

Oral History Interview with James E. Remlinger
October 22, 2007
By Charles Gamm

This interview takes place in the home of James Remlinger, 1301 Beech Street, Marshall, Illinois, on the afternoon of October 22, 2007.

CG: We're in the home of James Remlinger and he's going to tell us about some of his experiences in WWII and some of his ancestors along with that. Thank you. Go ahead, Jim.

JR: In combat, in Alsace-Lorraine, I was in combat there, and I heard from a friend of mine that the Remlingers were around there, and this guy was going to lead me to that to prove what he said. But I was marched through there so quick that I didn't get a chance to check it out. But that was Alsace-Lorraine; and that was where my Grandfather Remlinger and family, all the family, came over here to the United States.

CG: Now, for a dummy like me, that is France, right?

JR: Yes, well, I'm not sure. I'm not sure whether it belonged to Germany or France. It's such a small place.

CG: Okay, go ahead. Can you think of anything else there? How far back do you think your folks go here? Do you know what year they came over?

JR: I think they came over here in about 1864.

CG: And most of them settled here in Clark County?

JR: Well, my grandfather's brother went to Canada, so there could be Remlingers there, too, by the same name.

CG: Now you were drafted and went into World War II and we've got your story here. (This refers to a handwritten story of Mr. Remlinger's war experiences.) Are there some other things maybe that you want to add to that?

JR: Not really, we'd be here all day. There's many stories to tell, you know what I mean. Most of them is pretty much in here.

CG: Let me ask you this. When you were drafted, were you with some more Clark County fellows with you, or when you got there were you all mixed up? Did somebody else leave here with you from Marshall besides yourself?

JR: Yea, there were guys we went with to Chicago to be inducted.

CG: From Marshall?

JR: Yes. And a lot of those didn't make it.

CG: Didn't make it?

JR: They weren't accepted.

CG: In your unit was there anybody from here besides yourself?

JR: No.

CG: You were the only one. OK. When you were overseas, then, did you ever run into anybody from Clark County?

JR: Well, I met Cleo Raisner in England. We were both there at the same time, and we knew there was going to be an invasion. And I got to see him, and we were training for an amphibious landing. He told me his brother was there. They called him Bud. Do you remember him?

CG: No, I'm sorry, I don't.

JR: Well, anyway...

CG: Somebody on here will, though.

JR: It's in here. We were on alert to go to the invasion, and I walked ten miles... We were on alert at that time, and I had to go to see the Captain so I could go see this guy, Bud, Cleo's brother. And I walked ten miles, which was nothing. And anyway, I got to see him, and he brought me back to where I was, where I took off from, and... but I got a ride; I didn't have to walk back. And it wasn't... And we were... After that we were on our way for the invasion.

CG: I guess you got in your story. OK. I don't want to say or embarrass you or anything else, but being a Civil War nut, I know that the fellows in the Civil War called it "seeing the elephant". When you first went into combat I know you were scared. But can you tell these people what your experiences were like there when you knew that this was the real thing - that they're shooting at you and you had to shoot back? When you were first seeing the first German there, can you describe that feeling to someone, there?

JR: Well. Oh, by the way, Cleo and I was talking about things many years after we had been back home. And we probably went ashore at the Normandy invasion in France, although, there were so many guys at the time, he didn't know I was going in and I didn't know about him. I think he was in the 1st Army, maybe, and I was with the 1st Army, I think, for the invasion. But then in July General Patton came in, and I was in the 3rd Army with him.

CG: Okay, you were in the Battle of the Bulge, then?

JR: Yes, I was.

CG: Other than what you have written down, have you thought of any other thing that you can share with somebody in the future, looking for that? I know we see it on television. Well, it had to have been cold; it had to have been terribly cold there.

JR: Yes, 17 degrees below zero. And we were sleeping on the ground. And we were blue in the face because we were so cold. I almost froze to death.

CG: And they were shooting at you from all sides, had you surrounded.

JR: The danger was there, too, not only the enemy. Our own planes would come in on us, and we had a color code. It was probably...

CG: Three feet long?

JR: Well, no, it was real big, the square itself. We had to change color every day, because our own planes were coming in, on the front lines, and a lot of times we had to be ready to knock them out, our own. And I guess maybe I don't have it in here (his written story). I think this might have been in France, I'm not certain. But anyway, there was 500 guys that was killed on the front lines. I was on the front line at the same time, and our guns weren't set just right, and I think there was about 500 guys that we actually killed. I say "we"; I didn't know that I did, but I say we because...

