

This write up is from a tape made by Jim at our request to preserve his unique story. We have tried to incorporate his Oklahoma colloquialism into the writing as he said it on the tape.



Jim Cooley's Story

Hello! This is James H. Cooley. I'm making a very informal type of.....
...ahhhhh..... ohhh.....I'm making it my war years. That's World War II. My father Harry W. Cooley made a real good scrapbook and I'm going to be taking a lot of dates from the scrapbook. This will all be going over a few days. Today is February 11, Thursday, 1999.

I graduated from Central High School in Oklahoma City at the age of 17. After this, I started the first semester at the University of Oklahoma. I was still 17 after the first semester. I came home right after the spring semester and I had my draft notice waiting for me. This was May 14, 1943. I was ordered to be inducted into the army and I was inducted in Oklahoma City. I was sent from there on May 22, 1943 to Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

One thing you learn in college was how to take a test. So I took a test at Fort Sill and scored pretty high on it. So I got the opportunity to go into what is called the ASTP. That's the Army Specialty Training Program. You had to take basic training and they sent you to college and afterwards you came out a Second Lieutenant. However, it did not work out that way.

I left Fort Sill and I went to Camp Wheeler, Georgia for basic training June 1, 1943. The thing I remember about Camp Wheeler was it was hotter than you know what. I got prickly heat and everything else. But anyway, I go through this and then they (the Army), sent me there on September 10, 1943 to the University of Alabama. And this was what I was aiming for. There were just two of us and we had a private room.

We took engineering courses. We thought we were all set with this program. We took Chemistry, Physics, Algebra, and Trigonometry and everything. However, the first we knew it started appearing in papers: "What are our Sons over Seas Fighting When These Soldiers Are Here at Government Expense". So the first thing we knew (the government), did away with the whole program and sent us all to the infantry. This was March 28, 1944. They sent me to Camp Atterberry, Indiana.

I joined the 106th Infantry Division. I was in Company D, 1st Battalion, 423rd Infantry (Regiment), and 106th Infantry Division. There are a lot of dates here and I'm going to go ahead and give them to you if anybody has an interest. I left Camp Atterberry, Indiana October 14, and went to Boston.

I left from New York Harbor, October 17, 1944 on the Queen Elizabeth. There was about.... 16,000 troops on this one ship. It was not in a convoy and we went up near Greenland. We didn't zigzag; we just went straight across probably because it (the ship) was fast. It was hard for a submarine to draw a bead on us. It was extremely cold and there were icebergs. They told us that if we were to be sunk and went into cold water, we would not last more than three or four minutes.

On October 22, 1944, we arrived in Scotland. That's Greenock, Scotland. Went on down to a camp in England west of London, at Shotton, England November 28, 1944. I left England for the continent. We left from South Hampton and landed in Le Havre on December 2, 1944. Those dates don't sound right to me. That's a long a time before arriving to Le Havre.

On December 10, 1944, I went into the battle line. This was about on the extreme eastern part of Belgium and I was really in Germany, but not very far. We went into the battle line on December 10, 1944. On December 19, 1944, I was wounded and captured. On January 9, 1945, I was operated on in a prison camp (6G) for shrapnel in my arm to remove it. I have the shrapnel to this day. It is, oh, I say inch and a half long and half an inch wide.

On March 28, 1945 I was liberated by the Americans. On April 4, 1945, I was admitted to the hospital that's the 182nd Hospital in England. On May 3, 1945 I arrived at Mitchell Field by airplane. On May 19, 1945, I arrived at Borden General Hospital in Chickasha, Oklahoma. On October 8, 1945, I was discharged from the service.

Now that we have the dates out of the way, let's go back a little bit. When I first went into the army, I went to Camp Wheeler, which I said before was near Macon, Georgia. I don't know how hot it was.....way over a hundred and we were out there without any shade. We were marching and everything in it. It was rough, rough, rough. And after that time, I went to the University of Alabama.

It was like getting a real good break because like I said before, we had two to a room. We went to classes. We took engineering courses. We took Chemistry, we took Algebra, we took everything that had to do with engineering. We had physics and boy I hated to see 'em end that program.

