



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

# St. Johns High School

Home of the Redwings!

## Gerald Woodbury

Interviewed by Tim Beck, Grandson

- Home
- Administration
- Attendance
- Counselling
- Activities
- Clinic
- Staff
- Media Center
- Cafeteria
- Student Handbook
- Map to School
- School Calendar
- School Profile

I interviewed my grandpa, a World War II veteran. Gerald Woodbury was drafted into the Army in October 1942. He was 18 in August, and he was drafted in October. He was stationed in a half a dozen different camps in the United States, and then he went to England, in October of 1943. He trained in England, where he stayed until June 6, 1944. Then he went to France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. He was discharged from the war in December of 1945, but he was still in the Army until the following March 1, in case the Army needed him.

He was shot twice, while at war. The first time, he was shot with a machine gun in his elbow region and he didn't even notice until later, when one of his friends said he was bleeding. The shot wasn't that bad though, because they fixed it up and he kept on fighting. The second time he was hit, it was in the Battle of the Bulge, in the middle of the winter, sometime between Christmas and New Years. He was hit in the top of the head with shrapnel. He was standing under a tree when there was a tree burst and shrapnel went threw his helmet, in which he can still feel today. Then they shipped him from there to a hospital in Belgium. Even though he was hit twice, he never got a purple heart, because he never applied for it. The first time he was hit, he didn't even bother, went right on fighting. The second time, it was so confusing, because there were people running every which way and they were shipped out if they were hit, so he didn't bother with records or anything. The medal that he did get was the bronze star medal, where he took over a bridge in France. That was the only medal that he did get beside the campaign medals for landing and crossing the Rhine, and the Battle of the Bulge. You got a bronze star on your ribbons for each battle that you were in.

There was no particular scary part of the war for him, because he remembered being scared, but nothing really stuck out that much. He said that nobody really got freaked out or anything, because when you're only 18-19-20 years old, nothing scares you. He said that he actually was seasick once, the night before the D-Day landing, because they went all over in ships, and he was in a little 35 foot Higgins boat, and the waves in the storm that night was probably 30 feet high. When he transferred from the LCI ship to the Higgins boat, it was a struggle because the waves raised the boat up

almost to the deck or the snip, and then back down, and you had to climb down rope nets. It was pitch dark because they didn't dare use a light, or someone would see them. People fell off into the water, and some were crushed in between the boats.

He said that he actually killed people, lots of them, and he wasn't sure how many. When they were landing at the beach in Normandy, they lost all their officers, immediately. He was a PFC ( Private First Class) then, and when the battle was over, he was a Sergeant, not because he did anything special, but because all the officers were killed. They figured out afterwards, that we lost 70% of our company on the beach.

He said that he lost people that were close to him, including his friend Chicken Brown, as he was called. Chicken Brown was probably 16, because he lied about his age so he could get into the war. He said that every time he eats a bowl of Mrs. Grass's Chicken Noodle Soup, he remembers Chicken Brown, because at the time, they were sitting around a bomb crater, cooking and eating instant soup. The Germans frequently nuisance shelled them, just to keep them awake and bother them. The shell landed in the trees, far enough away that they didn't even flinch. Brown fell right over into the crater, tipping over the soup. Everyone was swearing at him because he spilled their soup. But then they realized that a little shell splinter went underneath his helmet and into his head and killed him instantly. Chicken Brown was such an innocent little guy. He said that he had chicken noodle soup just recently, and he thought of him. Another friend was Garvin Johnson who was a company sniper. The last time he saw him, he had a machine gun burst in his shoulder, big enough that you could have stuck your hand threw. He said there were a lot of close friends that were gone, and he said he has a little blue notebook with them listed in there. To this day, he can still see their faces.

His best memory was coming home. He had a seven-day leave in August, and was home for his 19th birthday. He came back to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, which was extremely hot, especially in August. He then went to Chicago by train, where he then went to Lansing. If he was going to ride the train to St. Johns, he had to go all the way to Durand first. So, he and a friend hitchhiked to St. Johns, even though his friend had to go to Midland. The highway then, in St. Johns, went from Scott Road to 21, in which he went down 21 to Lansing Street. He remembers turning onto 21, or State Street, and the weather was so cool and the trees were green. When he came home after the war was over, he didn't remember anything because he was still partly amnesiac from the head wound. So it wasn't the same as when he came home on the seven-day leave. That was the only good memory he had.

He was in the infantry, so they didn't use much equipment other than a Grand M-1 rifle, bayonet, and a gas mask. The Germans had dug a trench

out in the water, so he made an artificial reef, which was about a hundred to 125 yards out in the water so they couldn't bring their boats right up to the beach. He lost all of his equipment during the landing at Normandy. He said that you had to have all of your equipment unfastened, so you could get it off easy, because otherwise your pack would keep you down and you would drown. He had to throw off his helmet and pack when he was in the water, and he punched a button of CO2, which inflated a rubber life preserver to make him go back up to the surface. To hide from the bullets flying everywhere, he tried to dig a hole in the small rocks that were at the beach. There he got a Thompson Sub-Machine gun, from a dead officer who was trying to return to the landing craft because it was still stuck there. He also got part of his pack, and he used his helmet from then on until the last time he got hit.

The message he would like to tell younger people is to "Pay attention."

Thanks for the opportunity to interview you, grandpa. It was an interesting experience interviewing an actual World War II veteran. Thank you a lot.