

W&M119 Fred Toppel

SPEAKERS

Fred Toppel, Michael Burns

Fred Toppel 00:00

I joined the National Guard when I was in my teens and that's how I got into the service.

Fred Toppel 00:07

So we got activated, I was activated February 10th 1941.

Fred Toppel 00:15

That's 10 months before the war broke out.

Fred Toppel 00:18

We went down to the state of Louisiana and it was camp Claiborne.

Fred Toppel 00:25

We did all kinds of training down there and had manoeuvres, so that lasted about pretty close to the first year that I was activated.

Fred Toppel 00:37

From there, we went up to Fort Dix, New Jersey and we stayed there for training and stuff over there for a number of few months.

Fred Toppel 00:47

Then we got shipped over to Ireland and we were the first group of Americans to land in Europe, that would have been 1942.

Michael Burns 00:56

And what was the crossing like? Was it very long?

Fred Toppel 00:59

It was more or less uneventful, except that everybody on our ship got food poisoning from some duck, they served us (laughs) heaving over the side.

Michael Burns 01:12

And whereabouts in Ireland, did you arrive?

Fred Toppel 01:16

Yeah, we arrived in Belfast and then we went immediately to Enniskillen and I could name some other towns that we visited or worked around, if I saw map I could pick them out but I can't remember the names of all of them.

Fred Toppel 01:34

While we were there the King and Queen visited our unit and that was the parents of the Queen now.

Michael Burns 01:44

What sort of things did you do in Northern Ireland, where you training or?

Fred Toppel 01:49

Well we were training and when we moved over to Europe the British furnished us with new weapons we had... ours were old French 75's from World War One and so they were obsolete we didn't even bring them along.

Fred Toppel 02:09

We got British 25 pounder and they were a different sort of a gun and they were really good one.

Fred Toppel 02:17

It had a trail piece dropped into the ground and then you put the gun up on top of this round circle so the tires could ride on it and then they'd fire a round and that would sink the thing into the ground, it had jagged edges on it and it was a real accurate one.

Fred Toppel 02:38

We liked it and we used that gun all the way through North Africa.

Michael Burns 02:44

What did you think of the food here? Did you get to try any local food?

Fred Toppel 02:50

I enjoyed it. The fish and chips was a big thing.

Fred Toppel 02:54

When we got loose from area we could go to town and they had fish and chips all over.

Fred Toppel 03:02

Liquor was at a premium and one of the guys in our outfit got a bottle out of a place they sold liquor and very often you couldn't buy a bottle.

Fred Toppel 03:15

Then we went to a dance and he stuck the bottle in his belt and we're out dancing, dancing around the floor and then I kicked the bottle and there the thing had slipped down his pantsleg and was skidding across the floor (laughs).

Fred Toppel 03:32
Irish whiskey Bushmills

Michael Burns 03:37
So how long were you in Northern Ireland for?

Fred Toppel 03:40
I was there for six, seven months until we well we moved over to Scotland and then from Scotland we made the landing in North Africa.