

10th MOUNTAIN DIVISION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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All items in this collection were donated to the Center for Oral and Public History by the interviewer and interviewees.

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Descriptive Summary

Title

10th Mountain Division Oral History Project

Date(s)

2006-2008

Creator

Mark Wenger

Extent

Seven (7) oral histories

Repository

Center for Oral and Public History
California State University, Fullerton

Project Abstract

This project is a compilation of oral histories from men who served in the U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division during World War II, a specialized unit trained for combat and survival in high altitude and winter conditions. Additional text covers the history of the Division, the GI Bill and postwar America, and the current 10th Mountain Division Association (reunions, archives, and service activities).

The concept of this unique division was conceived by civilians after the start of the war, and repeatedly advocated until its acceptance by the War Department. This was one of the few, perhaps only, specialized units during World War II with one purpose - to be able to effectively fight in the snowy mountain conditions of the European Alps. An all-volunteer unit, it attracted an eclectic group of outdoorsmen - everyone from lumberjacks and muleskinners to the finest ski racers and coaches from Ivy League colleges, as well as emigrants fleeing Europe.

This oral history project is framed by primary and secondary research describing the conception and creation of the division; its exploits during the war; and the post war achievements of some of the more noteworthy members. They focus on three areas: 1) details the individual's life prior to the war, that is, home, school, work, family and social life; 2) the individual's reasons for volunteering for the 10th (all were volunteers), the attraction to the 10th, and the training and combat experiences; and 3) the individual's post war life – home, school, work, family, and community—that is, a picture of life after the war.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of the 10th came after the war, by turning the fledgling ski industry into a booming industry. Members of the 10th are credited with establishing or managing most of the major ski resorts in America. Others became ski and equipment manufacturers, while still others made ski films and published ski magazines.

10th Mountain Division Oral History Project Abstracts

OH 3788

Narrator	Asa, Warren (b.1926)
Interviewer	Mark Wenger
Date	March 10, 2007
Language	English
Project	10 th Mountain Division
Audio Format(s)	Cassette and digital audio
Length:	
Transcript	Final Transcript (33 pp.)
Collateral	Field Notes, Tape Log; Photographs

Abstract

Born in Pana, Illinois in agricultural area. He was severely wounded in combat as an

infantryman and still wears a leg brace, but hardly be considered a bitter man. Taught agriculture at Cal Poly, Pomona and was an American Youth Hostels leader.

An oral history with Warren Asa, born and raised in Illinois, moving to California after World War II, and currently a resident of Glendora, California. This interview was conducted as part of a graduate (M.A. History) project on members of the US Army 10th Mountain Division, who served during WWII, and is archived at the center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview was to gather information regarding Mr. Asa's early life, experiences during his WWII service with the 10th Mountain Division, and his life after returning from the war. Specifically, this interview gives an account of Mr. Asa's childhood in a rural agricultural community in Illinois where his parents were in the greenhouse business; his love of outdoor activities, including Boy Scouts; the affect of the war and the Depression on home life; Mr. Asa's WWII service; post war education under Public Law 16; and a summary of his civilian career, which encompassed teaching in the agriculture department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; involvement with American Youth Hostels, and the publishing of books and numerous articles on outdoor and handcraft activities. The bulk of the interview details Mr. Asa's WWII experience as a member of the 10th Mountain Division where his ability to speak some German was useful. He gives high praise for the quality of the men and officers in the 10th; speaks of his impressions of the destruction of Naples upon arriving in Italy, and paints a picture of how the troops dealt with the local people, the military rations, and the emotions of battlefield deaths at times in large numbers; discussion of combat experiences in the Italian mountain towns of Vidiciatico and Sassomolare and Castel d' Arano; recalls the difficult Po Valley battle, where he was wounded and continues to wear a foot brace due to this injury. He talks of the excellent medical care received in Europe, in contrast to the lack of quality received in the US; discussion of the appreciation of the Italian people during post war 10th Mountain Division reunion trips. The interview concludes with his thoughts on 9/11 and what he would like the younger generations to remember about World War II.

