

Charles Fosseneuve Interview

I enlisted in 1941 and I was overseas in '42. I took my basic training in Camrose, Alberta. That's where. I only stayed two days when I enlisted in Saskatoon. I was there for four weeks training and after basic training I went to Camp Shiloh for a week for field training. After a week, I was drafted overseas.

Just like that. Well, I was a healthy man. We waited about a week in Halifax, before we could land ship. That was after that we went across. Around June. I am not sure. In '42, April or June. Early in the spring anyways. We went across and it took us a week on the ship to travel to England. So we must have went to Greenland and Iceland, north like that. Then to Scotland through the Irish sea and London, Liverpool. I went to a field regiment right away. That's where I joined the 13th Field Regiment and I was with them till the war ended.

I was mostly in southern England. I was on the coast. Like Aldershot, mostly Burmouth. The east coast of England. They were mostly Canadian Army. And all the forces were stationed, from there through to the north like Scotland. There were a few people there 'cause they thought the enemy would land on the south of England, that they would have the invasion there. We took a little bit of training down to Scotland, Inverness, Scotland. We took some combine operations, naval operations in there, before the invasion. I took a lot of training there. We jumped in the water with our clothes on and the water was ice cold. You had to go to shore.

I had two brothers in the army. John didn't come out right away. The oldest man. I guess he was too old and Gordon he was in headquarters. But he was in the same battery I was. The only thing was he was in the headquarters, because they don't put relations together in action in one place. Like some of them get locked up. I remember the story of the Sullivan brothers. Seven people, seven boys enlisted in the Navy. When the ship was sunk, all seven drowned in it. That's the reason why they didn't put two of them together, any relations.

D-DAY LANDING

I got drafted in on the Third Division, which was was the main body of assault troops they called them, for the invasion of France. That's the Third Division of the Canadian Army. That's

42,000 people in that division. We also had the 7th brigade, 8 brigade and 9 brigade. Eight Brigade that was Winnipeg, The Regina Rifles cause I seen them landing on shore and it was my birthday. The 6th of June. We knew where we were going to land in France. A week before that we got paid in francs. Every two weeks we used to get army pay. Every two weeks. The first of May we had these French francs. They had us in this compound, they called it. Great big fence. Wires about 12 feet high and the men, they can't get out. We were kept in there for one solid week, we couldn't go out. You couldn't even talk to your friends on the street or anything, just keep away from everybody. So there'd be no leaked information. Security reasons. We got in the boats, I think it was about the 1st of June or the 2nd. We stayed on this landing craft for four or five days and it was all clumsy. It was all metal, flat decks. Open. We had the tanks inside. We had four tanks. No, four SP's, two tanks, couple of sixty 100 weight vehicles and one jeep. And I think there was two motorcycles. That was the landing craft and there was 60 people in one of these landing crafts.

I was with the armoured Corps. I was a gun layer. You do the same thing as a rifleman. You would point at him and fire and somebody else fired the trigger for you. As soon as there is elevation, error up and down, traversal gun, the guy, the sergeant behind you, tells you, gives you the order what the degree is, so the gun is put so many degrees in so many minutes and at so much elevation. You do it all by yourself, that gun layer, and as soon as you're finished you say you are ready and the guy sergeant says "fire!" and the other guy pulls the trigger for you. You don't open up your instruments there unless you're commanded. All the time, that's what we'll do. As soon as your gun is ready you say 'ready' you aim and fire. Very seldom we'd point charlie like that. We done it a few times but in open field like that. It was mostly hand targets like that.

That's the worst ride I ever had in my damn life. You see this lining crossing the bottom. It's just this flat deck gate going like this and it was miserable weather. Everybody was sick headed. I threw up myself in the middle of the night. I told my partner, I said, "we got to have a good drink of rum." We always had lots of rum so I had a great big slug of it and that felt good. That's one thing we had, great big mugs and every night on the front line we use to have a good cold rum every night. Keep us warm I guess.

