

**Oscar E. Brundige
Veteran**

**Mike Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on April 3, 2003 at 9:30 AM
Saratoga Springs New York**

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

OB: Oscar E. Brundige. July the 20th 1919. I was born in Mechanicville New York.

Q: What was your educational background prior to going to the military reserves?

OB: High school, I graduated from high school

Q: Could you tell me if you remember where you were and what your reaction was when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

OB: Yeah, I was watching... I was watching the football game and it didn't mean that much. I didn't know anything about Pearl Harbor, never heard of it. But then that night we played basketball up here, right downstairs here. I was down to that game and I see everybody, you know, company L coming in in uniform and everything. We really didn't...just didn't register.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

OB: Well, I'll tell you I was at 1A and I wasn't called yet but a lot of my buddies were going in. It was in April the 3rd '42. So, I went down. I enlisted, but I got a draftee's number because I went with them. I figured there was 140 some from Stillwater, Mechanicville, Waterford. I figured I'd stay with some of them anyway. If I was drafted maybe I would, maybe I wouldn't.

Q: Did you select going into the airborne?

OB: Oh yeah. That's all volunteer.

Q: Why did you pick that?

OB: Well, I'll tell you. A buddy of mine—when we were interviewed down in Camp Upton— they asked—he was just ahead of me—they asked him what he wanted to get into. He wanted to get in the paratroops. I never heard of it. They asked me, and I said I wanted to get in the air corps. Well he wound up in the air corps and I wound up in a paratroops. But after six weeks of basic training—

Q: Where did you go for basic?

OB: Camp Upton—and after six weeks, then they split you up into different departments. So they put me in this intelligence school, where you got to draw maps. I can't even draw a straight line, let alone make maps. So that night, after the first night we come in, they had a notice on the bulletin board. On Wednesday, they were given physical exams for the paratroops. So I figured that's my best, shortest way getting out

of what I was doing. So then, when I went down, when after you signed the dotted line and everything, they asked me when I finished basic training. So I had to finish that anyway. That was the reason. I didn't know about the 50 dollars extra month or nothing else. I just wanted to get out of what I was in.

Q: Where did you go for your airborne training?

OB: Fort Benning

Q: Could you talk about that a little bit? Did you, your jump training and so on?

OB: Well, you have three weeks. It's all exercise in the morning. They did a lot of running, a lot of calisthenics, and all of that, and they take you to these towers. There's a 30 foot tower you jump off and slide down a wire. Then they have the free fall towers. First, they take you up and they lay you down flat on the mat. They hook you up the harness, and they draw you up 150 feet, and you have a rip cord. They tell you to pull that and then change hands while you're dropping. You drop 15 feet and it catches you of course. Then, if you drop it they do it again. That's the worst part of the whole training right there.

Q: Why was that?

OB: I don't know. You're watching that mat get smaller all the while, you know, and of course it's the first thing you do. After, you know, getting off of the ground. But once you get over that, the rest is a snap. Then the fourth week, in the morning...in the...I forget now. Half the day you packed a parachute. In the afternoon you packed a parachute and the next morning you jumped. Then afternoon you pack it for the next day. You got two men packing a parachute together. For about...taking about 45 minutes for each one. Then they send guys to school riggers, to learn how to do it and they pack all alone in about seven minutes. So, that's the difference.

Q: So you guys actually packed your own chutes?

OB: You packed your own, yeah you packed your own chute. I went to demolition school, we had a job. We packed our own chute for that. But after that they had the riggers who had gone to school to learn how to, you know, pack all alone. So then, we didn't have to pack them anymore then.

Q: How many jumps did you have from a plane?

OB: 20...22 altogether, counting combat jumps.

Q: What kind of planes did you jump from?

OB: C-47s

Q: Now, you went to demolition school. Did you go to that after jump school?

OB: Yeah so soon as you finished, even before we got a furlough and everything, I went to demolition school for two weeks.

Q: Where was that?

OB: That's right there: Fort Benning. It's all part of the same, you know you jump in the same area and train in the same area

Q: What things did you learn in demolition school?

OB: Well, of course I would follow the big coal miners and worked in the woods out west and everything. That's old stuff to them I didn't know dynamite from TNT or anything else—you learn all about that. Then we had to learn how to ride a motorcycle, how to drive a truck, they had a narrow gauge railroad, you had to learn how to run the engine. Things like that in case you ever got captured and you were able to escape.

