



AUG. 20, 1946, AUSTRIA

Arthur Shapiro

World War II
U.S. Army Europe

Army of Occupation
990th Signal Service Battalion
T/5 Corporal

Arthur Shapiro

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
November 30, 2011**

**Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois**



Niles Public Library District
Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: Arthur Shapiro Rank: T/5 Corporal
Branch of Service: U.S. Army Theater: World War II – Army of Occupation
US Forces, Austria

Interview Date: November 30, 2011, 1:30-2:30 p.m. Place: Large Meeting Room B

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on Wednesday, November 30, 2011, in the year 2011 here at the Niles Public library. My name is Neil O'Shea, and I am a member of the Reference Staff. I am privileged today to be speaking with Mr. Arthur Shapiro who was born in Chicago on June 22, 1925, and now lives in Niles. Mr. Shapiro has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. We will now begin the interview.

(Interviewer's words appear in Italics.)

Mr. Shapiro do you recall when you entered the service?

I was inducted in March of 1945. I don't know the exact date.

(Mr. Shapiro's words appear in normal type.)

Had you graduated from high school?

Yes, I graduated in June of 1943 from Crane Tech High School on West Jackson Boulevard in Chicago. At Crane I was in the junior ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) for four years.

At that time were you aware that there would be a war and the possibility of military service?

Absolutely, the war was on and I knew I would be drafted. In 1943 I was 18 years of age and all 18 year old men were being called up so I was ripe for the draft.

Was anybody else in your family involved in the war?

No, I was the only person in the family of age for military service.

So at that time you were living in Chicago.

Right, I was living in Humboldt Park. Shortly after graduating high school and after my 18th birthday, I received notice to report for a physical exam prior to being inducted into the service. However, much to my dismay, they found that I had a heart murmur and I was classified 4-F and rejected for service. So the war was going on and one day I went down to the draft board and registered again for military service. Soon, I got a notice to appear for a physical, again, and this time I passed with flying colors. Finally, I was in the army!

Have you ever had any problems with the heart murmur later in life?

No, never, I have participated in baseball, football, basketball and other athletics, in and out of school. I am over 86, always worked hard to support my family and have never had a problem. I still play tennis every day for two hours plus I am active at the fitness center.

Was being in the Army the first time you were ever away from your family?

Except for two week periods at a boys camp once or twice a year, thanks to the Deborah Boys Club, our local off the street club, yes, I was pretty much a home boy. However, being a away from home was not a problem.

So you're basic training was in Camp Maxey, Texas?

Yes, I reported to Camp Sheridan for indoctrination, where I learned at meal time, take what you want, but eat what you take, "or else." After about week, it was off to Paris, Texas and hot, humid Camp Maxey. It was a new experience, to say the least, especially learning to use the weapons of war like rifles, mortars, grenades and many other things in the arsenal. But a great experience for a young, athletic kid. The officers and cadre were a great bunch and time flew past. Before I knew it, basic was over and I was home on furlough.

When you say that you were in the printing business, was that something you worked at through high school?

Yes, while at Crane, I took a Smith-Hughes, (a Federal Act promoting vocational education), course in printing. I was active in printing the *Crane Chronicle*, the school paper. After graduation, before going into the Army, I went into the printing business and was a printer for 50 years. I am retired on a Graphic Arts Union pension.

You were kind enough to draft out this preliminary statement for the interview, and I think that you mentioned that when you completed your basic training in Texas you were shipped then to...

Actually, when you finish basic training, you are not sure what kind of outfit you will be attached to at first. When I reported back to Fort Sheridan, I was shipped on the El Capitan, a fast train to Fort Ord, California. In the '40s, a fast train to California was 4 days.

While waiting for deployment to the Pacific, to extend one's tour of duty, they offered a reenlistment deal to all personnel for another year of service. I accepted and after another short furlough, I reported back to Ft. Sheridan. Then after a short stop at Camp Pickett, Virginia, I went to Camp Shanks New York, to be shipped to Europe. I was very happy about that as I preferred Europe to the Pacific. While at Camp Shanks before going overseas, I met returning GI's who gave me my first awareness of the Holocaust in Europe. They had packets of pictures of the death camps.

When the Liberty Ship docked in Le Havre, France, I was part of the 67th Infantry, an outfit that saw action at the Battle of the Bulge and possibly was short of personnel. However, after riding first in railroad boxcars and then on a bombed-out passenger train with stops in Amherst, Germany and some small towns in France, we arrived at our destination – Vienna, Austria.