When we went in, hey, we fired 200 rounds per gun right on top of our infantry like when they're landing. We fired right over top of their heads like that, so the guys, the Germans, go down in their trenches. We landed in about six feet of water, ourselves with the tanks and everything. The tanks got great big exhaust pipes way up in the air so that the water didn't get to the motor. Well, even the jeeps and everything. It's all water proof vehicles.

We landed at Courseulles. I never got scared actually. Not really. The only thing, this plane came around there and guys were bombing at us, you know, when they landed and but after that, you see, we took the 7th army, the German army and we got in some surprises. They didn't expect us. After we slaughtered them we just kept on going. There were just pockets of resistance here and there, and they took all the coast line, Calais, all the coast ports where our ships could come give us material. That's where we took all these ports, so the ships could land and bring our fresh food, bread and everything like that. Same with Holland. We took all the Leopold Canal. We took all that so the ships could come in and bring our supplies instead of back over the land, because it would be a lot faster if the ships brought our groceries.

HOLLAND AND BELGIUM

We were in Holland already in 1944. We went quite fast after we pushed in, after we put the Seventh Army in. We wintered in Holland. It was about 3 miles from the German border. We used to go in Germany pretty near every night. We got wet all the time, it was always snowing and our slit trenches were all wet, and our blankets were all dirty. We were lucky we had this mobile thing. We could go for showers. You go, take your blankets with you, and your clothing and you go have a shower there and you come back, you put new clothing on

and take clean blankets to cover with. We had it about half a mile behind our lines, I guess. Oh, used to have at least a hundred people that were taking showers in there, you know. If it wasn't for that, I don't know if I would have survived. Cause that's one thing I found out. When you're dirty and wet like that, boy, you don't feel very healthy. About the same thing when you go out in the bush you get cold, you come to the house where it's warm, you feel a lot better right away. Every time the army did heavy fighting, it had to be dirty weather. I don't know why. Just miserable, rain or snow, like that. That's the time the command would push. Every time.

Sometimes it was so damn miserable, you didn't care if you died or not anyway, because it was so cold and you wanted to get it over with. The only time I felt pretty weak in there was the time we took this Falaise Gap. The Americans were coming. After they got around they come around this way and we got into Falaise Gap and they were closing in. And just before we closed in, our goddamn bombers came in, the Liberators, raining bombs. They were supposed to soften the ground in front of us, 'sweep bombing' they called it. They struck the bombs all over the place, a long ways. And the goddamn thing, they started dropping about half a mile behind us. I could see the doggone bombs coming down. Good thing I had a trench about four feet deep and I was far down, I just closed my eyes. I knew damn well if something hit me I would never survive anyways. But that was the only time I got scared.

The funniest part of it was, after the war, my son-in-law McCafferty, his dad was in that air force. We were having Christmas dinner near Derlynd. Darryl says, "Let's go down to Moose Jaw and go and visit my parents." I said, "Okay." As soon as we'd finished our Christmas dinner we pulled out. Regina was getting dark, everything was closed, so Darryl phoned home from Moose Jaw. So we were hungry coming in in about an hour's time. So we pulled in, the old lady had supper for us and everything. Lots to drink. And the old fella started to talk. You know, he knew I was in the army. "Yeah," he said, "I was in the air force. Say you remember that time us fools there we dropped these doggone bombs in the Canadian front?" I said, "you're the son of a bitch that done it. You and I will have a damn good fight in here before it's over." I laughed after that. Of course I was doing a joke anyways. But how in the hell people can meet, eh, sometimes? He was in the air and I was on the ground. That's the time Gordon got blown out from the slit trench, eh? He wasn't standing up, he was laying down in the flat like this

(gestures), in the slit trench, and the bomb hit close to the road like that (gestures). The concussion just took him out and throw him out. Yeah, that's why his ears are bad. He was in the hospital for a long time. In Belgium. The last time I seen him was in Belgium. He was in the hospital. Ghent. We had a good visit there in Ghent.

