

David Bald Eagle's Military Service in WWII - OSEU

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I first went into the Armed Forces Army before the war in 1939, went into the 4th Horse Cavalry in Fort Meade. There was Horse Cavalry then, there were boots and breeches and spurs, you know. And I was in the remount stables where I trained horses, myself and some of the guys, the trainers. And then they were mechanized and so they were shipping the horses out. So we stayed, and then they put me in a motorcycle group as a messenger. So I was in the motorcycle brigade in the 4th Horse Cavalry. After they took the horses out, they shipped the horses out.

I was there. I helped load the horses when they shipped them to Fort Knox. And so I took a transfer into the 3rd Infantry, and on December 7th, I got my discharge. So I got my discharge and signed my discharge, and I was about ready to come home. And my buddy and I went, his name was Drexler, and Johnny Alexander, three of us went to town.

And on the way back, we were listening to a bunch of news, people selling newspapers, I guess, saying extra, extra, you know, they were saying that Japan had attacked the U.S. And it was a good thing we got a discharge, that I got a discharge, the war started. And I was saying that, I went back to the camp to get my pack, ready to come home, you know. And the company commander called me in, who was, I don't know, staying for the duration of the war.

And if I do, he says, you keep your rank as a non commissioned officer, or if you take a discharge now and go home, they'll draft you again, or get you to select a service because you were trained. Which one would you rather do? And if you re-enlist, he says, I'll give you a 60-day furlough with pay, rations, and you come back and go into whatever you like. can't go into whatever you want. This way, you'd be able to. So I took a discharge, came home for 60 days. And I went back there, my buddies, they came over to say, here's Chief, let's get together.

So five of us, we always ran around together. We're going into the 82nd Airborne, and we wanted to know if you would come.

I thought it over and I thought to myself, when are you guys going to go? I said, next week. They're sending us over there for training.

A full year of training. So I said, okay, I'll join you guys.

So we went into the 82nd Airborne Voluntary. Voluntary. They gave us the training.

Judo, everything.

Hand-to-hand combat. Night combat. How to be quiet. Killing. Quiet. Silent killing.

They gave us all that training.

Then they sent a cadre of us to Greenland for mountain ski training. And we never did use it. But they sent us up there for training. Then they shipped us back just in time for the invasions. My first combat jump was at Anzio Beachhead.

And I met somebody there from another outfit. Somebody hollered at me so I sounded like an Indian. And sure enough, he hollered at me. We ran together and we clapped our arms at each other and cried.

I think we'll never see each other again. Whether we get killed or may not survive.

But we came. After we jumped, we fought forward. That's where we met.

And these guys went in for the invasion. And they took us back to Egan. And we were preparing for D-Day. That was my last jump, D-Day. I never did know I hit the ground.

They left me for dead.

But the British commando's medical department came along. Felt my pulse and it was still beating. So they rushed me to the field camp. And that's how I survived.

But the doctor told me what saved me was my pressure dorsum.

It was so tight. It was hanging up in the trees and so forth. And part of it was on the fence. And it was so tight that I didn't lose very much blood. That's what saved me. To this day, I'm back here. I figure I'm the luckiest paratrooper in the world. When you were coming down, were you shot at?

Oh, yeah.

Did your parachute fail because of that?

They dropped us right on top of the enemy. Practically my whole outfit was wiped out.

So it was gunfire, not a failure of the parachute, but the fact you were being shot at. And where was that in France?

It was Normandy.

Normandy. Saint-Médiglise was the name of the little town. I never did see the town to this day. And you...

But some old people from Saint-Médiglise, when they dedicated that monument for the 82nd Airborne, went over there in 1979. We went over there, and there was a couple who wanted to see me.

they said... So the commanding officer, he says, go ahead, Chief, go down there and visit with them, he says, because you're through talking anyway.

So I went down there, and here this interpreter told an old couple that I was Chief Balding. And I had my war-battered everything on.

And they both cried and put their harps on me. I cried with them. I didn't know what they were crying about, but I cried with them. But the interpreter told me afterwards that they'd seen me laying in front of their house knowing that maybe they'll never see me alive. They knew it was me because of my name on the uniform. And that I was laying there with a pool of blood. And there was a bullet hole in my helmet right in the dead center. But they figured for sure they'd get me in the head.

But I told them, I said, that bullet hole, that was my foolishness. When we were on Angio Beachhead, my buddy and I were laying behind a boulder. They said, these German guys were sharpshooters, shall we try them out? And we stuck our helmets on a gun and we started pushing them up real slow. Ding! They hit them in the helmet. My gosh, I'll be damned if I'll stick my head out. They're sharpshooters. That was the time I got that hole in there. Those people thought that they shot me right in the head. But actually they shot me in the body three times.

Really tore me up pretty bad. And you won some medals for that service? I lost my record. That's one thing I told them. I said, I don't want to be buried in a national cemetery. I said, because if they didn't treat me right. I kept wondering about my records because this had been burnt up somewhere. My records had been burnt up in Kansas. Lebanon, Kansas. Somewhere they had a fire and burned everything up. There were thousands of us that didn't know our records. They just probably didn't want to pay us any money for, how do you call it, pension.

We figured that's what happened. There were a bunch of us that didn't know our records. There were three of us paratroopers that had never seen our records. I got my first discharge and there was nothing there. So to this day if they can't find my records, I said, why should I be buried in a cemetery? The Indian man that you embraced, that you heard call out for you, did you ever see him again? Yeah. He was from Red Scaffold, just about 12 miles from here. Just a little town, Red Scaffold, I mean in this village. He was from there, he saw me.

He hollered at me. So he came back after the war and after we got discharged. He always calls me Anzio. He died here about 10 years ago. He finally died. What was his name? Ironhawk. Claude Ironhawk.