

Max Loudenbeck

Lowe Veterans Appreciation Video – November 11, 2020

My name is Max Loudenbeck. I'm now in 95 years old. When I was 18 years old, I was drafted into the army as a replacement. And I served from June 6th 1944 till July 2nd 1946.

I was trained as a replacement in Camp Blanding, Florida, because the war had been going on for a couple of years. By the time I got to be 18 was old enough to be drafted. And so we were trained as replacements. We are not assigned to any particular unit, but we were trained in military skills. And they called them M. O.'s, military occupation. And I was trained as a – in the use of a pistol, a rifle, machine gun, mortar, and bazooka.

And I and they were and we were assigned to a heavy weapons which is a unit that's immediately in support of the infantry on the frontline. We were not frontline soldiers. We were in their immediate support. And we were trained to support them.

And when we arrived in Italy, we were in a [?] camp. And as various units needed replacements, we were assigned to various units. And I don't know how much you know about how the war progressed in - in the early part of World War II, but the immediate contact with the Germans was in Africa and the unit that I belong to was the 34th Division and it was Minnesota National Guard at the time the war started and they were acted - activated and made the regular army. They fought through Africa. Through the island of Sicily, onto the toe of the boot of Italy, and part way up the peninsula before I arrived to be involved.

And my brother was inducted in the army at the same time as I was and since the army made all transfers alphabetically and our last name, of course, being brothers was the same - and we went through training together, we shipped overseas together, we were in the replacement depot together. But when they assigned us to a combat unit, they separated us.

Now, I don't know if you know why they did that, but I might just tell you very briefly. During World War II, there were there was a family called the Sullivan family. There were four brothers who were in the navy and early in the war the ship was sunk and that was an awful blow to one family to lose all of their boys. And so the armed services said from now on when brothers are together in the service and they're committed to a combat unit we will separate them - and they did that with my brother and I.

He was assigned to a one unit as a bazooka man. I was assigned as a mortar gunner. And the action we saw in the in the two battles that we took place in the North Apennine Mountains and the Po Valley campaign. We were separated. And when the war was over they put us back together. And since we had not been in the army very long compared to some other guys we were not very high priority to go back home. So we were assigned to to guard, prisoners, German prisoners of war, and we were there a year and three or four months after the battles were over and the war ended, just guarding prisoners.

You might wonder well, why didn't they just send them home? You know, why did they keep I'm in Italy and guard them? And but we who experienced World War II saw the newsreels and we knew that there wasn't much left of Germany when the war was over. All the homes and the schools and churches and grocery stores, bus terminals, everything had been bombed and there was no place for those defeated soldiers to return to.

This is what the mail looks like. [Shows a letter he sent back home during the war.] It started out as a sheet of paper this big. Usually the Red Cross or the army would furnish us this paper and we could write a letter to the folks back home. And when - they took a picture of our

letter and reduced it to the size of a postage stamp. And they put thousands of those little negatives on a reel just like a motion picture reel. They'd have thousands of letters and then they would put the, put the reel on the airplane and fly it back to the United States. And then they would enlarge a little postage stamp negative, and this is the size of the letter they printed.

And it - it had the name and address and who it was sent to on the top. And they put it in an envelope and folded it in such a way that it appeared through an opening in the envelope just like we have a window envelope today. So there was no chance of the letter going to the wrong person. 'Cause the soldier had addressed it himself.

The reason they did this because they were, it was a common thing for all the girls to write a soldier boy, a friend from high school, or maybe a date for the prom or something. To write him overseas and there was so much mail going back and forth that it became a burden because they had limited capacity with their freighter ships and they needed the war supplies to a used for that capacity. So that's why they devised this v-mail. V as victory. Not email like we have today. It was V.

We didn't see any victory parade. There was no hallelujah, welcome back hero. Now the war had been over for over a year and everybody was back at their civilian jobs and didn't want to talk about the war anymore. So when we came home, why it was just our immediate family and friends and loved ones that were glad to see us.