

Stephen L Martin

WWII Experience

Overview

Given below are the memories of Stephen L (aka Buddy) Martin of World War II as told to his daughter Marilynne in July 2012.

Buddy Martin was drafted into the US Army in January 1943 at age 19. He served in the US Army from Jan 30, 1943 until his honorable discharge on Nov 24, 1945 as a Private First Class (PFC). His service was composed of 2 yrs., 1 month, 5 days in various camps in the US for training and 8 months, 20 days in the Rhineland and Central Europe, specifically France, Germany and Austria. He earned the European African Middle Eastern Theatre Ribbon with 2 Bronze Stars, Good Conduct Medal GO 9 RCN Co 660 T D Bn 18 May 44, World War II Victory Medal WD Cir 326 1945 Amer Thea Ribbon 1 and Oversea Service Stripes.

The Draft

Dad doesn't remember registering for the draft. He got a letter in the mail telling him to report to a NYC office on January 23, 1943. At the office he filled out papers and took a physical examination. He was then given one week off and told to report to duty on January 30, 1943 in NYC.

He remembered that during that week before he went in, he was driving down Sunrise Highway with his brother Charlie. He may have been going 5-10 miles over the speed limit and was pulled over. His brother told the policeman that he was being drafted into the service in a few days, but the cop kept writing the ticket. It didn't matter to him. No breaks given!

Camp Upton, Long Island, NY

He reported on January 30, 1943 and from NYC they took a train to Camp Upton on Long Island, NY. He spent about 3 days at Camp Upton being processed, i.e. getting uniforms, shots, filling out papers.

Off to Camp Hood, Texas

After being processed at Camp Upton, they took a train to Camp Hood in Killian, Texas. The train ride took about 3 days. He was assigned to the 660th Tank Destroyer Battalion in Headquarters Company. At Camp Hood he went through basic training and Armor school for about 2-3 months, learning about the weapons (machine guns, rifles) and how to take them apart – even in the dark. He was assigned to a big room in the motor pool where all the tanks, cars, trucks were kept and the weapons were stored. He was in charge of the weapons for his battalion.

He then was assigned into a reconnaissance company and was a messenger driving a

motorcycle. He also trained in communications for several months and went on maneuvers and army training. He was stationed at Camp Hood for about a year and half. Then his whole battalion was broken up. Apparently they had suffered many casualties overseas and needed replacements for the infantry. Most of his unit was then sent to Camp Carson in Colorado. End of tank destroyer career!

Camp Carson, Colorado

Dad spent about 3 months at Camp Carson. Their first assignment was to test the K rations. They were sent up into mountains outside the Camp. They lived in 2 man pup tents for about 30 days. They were put through endurance tests and training and ate K rations.

Fort Jackson, South Carolina

They were then shipped to Fort Jackson, SC by train. At Fort Jackson they were put through combat infantry training. All types of people that were originally in different units were there to be trained as replacements for the infantry. He was in Fort Jackson for about 2 months. At the end of the training they were given two weeks leave to go home to family before being sent overseas into combat.

Trip to Europe

After his leave, he reported to Fort Dix, New Jersey to get ready to be shipped out to Europe. He did not go over to Europe as an outfit – they went over as individuals to be assigned as replacements for different units in Europe.

On Nov 1, 1944 they departed Fort Dix on the El Dea France. During WWII many passenger liners were taken over by the Navy and converted into transports for troops. There were about 5000 servicemen on the ship. The British Navy operated the ship. The conditions were not good. The food was slop and the PX ran out of supplies.

The ship took 7 days to get overseas because it had to travel in a zig zag manner with convoys to avoid detection from German submarines.

Europe

They arrived in Scotland on Nov 9, 1944. They stayed in Scotland overnight, sleeping in pup tents in the rain and mud, miserable conditions. The next day they took a train from Scotland to South Hampton, England and went right to a ship that took them to Le Havre, France (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Havre) . From the boat they went into a muddy hillside campground to get prepared to get on trucks into warzone. It took about 3 days to get to Epinal, France (<http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/ep.php>) by truck. On the journey to Epinal they were scraped by airplanes once. At Epinal, they then went into big warehouses where they were getting ready to call names to assign the servicemen to units. It took roughly 2-3 days before dad was assigned to a unit.

Dad was assigned to G Company, 103rd Infantry. Their emblem was a cactus. They were packed into trucks that took them to the area that their unit was staying. The trucks dropped them off and they walked about a mile in order to reach the unit. It was getting

dark and the weather was terrible. They finally reached the foot of the Vosges Mountains (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vosges_Mountains) where they were united with the company they were assigned to.

The G Company was a reserve unit for the front line. Shortly after arriving and joining that unit they moved down into a small village in the Vosges Mountains to provide assistance to the front line and that is when all hell broke loose. The front lines were pushing the Germans out of the town and the Germans were bombarding them with canons and machine gun fire in order to protect their retreating troops. Dad's unit came under terrible shelling as they moved down into the town. They did manage to reach the town that night. His unit was now on the front lines. He said that it turned out to be the worse shelling he experienced in the whole war and it was amazing he survived. He also mentioned that the biggest risk was the first few days of combat. Many soldiers that died did so in the first few days of battle.