OH 3789

Narrator	Meyerhof, Robert (b. 1919)
Interviewer	Mark Wenger
Date	October 28, 2006
Language	English
Project	10 th Mountain Division
Format(s)	Audio; Final Transcript (26 pp.)
Other	Photograph; Field Notes; Tape Log

Abstract

Born in Munich, Germany, as a youth he met Hitler. He immigrated to America and served in the 10th as a medic. After the war he became an architect, and is still an avid skier.

An oral history with Robert Meyerhof, born in Munich, Germany, immigrated to the US, and currently a resident of Laguna Beach, California. This interview was conducted as part of a graduate (M.A. History) project on members of the US Army 10th Mountain Division, who served during World War II, and is archived at the center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview was to gather information regarding Mr. Meyerhof's early life, experiences during his WWII service with the 10th Mountain Division, and his life after returning from the war. Specifically, this interview gives an account of Mr. Meyerhof's Jewish roots, his childhood growing up in Germany, where, as a child, he met Adolf Hitler; discussion of his immigration to the US prior to the war, and, although considered an *enemy alien*, his joining the 10th Mountain Division; details his service with the 10th during the war, his postwar education using the GI Bill to obtain a degree in architecture from UC Berkeley, a summary of his civilian career as an architect where he worked with a number of well-known projects, and discussion of his family and retirement activities, which include skiing and involvement in the Veterans for Peace organization. The bulk of the interview details Mr. Meyerhof's WWII experience as a member of the 10th Mountain division where he served as a medic, talks of his desire to defend the US after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and discusses his reasons for wanting to be a medic including reflections on the emotional and physical difficulty of being a medic in a war zone; recollections of crossing the Atlantic and arriving in Italy, discusses the battles of Riva Ridge and Mt. Belvedere, and talks of the time-saving tramway built to bring ammunition up and the wounded down from Riva Ridge; documents the battlefield heroics which led to Mr. Meyerhof receiving a Bronze Star, discussion of the difficulty crossing the Po River, the tough going around Lake Garda, and talks of the relief and celebration upon hearing the war was over in Europe; discussion of his postwar duty assignment at Fort Leavenworth, and his eventual discharge and return to California. He shares his feelings about 9/11 and about going back to Italy on reunion trips, and how very welcoming the Italian people are to the veterans. The interview concludes with his thoughts on what he would want the younger generation to understand about WWII.

OH 3790

Narrator	Greider, Bob (b.1918)
Interviewer	Mark Wenger
Date	March 17, 2007
Language	English
Project	10 th Mountain Division
Format(s)	Audio; Final Transcript (29 pp.)
Other	Photographs; Field Notes; Tape Log

Abstract

Greider attended the Colorado School of Mines, and was an intercollegiate skier. He served as an engineer with the 10th; clearing mines, building bridges, and more. He worked as a geologist for Chevron for over thirty years, exploring the world for petroleum and minerals.

An oral history with Bob Greider, born in Kansas, and currently a resident of Encinitas, California. This interview was conducted as part of a graduate (M.A. History) project on members of the US Army 10th Mountain Division, who served during World War II, and is archived at the center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview was to gather information regarding Mr. Greider's early life, experiences during his WWII service with the 10th Mountain Division, and his life after returning from the war. Specifically, this interview gives an account of Mr. Greider's childhood in an agricultural area of Kansas, spending summers in the Colorado mountains, his experiences at Wichita University and the University of Colorado School of Mines where he was involved in inter-collegiate ski team competition, and discussion of the political atmosphere on the college campuses; details Mr. Greider's WWII service and post war civilian career as a geologist with Chevron, traveling the world in search of petroleum and minerals. The bulk of the interview details Mr. Greider's WWII experience as a member of the 10th Mountain Division serving in an engineering battalion where he disarmed land mines, booby traps, and built and repaired roads and bridges; discusses joining the 10th, along with many other collegiate ski racers, at their new training camp in Colorado, and his combat engineering training; reflections on combat experiences and the difficulty of performing his duties diffusing explosives while under enemy fire or extreme weather conditions, and at times helping local farmers with mines planted in their fields; describes the initial assault on Mt. Belvedere and the Po River campaign, where Mr. Greider was involved in the initial reconnaissance and in the difficult task of obtaining the boats critical to the crossing of the Po river. He describes the danger and difficulty moving along Lake Garda, and discusses the different styles of US Generals Mark Clark and George Hays. While still serving in Italy after the war, he tells of contracting polio, and his eventual recovery. The interview ends with his feelings about 9/11 and what he feels the current generation should understand about WWII.

