

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with William “Bill” Cantrall

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

Interview # VR2-A-L-2012-039

Bill Cantrall, who served in the American Field Service during World War II, assigned to the 8th British Army in Italy in 1944-45, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library’s *Veterans Remember – World War II* Oral History Project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Aug 15, 2012 Location: Cantrall residence in Oak Brook, Illinois

Date: Oct 23, 2012 Location: Cantrall residence in Oak Brook, Illinois

Date: Nov 20, 2012 Location: Cantrall residence in Oak Brook, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Cheryl Wycoff and Jan Culp, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 74 pgs Total Time: 2:16 + 2:06 + 2:05 / 2.27 + 2.1 + 2.08 = 6.45 hrs.

Session 1: Growing up in Sangamon County, and the advent of World War II

Session 2: Joining the American Field Service and experiences in Italy

Session 3: Service with the AFS in Italy and post-war experiences

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on April 11, 2013.

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

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Abstract

William Cantrall, *Veterans Remember*, VR2-A-L-2012-039

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: William “Bill” Cantrall was born on June 30, 1924 in Old Fancy Prairie, Illinois and grew up in nearby Athens. Bill’s father worked as a teacher during the depression years, but the family still struggled financially. He graduated from Springfield High School in 1942 and began a long struggle to join the military. Because of some scarring on his lungs, however, Cantrall was repeatedly turned down. He attended college and also held a variety of jobs until May, 1943, when he was accepted into the American Field Service (AFS), a civilian, non-profit organization that provided ambulance drivers to America’s allied armies in combat zones. The AFS had its roots in the First World War and for World War II were equipped with American ambulances and other equipment but were otherwise not directly affiliated with the U.S. military. Cantrall and his comrades received no pay and a very modest allowance. They were all volunteers.

By October, 1944 he was on a Liberty ship headed to Italy. For the next several months, he served as an ambulance driver in the 8th British Army, which was fighting its way north, through the boot of Italy. The Brits occupied the eastern part of the line, and the Americans the western part as the allies moved north. During those months, Cantrall and his fellow drivers supported many of the diverse nationalities that made up the 8th British Army, at the time, including Poles, New Zealanders, Indians, Sikhs, Pathans and others. He was often in harm’s way, shuttling casualties from the front lines to aid stations and medical facilities a short distance behind the lines, often driving over very treacherous roads and through inclement weather. He ended the war near Trieste and the contested border with Yugoslavia. Cantrall wrote about his experiences in a book entitled, *Just Like a Taxi: Frontline Ambulance, Italy, 1944-45*, which he self-published in 2011. Bill passed away in February of 2017.

Subject Headings/Key Words: American Field Service (AFS) in Italy during World War II; service with the British 8th Army during World War II; growing up in Athens, Illinois; working at Allis-Chalmers Springfield plant in 1940s; Polish army units in Italy.

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.

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(217) 785-7955**