



501 W. Sickels St. Johns, MI  
48879  
989.227.4100  
989.227.4199 Fax

## St. Johns High School

Home of the Redwings!

### Blaine C. Lentz

#### Interviewed by Katja Zinner, German Exchange Student

Blaine C. Lentz was a soldier in WWII who was in the military service for two years and fought for 18 months for America in the European War.

Blaine C. Lentz was drafted to join the service when he was nineteen years old. He had 16 weeks of infantry training before he entered the war. In this training he learned how to take orders and follow them, to march, to operate weapons, guns and explosives. He also learned techniques of combat and to live under bad conditions.

Blaine C. Lentz participated in the European War. His exact location was in Aachen, Germany. A normal day in the war was extremely difficult. The soldiers got two hot meals every day. The first one was in the morning before daylight, so that the Germans could not see them cooking. For lunch they got a box which contained breakfast, lunch and dinner. Inside were also four cigarettes and toilet paper. Although there was breakfast and dinner in that box, they ate it for lunch, because they had nothing else to eat for lunch. He said "If you didn't have a way to heat your coffee up, you just drank it cold out of your helmet." At the end of the day, when it got dark again, they got to eat their warm dinner. Sometimes they did not get much sleep at night. Later in the war, they got to sleep in beds from houses. They lay crosswise in it, so that more people would fit on a bed. It was also very cold in the winter in Germany. The clothes he wore were cotton summer shorts, an undershirt, two pair of wool underwear (top and bottoms), two pair of wool pants, two shirts and a sweater, a field jacket, a wool cap under the helmet, gloves, combat boots and overshoes, which were resistant against water. The soldiers would also carry around their socks inside of their underwear to keep them warm and dry.

In their free time during training they would go to town on the weekend and have some fun. But in combat there was not any free time. Only the enemy was important. One time he had three days of free time and he went to the Netherlands, Holland. During another three days of "Rest and Recreation" he went to Paris and really enjoyed that time because he did not have any worries. After the war they had much free time.

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Two of the famous battles he participated in were the "Battle of Bulge" and the "Bulge of Remagen." The "Battle of Bulge" was on December 17, 1944, and the German army tried to break through the American lines on the German border. The Germans tried to get back to Belgium. They invaded at a day when it was snowing, cloudy and no planes could fly. More American soldiers died in that counterattack than on D-Day. But finally the sky got clear so that American planes could fly and shoot German "Panzers." The Remagen Bridge was the only bridge which the Germans left to go over the Rhine river. Then the Americans crossed that bridge and occupied a certain area, but the Germans were not very pleased about that. So they sent airplanes and tried to hit that bridge with bombs. At the beginning they were not really successful because American engineers would repair it afterwards. Finally the bridge fell down.

His scariest experience was when they lost all of their communication and he was at that time the runner, (the man who had to get and bring the messages), when there was no communication. So he had to go back to the battalion command post on a really dark night. Blaine Lentz defined it as "The blackest night I had ever seen in my life." He had to walk on an asphalt road. The only way he could tell that he was on the road was when the ground under his feet was hard. When it got soft, he knew he was off the road. "I can still remember walking on the road all by myself. Soon I heard somebody hollering at me and I answered them, but kept on walking. These were American soldiers who repaired the phone line, but they could not tell who I was and I could not tell who they were, because we could not see each other. So I walked to the battalion headquarters and spent the rest of the night there."

A good memory for him was when combat ended in Wuppertal. When he was in the military, another fun memory was when he got to go to Switzerland for a week of relaxation. They went there in January, so they had winter weather, but he really enjoyed that. Of course they sometimes had their parties, too.

Blaine Lentz's brother was in the Coast Guard. This is a branch that was during the war under the navy. Their responsibilities were to protect the shores, watch over lighthouses, to use the icebreakers to open the sea for shipping, and to operate helicopters to rescue people over the East Coast or Atlantic. At the time Blaine's brother was in high school, he told him during the time when he was in the infantry, "when you are 18 you might get drafted like me. It seems like a good idea when you would invest in something, so that you do not end up like me."

Blaine C. Lentz joined the service in Belgium as a replacement. When he joined the company he was assigned to, there were supposed to be 39 men,

but there were only nine of them left. Many of them were wounded or dead. He describes his feelings about this in that way: "I feel like I got 50 some years of bonus life. I could have been one of them very easily."

But he still keeps in touch with some of his friends from WWII. Every year they have reunion in May. Blaine Lentz explains that, "You are kind of attached to these people." Some of them also had gone back to Germany and met with the Germans they once fought against. The Germans even built a memorial there. It shows their appreciation for what American soldiers had done for their country, because the Germans were not happy about what Hitler had done. He also says about Germans soldiers that a lot of men were in their army, but many of them were not excited about going out to fight. After the war, there were many Germans who once fought for the German army and then worked for the US army afterwards. He also said that one time they surrounded Germans and he had the opportunity to shoot them all, but he did not. "I don't interfere with the living. They have done their job and I think that some of them might have been drafted as I was."

He also talked about all the things that happened in the war that "you still think every once in a while about them. You get tougher to it, but you still get tears."

The message he would send a teenager about war is that; "In reality, nothing is really solved with a fight. Even peace is arranged by people getting around a table. They never really resolved anything with a war."

The message he would send a teenager about life is, "Life is what you make out of it. You could have a fighting attitude and you could always find somebody willing to fight with you. It is important that you look at life as having a sociable relationship with people. It is important to be honest to people, because they will appreciate that and they will think better of you. There is nothing easier to destroy than a good reputation. We live in a people world and we need to learn to get along with people. We need to appreciate what people do for us. And we need to be able to help people when they need it."

Blaine C. Lentz got out of the service in 1946. He went back home and wanted to have a job that would allow him to have a decent life with retirement benefits when he got old. So he got into education, because people will be having children and children need to be educated. He was a high school principal for 25 years in Ovid-Elsie. His advice to succeed in life is to be able to do what you think you want to do. Blaine C. Lentz has been married for 53 years to his wife and lives now in St. Johns. I personally really enjoyed talking to him. His experience from war and from his life has made me think about some new aspects I never before thought about.

**Special Note:** Katja Zinner is a foreign exchange student from Germany at St. Johns High School (2000-2001).