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Oral History report : an interview with Dr. Truman Warner

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In the last century, our world has benefited from the technological advancements created by the scientific community to a higher and more widespread degree than ever before. The ability to record the events of history as they unfold gives both future and current researchers the chance to more fully and accurately depict the era. Our assignment was to seek out an individual who was alive and aware in the early 1940's, and to have them discuss what they did during the second World War. As each person has his or her story to tell, one can gather a wide array of perspectives from those interviewed, and from this a larger scenario can be drawn.

The subject that this student sought out had many unusual experiences during the war. Dr. Truman Warner is an Anthropology Professor here at Western. A lifelong Danbury resident, Dr. Warner graduated from the HighSchool that is now White Hall, continuing his education next door at then Danbury State Teachers College. When the war began, Dr. Warner was teaching at his first assignment, having just graduated from college in June of '41. The following interview was 90 minutes in length, and was recorded in the El Gross library in the basement of White Hall. An index has been provided so that the listener can pick and choose from a number of topics that the interviewee has discussed.

Side A

000 Tape begins.

064 His graduation and subsequent employment at Center Elementary School in Brookfield Center.// December 7 , 1941 // Rebuked at school by administration for allowing students to listen to the radio about news of the war.

100 Civilian Defense duty - appointed as an Air Raid Warden in Danbury // discusses the silly rules and regulations of the CD - "people having a sense of duty"

200 Drafted into the Army (given notice) in early 1942 // the feeling that "not whether but when" the U.S. would win the war.

240 Travels to Fort Devens, Massachusetts along with a number of local men in Nov.'42 Processes into the Army, then travels by train to Boot camp.

270 Recalls his train derailing in Indiana.

290 Arrives at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma (Grapes of Wrath country) // Begins training, eventually ending up as a Medic. // Division unique in that all men will stay together during and after training, as opposed to being sent as replacements to already existing units - his unit known as the 88th - the Blue Devils.

340 Unit moves to Louisiana for further training in the summer of '43. Transfer and promotion to Corporal in 3rd Battalion, 350th Regiment Aid station.

- 348 Describes the function of the station(triage center, primary care)
- 370 Describes typical Army Ineptness of command : troops not given adequate water supply, many experience heat exhaustion on long, hot marches.
- 390 Tells story about commanders looking for their missing troops.
- 400 Transferred to Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas
- 410 Sightseeing in san Antonio// further training.
- 425 Takes his first and only leave // 3 days by train thru New Orleans ending up in New York. // only a week at home and then back to San Antonio.
- 455 Receives word to prepare for debarkation in Fall of '43 // Unit transfers to Norfolk, Virginia (staging area)
- 470 Screens troops for final processing to ship out at Dispensary // reprimanded by officer for giving out immunizations, but is exonerated by realistic officer who understands the difficulties.
- 500 Travels in a giant flotilla known as a convoy in Nov. '43 across Atlantic. recalls that the journey was long and crowded, not breaking any records for crossing the Ocean - over 3 weeks.
- 520 Arrives at Casablanca, Morocco. // story about curious medics who drink strange brew that has "fallen off the back of a donkey cart." - turns out to contain some hallucinogenic compound which causes medics to experience horrible visual and audial illusions.
- 550 Troops board trains heading north, then east across North Africa. "Lister bags and K-rations" - crowded as usual.
- 570 Recalls being fascinated by journey.
- 590 Turns south towards the Atlas mountains arriving at Magenta, Algeria ? // Cold desert nights - only officers have sleeping bags - little food, as the majority of supply trains are attacked by nomadic Arabs, cargoes pillaged.
- 600

Side B

- 000 Officers get guns and jeeps and hunt gazelles - which become "gazelleburgers"
- 015 Wanders around local country during free time exploring; credits these times as crucial to developing his interest in Anthropology.
- 070 Goes to city of Bellabes - the headquarters of the French Foreign Legion // vivid memories : bazaars, unique architecture and a real meal at a French restaurant..
- 100 Given orders to prepare, once again, for journey to points unknown
- 200 Arrives in Italy after many harrowing accounts crossing the Mediterranean
- 220 Describes the Screaming Mimi shells that the Germans used in the war.
- 240 - 266 Recalls his duties as medic during the fighting that his unit was involved with// retrieving the dead and wounded in the middle of the night.
- 288 Use of sulfa drugs and the importance of suchdrugs in fighting infection.

- 290 - 360 Discusses the May push - U.S. troops drive north in May '44 - unit reaches the Arno river in late May.
- 380 Transfers to Anti-aircraft batteries unit // All-Black troops, highly decorated but commanded by white officers, causing a degree of tension.
- 420 Told by Warrant Officer that he is accepted by the troops.
- 460 Recalls watching hordes of aircraft flying overhead on their way to France, during early June '44.
- 470 Given a commission as Medical Administration Officer.
- 480 - 500 Transferred to France in middle of Summer of '44 // in charge of a medical supply unit preparing items for the South Pacific.
- 520 Gets appendicitis.
- 530 Takes a recuperative leave on the French Riviera, at Cannes.
- 550 Finds unit gone after he returns from leave.
- 560 Relocates to [↓]Le~~x~~on, where he stays until the end of the war and when he finally returns to the States and separates from the military.
- 600 End of tape.