Q: Now when were you assigned to your unit? What unit were you assigned to?

OB: When we went after we went through jump school, and I said two weeks at demolition school, then they took our whole platoon and that became the demolition platoon for the 507. The 507 was formed on my birthday, the first day of jump school July the 20th.

Q: Were any of the ones from Mechanicville that went in with you in your unit at all?

OB: No. After I volunteered for the paratroops, I was all alone.

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

OB: Yes.

Q: How did you feel about that?

OB: Well, I'll tell you, they kept you busy. I never minded that that much, really. We got a couple of furloughs. There was only one time I ever got homesick. That was when we were going into the Bulge. They flew us over to France. We were in England, getting ready for a (we were going to jump across the Thames River) practice jump across the Rhine. Then they flew us over to France and put us in a tent—no heat, no lights, no nothing. There was one guy in there. He kept saying, "Well, it's half past one at home now. I suppose my father is getting ready to go down to the store and get a cigar to have after dinner and everything" and, "A quarter to two, mother is starting to put food on the table and everything." You know, I wouldn't have minded shooting the guy then. But that was the only time I ever really got homesick.

Q: After you finished your basic training, did you go over to Europe as a unit? To England?

OB: Yes

Q: Can you tell us about where you left from and how you went overseas?

OB: Well, after we got through at Fort Benning, we went down to Barksdale Field, Louisiana, for maneuvers. Then we went out to Alliance, Nebraska, where we did most of our training out there. I think it was in November, '43 that we left from Camp Shanks, New York. We went over to Northern Ireland.

Q: What kind of vessel did you travel on?

OB: It was a British troop ship. The HMT *Strathnaver*—I can still remember the name of it.

Q: Did you get British food on that ship?

OB: Yeah, wet rations and dry rations.

Q: What did you think of the British food?

OB: Well, I'll tell you, if you're hungry enough, you eat anything. It wasn't that bad.

Q: Were you in a convoy?

OB: Yes.

Q: Where did you go from Ireland?

OB: We were in Ireland until about March. From November until March. Then we went to England, and that's where we left from for D-Day.

Q: Did you do any special training in Ireland and England?

OB: No, not special—more or less the same thing we had been doing all along. We helped blow up a golf course in Portrush, Northern Ireland.

Q: What do you mean, blow up a golf course?

OB: Well, they used explosives, you know, run problems there. I see they're using the golf course now, so I guess we're all right.

Q: Do you want to talk about your preparations for D-Day? You went into France?

OB: Yeah... let's see now. One thing about everything we did—it was always at night. Everything was top secret. Except when we went to the airport to jump for D-Day—it was in the middle of the afternoon. People were out on the street waving goodbye to you and everything. We were at the airport for about a week. Then we went out, we were going out the one night, and then they postponed it to the next one. We had General Gavin give us a little pep talk beforehand.

Q: Had you seen much of General Gavin before this?

OB: Yeah, we trained with him a lot in Fort Benning. He was head of the 505 (we were the 507) I took two weeks and went to demolition school, but a good share of the fellows I went to jump school with went to the 505.

Q: What did you think of him?

OB: He was a good man. He was always up at the front. When we jumped, we had to go through some swamp and we had to wade across the Douve River. He helped pull me up the bank there. There was a railroad running right through the middle of it, and he went up on that and helped pull people up the bank and everything. You'd swear he'd just came out of the tailor shop, you know? But he was with the first ones there, he was at the front all the while.

Q: Could you describe the planes going over and your jump on D-Day itself?

OB: You really couldn't see that much in the plane. We weren't very high going across the channel. As soon as we hit the land, then they went up higher for the jump. You really couldn't see, even the boats—it was dark—you couldn't even see them. They have some good pictures of guys jumping over the boats. I don't know how they got them, but I never saw any of them.

Q: Could you tell us about the jump itself?

OB: They put on the red light, and you had four minutes, and you check your equipment, the red light, then you jump. I jumped right behind the lieutenant—that was the last time I ever saw him. Then, when we landed, we had no idea where we were. They made such good preparations—big sandboxes, probably as big as this room. You land right here, then you assemble in the corner of this field and follow this hedgerow to here. I've never seen that place yet. We were supposed to go in Freeville. The 507 just put up a monument there a couple of months ago.