While stationed in Vienna, I was a switchboard operator handling messages between other outfits in Austria and other parts of Europe. I was also a file clerk. Other soldiers and I alternated on these jobs. We also interviewed and hired private citizens who could prove they were not Nazi to work in the Signal Service Depot.

Later they needed some men in the town of Wells so I was transferred there (about 120 miles) and designated company clerk. My job was to keep track of personnel coming in and going home. Also taking care of sick call, furloughs, court-martials plus numerous situations like GI's wanting to marry German girls and driving to the next town of Linz to pick up the mail.

Was there as much destruction from the war in Austria as in Germany?

Hardly, there was quite a bit in Vienna, but not so much in Wels or Linz. I do remember the beautiful Schonbrunn Castle in the park was pretty beaten up. All the glass windows were shattered and other damage. This area was very popular on weekends when the weather was nice. Great area for GIs to meet Frauleins.

Did you get all get along or were there problems?

With the Austrian population there was no problem. We shared some rations with friends we made and did some bartering. Vienna was occupied by all four powers, American, French, British and Russian. We were billeted on the "Ring," Americans on one extreme and Russians on the other. The perimeter of the Ring had the Austrian Parliament Building, the Opera House and two other important buildings that I do not remember, maybe a library. Sometimes the GIs got a little nasty and teased the Russians a bit. Many times if things got out of hand, we would have to call the International MPs, a jeep with a Russian, French, British and American to smooth things down (see appendix with illustration). The worst incident I can recall was when a Russian guest at our club got out of hand. He was drunk and started waving his sidearm around. Two of us on guard had to subdue him and hold him for the International MPs. Actually we confiscated his gun and the next night he came looking for it and it got scary again.

The food was good?

We ate very good in Vienna. We ate in a civilian restaurant. At dinner they even had a violinist playing music. In Wels, I cannot remember where we ate, but I think it was a mess hall in billets.

It must have been a relief when the war ended.

For everybody. I'm sure. In Wels it was only Americans, no other soldiers. I think the Occupation was more a show of force than anything else. There was always a lot of activity. General Mark Clark was the top guy. I met him in Vienna and he was a gentleman. I had to go to his building. I forget what for. He was coming out so I took out my camera. He posed for me. He was a nice man.

The officer in charge of our unit was Captain Charles Barr. He encouraged me to reup, but I knew my family would not be happy if I did. Capt. Barr I believe was happy with the way things were going in our little company and would have liked me to stay.

The idea of having a career in the army didn't appeal to you.

It did and it didn't, but I decided against it and when the time came I went home.

Did you get any recreational or furlough time in Europe?

Yes, first I took a trip to Switzerland and then a weekender to Salzburg, Austria. Salzburg is noted for the marionette and puppet shows and also legitimate theater. I saw a Noel Coward play, *Private Lives*. In Vienna, we procured a jeep and found young ladies to show us the town.

Were you looking forward to your release from the service in November of 1946?

I don't remember how much thought I gave to the future, then, but I would have loved more time in Europe. I was too young and not smart enough to take advantage of all I could have seen while I had the opportunity. I still have regrets.

So you stayed in touch with home through letters?

Yes, my father was very proud and loved to tell people about his son the soldier. He wrote regularly. My sisters also wrote.

It sounds like your military service was pretty much what you bargained for, what you expected.

Well, I don't know.

I cannot really say that. How did I know what to expect? Rather I would say it was an interesting experience. On May 1st, Mayday, a Communist holiday, there was a Four-Power parade in Vienna. The Americans were so outstanding. It was unbelievable - chrome helmets, chrome bayonets, the shiniest boots. They were really a wonderful band. Even though people were not happy about Americans when they came down the street everybody stood at attention and saluted. It was wonderful - the 5th Army marching band. When I saw how superior our parade regiment looked compared to the others, I was thrilled to know I was a part of it. Even though some of the citizens were anti-American, they applauded our troops.

You're saying that some of the Austrian civilian population wasn't that happy with the Americans?

Thinking about it, I guess it would be fairer to say they just were not happy to have an occupation. Personally, the guys in our outfit got along well with most of the people we had contact with, including sharing our monthly PX allotment. Our outfit was pretty liberal with the rations and cigarettes and whiskey and whatever we got

So you went over to Europe in a Liberty Ship. Did you come back in a Liberty Ship?

Yes, I went overseas on a Liberty Ship and came home on one. I'm a terrible sailor and I was seasick 5 or 6 days each way. When I finally got over the seasickness and was able to hold down

some chow, the sea got so rough, they could not keep the food on the tables and so I still hardly ate, except for candy bars.

Did you ship home from Le Havre.

No, I got on the ship in Bremerhaven.

