

Kenneth Rockwell
Narrator

Unknown Interviewer

Interviewed on April 15, 2004
Herkimer County Veteran's Video Project

KR: My name is Kenneth Rockwell. I was drafted in 1943. I went to San Antonio Texas for my basic training and then wound up down in Louisiana for other training of the Railway Operate Battalion. I was attached to that Battalion since I was a linemen in it for years. When we went overseas in late 1943, I went to Omaha Beach, Normandy. We wound up in Mainz Germany for quite some time. Mainz was quite a big village located on the Mainz River. In that village all the streets were made of square blocks and when they bombed, it went up all over. I was what they called a lineman. We had a crew. We rode motor cars and put out lines for telephone warts along the railroad. Since we worked in a railroad Battalion, sometimes the bricks from the trains would fall down and burn the cable, so then we would either move them or put new cable in. I wound up in four different campaigns. My last one was in battle of the Budge. I was glad to get home that's for sure. I got home in February of 1946. I was in service for 2 and a half years. (Shows pic of himself in Mainz Germany in 1945) I was a T5, which meant I was a corporal technician. I have a meritorious certificate here.

I: Can you explain what the meritorious certificate was?

KR: The meritorious certificate, was given to us for our service from the lieutenant colonel in 1945. (Opens book of pictures) I was in a line crew and this picture shows us working on top of a pole. In this scrap book, I got different pictures of guys in here and pictures of where they bombed out. You can't see them too good but there is some of them. When we went through France and Germany, I took pictures of different things that were interesting to me at that time. The last one I wound up in was battle of the budge. In that two [unclear] was the start of the black forest which lead to the battle. That was our last encounter over there. I was discharged on Valentine's Day of 1946 at Camp Upton

I: What would you say is one of your memorable moments while you were in?

KR: One of the most memorable moments that took place was at a railroad yard. We took up a caboose. There was two of us in a caboose we lived in. Every time we'd move, they'd move the caboose with a train. Of course I rode motor cars most of the time on the railroad... I remember one time when they bombed the yard in Mainz. The Germans bombed on one end of the yard and I didn't hear them. They bombed the heck out of it. I woke up in the morning on one side of the yard completely bombed. This all happened overnight, when I woke up in the morning I had no clue anything happened. Someone had to tell me about it. That's how good I slept because we worked all day long and didn't stop. We rode motor cars laying cable along the side of the tracks. On the motor cars there was six cylinder motor that would go either way we pushed it to. We would just throw a big lever on and go either forward or backwards. The only place we could take them off was at a railroad crossing or a road. They were so heavy. They weighed around 300-400 pounds. The two of us could lift them off the tracks as the train would go by. One of the most memorable moments I can remember the most is doing my time over there.

I: Can you remember any particular happy times?

KR: Yes, we had a lot of happy times, especially in France. There was a lot of places in France as well as Germany that had everything down underneath buildings. I wound up getting a scooter out of one of the buildings about three blocks below ground. I rode that son of a gun all over the place. We had a lot of good times and a lot of bad times as well. There was a few in our outfit that got killed by bombing. Other than that a majority of the guys I was with came back home with me. We were sceptor to go to [unclear] but never got there because the war stopped.

I: Did your military experience have any influence on your regular career in the future?

KR: No not really. I just came back and went right back to the telephone company in 1946. I had to work there 5 years before I reached my time. I only worked there 41 years before they let me out.

I: How old were you when you went in service?

KR: I was 19 when I went in service. I was drafted at 18 but they deferred me in March. I didn't go in until November of 1943. In March of 1944, we went to

Normandy. There was quite a few casualties on that beach at that time. I drove a half track off from a magnum craft. Just going across the channel, I was sick to my stomach for about three days. I laid on top of the half-track and ate crackers. When I came home I was sick for 10 days. The Kaiser Liberty ships were so small I thought it was a canoe I came home in. When I went over, I was on the St. Mary's with about eighteen to twenty thousand people. We ended up only coming home with about with about five to six thousand people. There was a big difference in crossing the ocean.