

# **A Veterans Oral History Eugene Holm**

**Heritage Education Commission**  
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**Moorhead, MN**

In 2000, Bev Paulson, Heritage Education Commission member, developed a plan to record Veterans' oral histories, starting with WW II Veterans. Bev made a significant personal donation to start our Veterans' oral history project which was supplemented by other concerned individuals, we have recorded 65 oral histories of WWII veterans plus a few Korean War and Vietnam War Veteran. The project is ongoing.

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Interviewee: Eugene Holm (EH)

Interviewer: Linda Jenson (LJ)

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## **Transcription**

**EH: My name is Eugene Holm and I was born in Watertown, South Dakota. My parents were Edwin and Clara Holm. And we lived at Bruce, South Dakota. I spent the first 11 years of my life there. Then in 1933, my father was a rural mail carrier and he was transferred to Tulare, South Dakota. And then I spent – I went to school, graduated from Tulare High School. And I - then I attended Augustana College in Sioux Falls for two years and then went into the military. And when I came back, I spent one semester at the University of South Dakota.**

LJ: Okay.

**EH: Then, I came home and my father was ill, so I started carrying mail and I spent 46 years carrying mail.**

LJ: That's terrific. Were you drafted?

**EH: I was drafted. Yes.**

LJ: And what branch of the service were you drafted into?

**EH: I was drafted into the Air Corps. I was inducted at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, and we were sent to Lincoln Air Base. And then I spent – took my basic training there. And then, we were given – of course the Army gives you a test when you enter, so we**

had a choice. After basic was over, we had a choice of going to OCS or to the ASTP program. So I chose that and I went to the University of Wyoming. And it was an accelerated program. You were supposed to get a degree in engineering plus a commission. So we went there in October from Lincoln, Nebraska. And after six months, the program folded. Yeah, they didn't need any more engineers, they needed foot soldiers. So we all ended up – practically everybody ended up in the infantry. So then, I was sent to, to – Camp Robinson at Little Rock, Arkansas, and I joined the 66<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division there, 263<sup>rd</sup> Infantry. And then, we again took basic training and in the September of 1944, I was shipped overseas as a replacement. So then, there was five of us that went over together from the 66<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. And we went to Boston and shipped to Liverpool, London, and then across England down to Southampton and from there we went to – [dis]embarked at Omaha Beach. Now Omaha Beach was secured by this time so there was no – there was no fighting there. And then we were in Northern France for a while. Did a little training. And then we moved to – farther east to Lunéville. I joined the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Lunéville – Lunéville, France. And went on the front lines in October and I was a member of F Company of the 71<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment. And we fought – we fought then. We were connected to the 7<sup>th</sup> Army. We were in the Vosges Mountains in Alsace and so, I fought – I was with them. And I was in the motor platoon, 16-mm mortar assembly. And then we were in the big push in early November. And on January 3<sup>rd</sup> I was wounded; so then I was – left the front lines; went to – was in the hospital at Epinal, France. And then – by then we went by hospital train to Paris and then we flew to England, to Bournemouth, England to a hospital there.

LJ: What was the extent of your injuries?

EH: Well, I just had – just some fragments of a shell. Yeah, and had some splinters and it was no permanent – it wasn't too bad but we went clear back to England. And then we were there until April. Then I went back to France. But I joined the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Hospital at Aix-en-Provence, France, in the southern part. And so then I worked there in – in the receiving office for quite awhile. And then we were scheduled to go to Japan. So we had all our equipment, everything on the docks at Marseilles ready to go to the – to go to the Pacific. But, of course, the war in Europe ended in August and then they dropped the bomb on – in Japan. And so then we had all been in staging areas. Well then, they – Truman wanted to get the high-point men home so we had to move out of the staging area and they sent us back to the United States. So I was overseas for one year. So I got a break. I came home with this hospital that had been there for quite a while.

LJ: Oh, how nice.

EH: So that's – that's about general what I – my – you know where I belonged and . . . Yeah.

LJ: Any special stories of the people – some of the people that you fought with?

EH: Well, we went overseas. There were five replacements. And, Freddie Wheaton (sp?) from New Jersey. Freddie was killed overseas. Bill Quinn and he went to the 45<sup>th</sup> Division. We split up. One boy stayed with the 71<sup>st</sup> but a different company.

**And Bill Quinn – I met him. He was guarding a Bailey bridge one night as we went over, moving up. And so we got a chance to greet each other. And then there was Robert L. Switzenberg from Bismarck, North Dakota, and he was captured very early. He was with the – I think the 79<sup>th</sup> Division and he was captured very early. And then, Norman Kilbourne [sp?] from West Union, Iowa, and he and I met on the front lines overseas. We were in the midst of battle and he had lost most of his company. And he was staying – there was an old French military school and he was down in the basement. For some reason I walked around because we had been shelled, and so I walked down there; and here he was sitting with his head in his hands. He had lost most of the – most of the men in his group. So and then . . .**

**LJ:** He must have been very excited to see you.

**EH:** Oh yes, yeah, yeah. We had – and of course since the war I've seen all of them. But Bill Quinn had problems from the war and ended up committing suicide. And now, Norman Kilbourne's health is bad but Switzenberg lives at Bismarck and I talk to him every once in a while. He came to my hometown, he and his wife to see – to see my wife and I. We'd had a car accident in 1987, so he and his wife, Mary, came and visited us.