Was it a truck or a train from Vienna to Bremerhaven?

You know, I cannot remember so well, but it probably was a train.

So you were discharged from Fort Sheridan, then?

Ft. Sheridan again. We landed in New York. It was electrifying seeing the Statue of Liberty when we were coming to port in New York. Then we got on a train to Chicago, and it too was a great feeling getting off the train and seeing the city. Next we took the North Shore Line to Fort Sheridan and from there we were processed out and discharged.

Did you have any trouble readjusting to civilian life?

Not really. I visited my last place of work, and my boss offered my job back and I accepted.

You must have been a good employee. Now was that in the print shop, in Chicago?

Yes, it was in downtown. Gunthorp Warren Printing Company and it was the only full time job I had for 45 years until I retired with a Graphic Arts Union Pension.

So because you already had a job set-up, you didn't consider using the G.I. Bill?

That is one of my biggest mistakes and regrets. I just was not thinking straight when I went right back to the old job. However, I guess things worked out okay for me in the end.

Did you make any friends in the service from the Chicago area that you kept up with?

Actually, I met three men when we were taking our physical exams and we went through basic, then went overseas together, were stationed in Austria and came home together. They were at my wedding but after that we had very little contact until recently when I told the others that one of them had passed away. One of my friends from here was stationed in Munich when I was in Vienna and we visited back and forth a few times.

Did you join a Veteran's organization?

For a short time, I was affiliated with the Bob Gartenburg veterans organization but I kind of drifted away after a while.

May I ask when you moved to Niles?

I sold my home in West Rogers Park in 1958 and moved to Niles where I purchased a condominium, so I have been in Niles for over 30 years.

Now we always ask these questions in the last part of the interview. How do you think your military service and experiences might have affected your life?

That's a hard question. I know you learn how to take and give orders, which helped on my job as an offset pressman and then a shop foreman. I learned that right or wrong in my judgment, you still have to follow orders, and being a soldier in a foreign country you have to try to project a good image and set a good example for the American Army. I think it made me a more liberal thinker when dealing with my wife and children. Lastly, all the kitchen duty and cleaning jobs I caught while in the service made me a kind of clean freak and my wife loves it.

And do you think your experience in the military influenced your thinking about war or the military in general?

I don't know if I gave it much thought just because I was in the army. What I read every day about world wars, those poor guys got a tough road to hoe, Afghanistan, Iraq. Viet Nam was a terrible war. I think the World War II veterans were treated better than the vets from Korea and Viet Nam. I don't know about now. War is a terrible thing and that is the bottom line.

You reached the rank of Corporal, do you recall when you were promoted or why you were promoted.

We were in Vienna a short time when I was assigned the job of a soldier going home and as my superior, a Lt. Forbath, was satisfied with my work he called me to his office and gave me a promotion.

I suppose if you had stayed on, they might have made you a sergeant.

No question about it. That's what they were dangling. I used to make a mail run. The things I did while I was there earned me a promotion.

Anyway, Mr. Shapiro would you mind reading the statement you prepared? It might be a good wrap-up for the interview.

Yes, I can read this.

Remembering:

My Name is Arthur Shapiro, born June 22, 1925 in Chicago, Illinois. My nicknames were, all my life are Art or Artie, mostly Art. There is no question that I was a child of the depression. I started school at the Columbus Elementary School on Augusta Boulevard in the Humboldt Park area, but as we moved quite often I went to many other schools, finally graduating from Von Humboldt Elementary School on Rockwell and Hirsch Streets in 1939. Next, it was on to Crane Tech. High School. At Crane I had my first taste of military training, with four years of R.O.T.C, which I took a great liking to.

In 1941 the war broke out and staying in school was tough. However in our house, dropping out of school for any reason, including the army was out of the question so I had to plug away until 1943. I graduated; I was 18 years old, just the right age for the draft. I got my draft notice some time after my birthday and was notified to appear for a physical prior to being inducted into the service.

After the examination, I was told that I had a heart murmur and was being rejected for service; it was one of the biggest setbacks I can ever recall in my young life. So, after some months passed, I decided to try again to get in to the army. After another physical, this doctor did not think my heart was so serious and I passed the examination. Waiting impatiently, time passed and finally in March of 1945 I left for basic training. I was sent to Camp Maxey in Paris, Texas. While still in basic, the war ended. When basic training was finished, we were sent home for a furlough before being sent overseas.