OH 3791

Narrator	Kovacs, Edmond (b.1924)
Interviewer	Mark Wenger
Date	April 29, 2007
Language	English
Project	10 th Mountain Division
Format(s)	Audio; Final Transcript (24 pp.)
Other	Photograph; Field Notes; Tape Log

Abstract

Born in Vienna, Austria. He describes the takeover by the Nazis and atrocities. He and his parents were able to immigrate to the America. He served in an anti-tank unit within the 10th. He settled in Los Angeles after the war and took over the family jewelry business.

An oral history with Edmond Kovacs, born in Vienna, Austria, to a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, immigrated to the US for political reasons prior to World War II, currently a resident of Los Angeles, California. This interview was conducted as part of a graduate (M.A. History) project on members of the US Army 10th Mountain Division, who served during World War II, and is archived at the center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview was to gather information regarding Mr. Kovac's early life, experiences during his WWII service with the 10th Mountain Division, and his life after returning from the war. Specifically, this interview gives an account of Mr. Kovacs childhood, growing up in Vienna, Austria, where he details his parents activity in the socialist movements, his experience of the atrocities of the Nazis, the turmoil in the pre-war years, and the difficulty he and his parents had in immigrating to the US prior to Germany invading Poland; discussion of Mr. Kovacs military experience in WWII, post war duty assignments in Italy and Austria, and after discharge, his use of the GI Bill to obtain his degree in chemistry from the University of Southern California, eventually taking over his father's jewelry business. The bulk of the interview details Mr. Kovacs 10th Mountain Division experience during WWII and while serving in Europe after the war. He talks of arriving in Naples to a desperate Italian people, describes taking Riva Ridge, and of learning months later that one of his cousins was injured by a shell he personally placed into the German line during the battle; recollections of crossing the Po River, including his use of the German language to communicate with the enemy troops. Details are given of Mr. Kovacs post war assignments, which included interrogation of prisoners of war, and identifying potential war criminals. Later, he describes his duties with the occupation forces in Austria under US General Mark Clark; details of Mr. Kovacs being able to find many of his relatives who were , unfortunately, in Soviet occupied areas, and his attempts to aid their suffering. Mr. Kovacs discusses his return to Italy on a 10th Mountain reunion trip. The interview concludes with his feelings about what he would want the younger generation to understand and remember about WWII.

OH 3792

Narrator	Vanderwall, Harold (b.1925)
Interviewer	Mark Wenger
Date	March 10, 2007
Language	English
Project	10 th Mountain Division
Format(s)	Audio; Final Transcript (26 pp.)
Other	Photographs; Field Notes; Tape Log

Abstract

Born in Muskegon, Michigan. He served as an infantryman with the 10th and was wounded. He also served with the Air Force in Korea. He obtained an engineering degree and worked for various agencies including NASA.

An oral history with Harold Vanderwall, raised in Michigan and currently a resident of Fullerton, California. This interview was conducted as part of a graduate (M.A. History) project on members of the US Army 10th Mountain Division, who served during World War II, and is archived at the center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview was to gather information regarding Mr. Vanderwall's early life, experiences during his WWII service with the 10th Mountain Division, and his life after returning from the war. Specifically, this interview gives an account of Mr. Vanderwall's childhood in Michigan, including his education, lifestyle changes after Pearl Harbor, his WWII service in the 10th Mountain Division, post war experiences, conditions in the US after the war, his brief return to US military service (Air Force) during the Korean War, and a summary of his civilian career, which included work with NASA on the Apollo program. The bulk of the interview details Mr. Vanderwall's WWII experience as a member of the 10th Mountain Division, 87th Regiment; description of training, arriving in Italy, recollections of the tense battle campaigns of Mt. Belvedere and the Po Valley, combat deaths of fellow soldiers, and the circumstances of his battlefield injury and treatment at hospitals in Italy and the US; discussion of the appreciation of the Italian people during the war and post war on 10th Mountain reunion trips. The interview concludes with Mr. Vanderwall's response to what he would want today's generation to understand and remember about WWII.

