

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Clifford L. Wise, Sr.
Current home town: Minster, Ohio
Age: 86

This is about my husband's (Clifford L. Wise, Sr.) memories of World War II. I am his wife (Edna) and I am writing this for him as he tells me what to write. He has never talked much about his time in the war. When I would ask about it, he would tell me that no one had to know the horrors he went through and all the killing. Cliff didn't like to talk about it and he didn't like to be around people who talked about the War.

Cliff lived in Hardin, Ohio, a small village, about three miles from Sidney. At eighteen years of age he had never been farther than fifteen miles from home. Three months after his eighteenth birthday, he was drafted. His dad told Cliff they would never take him because he was too small. He hadn't finished growing. He was only five feet, two inches tall and weighed 112 pounds. He also had flat feet. He isn't sure if he had flat feet when he went in, but he knows he had flat feet when he got out of the Service. When he got out of Service he was five feet, eight inches tall and weighed 148 pounds. He lived mostly on K-Rations overseas. The K-Rations must have agreed with him.

Cliff was put in the Infantry. He took his Basic Training in Fort McClellan, Alabama and also in Camp Van Doran, Mississippi. He took two twenty-mile hikes with full field packs weighing 40 or 50 pounds. This 112-pound kid made it. Some, a foot taller and 100 pounds heavier couldn't make it and had to be brought back by truck.

Cliff was going overseas on his nineteenth birthday. It took him between two to three weeks to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a convoy. He landed in LeHavre, France in the 63rd Infantry Division and transferred to the Third Infantry Division. Within a week, he was sent to the front line. His Division was moving constantly, sleeping on the ground or in foxholes. Sometimes there was deep snow or zero-degree weather. He was a Squad Leader and was a Second Scout. When the First Scout was killed, he was made First Scout. The First Scout had to go ahead of the others in the Squad to see if the Germans were around. Being small made him a smaller target to shoot at.

Several years ago, an old house next door to ours was being torn down. It was a two-story house and it was at least 30 feet high. One day, Cliff and I were looking at it from our upstairs window. Cliff said he had seen bodies stacked higher than that. I asked if they were Americans. He said "yes" and that was all he would say. The bodies were taken back behind the front line by the Americans, he told me as I was writing this for him.

Cliff said when they would capture a town, they always would march through the town. Oftentimes, when they were marching through the town, the German women and children would shoot at them from their houses.

The Siegfried Line was between France and Germany. They crossed the Siegfried Line and the Rhine River. The Nazis must have been working on the Siegfried Line for years. They had bunkers underground and some above ground. They were all lined with concrete and were like a house with carpeting and everything. Above ground they had what was called "Dragon's Teeth." They were concrete triangles about three feet high, touching at the base and coming to a point on top. They were several miles long and close enough so an army tank couldn't get through. They had to have a demolition crew before the tanks and infantrymen could cross. Hundreds of American lives were lost crossing the Siegfried Line.

A German machine gun crew had a machine gun pointed at Cliff's Squad. Before they shot it, they threw a hand grenade in Cliff's foxhole; it didn't explode. Cliff picked it up and threw it back and it exploded, killing the machine gun crew. He got the Bronze Star for this. Often he wonders why his life was saved when he should have been killed.

When the War was over, he signed up for another six months. He was made a Military Policeman. Cliff said that was a gravy job. He was to be a Tech. Sergeant, but the Military froze the ratings. He was thinking of making the Army his career, but when the ratings were frozen, he changed his mind and came home.

During World War II, of course there weren't e-mails, and there were no phone calls and no television. We got our news of the War from the newspapers and the radio. All the mail was censored coming in and going out. Sometimes it was months before families at home would hear from them. Also, lots of other men were overseas several years before getting home. When they went overseas, they stayed until the War was over, unless they were injured. Cliff said when they were in the front line there wasn't time to write.

Cliff has many stories he could tell about the War but he won't. The stories will go to the grave with him. He said he must have had at least a half a dozen Guardian Angels watching over him or he never would have made it home.