

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

HOMER WALKER

An interview conducted on

April 2, 2018

Interviewer: Christine Lamberson

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Homer Walker are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on May 12, 2017.

Interviewer: Christine Lamberson

Transcriber: Christine Foley

Editor: Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai

The electronic file and complete transcript of this interview were processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and are available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

LAMBERSON: So, my name is Christine Lamberson. We're in Waco, Texas. It's April 2nd, 2016, and I'm here to do a War Stories interview. So, as we start, can you tell me your name?

WALKER: Homer Walker.

LAMBERSON: Okay, great. When and where were you born?

WALKER: I was born in Henderson County, east of Athens, Texas.

LAMBERSON: Okay. Where did you grow up?

WALKER: There, until I was about eight-years-old. Then, we moved to west side of Athens, to the big city of Malakoff.

LAMBERSON: Okay, and when and where did you enter the armed forces?

WALKER: I entered the service in Corsicana.

LAMBERSON: And which branch?

WALKER: Army.

LAMBERSON: And when was that?

WALKER: Infantry, I mean.

LAMBERSON: Infantry, okay.

WALKER: That was 1944.

LAMBERSON: Okay, and did you enlist, or were you drafted?

WALKER: No, I got that five minutes later. "You have been selected."

LAMBERSON: And what did you think of getting that letter?

WALKER: I was expecting it.

LAMBERSON: Were you ready to go?

WALKER: Yeah, I was ready to go, I guess.

LAMBERSON: And where did you go for training?

WALKER: Camp Croft, South Carolina.

LAMBERSON: What was the training like?

WALKER: It was rough. I made six weeks maneuvers and three twenty-mile hikes in . . . I mean, three thirty mile hikes in six weeks.

LAMBERSON: Wow . . . and then where did you go from there?

WALKER: To Germany.

LAMBERSON: Okay, what was that like?

WALKER: It wasn't home. I'll tell you that. It was alright, except . . . The Army, when you go in the Army, you . . . That life is different from civilian life. It was for me. Of course, I had never been away from my mother and daddy more than two weeks.

LAMBERSON: How old were you when you . . .?

WALKER: I was eighteen-years-old.

LAMBERSON: Eighteen.

WALKER: I was eighteen in September and went to the services in January.

LAMBERSON: Wow. What did your parents think? Were they worried about you?

WALKER: No, I don't guess. They knew somebody had to go fight for us, so I was no better than anybody else.

LAMBERSON: And so where were you in Germany?

WALKER: I was all over Germany except, I think . . . Berlin is in the northern part, isn't it? Well, I didn't ever go to Berlin. I was all over though. All of them places. I was there.

LAMBERSON: And so you arrived in Germany in the middle of 1944?

WALKER: No, no. In '45.

LAMBERSON: So was the war still going on when you got there, or was it over?

WALKER: No, it was going on. The war ended over there and we took the train in to go to Japan, and I was on what they called a "delaying route." Me and a buddy of mine went to Paris. And we were in Paris, France on the day the war was over in Japan. When we got back home, they told us we wouldn't have to go to Japan, the war had ended.

LAMBERSON: So what was it like in Germany when you got there? You were there towards the end of the war . . .

WALKER: It was okay. We had it pretty rough a time or two. We had it awful rough one day. We had, ah, one day, we started up a hill and there were fifty caliber with machine guns pinning us down and the scouts couldn't get up in front to direct artillery. They killed fifteen of our men. There were 22 of us and there were seven of us when we got to the top of the hill. That's the only day I had that was really tough. I had duty that was tough but it was nothing like that.

LAMBERSON: That was the most serious combat you saw?

WALKER: Well, they shot my gas mask and my pack off my back.

LAMBERSON: Wow! Were you injured?

WALKER: No. Only when I got over there, a motorcycle went over my foot. It bruised it. Didn't break anything or tear any skin. It just bruised my foot. It swelled for a couple of days and they put me in the recovery room to get that straightened out.

LAMBERSON: Were you in the infantry the whole time you were there?

WALKER: No. I was in it until the war was over, then they transferred me to the MP unit. I was a sergeant in the MP unit.

LAMBERSON: And what was that like? What did you do there?

WALKER: That was a fine job. I had two German fellows we had captured as mechanics.