CG: You're talking about the enemy now? It's the enemy that you're talking about now?

JR: Well, no, our guys, 500 of our men with our own guns. But of course that didn't get out; it didn't come back here. That was... Those things you had to keep quiet even for the rest of the guys around, because, to know that... I was on the front lines with Patton, what can I say? He was with me; I was with him.

CG: What did you think about him? Did you...

JR: He was a leader! He believed that you don't sit still; that you go after the enemy. We got surrounded... I don't have that in here. We got surrounded one time, and we were wondering if we were going to get out of it, but we did. We were so tired, you know, at that time. I think it was raining. And we were a spearhead division. And I was in the front line for eleven months and did nothing but attack.

CG: Did you (I haven't read your story when we're doing this). Did you come into some concentration camps? Or did you see those, or any other type prison camps yourself?

JR: If I did, it was only just to see them and go on by, because we didn't have time to stop at some places, because we were a spearhead division. All we were doing was going forward all the time. And Patton made certain we could just keep on going, because he'd get right up there with you. Not every day; but I saw him four or five times.

CG: I'm not rushing anything, and you can add on anything as we think about it, but before I forget it, what was the feeling when you came back? They treated you as a hero, didn't they? There wasn't any of the thing like the Vietnam feeling when you came back. When the war was over you guys were all heroes, right?

JR: Well, I guess you could say that. They didn't have the bad feeling that they did to some of the soldiers during the Vietnam Conflict, where they ignored you or spit on you and so forth. That was terrible. There wasn't that feeling at all. When I came back, as soon as I got back to the United States, the one thing that entered my mind was, "I hope we stay prepared". And any soldier, I think, could say the same thing, once you've been in battle.

CG: What did you miss most being over there? The dinner or – I'm just curious. What - other than just being out of there?

JR: It tells in here (his written story) what we did do. We couldn't always get something to eat, because we were a spearhead division and we were going all the time, and guys sometimes couldn't get the food up to us. So the very first thing that we did, we killed a little calf. And we got ready to cook it and we got march orders. So what did we do? We just picked that up and put it in a truck and went on. See we had... Sometimes we had to move that way because we had a big gun that we had to pull - a truck had to pull that. So when we finally got to where we could sit down and cook that meat, why, we were pretty hungry by that time. Then the next thing... One time when we didn't have any food, we pulled into an area when we were going to get with some other guys as well, and there was one old pig in there. It was the only animal around, and we were hungry. Somebody was a butcher, and they killed that hog, hung it up, skinned it, and we were having meat that evening. We didn't give it any time because we

were hungry; we could eat anything. If we'd hear where – if we knew there were chickens around, we'd figure - whenever we'd pull into an area we would really jump off of that truck immediately if we heard those chickens, and we knew there'd be maybe some eggs. And usually always we got enough for each one of us.

CG: Well, can you think of anything else that somebody would be interested in?

JR: Oh, I can't think of anything.

CG: I'm curious. I know the supplies were moving up. And you were in the beginning or up ahead. Could we use their gas or was it a different quality than our vehicles? Could you have drained the German Panzers or something and got gas from them like that to put in our equipment?

JR: Well, I can say we didn't do it. In August of I think it was '44, we were to go into Metz, France, and that was in August of '44, and we had to stop moving until we got gas. We were supposed to go in and take this place, and we didn't get in there until November. It was in August that we were held up - just because we didn't have any gas at the time. And we didn't get in there until November. That's how much it held us up. Just because we were out of gas.

CG: Do you think the gas quality of what the Germans had would have worked in our equipment?

JR: Well, I really don't know

CG: Evidently it wouldn't have since you got held up. I'm sure that Patton would have gone after it, he would have confiscated it, whatever they had. There must have been a difference there somewhere that I don't know about.

Well, I'm not doing a very good job of interviewing you. You're doing great yourself.

Did you ever see any other important figure, like Eisenhower or any other so called celebrity back then?

JR: I saw other officers, but I can't remember who. They wouldn't have been with us anyway, being we were a spearhead division going - moving every day.

CG: Did you remember taking any prisoners?

JR: Yes, we took prisoners, but I could tell some stories, too, about that - what others did. I didn't do it. But when we would take prisoners we would want to find out what was going on, on their side. If they didn't tell us, there were guys in the infantry... I was in the infantry, too, but I didn't do any of this. These guys, to get

them to talk, would take the butt of their rifle and hit them right in the head. And usually they would give you some information. I heard that some of our guys killed some of the enemy that way. But if there were a lot of guys that were prisoners, I don't think they killed any of them. But to get information they would do just like what I said.