After my furlough I was sent to Fort Ord, California for deployment to the Pacific. However, while there, I reenlisted for a year and was sent on another short furlough. When I reported back for duty, I was sent to Camp Shanks, New York and soon was on a Liberty Ship bound for Europe. Not much of a seaman, I was sick most of the way due to very rough waters but managed to survive and landed at Le Havre, France. From there we rode rickety passenger trains to Germany and finally came to our final destination, Vienna, Austria. At this time I was attached to the 67th Infantry Division. Later, I was transferred to the 990 Signal Service Battalion, in Wels, Austria. So, for the rest of my service in Europe, I shuttled between Wels and Linz, Austria as Corporal Arthur Shapiro, RA 46017674, a part of General Mark Clark's Army of Occupation.

As a young 18 year old, I looked forward with much anxiety to going to war, getting into fighting and possibly being a great American hero. However that never happened, but I am grateful that I was able to be some small part of that big war. Not for one minute do I regret the better part of the two years I spent away from home and family and as a matter of fact I regard it as a great American experience, and I would do it again in a heartbeat.

Beautiful. Thank you.

Years afterward did you ever want to return to any of those places in Europe that you had seen?

Certainly, I would love to see Austria again, but my wife is not interested in seeing Germany or Austria. We visited Paris, which is beautiful, and we have been to Israel. We have also been to Milan, Italy, and it too is very nice.

There was another veteran who lived near you here in Niles, a Mr. Hymen Ray. Did you know him?

Hyman Ray was a gentleman and a very good friend. Don Spitzer, another veteran, is a close acquaintance and both have participated in the Veterans History Project. Mr. Ray had a glove factory.

Yes, Hy had an interesting story.

He had a glove company, and he had a deferment because the company made products for the Army, but he told his dad that he wanted to serve and he enlisted. A nice guy.

Well, anyway, you're a nice guy too, Mr. Shapiro, especially for coming in and giving us this interview. And I'll get to work and try to type this up for you. And if there's anything you would like want to add, a funny story o something, and we will use that photograph for the front cover and I hope the other picture we took turns out for the front page and we'll conclude this interview which helps us to understand the war effort.

Thank you very much.

After the interview, Mr. Shapiro wrote from California to append the following recollection to his remarks.

Mr. Shapiro appended this statement to his response to the last question

What I do remember is that I made some wonderful friends, some that I went through basic with and one I occasionally communicate with. Actually he is the only one I know is still alive. Being in the army gave me the opportunity to see a lot of Europe that I probably never would have seen otherwise. I made some friends among the civilians that I dealt with in Vienna and Wels who gave me interesting views of their experiences of the war and I am sorry I was too young to think about making some long term relationships.

Needless to say, the overseas experience made me glad and proud that I am an American. being of Jewish heritage, and after talking with some Jewish people that were working in our service depot, I realize how fortunate I am to have been born an American and not in Europe. Lastly after seeing some of the destruction in Germany and Austria, I know how lucky I was to only have served in the Army of Occupation and I am proud to at least have done that.

**Arthur Shapiro, Cpl. 990 Signal Service Battalion
U.S. Forces/Austria**

Reader's Note:

The two pages which follow illustrate some of Mr. Shapiro's experiences while serving in the US Army.

Photo of occupation team for jeep patrol described by Mr. Shapiro during his interview.



Wie- One Vienna, Sept. 14- Last handshake of Vienna's famed International Patrol today. L. to R. Pfc. Richard R. Mortara, U.S. Army; Lance Corp. Robert Goslin, British Army; Sgt. Claude Tanguerel, French Army; Sgt. Venitschenko, Russian Army -- 1977



Occupation of Austria 1945-1955 "Four men in a jeep", patrol of the four Allied forces in Vienna. Photo, September 1945

(Image: Votova)

<http://www.wien-vienna.com/occupation.php>

Lessing, Erich courtesy of Lessing photo archive

After World War II, Vienna was divided between all four occupation forces, US, British, French and Soviet Russian. Joint military patrols formed the "Four in a Jeep". Roll-call before another tour of duty depicted above..

Hofburg Palace, Vienna, Austria

www.lessing-photo.com/p2/imagesbw/47010102.jpg

Mr. Shapiro arrived in Europe at Le Havre, France aboard a Liberty Ship and returned in a Liberty Ship from Bremerhaven, Germany. He was seasick on both voyages.



http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/116liberty_victory_ships/116images/116coverbl1.jpg

The United States built 2,710 mass-produced ships at 18 shipyards during World War II. Only 2 Liberty Ships survive today. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty_ship

Map of Austria, showing Vienna, Wels, Linz and Salzburg
Mr. Shapiro noted these cities in his interview.



http://www.eslincanada.com/zz_common/images/austriamap1.gif