Oh, you have to remember that I was just an 18 year old kid at this time. When we got to Camp Atterberry, to show you how experience pays off, we had a sergeant (he must have had an IQ of at least 70), he said “ All yous guys that's been to college step out. “We's going to put you in a special detail. A special assignment”. We all stepped out and we were on KP for two weeks. I really learned fast.

On the trip to England, on the Queen Elizabeth, with that many troops on there like I said, were 15-16,000 there. They never quit eating. They ate around the clock and had to. To be able to serve that many people....I joked with all the people that got seasick, because, boy, I was doing real good and I was eating and so we really joked them because they got seasick and could not keep their food down. That worked real good until the last day or day and a half. Then I got sicker than a dog. That's when I began to appreciate what they were going through.

When we got to South Hampton, England, they gave us a choice of going to London for the weekend or waiting till we got to the continent and going to Paris. We couldn't do both. A lot of people said “Well, I'd rather go to Paris”. But I knew better than them. I had learned my lesson. I had found out that anytime you could take advantage of anything, do it. So I said I'll go to London. I'd worry about Paris later on.

So I went to London. I got off at Piccadilly Circus. I'm going to tell you a little story. Remember, I'm a little bitty kid. I had my tie on and my army uniform. I started walking down the street and a girl was coming the other way. She grabbed my necktie and turned me around and said, "I'll screw you necktie off for a pound". I tell you that scared me to death. She hung on to the necktie and drug me over to the hotel. She said you wait 'ere and I'll go inside and see if they have a room. I'll be right back. She went inside and I ran away because I was just green at this time.

We left England from South Hampton on a ship and we went over to La Havre. We could not dock at La Havre because it had been bombed like nobody's business. The bulldozers had scraped out a place where we could go ashore on landing craft. We came off the ship on nets, landing nets. We got into the landing craft and we went ashore. It was getting late in the afternoon and we marched inland a bit. They told us to find a place to sleep for the night. This was out in an open field.

I don't know if you all remember or not that they had pup tents. What you did was, you got another soldier and you pup tent made up half and the other soldiers made up the other half and both of you slept in this pup tent. Well, we did this, grabbed some hay to put on the bottom of the pup tent when we went to sleep. The next morning, I got up and I was sleeping in about an inch of water and it was cold, cold, cold.

So we left La Havre and we got into a Jeep. I was one of the advance guards and we drove through France and into Belgium. It was cold, cold, cold. I did everything I could think of to get warm, but when you're in the back of a Jeep and have that wind blowing on you for hours at a time, you get past feeling numb. I even took my boots off and put my feet in a sleeping bag. I did everything and I still couldn't get warm.

Anyway, we went up into the line that was in Belgium. Like I said before, I was just a little bit inside Germany. If any of you are interested in military history they had a big battle at Bastogne. If you go straight east from Bastogne and I have no idea how far, it could be 15 miles, maybe 20 miles, or maybe 25 miles. There is another large town that is a railroad town called Fanleider? That was my division headquarters. If you go straight east of "Fanleider", you come to a town on the border of Germany and it is Schonberg. Now Schonberg was just a crossroads. I imagine about two miles straight east of there is where I was in a foxhole.

The battle started on December 16, 1944 at about 5:30 in the morning. I mean all kinds of shells and everything else came down on us. It was earth shaking. On our battlefield, we were holding 26 miles of front for one division. Looking in the book it says we were holding 27 miles of front. But the important thing is that we had up to half mile gaps in our line. What we did was to send patrols back and forth just to patrol it. We really didn't have a line in the valleys. We were on the hills and sent the patrols back and forth between the hills to make sure no Germans were there.

Where we were was supposed to be a quiet place. It was very wooded and very hilly and you would think that it was impossible. In fact, if you read history books that's what exactly everyone thought, even the French when the Germans came through in 1940. Also, the Americans thought the same thing - just thought it was impossible for tanks to come through there because it's extremely mountainous and an awful lot of forest. (Black Forest - Ardennes).