LAMBERSON: Okay . . .

WALKER: And they were real good. In fact, they said more times than one that they were glad we won the war and got it over with. So, they were good. My time with the MP unit was excellent.

LAMBERSON: And what were you doing with the MP unit?

WALKER: Motor sergeant. Looked over all the motor vehicles.

LAMBERSON: So, you were with the infantry and fighting Germany towards the end of the war. What kind of news were you hearing about how the war was going? The progress, how soon it was going to end . . .

WALKER: They kept us informed. How we were doing, and everything.

LAMBERSON: How did people feel about that? Were they excited that the war was coming to a close, or were they nervous?

WALKER: What people are you talking about?

LAMBERSON: You and your fellow soldiers.

WALKER: We were ready for it to end!

LAMBERSON: What was it like when you heard that there was victory in Europe?

WALKER: Like a vacation for a week or two.

LAMBERSON: Ah, where did you go? Is that when you went to Paris?

WALKER: Well, we went to Paris after the war was over in Germany and before it was over in Japan. We had took basic training to go to Japan.

LAMBERSON: Oh, you did training in Paris?

WALKER: In Germany.

LAMBERSON: In Germany, okay.

WALKER: We were just in Paris for three or four days, a vacation.

LAMBERSON: Ah. What kind of training did you do to potentially go to Japan?

WALKER: For jungle fighting.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

WALKER: It really wasn't jungle but in wooded areas. And the heavier the terrain, that's where they trained us.

LAMBERSON: Was that training hard?

WALKER: Yes it was.

LAMBERSON: Were you nervous about going to Japan?

WALKER: No. I don't know what the Army does but you get to where you're not scared of anything. You're ready to do whatever it is that needs to be done.

LAMBERSON: And did you have very much contact with the Germans while you were there? You mentioned you were there . . .

WALKER: Just after the war was over, we did. After the war was over, it wasn't long until they lifted the ban and we could talk to them. If you wanted to talk to one before, it would cost you 25 dollars.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

WALKER: Which I didn't have. I only earned \$900 a month. I sent a lot home to mom and daddy, and I drove home 900 or so dollars a month for the 27 or so months I was in service.

LAMBERSON: So, you didn't want to lose any of that?

WALKER: No. I didn't want to lose any.

LAMBERSON: And did you see a lot of the effects of war on Germany?

WALKER: Oh yes. It was terrible. There was not one building left standing in the town of Kassel, Germany. Not one building. We walked down the streets one day, and there'd be a pile of rubbish there, and the next day we'd go down that same street and there'd be three or four crosses outside of that building, since they cleaned it up and found that many bodies. They put a cross every place they found a body. It wasn't a good feeling.

LAMBERSON: Did you hear much about the liberation of concentration camps and things like that?

WALKER: We broke two concentration camps.

LAMBERSON: What was that like?

WALKER: Terrible. I saw men that didn't have the strength to get up. They were on their hands and knees, eating grass, like a cow.

LAMBERSON: Were those in Germany?

WALKER: Yes, Polish people.

LAMBERSON: Polish Jews or Polish political prisoners?

WALKER: I imagine political prisoners, I don't know. All we did was get them out.

LAMBERSON: Where did they go from there?

WALKER: We don't know. We were in the convoy. We just opened the camps up and freed them. Took whatever German guards there as prisoners. And they went to concentration camps, wherever that was that they took the German prisoners. We had no idea where they would go, we just knew when we captured one, we'd hold it until somebody came and got it.

LAMBERSON: And then someone else came and got the Polish prisoners?

WALKER: I couldn't answer that because I don't know. We left them there. We threw all our rations out to them, some of them had enough strength to get them.

LAMBERSON: Were you surprised? Were you expecting to go to concentration camps and . . . Was it unexpected?

WALKER: We were in the convoy, going to another town in Germany . . . I don't even remember where we were going. But we were going to another location. We were in . . . Well, I call it the clean up. Hunting snipers, and we'd come onto these two camps. Of course, we were armed and took the Germans out of there. Somebody came and got them. I don't know who, but they were in the camp themselves when we left. We only stayed long enough to free the Polish and we were gone.

LAMBERSON: So after the war, you trained to go to Japan . . . You went to Paris, what was Paris like?

