybody else wounded with your group or just you?

OO: Not at that time I was the first one to get wounded on that morning.

WC: Did you get treatment right away?

OO: Yes, The medic was there came up and treated me right away and then they sent me back to the field hospital.

Q: where did you go from the field? What did they do for you in the field hospital?

OO: They cleaned the wound up and tested and they found that I had nerve problems in the arm and I couldn't return to duty so from there they sent me to a hospital in France. Stayed there for two weeks, then back to England. I stayed in England until around 20th July they operated on my arm and they stitched it up and they put me in a cast and [unclear] was the nerve problem. Radial up a median nerve loss [unclear] therefore I couldn't return to duty. So I didn't see any active duty from April 5, 1945 until April 27, 1946 when I was discharged from the hospital.

Q: so you were in the hospital almost a year?

OO: Yes, thirteen months.

Q: Where did you go in the United States?

OO: When I came back?

Q: Yes.

OO: The ship landed at Norfolk, Virginia and then we went to Patrick Henry Hospital, stayed there for two weeks, then they sent me to Fort Devens Massachusetts, I think. From Fort Devens Massachusetts they sent me to a hospital on Staten Island called [unclear] Hospital at that time. I think it was a state hospital that was newly built and the state never used it, and they turned it over to the army to use for wounded soldiers coming back until a few years after the war they turned it back over to the state.

Q: what kind of care do you think you received?

OO: I'd say I received excellent care, even to this day, I'm getting good care.

Q: Your arm still bothering you?

OO: Yes, I have a partial paralysis.

WC: You received the Bronze Star also?

OO: Yes.

WC: Did you want to tell us about how you received that?

OO: The Bronze Star, we didn't get until late. In fact, I just got it June 1, 2000. In 1994, we organized and there was one of the fellows from Texas. He went into the war department, his name is Mr. Wade and he found the records of about eight-hundred that were alive at the time and he sent out letters to everyone and some of us got together in 1995 informed an organization called 2221. That was the number of soldiers that went into combat and we operated as a unit and we have a homecoming at first in Atlanta, Georgia, then St. Louis, Philadelphia, Our last one this year was in Nashville, Tennessee. Next year we hope to have another reunion in Tennessee.

Q: how did he find out who were the ones that received the Bronze Star?

OO: All the [unclear] were supposed to receive it, but they didn't give it to the black soldiers [unclear] being discharged. In fact [unclear] got the Purple Heart when I was discharged. And the combat [unclear] badge and the Bronze Star and the other awards were given after Mr. Wade got us together. We went to the Pentagon, and they searched our records and found out that we were entitled to it. And those of us that were living, we got the [unclear]. Governor [unclear], they contacted him and he presented mine and

one of the other fellows, Mr. Haywood Campbell, at the 369th Armory in upper Manhattan.

Q: after you were discharged, did you make use of the G.I. Bill at all?

OO: Yes, I did. I went to school under the G.I. Bill. I went to the [unclear] School of Watchmaking, and I became a watchmaker, and in the beginning I had trouble getting jobs but eventually got out on my own and I stayed in the business until fifty-six when they started burglarizing and robbing me so bad I couldn't offset the losses. I closed up and I went to work for [unclear] Watch Company. I stayed there for seven years. I left there in 1972. I am moved to Atlanta in 1973, and I set up shop in my apartment, and did trade work; contract work for stores. So that worked out very well for me.

Q: Did you, besides the 2221 group, belong to any other veteran's organizations?

OO: I belong to the DAV, Disabled American Veterans.

Q: you never decided to go to the American Legion or VFW?

OO: No, the DAV was [unclear] my purpose at the time.

Q: Are you active with the group?

OO: Yes, I was active up until a couple of years ago; I had a heart surgery and I had trouble getting out. In fact, we meet right here in the Masonic Temple on 23rd St. and sixth Avenue.

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

OO: Only one of the fellows in Louisiana. He passed away two years ago.

Q: but you now go to reunions with the group?

OO: With the group, right.

Q: so they meet once a year now?

OO: we're trying to meet once a year; we were meeting once a year under Mr. Wade, but he became ill and he can no longer function. The year before last year we met in [unclear], Alabama, last year in Nashville, Tennessee. I'm still in contact with about twenty of the guys.

Q: How do you think your time in the service change or had an effect on your life?

OO: It had quite an effect on my life because I grew up as a youngster in segregated south, and then after I moved to New York at seventeen, I began to integrate into society. The army, in a way, sent me back [unclear] the integration. In fact, we performed so well in London in combat that General Eisenhower was in contact with President Truman. He told him of us and that was one of the things that inspired

President Truman to sign the proclamation of the executive order to integrate the Armed Forces. So that's one of the pluses.

Q: What made you volunteer one General Eisenhower ask for volunteers?

OO: it was something different. I mean, the segregated outfit, we had no privileges, we couldn't go anywhere, we couldn't go to France, Paris, you couldn't go there, you couldn't do anything and otherwise you were just restricted to a small area. All you'd do was work, work, work, work, work, and I was under the impression when I went into the service that I would be in the front lines fighting. I was never comfortable in the service outfit, so when the opportunity came for me to get into the infantry, I grasped it.

Q: when you were in the hospitals, were you segregated then?

OO: no, no. All integrated. In Germany, in France, England, all integrated.

Q: all right, well thank you very much for your interview. There any other things you think you'd like to add?

OO: no, there isn't anything else I can think of right now. You see, some of the guys had much more experience than I did because some of them [unclear] Ahead of me, and some of them, they all stayed longer. Some of them stayed longer, they didn't get wounded; they stayed longer so they were there when the war ended. Although, I'm told that when the war ended, they put them back in service outfits; they didn't give them any recognition whatsoever. That's why I was wondering if you interviewed Mr. Haywood Campbell or Mr. Melville [unclear] because they had much more experience than I did.

Q: Now are they someone from New York?

OO: Yes, there's about six of us in the New York area.

WC: you know what we can do? When we send you your tape, will add some applications in if you see them you can give them the applications for us.

OO: Sure, I'll be glad to do so.