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St. Johns High School

Home of the Redwings!

FL Harris

Interviewed by Katie Harris, Granddaughter

FL Harris is my great grandfather. FL is eighty-seven years old and he is a World War II veteran. He did not fight in combat, and insisted to me that he had nothing interesting to say, but I found that everything he said was nothing but interesting. He wasn't in combat, but without his job, but all the soldiers really appreciated his job. FL was almost thirty-one when he entered the war. FL entered the war because "nobody wanted to do it, but it was a necessity." In the war, FL was in the Army Corps of Engineers, or the ACE. His job wasn't on the field, but in the kitchens. FL was a chef. He cooked on a train with one other person, the baker. He made three meals a day for one hundred and twenty hungry soldiers. The kitchen was in no ordinary place, it was not in a restaurant, and it was not in a McDonald's, either. It was on a train. He stated that "It was hard to cook on the train, it sure rode rough . . ." On every train, there was a separate boxcar for the kitchen. One side of the kitchen was a stove with square pans about 2 feet wide and 2 inches deep. "You could never fill the pans all the way because it would spill over the top when the train was moving, but we got the job done anyhow."

Although he was not in combat, he had to train with them. He made it clear that "it was not nice at all." He said the two scariest training processes they went through was when they had to crawl on the ground under open fire, and the other was when they had to go into a building full of tear gas to wait a certain amount of time before putting on a gas mask.

He also had to sleep in the barracks. He had a separate room, though. "There were forty people in a barrack, and there were three barracks in my group." "We had to work about six to eight hours at a time, but we had breaks in between. We were paid well and my wife was paid for taking care of the children at home. We did not sell Coca-Cola, but we did get a shipment of it here and there, and we got it real cheap. About five pennies a bottle."

He did get hurt once, so he had to get surgery for a hernia. He said "you had to be in the hospital for fourteen days before you were allowed to go. The only way to get rid of the pain before surgery was to get a spinal. "I don't

like needles, but was sure I wouldn't like open surgery any better." When they did the surgery, all they had to lay on were army cots. A nurse would talk to you to get your mind off of it, though. "The nurse I talked to happened to be from my home town, in Flint. That was nice because we knew the same people and had the same friends." When he was in his last days of his stay in the hospital, "The first lady, Eleanor, came in. She had fallen ill, but I don't remember what with."

"We were under attack one time, so we threw out tear gas so we would have time to escape. The bad thing was, though, that the wind had changed directions at the same time, so I guess you could say that we got a taste of our own medicine, only it was not medicine, it was gas."

"I was just over thirty-two when I got to go home. We were all standing in our rows; the First Lady was giving a speech. She greeted me, but I do not recall if I shook her hand. I wish I could remember more." So he went home to his wife, Marjorie Harris, and three children Ron, Beverly, and Jimmy. They are all alive today except for Beverly, and FL and his wife are constantly getting sick. I know they won't be there forever, so I talk to them about these things as much as I possibly can.