Q: When you landed, did you land in a field, in trees, or—?

OB: I couldn't have asked for anything better. I landed right in a field. Some guys landed in trees, some in swamps. I landed right in the middle of a field.

Q: Being in demolition, did you carry any special equipment with you?

OB: Oh yeah. We carried a box. I think it was 12 pounds of TNT, then we had Gammon grenades. It's a British...it's like putty, really powerful. We that, we had 12 pounds of TNT, we had the caps and the prime and cord, detonators.

Q: What kind of weapons did you carry?

OB: On that jump, I carried a Tommy gun. Later on, I switched to and got a carbine—it was a lot lighter.

Q: Did you meet any enemy opposition when you landed?

OB: Yes, there was. There was more in the air because they didn't know where we were, and we didn't know where they were. But, you know, they could see the planes I suppose, and hear. There was a lot of firing in the air, but once we were on the ground, not until it started getting daylight did we really run into anything. Because we didn't run into any Germans or anything at that time. We were just wading across the swamp. The thing was, the way I understand it, they knew right where we were going to land. They had everything set up for that. The only thing is, we didn't land there. So they were just as confused as we were.

Q: Did your unit assemble somewhere?

OB: I probably had 15 or 20 guys all together until we hit that railroad out of the swamp. Then there were a lot of people there. That's when Gavin got everybody together.

Q: What did you do from there?

OB: We went into Chef-du-Pont. There was some fighting outside of there, and we set up a defense right along the edge of Chef-du-Pont because they were supposed to be coming toward us—the Germans. The Americans took a bridge right near there, and one officer, he got killed there. No, he didn't get killed—he got wounded bad. He didn't die. But they were coming our way, and we were there all night.

Q: Were there any glider units near you at all? Did any glider units come in?

OB: Not that I know of. They must have. But I don't know of any where we were.

Q: How long were you in combat at that time?

OB: That was June 6th, and I think we came out something like July 15th. We went in with about 2,200 men, and I understand we came out with 770.

Q: Could you tell about some of the hedgerow fighting? How did you feel about going through some of the hedgerows?

OB: To be honest, after I got out, I tried to forget everything that happened. I don't remember too much about that. A couple of battles I remember, but outside of that, you just go from one hedgerow to another—usually at night. In demolition, first we were riflemen, then demolition men, then you were a paratrooper. Paratroopers were just a way to get you where they wanted you to go. Demolition was if they needed something like that, then you were trained in that. But mainly, you were a rifleman, and we were with battalion headquarters most of the while.

Q: When you went back to England, how long were you in England?

OB: We went back around middle of July, and we were there until they flew us over for the Bulge.

Q: What were your relationships like with the English people?

OB: We got along well with them. I don't remember any trouble with any of them. We were stationed just outside of Nottingham. Of course, we didn't see the Sheriff or Robin Hood.

Q: You were training for jumps in the Rhine when they called you over for the Bulge?

OB: Hmm, for the Bulge, we didn't jump in the Bulge.

Q: Well, how were you taken over for that? Did you hear the news of what was happening?

OB: Oh yeah, we knew everything that was going on. We were at an airport, ready to jump across the Thames River, and then they called us back to camp because of the Bulge. Then they got us ready and flew us over to France, right near the Belgian border.

Q: Did you have winter equipment or gear?

OB: No. Not too much. We had heavy overcoats but not too much. We didn't have any overshoes or nothing like that. Just our jump boots.

Q: How about your gloves and such? What were your gloves like?

OB: Well, I think they were woolen gloves, but not real heavy ones. You can't do anything with them anyway.

Q: Could you tell what happened after you landed in France? How did they get you to the front?

OB: After we landed there, we were in France for probably four or five days. Then they drove us up in trucks.

Q: Could you talk about the Bulge and what it was like when you got there?

OB: Well, when we got there, it really wasn't too bad. But, then it snowed, and got real cold. Our first day of action, we waded through about a foot and a half of snow to take a hill the Germans had just pulled out of. But they had that all zeroed in, so as soon as we got up there, they started shelling. I think the communications section lost 22 out of 28 men right there. Of course, you've got a lot of tree bursts and all of that. But then, we pulled down onto a side hill and dug in. Then, about three o'clock in the morning, they came and got us, and we pulled out.