WALKER: Paris was alright. We stayed two days. We didn't have a pass to go to Paris. We had pass for Nice, France, you know, the Riviera. We went there and stayed two or three days, and my buddy suggested Paris. I said "Man, we don't have a pass to go to Paris!" He said, "Would you rather be in jail here, or in that jungle over there?" [Laughs] I said I think I'd rather be in prison in France, so we went. We caught a ride with the four-star general. He never once asked for our passes or anything. He took us into Paris from the coast. He and his friend stopped and picked us up. He told us to be careful.

LAMBERSON: What did you do in Paris? Were you careful?

WALKER: Oh, yes. Indeed. We went . . . Had dinner that night and went to the hotel where we had our room. Didn't do anything at night.

LAMBERSON: Was there a lot of destruction in France that you saw?

WALKER: We didn't see a whole lot in France.

LAMBERSON: Did you interact with the French people very much?

WALKER: We didn't like the French people.

LAMBERSON: Why not?

WALKER: They weren't near as good to us as the Germans were. We talked to Germans and the French weren't near as good. After the war was over, it was all different with Germany.

LAMBERSON: Why do you think that was?

WALKER: I have no idea. Just, ah, the way people did things, I guess.

LAMBERSON: So, after you were in Paris, you went back to Germany, and then back in the MPs, is that right?

WALKER: Yeah. I went after the war was over. I took training. Then when the war was over, the Germans were all different. We could talk to them, whatever.

LAMBERSON: Were you a part of the initial occupation, then?

WALKER: No, I was in the motor pool. I had done mechanic work for the MP unit. We took care of armored cars, motorcycles, anything they used in that unit.

LAMBERSON: And where were you then? In which part of Germany?

WALKER: We were in Cologne when I came. I left out of Cologne, Germany. I couldn't tell you all the places. It was a few years ago. [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: I understand! How long were you there after the war was over?

WALKER: In Germany?

LAMBERSON: Yes. Or when did you come home?

WALKER: I came home in May of '46. I was there about, ah, about eight or ten months after the war was over. I don't even remember when the war was over in Germany. When was it?

LAMBERSON: In May of '45.

WALKER: Yeah, so I came home in May of '46. So I was there nearly a year. It took nearly two weeks to get everything together to come home.

LAMBERSON: What was the journey home like?

WALKER: It was good. We had the best cook there ever was. He would get up at midnight and cook you something if you asked.

LAMBERSON: Wow, good service!

WALKER: I imagine there were a few thousand on the ship.

LAMBERSON: How long did it take to get over there?

WALKER: Twenty-nine days.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

WALKER: It was in the convoy. Closest ship to us was a tanker. We could see him all the time, except for when a wave would come over, sink him, put him under the water, then we couldn't see him. We'd see the guys working the water from under the base when we'd come up.

LAMBERSON: Wow. What was the journey over there like?

WALKER: Terrible, terrible.

LAMBERSON: Why?

WALKER: Well, the mess hall was about five floors down, and before you got to it, you could smell it. By the time you got to it, you were already sick to your stomach. In fact, I got to where I didn't even go to the mess hall. I'd go to the candy counter and get me some candy. It didn't smell like the mess hall there.

LAMBERSON: What did you do with your time while you were on the boat?

WALKER: You didn't have a whole lot of time left. We had duty, and just everything. We did a little bit of everything, except work on the ship. We didn't do any of that. But we had duty, and we cleaned our quarters where we stayed. We had to keep that clean. But that's about it.

LAMBERSON: On the way back, did you do similar things?

WALKER: No. We didn't do anything coming home. I slept on the bottom bunk. They would shoot dice right from my bunk. We shot dice all day, all night. I didn't shoot at night, I'd go to bed. A certain guy . . . He won \$15,000 coming home. I don't know if ever slept.

LAMBERSON: That's pretty good!

WALKER: He told us when we came to New York. We'd head over to New Jersey and get dispatched to wherever we'd be discharged. I was discharged in Arkansas. They put me on a train from New Jersey. I called . . . Or a friend of mine called a guy in Dallas who had a two seat airplane. He came and got us. I was discharged at ten that morning. I got there at nine, after dark. I hitchhiked to Corsicana, and then I hitchhiked from there to home. I knew everyone there. This lady had a taxi and saw me. She said, "Homer, where you need to go?" I said no . . . But she said, "Get in." She put my suitcases in the back of the car, I got in, and we went home. We lived about seven miles out in the country. Loaded up and went home. That was my career.

LAMBERSON: What was it like when you got home?

WALKER: It was fine. I tell you, for sure.

LAMBERSON: What did you do after you got there?

WALKER: I didn't do anything for a couple of months. And, ah, when we were discharged, they had what they called a 52-20. You could draw twenty dollars a week for 52 weeks. I'd draw two

checks. And my daddy said, “Son, get you a job.” So, I got a job and worked. I worked ever since until two years ago.

LAMBERSON: Wow! What was your first job when you got back?

WALKER: My first job? Pulling chains and cables, setting pipes in the ground for drilling, always in water about waist deep. It wasn’t easy.

LAMBERSON: I imagine.

WALKER: But it paid. That was my first job when I got home.

LAMBERSON: I have a couple more questions about your time in the service. So, when you were training, did you get any training about the Germans or the Japanese? Any kind of training about the place you were going to be?

WALKER: No. You didn’t know where you were going to be in the service. You didn’t even know if you were going to go from one town to another. And we didn’t . . . The Japanese, well, we had talks about what we were going to do once we got over there. They were different from the Germans.

LAMBERSON: Did you know much about the Germans, or Germany, or the Japanese?

WALKER: Before I went over there? No.

LAMBERSON: Or about the war? Did you know about the war?

WALKER: Just what I heard on the radio. I kept up with radio. I knew soon that I’d be going. I was 18 on the 21st of September, and the second week in January of the next year is when I went.

LAMBERSON: What was . . . You mentioned that there were some black folks on your ship. What was race like . . . What were race relations like in the military? Did you have contact with soldiers who weren’t white?

WALKER: No. We had no colored in our unit. That’s what I came to figure out.

LAMBERSON: Only on the ship?

WALKER: I imagine maybe three or four out of that whole bunch. They were colored. This guy I was telling you about was a sailor, not in the army. A sailor.

LAMBERSON: Okay. What did you think of the war in general? Good war, bad war? Did you have an opinion on what the U.S. was doing there?

WALKER: There are no good wars, honey. No good wars. It's all bad. A feminine man has no business being in the service. Now, a single man, couldn't beat that career. I was stupid for getting out. I was offered a rank increase and I would've been tech sergeant.

LAMBERSON: And why didn't you stay?

WALKER: I thought Texas was the only place in the world. The quicker I can get there, the better off I'll be. And I made a big mistake. I could have retired with full benefits in '74.

LAMBERSON: Did you miss your family? Did you write to them?

WALKER: Every day. Wherever I was. I had my little pad, a tablet, and I'd write in that. Put it in an envelope, seal it up. We could get envelopes out of the office. We got mail every day. Wherever you were, you got mail.

LAMBERSON: Looking back on it, how do you feel about your military service?

WALKER: It was okay. Like I said, I stayed away from my mother and daddy for two weeks before I went in the service. I had my grandmother living in the east of Athens and every summer I'd go be with her for a week or two. But that's family. Other than that, I was away from them for two weeks by the time I was 18-years-old. It was alright once I got used to being away from home. Amy wasn't home. It's a place to hang your hat and sleep but it's not home. You didn't do without any food or clothing unless you were pinned down in a foxhole somewhere. That would be several days in a predicament.

LAMBERSON: Did you spend much time in a foxhole?

WALKER: No. I spent quite a bit of time in it because we kept the Germans moving back. They had the foxholes already dug. They had gotten out of the line of fire when the Americans were coming in. About all we were doing was chasing down snipers. It was terrible but that's part of the show.

LAMBERSON: Do you have any advice for young people who are entering the military now?

WALKER: No. I wouldn't try and tell anybody how to do it, because there's one way to do things in the military and that's their way.

LAMBERSON: Mhm.

WALKER: You can have all the ideas you want. They throw them in the trash. If you're in the Army, you live by Army rules, not by what you want to live by.

LAMBERSON: Great. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you want to share?

WALKER: No, I don't think so.

LAMBERSON: Thank you so much for talking to us.