**LJ:** Oh.

**EH:** Yeah, so that's pretty much, you know . . .

**LJ:** Going back to when you came back from war after being over in France for a year, what was it like coming home? Was there – was there a party with your family? Were they...?

**EH:** Well, when I came back from – we came back to Boston and then, we went by train through Pittsburgh and to Minneapolis. When I got to Minneapolis I got on the train and there was my – one of my closest buddies from my hometown who was just coming home from overseas . . .

**LJ:** Oh.

**EH:** And he and I had gone to Fort Snelling in this group of 200 people, Spink County people from South Dakota and there he was sitting.

**LJ:** A year later?

**EH:** Yep, yep. Well this was – this was – this was three years later. Yep. Three years later I hadn't seen him since then, so. But the experience at Wyoming was very good. I mean, it was nice, you know, to go college and – coming home? Yeah, it was pretty low key, really, because see after I came back to the States, I came home on a furlough; and then, I had to go back to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, because I didn't have enough points to get out. But then by January 1st of '46, then I did have enough, then I was discharged on January 1<sup>st</sup> of 1946. So I worked over there at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. But, no there was really no – no – some of the high-point men had – were home – they had been home for a while. So, of course it was great to see my family and to – I have one sister – to see her. And, but it was kind of low key. I did have a college friend who, he and I were roommates at Augustana and he

was teaching at Chaska, Minnesota, so I stopped to see him on the way home and – and back to Tulare.

LJ: Yeah.

**EH: Yeah.**

LJ: So you said once you got back, back home, you went back to college?

**EH: I went to the University of South Dakota for one – one semester. And then my father became ill and my sister was in college so I decided that she should finish up. She was closer to finishing, so I told her she should do that and I stayed home. Well then I got involved in a temporary appointment as a rural mail carrier and so, I decided I guess I'll just stay with that so I spent the next 46 years of my life being a rural mail carrier.**

LJ: That's terrific.

**EH: Yeah. Yeah.**

LJ: 46 years.

**EH: Well we had one pretty wild experience, I guess, on New Year's Eve; the Germans were pretty intoxicated and they attacked us. And then we didn't have any automatic weapons in the mortar squad, so everybody was quiet. And there was Germans all around us, talking German. I never heard so much German in my life.**

LJ: That must have been scary.

**EH: And I come from a German community. But so, it was, you know, quite – quite exciting. We kept quiet and finally they turned around and went back. And so, I don't think anybody was captured but we could have been.**

LJ: Still scary. Any final thoughts about serving your country in World War II?

**EH: Well it's – I've heard many of them say it's an experience that you wouldn't take a million dollars for but you'd hate to do it again. And then I've heard other guys say that, yeah I was – I mean, it was a good feeling to know you had been there and did a little bit; but of course, it was great to get out.**

LJ: Absolutely.

**EH: It was great to get out. Yeah.**

LJ: What do you think about the war that we're fighting now in Afghanistan, the War on Terror? Any thoughts?

**EH: Yeah. I think it's – I think it's an endless problem. I'm a little concerned that – I mean, I think something had to be done. I feel that way. And I hope it's successful, but – I've just finished reading a book about Hitler and if you stop to think of the millions of lives that were lost because of this one man, it's frightening. And I'm just concerned that Afghanistan will lead to Iran or the Philippines or Iraq or whatever, so I hope that's not the case. I hope they – I think there are so many of them that are involved that even if you catch – find bin Laden that there are others that will step in his place.**

LJ: Absolutely, yeah.

**EH: That's my feelings. Yep.**

LJ: Any special thoughts? Any special stories you want to end with?

**EH: Well, in September, this was after the – the destruction in New York City, the Towers, South Dakota honored World War II veterans and it was a tremendous day. And it was a very, very proud moment for us. We rode on a float and people were standing up, thanking us – young people. It was very, very emotional. And there was an old sergeant with us from our town; and he had gone from Africa to Sicily to Italy to France, ended up in Germany and he thought it was the greatest day in his life. So it was really very nice and – and, of course, South Dakota had 68,000 veterans in South Dakota. Based on our population it was the highest percentage of people and there were 1,600 killed.**

LJ: Interesting.

**EH: Yeah, 1,600; and they sent off 68,000 balloons that day, you know, to honor all those who had served. There were 40 bands in this parade and oh it was four miles long. It was a wonderful day. It was a wonderful day.**

LJ: That's terrific.

**EH: Yeah.**

LJ: How many veterans do you think were on the float that you were on?

**EH: Well, they were all from our village. Oh, I suppose we had probably 10. Some of them – some of them had moved – you know were living in Rapid City or something and they got on the float with us. Yeah. We had about 10, but then we also had – we also had the Auxiliary; a lady, a schoolteacher, she was the one who organized it. So there were many Auxiliary members. They all had made red blouses or jackets you know. And then, we all sang “God Bless America” as we went down the parade route. So it was a great day. And then the Governor of South Dakota spoke in the afternoon and they said about 25,000 people were there.**

LJ: What a wonderful day.

**EH: Yeah. So it was a wonderful day, it really was.**

LJ: Great memories.

**EH: Yeah, it really was.**

LJ: Mr. Holm, how would you like to be remembered?

**EH: Well, I would like to be remembered as having served my country. I – I mean I was a church organist for 35 years. I'd kind of like to be remembered that way.**

LJ: Awesome.

**EH: And, I guess, just as a normal, maybe stable citizen of Tulare, South Dakota. That's about all.**

LJ: Terrific. Thank you, Mr. Holm.

**EH: You're very welcome.**