OH 3793

Narrator	Harvey, Howard (b.1922)
Interviewer	Mark Wenger
Date	April 21, 2007
Language	English
Project	10 th Mountain Division
Format(s)	Audio; Final Transcript (36 pp.)
Other	Photographs; Field Notes; Tape Log

Abstract

Born in Canada, settled in San Diego, California. He served as a radio operator with a battalion headquarters unit within the 10th. He worked in the retail and furniture industry in the San Diego area following the war.

An oral history with Howard Harvey, born in Ontario, Canada, immigrated to the US at age one, and currently is a resident of San Diego, California This interview was conducted as part of a graduate (M.A. History) project on members of the US Army 10th Mountain Division, who served during World War II, and is archived at the center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview was to gather information regarding Mr. Harvey's early life, experiences during his World War II service with the 10th Mountain Division, and his life after returning from the war. Specifically, this interview gives an account of Mr. Harvey's childhood in San Diego, California, his early recollections of the city, its people and the US Navy presence, the early fishing industry, precautions taken to safeguard the city after the attack on Pearl Harbor, his education, World War II service in the 10th Mountain Division, post war experiences, atmosphere and changes in San Diego after the war, and his civilian career in the furniture business. The bulk of the interview details Mr. Harvey's WWII experience as a member of the 10th Mountain Division, serving as a radio communications operator; description of hearing about the 10th, training, landing and serving in the Aleutian Islands, and later arriving in Naples to serve in Italy; details his combat experiences and deaths of fellow soldiers during the battles of Riva Ridge, Belvedere, Della Torraccia, Castel d'Aiano, and the Po Valley Campaign, and discussion of the service and battlefield death of US Colonel William Darby; details Mr. Harvey's post war service in Caporetto, Italy, and discusses the quality of people in the 10th Mountain Division, retired and current. The interview concludes with Mr. Harvey's response to what he would want young people to understand about World War II.

OH 3794

Narrator	Wenger, Julius George (b.1926)
Interviewer	Mark Wenger
Date	October 26, 2006
Language	English
Project	10 th Mountain Division
Format(s)	Audio; Final Transcript (30 pp.)
Other	Photographs; Field Notes; Tape Log

Abstract

Born in Menlo Park, California, spent several years of his youth in Switzerland. He served in an artillery unit with the 10th. After the war he served briefly with the National Forest Service, and then worked for the Los Angeles Flood Control District for over twenty-five years during the boom in Southern California's infrastructure.

An oral history with George Wenger, born in Menlo Park, California, returning to Switzerland with his Swiss born parents, and then back to the US to settle in Fairfield, Connecticut, and eventually to Southern California. This interview was conducted as part of a graduate (M.A. History) project on members of the US Army 10th Mountain Division, who served during World War II, and is archived at the center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview was to gather information regarding Mr. Wenger's early life, experiences during his World War II service with the 10th Mountain Division, and his life after returning from the war. Specifically, this interview gives an account of Mr. Wenger's childhood growing up in Switzerland, including herding goats and making cheese, the political atmosphere in Switzerland prior to WWII, his return to the US and discussion of the cabin classes aboard the ship on his return; discussion of Mr. Wenger's activities as a youth in the US, including Boy Scouts, the mood in the US in the early years of the war, his WWII service in the 10th Mountain Division, his post war education, importance of the GI bill, and civilian career with the Forest Service, and the Los Angeles Flood Control District; discussion of changes in Southern California infrastructure. The bulk of the interview details Mr. Wenger's WWII experiences as a member of the 10th Mountain Division artillery, training for the 10th, and discussion of the circumstances in which the 10th arrived in Italy to take Mt. Belvedere from the Germans; recollections of the difficult battles for Riva Ridge and Mt. Belvedere and describes the Po Valley campaign, the heavy losses in Lake Garda due to Germans attacking the tunnels along the lake, and crossing the lake in amphibious boats; details of Mr. Wenger's post war service with the 10th in Udine, Yugoslavia, and the impact and feelings about the atomic bomb. The interview concludes with Mr. Wenger's feelings about the Cold War, and thoughts on other wars - Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq.