

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Harold Steele

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History project

Interview # VR2-A-L-2008-059

Harold Steele, a U.S. Army Infantry lieutenant in the European theater during WW II, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: September 8, 2008 Location: Steele farm in rural Dover, Illinois

Date: September 12, 2008 Location: Steele farm in rural Dover, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Tape Transcription Center

Edited by: Rozanne Flatt, ALPL Volunteer

Total Pages: 68 Total Times: 2 hr 18 min + 2 hr 2 min = 4 hr 20 min / 4.33 hrs

Session 1: Childhood, military training, & early combat thru Rhine River crossing

Session 2: Liberation of Ohrdruf, occupation duty in France, Austria & marriage

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on 10/01/2008.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

© 2008 Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Abstract

Harold Steele, *Veterans Remember*, VR2-A-L-2008-059

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Harold Steele was born on July 8th, 1922 in Sublette, Illinois, and grew up on the family farm in nearby Dover, Illinois. The Steele farm was typical of farms of that era, as they were nearly self-sufficient due to the farm's diversity. Harold discusses life on the farm during the depression. He graduated from High School in 1940, and enrolled in the University of Illinois, majoring in Animal Science. He was also enrolled in ROTC, since the University of Illinois was a land-grant college where participation was required. He enlisted in the Army in 1942, and was inducted in June of 1943, going through Field Artillery Basic Training at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. The Army sent him back to the University of Illinois for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), where he received training as an engineer. Upon the closure of the ASTP program, Harold was redeployed to Ft. Sill and assigned to a school unit, manning a 75 mm howitzer. In 1944 Harold headed to Ft. Benning, Georgia to attend Infantry Basic Training, and immediately afterward, through a 17 week Officer Training Program (OCS). He was commissioned in the Infantry on October 3rd, 1944 and subsequently assigned as the Platoon Leader of the 2nd Platoon, Company I, 3rd Battalion, 353rd Infantry Regiment, 89th Infantry Division.

The Division shipped overseas and arrived in France in January 1945. By March the unit was in combat, receiving its baptism of fire during the Moselle River crossing, where Harold distinguished himself, earning the Silver Star for gallantry. In late March the 353rd Infantry Regiment crossed the Rhine River under fire. On April 4th, Harold's company was among the very first to discover the Ohrdruf concentration camp, a satellite of the infamous Buchenwald concentration camp. It was the very first concentration camp liberated by Allied troops. Lieutenant Steele's unit continued to fight its way across central Germany, linking up with Soviet troops near Chemnitz, Germany.

Following the war Captain Steele was stationed in France to assist in the redeployment of American troops, then was reassigned to Vienna, Austria, first in the Provost Marshall's office, and then as a Criminal Investigation Division (CID) agent for the Army. While there, he met Margery Whiteley, a former OSS cryptographer then working for the U.S. Army occupation force. The two married on October 12th, 1946.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Growing up on the farm in rural depression-era Illinois; Marshall Fields; concern about situation in pre-war Europe; University of Illinois; Pearl Harbor; Field Artillery Basic Training; Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP); Infantry Basic Training; Officer Candidate School (OCS); 353rd Infantry Regiment, 89th Infantry Division; Moselle River crossing; Rhine River crossing; Ohrdruf Concentration Camp liberation; General Dwight D. Eisenhower; General George S. Patton; Eisenach, Germany; American-Soviet link up; VE Day; post-war Vienna, Austria; Margery (Whiteley) Steele

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. “Fair use” criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955