Q: Were you well supplied with food and ammunition and so on?

OB: Yeah. Personally, I never lacked for anything? You know, ammunition or food. Of course, going in normally, we would carry a lot of the C-rations with us.

Q: Did you suffer from frostbite?

OB: Nope. Of course, my ears froze when I was a kid, and I had my fingers frostbit when I was a kid so, you know, the cold bothered me some.

Q: How long were you in combat during the Bulge?

OB: I would say probably around a month. I don't know exactly. And then they flew us back to England, and then they got ready for the jump across the Rhine.

Q: This was Operation Varsity?

OB: That was the Rhine jump.

Q: You participated in that?

OB: Yep.

Q: Could you tell us about that a little bit? Where and when were you wounded?

OB: In Normandy, was one. I was on guard duty outside of a dugout, and we heard shells coming in. I couldn't even find the entrance of the dugout. A shell went off—I was carrying my rifle—and I got a chunk about that wide and about that long taken out of the stock of my rifle. I got hit in the shoulder. Of course, it spun me around. I had a whole side of my face scraped and everything, but I went over to the medics. They got the shrapnel out. A couple little pieces are still in there, but not a lot. Then, well, I was really lucky. We had to go out after a sniper.

Q: When was this?

OB: This was in Normandy, around the middle of June somewhere. I was a corporal, so I was leading. I had three on our side of the road, two on the other. We were spread out. We went about 100 yards, and two mortar shells landed right by the guy behind me. I didn't hear the second one. The two on the other side of the road got wounded bad enough that they were evacuated. The guy behind them, same thing—he got killed. I had a piece of shrapnel come up right along my neck, went right through my wool liner that I had, and knocked my helmet off—took a chunk out of that. I couldn't hear for half an hour or so, but later on, I could—except I found out later I'm deaf in my right ear from that. So, I get a pension for that now, but the thing is, there were no medics, so I couldn't prove anything. But I wrote a letter to my wife around the first of August.

Q: Oh, so you were married when you went into service?

OB: Yeah, I got married while I was in the service. I wrote a letter to my wife explaining everything that happened there when I got through that. But I didn't tell her that I was deaf. But they told me when I went back to work that I was deaf in that ear. So, I applied for a pension and was turned down because I had no proof. Then, about four or five years ago, I had a lot of stuff down in the cellar when we had the flood here, and most of it got ruined. But she had a scrapbook. I got it out one day, and we were looking at it. I went right it. She opened up this envelope, and she had this letter from me. It explained everything exactly the way I wrote it when I applied for the pension. So, I brought it up to Boston. They made a photostat, sent it in, and a couple of months later, I got a notice from the Legion that there at the hearing, and the decision was favorable. So I started getting the pension from that. So, I got a hearing aid and everything for it now.

Q: You mentioned in this form you filled out that one of your best remembrances happened in Belgium or Luxembourg when a German plane came in. Could you tell us about that?

OB: No, it wasn't a German plane....oh, I thought you were talking about something else. Yeah, I know that. We were on guard duty. I had the whole platoon then. Anyway, I was with him, this one guy—he was a newcomer. We were putting guys out. German planes started to come over and started strafing. So we all found some place where we could get out of the way. So, after they left, I went out. He was still standing there. I asked him where he went and he said he was right there. I asked him why he didn't hide. He said, "Well, they weren't shooting at me."

Q: Now, you said that someone helped you out of a burning building?

OB: Yeah, that was in the Bulge. Yeah, we went out and this lieutenant. We were supposed to mine a bridge. There were two small towns with a stream between them and a bridge across it. We were supposed to mine it but were told under no circumstances could we blow it. I don't know why they weren't mined. So anyway, we went out and we found out it was already blown.

So, they put us in a house and we stayed there. Then the Germans started shelling and it got hit with a smoke grenade hit, and it caught fire. So, I helped all the rest of the guys find the doorway to get out and everything. Then I couldn't find the doorway. Then this buddy of mine, he lives in Oswego, I see him now...

Q: What was his name?

OB: Bob Oxenboi. He was the one who helped me find the door to get out.

Q: After Operation Varsity, where did you go from there?

OB: Well, we were there for a while.