CG: Just like Sherman said, "War is Hell".

JR: Yes it is. I was scared every day, every day. When we'd have action and when they pinned us down with artillery or if the planes were coming in on us - even our own planes, because we were afraid they were going to cut loose on us - the only thing that saved us was our big colored code of the day - the color of the day. And it was changed every day.

CG: Jim, now where did you put that? Was that on the vehicle, on the roof?

JR: Yes, on the truck.

CG: On the top of the truck?

JR: Yes, usually.

CG: Well, I understand. I have a small flag that has rays on it, and I understand that the Germans did the same thing, put it on a house that they didn't want their own Luftwaffe to hit. And I assume that's the same deal there on the vehicles.

JR: But the reason we were so scared, we didn't want to shoot at our own planes. We were set up for it, and if they let off, why then we knew that they recognized us. That went on so many times that you'd get to the place... As I was about to tell you, every time we got pinned down with artillery fire or their planes coming in on us, we were so scared that we couldn't talk. We knew what to do, I mean, to start out with because we were trained. But after the action a lot of times that was almost regular we couldn't talk for quite some time because we could hardly whisper. That's how scared I was.

CG: Well, let's see. I hope we've covered everything and that it makes everybody happy. I'll think of things later on. Jim, I appreciate what you're saying here, and if we find more things I suppose we can write them down and get them on tape. Thank you.

Jim, I just thought of something else. You used the grand? You were using the grand? The M1-grand? Is that what you were using? You carried the grand? What kind of rifle did you carry?

JR: I don't know. I forget the name of it right now.

CG: Semi-automatic? You don't remember. OK. Well, in your unit...

JR: I was on... We were set up... The big gun that we were on was to try to knock the planes – the enemy - out of the sky. And we were also set up for anti-tank. We had armor that would stop a tank, maybe.

CG: You weren't actually with the ... You weren't doing the foot soldiers job; you were with the artillery then?

JR: Yes, I was artillery, but we were attached to the infantry. Or they might have been attached to us, which ever way. And they were right up on the front line and we were right up there with them. So I call myself infantry, too.

CG: But your job wasn't to fire a rifle, really, at the enemy. Yours was to use the guns, the big guns, right?

JR: Well, we could fire our guns, too, like the enemy.

CG: So you had carbines, maybe a carbine? Sometimes they...

JR: Some of them had those, yes.

CG: Well, I thought of something else, there – the reason I started again. I suppose after you were up there just a little while you could recognize some of the rounds coming toward you. Like I hear if the German 88's would attack you, you could hear those, and you knew by the sound of that what they were after a while. And the other guns the same way. And I see the WWII tapes I hear the rat-tat-tat of the machine guns. They had several kinds of machine guns. I assume you could probably pick those out after a while.

JR: That they were the Germans. Yes, we could tell by the... We could tell ... And almost every night if we were trying to get some sleep we could hear them. We could hear the enemy guns firing. Sometimes they would slip over into our lines and try to kill anybody that they could. But we were sending out - the same as they were sending out to us, we were sending out to them. And you would see how many Germans you could kill.

CG: Can you think of anything else, Jim?

JR: And the way the Germans did... I think I told you this story the other day about... They would ... Where there's a lot of cows or horses or whatever – Well, this would be at night, almost usually always at night. So the Germans would have these cows to take off so they could rouse us. You know, we'd probably shoot at them, because it was dark; it was so dark we couldn't see what was

coming. We thought it was maybe the German soldiers, or whatever. They were doing that so they could try to draw where we were at. And then they could come right on in on us.

CG: With the big guns.

JR: Yeah.

CG: Along that line, it just dawned on me, did you ever see any of the Germans dressed as our soldiers?

JR: Yes, that was in the Battle of the Bulge. That was where I didn't have the password. And I've got it down in here (his written paper).

CG: OK, that's good. And were you kind of in camouflage with white, or did just the Germans have those?

JR: They had our clothes right down. They had everything that we had, our colors, I mean.

CG: What about the white uniforms, though? Was that just Germans, or did we have those, too? I know they snuck up on some of us with white on. Did some of you have white? Sure, when you'd land in the snow, you'd be half white anyway.

JR: Well, I don't think we had any issued to us. But we did find some things that belonged to the Germans - and some of their sheepskins. And, boy, we really took after those. That was during the time, I think, of the Battle of the Bulge. So they came in handy. I think they kept us from freezing to death.

CG: Well, we'll cut it off again, I guess. Thanks Jim.