

An Oral History

with

Henry Eason

(Excerpts)

Excerpt One:

Caudill: What was your consciousness of the war? You said that you tried to enlist in the Navy, were you quite conscious of the war before we got into it?

Eason: No, no. I remember that for some reason, which I've never understood, I wanted the Germans to win; I remember that.

Caudill: Propaganda was on their side a couple of years, for the first couple of years.

Eason: That's right, that's right.

Caudill: When did you change that feeling, or did you?

Eason: Well—

Caudill: You did when you got over there!

Eason: It was something that left me, but I can remember that for a while I felt that way. Then we learned the arts of propaganda, you see; and, of course, I was anxious. So many boys in my class at school were trying to get in the Navy in early 1916, and they had to have their parents' consent—I mean early 1917—I even had to have my mother's consent when I enlisted, and she was very reluctant about it. Then later on, after war was declared—no, this was after war was declared—later on that year my brother enlisted also.

Caudill: What was the general feeling of the population around where you were? Were they in support of the war, or was there dissension?

Eason: Oh yes, yes. Proof was in the fact that Vardaman couldn't be re-elected.

Caudill: He opposed—

Eason: He was one of the willful nine or seven; I can't remember, either seven or nine. "A small group of willful men," I think Wilson called them.

Caudill: Yes, "a small group of willful men." What, in addition to the combat, are your most outstanding memories of training and then Europe itself, your crossing and such things?

Eason: I was seventeen—I was eighteen in December 1918—and it was a gay adventure for me. I can look back on it now, and I just had the time of my life. It was pretty rough at times, but good gracious, you can't make it too rough for a seventeen-year-old boy.

Caudill: Did you enjoy it more in retrospect or enjoy it while you were there?

Eason: More in retrospect, that's always true.

Excerpt Two:

Caudill: What were the outstanding experiences in France that you recall?

Eason: One of the most enjoyable times I had was when I was first assigned to this outfit during the drive north of Chateau Thierry. I was turned over to the first sergeant, Denny Dagland; and he used me to carry messages from the guns up at the front and what they called "the rear echelon," where all the rest of the battery stayed, the caissons which hauled ammunition. They gave me a little mustang, just as wild as you please; and every time a shell would burst within a hundred yards, this little mustang would jump out from under me and then wait for me to get back on, which was very nice. As I recall it, the weather at that time—this was late July—the weather was delightful. I recall so well that when we came out of that to go to over toward St. Mihiel, we had our first casualty; a boy died swimming in the Marne River. Then we moved over to St. Mihiel, and all of our movement was at night; in the daytime we'd be concealed somewhere.

Caudill: Were you within range of German guns, then?

Eason: On the move?

Caudill: Yes.

Eason: Not on the move, but all the rest of the time we were.