After all that fighting, for about two months without a stop, we had five days rest in Ghent. The whole third division was invited to the city. They told us where to stop, and they told us the number of house to go in. As soon as you stopped, open the door to get out, a whole bunch of people shouted "come home with me!, come home with me!" And we were all dirty from the front and everything you know. My hosts, she could talk a little bit of English but he can't, just straight French, so we had a book in there to translate. He stood there for a long time, but the in the meantime this woman came and ask the boss if he wanted the water warmed up and towels. Right in the middle to the goddamn floor he said, "take those clothes off and wash!" She wanted to wash my hair and everything like that you know and while I was talking they were so glad that I was there. Oh they treat us nice. I remeber they had a big army hut in where there was always lots to eat. My hosts wouldn't let me go and eat and they didn't have nothing to eat, except black bread and they had a coffee, I think it was a roasted barley. So I told that guy I said, "why don't you come with me, then come to the bars and get some food?" By golly we went to the hut, I said, "may as well take some home. Just help yourselves and bring the truck and help yourself." So we got a couple of great big bags in there and everything mostly cans, cheese and biscuits, white bread from Holland. So we load this bag and I could hardly carry it. My, when we went home boy that woman didn't know what the hell to say. She said that's the first white bread she's seen for five years. She was so glad and then after that five days we started going and they were both crying when I left and they said I will never see you again.

COMING HOME

There must have been almost a million Canadians going then. The ship I was in, I was in France, I think there was 20 thousand (or two thousand?) people on that ship when we came across. Took us half an hour to walk around the outside deck. Swimming pool right in front you could swim anytime. It was cold ice water hey. They were big ships, Queen Mary's bigger

than that. Some were lucky, like Gordon. He landed in New York on the Queen Mary.

I came home in the fall. Just before freeze up, anyways. I stayed all winter in the Army in Regina. They came up in the spring. I was discharged in '46, March. And then came out trapping for a month, spring trapping. I don't remember, how I felt. I came to Cumberland House, my mother was still living that time. Otherwise, if my mother had died I would never come to Cumberland House 'cause I had nothing to come home for. She was still living when I came back in '46, and she died in '47 of cancer and in the meantime I got married. After, I worked for four years for an exploration company. But my wife didn't like me to travel all summer without coming home. That's why I quit that. I liked that job very much. I was studying geology then for four years. So I had to quit that to work in my own place (RCMP) for 26 years. So I retired from there and now I am not doing anything. That's how I made my living. I get pension out of that and that's it.

LOOKING BACK

It didn't take us long to go from France to Germany, because Americans went so fast. The General Patton was in Paris before we even hit Calais. They went so fast, they used planes and everything for transportation. They dropped loads of stuff that they wanted. Old General Patton, he was the biggest General. I liked that guy. He had pearl handled guns just like a cowboy. He was tough. He was like soldier right in the front line. He was right there with the boys. He was a real general. He didn't care for nothing. He was on the front line. He told General Eisenhower and Montgomery "I'll be in Paris before you guys." He said, "I'll be the first guy," and he was.

One thing about it, that's where I got my education. You're well educated in the army, for living. Everything, I think. And another thing, I don't care what anybody says, you get disciplined. That's the main thing is discipline.

In my time, I hope there'll be no more wars. I hate wars. To tell you the truth I hate seeing people get killed. Actually, maybe God put it that way so there wouldn't be too many people in the world, I guess. that's the only thing I don't like about the

war - I hate people to suffer. It's very bad when they die. I think, to tell you the truth, I think women, as leaders, should be better peace-makers than men. Because a woman is more generous to give way than a man.

THE ELUSIVE CUMBERLAND BRIDGE

The Rhine River. I forgot to tell you about that because it's the funniest part of our history in civilized life. Because people say it's money, money, money, money, but in the army you don't talk about the money, you do the thing that you need to immediately. You not gonna wait forever. You don't wait for politics, you just go by the orders of what you're going to do. Like Rhine River, for instance, comparing to Saskatchewan here. They throw that bridge up over night and we'd cross our tanks and vehicles. In Cumberland here they can't. They say it cost too much money for that bridge. I said why don't they call an army. Demonstrate their skills on the bridges.