After they (Germans) attacked us on December 16, I was in heavy weapons. I was in 81 millimeter mortars, which is a shell that you lob over that explodes when it hits the ground. Of course we started firing to our front, then towards the left, then toward the right, then in back of us. As young as we were, we finally figured out we were surrounded, which we were. So we fought up there until the morning of December 19 and we got orders to fight our way out. We were about I guess, 5 miles behind German lines or maybe more. So we went up one hill and down another hill to fight our way out.

The German's shelled us and at this time I got wounded in my left upper arm. I was lucky of course during the shelling. I was lying flat on my stomach and I had my arms over my head. I was lucky it hit my arm instead of my face or something or going into some other part of my body. So a medic came by in the afternoon and cut off my sleeve and gave me a shot of morphine. But we were out there in the cold and it was really cold and on the battlefield and bleeding for the rest of the day. This was also December 19.

Oh about 5:30 or 6 that afternoon or night (December 19) they (the officers) decided to give up. So they destroyed what weapons we had and we gave up. To show the intensity of the battle, I'll kind of go up the line. My Captain, Captain Clarkson was killed. My battalion commander, a Lieutenant Colonel was killed. And I'd say we had about, oh, 35 percent casualties in our outfit.

Anyway, I was captured and I was marched. I don't know of course, but the body does wonderful things when you have something happen to it. You reach the point where you're just numb. They marched me into a kind of a, not a hospital, just a barn where German medics were working on wounded people. I stayed in there a day, 2 days, regardless and if they got through with the Germans, they would start on us. Finally, they took me in and poked around with a needle like to find the shrapnel or whatever was in there and could not find it.

So of course we hadn't eaten all this time. They put me on a truck to take me someplace, I don't know where, but near Cologne. The truck arrived there at night. There were two soldiers (Germans) and one went inside to see his girlfriend and we were left there all night. We left there in the morning and took us to a prisoner of war camp.

I was in two prisoner of war camps. They named them by numbers and a letter. The first one was 6G that was near Cologne, Germany. And then they took me down to Limburg, Germany Camp 12A. In my experience as a prisoner of war, I was never beaten as such. It's not what they did to me, but what they didn't do.

Like I said, I didn't get any bandages on my arm and of course the arm finally got infected. They didn't have any doctors to look at us or anything like that. As I said, I was in 6G after the arm got infected. They didn't have a x-ray, but really don't know what they call it, but it's like something they can see your bones (fluoroscopy?) and they could see a shrapnel in there.

I remember going in, no linen or anything. It was cold. It was a steel cot, like a prison cot. They had finally got some Sodium Pentothal and so they knocked me out. Like I said, they didn't have a doctor. A French medic operated on me. He was a prisoner of war also. But they did let him do surgery like this. So he took this piece of shrapnel out and gave it to me. Of course I was getting weaker and weaker and losing weight right and left.

Finally, we left 6G and we went down to Limburg, Germany which was 12. At Limburg, Germany I kept getting weaker and weaker. Our food was composed of watery soup and two slices of bread a day and that was it. I don't know if it was or not, but I think it was sawdust bread. I don't know how they do that, but mixed sawdust with the bread or some way or another. The soup, boy you couldn't find any meat or anything in it except a potato or two and that was it.

My arm was still running (draining) and infected and everything. On the official records, when I got back I got home, it showed I lost 46 lbs. I was lean as all get out when I went in. You get so weak you can't think of escaping because you get so weak. You can only walk about half a block before you faint. So they (Germans) didn't have food anyway.

The Americans were all the time bombing all over Germany. When I was in prison camp they did not hit my quarters, but very, very close. The camp was in the town of Limburg and Americans bombed it. I think they killed some Americans, but not right on top of me. The Americans were closing in on Limburg so they (Germans) decided to get us out of there. The ones who could march were marched. Of course I was not able, so they put a whole bunch of us wounded on a train. They got the train, got it full and started taking us towards the interior of Germany.

I don't know what happened, but all of a sudden they stopped and they took the engine way and left us out in the open. Well, the Americans came over. They were P47 fighter-bombers if you know what I'm talking about. And boy, they just strafed and bombed the living daylight out of us. Now they hit a boxcar next to mine. They killed about 20 to 27 Americans. Of course this opened it up and the ones who got out opened the doors for the rest of the boxcars and so we got out.

They (some prisoners) took their shirts off in the cold and everything and leaned over and made a POW, so that the airplanes would know that we were prisoners and not Germans. So from this point, they marched us because no trains. They marched us into a town. At this point, I'm trying to recollect because I was not in good shape. In this town, the Americans were on one side, and the Germans the other side and we were in the middle. It was not as dangerous as it sounds. They were fighting, little small arms, but nothing terrific, no artillery fire. It was an American tank battalion that came up; and they captured the town. They were just lined up. I never saw so many tanks in my life down the road.

They (the Americans) marched us out of there into American lines. The tank people started throwing food at us and everything else. They marched us someplace into a barn I think. They deloused us; put that powder (DDT) all over us, and everything because we had lice. Then in a day or two they flew us out of there on C47's. These were little two engine airplanes they used for parachute troops and everything.

They took us to England. I had gotten a hold of an army coat and had thrown over my shoulders and everything and buttoned it from the front with my arms inside the coat. We were the first Americans liberated and they didn't know what to do with us. They sent us to a replacement depot of all things. This was where people were coming over from the states and replacing people on the front lines. Of course they segregated us. They had a real high fence around us like a prisoner of war camp. So we were segregated and put in this. They just did not know what to do with us.

I went up to the guard MP and asked for some bandages. He said "what for?" I said I have a wounded arm. He said you're kidding. I said I'm not and I'll show ya. So I took my shirt off and showed him where I was wounded and everything. He just about came unglued. He said you stay right there. He got on the telephone and called. They sent an ambulance down. Of course I was walking a little bit. They brought out a stretcher and said lay down. From then on, I was a stretcher case all the way back to the United States.

They took me to the 182nd hospital in England. Now we're talking business. Now we got sheets on the bed and hot and cold running water and everything that goes with it. They had a chow line and everything. I went through the chow line and of course what you do, you loaded up on food and everything else.

The next day I was yella' (yellow) as the moon. My skin was yella', my eyeballs were yella'. Everything was yella'. I had gotten yella' jaundice. With my yella' jaundice, one day I would feel good and the next so sick I thought I was going to die. With the huge weight loss and everything, I found out later they were not going to let me come home to the American public until I fatten up a bit because you start to gain weight back from all the weight you lost.

Finally, after this, I was still a stretcher case and the war was not over in England and Germany, but they took me out and put me on a C54. That is a four engine airplane. I was a stretcher case and we had nurses n' everything. Of course I was in pajamas: you don't have a uniform or anything. They flew us to Iceland. We just let down and we gassed up n' everything and then we flew from there to New York. And of course, still in the hospital.

Funny thing, you'd feel good one day and lousy the next. But we conned a nurse into takin' us guys into New York City. One night, we went to the \$64 dollar question, which is an old radio show they used to have. I came back to New York and the war ended in Europe. Well, when the war ended in Europe, the air pilots who were flying the airplane, they all went up and got drunk. So now we had no airplane transportation from then on.

So I was put on a hospital train. Still had nurses and still horizontal all the time and the hospital was real good. They brought us back to Oklahoma, took down to Chickasha, Oklahoma to the Borden General Hospital. It doesn't even exist anymore, and that's where I stayed. I was medically discharged from the Borden General Hospital.

When ya' got out, they said you ought to apply for disability. I thought that was a good idea. I didn't think I would get too much. But I was really astonished because when I got out of there and applied for it, I was discharged 100% disabled. And I thought, my gosh, I'm making more money out than I was making in. And so they discharged me 100% disabled and I thought that was a good deal. I got out on October 8, 1945 and I thought that's real good. So I said, well, it's October and college starts again in January. So I went down to OU and they had two Bills.

