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St. Johns High School

Home of the Redwings!

Robert Tait

Interviewed by Caleb Sepeter

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Mr. Robert Tait was a Corporal in WWII and was drafted by the government. His favorite part of being in the war was the basic training. He was based in Valedessa, North Africa where he had maneuvers to do and it was nice out there. He joined in 1942 and was discharged in 1945 after the war was over. He served in the war for 3 years and 3 ½ months. He then moved on to Europe for 2 ½ years. He was 21 years old when he got drafted in the war. In the war, he was a combat engineer and built bridges and all of the dirty work for the army. He never saw combat, in which I really don't think he would have liked. He was right behind the infantry, during D-Day in Normandy, France, and scoured the beaches to gather the material for the army to get their heavy artillery on land before it was blown up by the Germans. In Southern France he brought the lines up on the beach so the half-tracks could get on the land.

He was in no hand to hand combat like the other many soldiers were. He and his other comrades built bridges at night so the enemy could not easily see them and stop them from completing the bridge.

Day to day life in the war consisted of eating out of cans and sleeping in foxholes or pup tents. It also surprised me to hear that he got quite a bit of sleep unless they didn't finish the bridge they were working on. If it was not done they would stay there until they finished it. They had to finish the bridges because they were a vital key in the war. Bridges were vital because if they were not finished, the artillery, like the half-tracks or the other heavy artillery, would not have been able to go help the men who were in hand to hand combat. Sure the men could walk, or maybe even swim, but all they had were little guns compared to the other artillery. The little guns could only take out a few men at a time but with the heavy artillery they could take out a whole enemy line. To build a bridge it usually took about a day and half to two days if they stayed right with it.

Mr. Tait was not wounded in the war but saw a lot of people die. He received medals including the good conduct, and a Presidential Citation. The French Army passed on their medals later in 1962. He still keeps in contact with his friends and they have a reunion every year on Labor Day. He sometimes goes to the reunion to see his friends but for the past couple of years he has skipped because of his age. The reunions occur all over the United States in which he usually drives, but on occasion he flies with his

wife.

Mr. Tait showed me a book on what he did, which was to build bridges, and pictures of what he built. He mostly used his hands for the jobs he had to accomplish, but once in a while he used technology like air compressors. He talked about the technology today and how we just use a helicopter and set it down and all of the other machinery we use today. Two men had to carry 600lbs of bridge all at once. They built all kinds of bridges. He and I both thought that his part helped win the war because he had to build the bridges in order for the tanks and other artillery to get to the other side of the river or the other side of a deep ditch. He was out in France and the higher ranked people pulled out the infantry to hold the lines for about two weeks to keep them from being destroyed.

He had a younger brother who was in the Pacific fighting Japan, now dead from natural causes.

The scariest part of the war for Mr. Tait was floating down the Rhine River with a boat full of infantry which was shelled (bombed by planes, shot at with 52-caliber machine gun fire), until daylight. His favorite part of the war, like all veterans, was coming home to their families. He made a lot of close bonds with his comrades. In his free time he laid around because he had nothing to do but wait. He also slept, relaxed, and washed his clothes.

Pearl Harbor to him was a deliberate attack by the Japanese and he still does not forgive them for that. He also thinks that the Japanese stabbed the US in the back and, like anyone, he didn't like it and will not forgive them until probably in his grave. He thinks that our government knows a lot more than what they are telling the nation and if they don't want us to know they will not tell us. He does not think we should trust them. In his opinion he thinks the government did not know Pearl Harbor was going to be attacked by the Japanese.

The war has affected his life now by knowing what he went through and he would not do it again. He wants to tell teenagers to work and save your money until your old. He was brought up during the depression and you had to work two or three jobs just to put food on the table. If you only made \$5.00 then now it would be more than \$100.00. He thinks that World War II Veterans aren't treated very well. A lot of veterans are not getting the medical attention they need, and in Washington D.C. in the hospitals they get treated with whatever is wrong with them. But he feels, the little guys like him don't get anything from the hospitals. He joined the VFW for a lifetime membership. But, he doesn't march in the parades, and he calls himself a loaner. He gives to one charity, the paralyzed veterans, about three or four times a year. He doesn't care if we have a memorial commemorating what they have done for us. But, because of his age (81) he really does not care what happens, but for the future generation he thinks that the World War II Veterans is a forgotten race. It's really too bad that he thinks that, and I know I will never forget what he and his comrades have done for us. If there was a different end to the war we might not have had our freedom today. The veterans sacrificed their lives to save ours and I think the least

that we can do is to build a memorial in honor of the WWII vets before their lives are taken to old age.

Remember the World War II Veterans who fought for our freedom!

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