His unit stayed in the Vosges Mountains for quite some time. He described the navigation of the mountain and passes as very difficult and dangerous. The Germans had set up pillboxes along the passes to attack the Allie Forces coming through. The passes were hard to navigate and tanks were getting stuck. The Army used many mules to bring and carry supplies through these mountains. The weather was also not any help as there was constant rain, sleet and snow. While in the mountains they were required to do guard duty at night for 2-3 hours. He said it was very nerve racking as there were all type of noises in the night with the wind blowing.

They then moved on to the plains where the French Maginot Line (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maginot_Line?oldid=0&useFormat=mobile) was located. This area was a line of concrete fortifications, tank obstacles, artillery casemates, machine gun posts, and other defenses, which France constructed along its borders with Germany and Italy during WWI.

After that they moved to Alsace, France (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alsace>). This was a rural area, mostly farmland. From there they went into Germany. They stayed in Alsace for about 2-3 weeks, there was a lot of snowy rain. Then all of a sudden they were getting into trucks and rode almost all night to Bastogne, Belgium (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Bastogne).

This was the place where the battle of the Buldge took place. They were sent there to help out. The main battle was over by the time they arrived and the forces were holding the Germans back. They stayed there about a week or so. There was not much going on there just mainly artillery & reconnaissance. He does recall that our air force was sending a significant number of planes and bombing the German forces at that time.

His unit then suddenly pushed out and they quickly proceeded to cross the Rhine River. The Germans were retreating and he remembers the unit taking a lot of sniper fire. They crossed over the river via patton bridges and marveled at how quickly these bridges were constructed.

After that they did a lot of traveling in trucks through Heidelberg, Germany (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidelberg>) and into the Bavarian Alps. On their travels he remembers that they went through a few big castles where Hitler and other bigwigs stayed. At that time the Germans were surrendering in big droves. They then went into Austria into Innsbruck (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Innsbruck>) . From there they headed towards the Brenner Pass (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brennerpass>) in Italy. While there they met the troops coming up from Italy and that's where he was when news arrived that the Germans surrendered and the European part of the war had ended.

They stayed in Innsbruck about a week after the war was over. A decision was made to send the troops that were in Europe the least amount of time home first. They would be quickly trained for the Pacific war against the Japanese and redeployed to the Pacific. Since dad was only there 8 months, his unit was being sent back first, They travelled back to ?? and went through various US camps that were all named after cigarettes – Camp Camel, Camp Chesterfield, Camp Lucky Strikes, etc.

Trip Back to the States

On July 13, 1945 they sailed out of ?? on a big German passenger ship which was captured in South America during the war. He sailed with a lot of soldiers from the 4th Infantry Division and remembers they had red diamond patches on their uniform. The ship was under control of the US Navy and the conditions were much better. The food was very good and they had nice music on deck for the soldiers. He said it was beautiful and almost like a “pleasure” trip. They arrived back in the states on July 20, 1945.

He vividly remembers arriving in the NY Harbor. As the ship was sailing under the Verrazano bridge and heading up the Hudson River, all the fireboats and ferries were blowing their horns and the trains were sounding their whistles welcoming back the troops to the States.

The ship continued up the Hudson River to Camp Shanks in Orangeburg, NY. At that Camp he remembers being treated like kings. They were served excellent foods, steaks, cake and ice cream. He stayed there a couple of days and then was given a week or two leave before he would return for training for the Pacific.

While he was home on leave, he remembers he was in Rosedale and was taking his army suit in to the tailors when the radio announced that the first atom bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945. And a few days later on August 9, 1945 the second bomb was dropped and the war with Japan was over. He remembers going out that night and describes it as being like 5 New Years Eve's in one with all the people celebrating. If you had a uniform on you got a kiss from everyone alive, people were so happy. The soldiers also got a few free drinks that night too.

Camp Campbell, Kentucky

After his leave was over he reported to Camp Campbell in Kentucky where the training for the Pacific was supposed to take place. But since the war was over they were not

trained. He remembers they just played games like touch football and spent time going into Nashville, TN and listening to music. He was at Camp Campbell for about 3 months until he was declared surplus and was honorably discharged on November 24, 1945.

They gave the soldiers some traveling money for a train to get home. Dad went to the air force field and waited to get a plane to take him back home. The soldiers were allowed to ride any available flight but had to pay a dollar to rent a parachute (and had to wait for a parachute to be available). He finally boarded a plane with about 5-6 privates like himself and colonels. He said the colonels treated the privates like kings and were very grateful for their service. The plane went to Cincinnati, OH and picked up some more colonels, and then finally landed in DC. From DC he took the train to Penn Station and then another train to Rosedale. He then walked home.