One was the G.I. Bill and then they had a Special Bill for disabled veterans. The disabled veteran got more money than the regular G.I. Bill and they paid for a lot more n' everything. So, I applied for the disability. It was called Public Law 16 if I remember right-PL 16. I applied to go to college under this bill and I got the biggest surprise of my life because they wrote, they said "Well, you go home and we'll write you a letter." So, I went home and I got a letter and it said I was too sick to go to school. They wanted me to just stay home for 6 months- a half a year or a year. Then they would re-evaluate me and then in that time, if I got better, I could go back to college. Well, that didn't suit me a little bit. So I went down there again and I didn't talk to them at all. I just went over to another end of the line and I signed up for the G.I. Bill of Rights for a semester. Then after that, I came back and they let me in, then, when I was making more money n' everything.

Of course by now, you've figured out I would have never made it in broadcasting. I would have flunked out and starved to death.

I am going to add a few things to recap.

I've told this time n' time again that, you know, when you're overseas, you don't consider yourself a hero. I've told everyone that if you were in the Civil War and all you did was just take water to the horse and nothing else and if you were still alive, you'd be on the front page of every newspaper and they would list you as a war hero. But anyway, during this time I didn't consider being a hero at all. As time goes on, I think people make you a hero. I don't know, maybe they needed it. But anyway, to kind of give you an idea of what medals I got, I got the Purple Heart, I got two Bronze Stars, and of course I got the E.T.O. Campaign Ribbon. I had the combat infantry badge and I have the medal of Valor that is from the state of Oklahoma and by all means, but don't forget I got the Good Conduct Medal.

There is one other thing that I would like to say and that is, my mother and my father suffered quite a bit when I was missing in action and a prisoner of war. The scrapbook has many letters from her friends and relatives and many flowers sent to both of them when I was missing in action and a prisoner of war.

The last thing I would say, is if any of you are around the house or anything and you want to see my scar and my shrapnel that went through my arm, I will show you them for 25 cents.

Answers to Questions:

I didn't sleep in water in my pup tent. We got some hay to sleep on and I guess it rained and the water seeped in. This is what woke us up. Of course, this was before we went to the front line.

I don't know what I weighed when I got out. The Army said that I lost 46 lbs. I guess my weight was about 96 lbs. My father kept four big volumes about me and the war. I am enclosing a picture from one of these. These pictures are from the people in my 106th Division and at Limburg with me. I did not know them personally, but this will give you an idea of what I looked like. Some of the people I was with were not wounded, but died in POW camp from lack of food.

When I was first taken to 6 GI, I was operated on and we had old wooden punks with hay in them. However, in 12A, there was nothing but a brick floor and lice infected hay and we were extremely crowded and in filth. I learned you could not kill lice by rolling them between your fingers; you had to squeeze them between your nails, so that the blood pops out. We spent most of the day killing lice. You couldn't win on this. If you got warm, the lice started crawling all over you. If you got real cold, they would not crawl as much, but you froze to death. When I was a POW, there was no heat. Your body just got numb and that was it. We all had diarrhea and this didn't help either.

I had one thin blanket. The Germans took my watch and billfold. However, I had some money and French POW sewed it into the crotch of my pants and I got home with it. They did not take my dog tags. My coat and my uniform were lice infested and they were taken from me when I got back and I was given pajamas.

The International Red Cross did not visit camp, but they must have gotten medical packages because we had to wait to operate until the Sodium Pentothal arrived. No food from the Red Cross. The only thing I could do to keep my mind active was look for lice. Otherwise, I thought about food. When you are starving, you do not think about sex at all. I did not get to know anyone. There was only one hydrant for water outside for all of us. No bathing. We had a slit trench and did it smell because of the diarrhea. The first food I had, I don't remember. I remember the plain bread tasted like cake because there was nothing like sawdust in it.

The train cars that we were moved in were called 40 and 8. When we were put in these, only half could sit down and the others had to stand. I remember the only opening was small and was real high in the boxcar. Of course, it smelled to high heaven and you thought you were in the sewer. If someone died in the barracks, they took them out and buried them. I did not have work details. I was wounded and had lost a lot of blood and was too weak. I think lots of it is attitude and what kind of genes you have. We had some people die who were not even wounded.

**Jim stated that he really found it a lot easier to write email or tape than talk person to person.*