Q: Did you have much opposition in that landing?

OB: Well yes, it was a lot of fire, yes. But then they pulled us, and we went down around the Ruhr Valley, down in Essen, to help clean up the Ruhr Valley. I think we were there when the war ended.

Q: Did you stay in Germany for any occupation duty?

OB: Nope, no, never. During the Bulge and when we crossed the Rhine, that's all I saw of Germany there. Yeah, a lot of them, they didn't have enough points. See, I had: I was wounded twice, so that's ten points there, I was married, had a son and everything. So I had enough points to come home. But I know a lot of them there. They went over to Germany for the German of occupation.

Q: What was your feeling when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt? Do you recall?

OB: No, no. I know where we were—a town called Mayetrap. We were going into combat there to clear out the town and everything. So, I didn't worry too much about it then. I was worried more about me right then. Cause, we knew we were getting near the end of the war. You're kind of anxious to get home.

Q: How did you feel when you heard about the surrender of Germany?

OB: Well, we had a big party that night. We had a big party when we heard about Hiroshima too.

Q: Why?

OB: Just celebrating.

Q: Now, where were you when you heard about Hiroshima?

OB: Let's see now... well, we were in Essen.

Q: Were you aware of the German concentration camps at all?

OB: Not a bit, not a bit. Except later on, you know, I read about it in the Stars and Stripes. Of course, they didn't have television then, and we heard nothing about it on the radio. But I never saw any indication of anything like that at all. Never.

Q: When and where were you discharged?

OB: It was September 23rd, from Camp Dix. We landed at Miles Standish when we came back. From there, we went to Dix, and about a week later, we got discharged.

Q: When you went home, was this the first time you saw your son?

OB: Oh, yes. Yeah. I was overseas. Of course, he was born six weeks early, and I didn't find out about it for a long time because they sent the cablegram to the wrong place. Eventually, I did.

Q: Did you make use of the GI Bill when you returned?

OB: No.

Q: Did you ever use the 52-20 Club?

OB: For a short time, just a short time. We come back...I think it was the 25th or 23rd of September, and I took the month of October off. I went back to work at the beginning of November.

Q: Did you join any veterans' organizations ever?

OB: Yeah, Legion. I belong to the Legion. I don't belong to the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

Q: Have you kept in contact with many of those you served with?

OB: Yes. Of course, both—see, most of them are dead. Now, when we start, I didn't go to any reunions until I retired—that was 18 years ago. At that time, there were 12 of us that was within the service, and our wives. There were other guys there, but just the special ones and their wives. Two years ago, the last reunion we went to, there was only one other couple besides us. That's the one I told you about who helped me out of the burning house—he lives in Oswego. Last fall, we met him again. Shortly, we're going out there again. Have you heard of the Turning Stone Casino? He drives down from Oswego, I drive out from here—it takes him about an hour, me about two hours. We meet there around 9:30 in the morning and leave around three, so we have a good share of the day together. His wife with him, and my wife. Yeah, I've been out to his house four or five times, and he's been to my house a couple of times, even before he was married.

Q: Did you ever see any USO shows while you were serving?

OB: I saw one, I'm trying to think who in the heck it was now. It was the only one I saw, in England.

Q: How do you think your military service affected or changed your life?

OB: Well, you know, in a lot of different ways. Of course, I was... there's one thing, I was always a fussy eater, but I learned to eat almost everything except liver. I can't stand that. When we took our 50th wedding anniversary trip to England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, I even tried that Scottish haggis. If you can eat that, you can eat anything.

Q: So you've gone back over to see some of the places you were? Or you just went on a trip? **OB:** No, we just went on a trip. I did see some of the things we saw before though. Like, in England, I saw Stonehenge. We saw London. I got in there a couple of times. We visited Winchester Cathedral. Of course, In Scotland, a buddy of mine who lives in Michigan he was born in Glasgow. We got a week's furlough after D-Day and I went up to Scotland with him. So, in our trip, I saw Glasgow in the distance, but never got in there.

Q: How about holding this up? Wayne can zoom in on it. Tell us when that photograph was taken and when.

OB: All right. Yeah, it was taken in Alliance, Nebraska, in the summer of 1943.

Q: Okay, got it. Well, thank you very much for your interview, sir.

OB: Yeah, thank you.