



WALTON RELATIONS

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Walton County Genealogy Society

March 2013



Photograph donated by Janet Campbell.

Who Are They?

In 1942 or 1943, some of the businessmen of DeFuniak Springs gathered for a photograph in front of a large pile of scrap metal and tires that were collected for the war effort. The photo was taken by the railroad tracks that run behind the train depot and is one of the most popular photographs on display at the Museum because you can look out the back door in the west room and see precisely where the photograph was taken.

Of the 19 men in the complete photograph, the two men on either end of the above section have not yet been identified. The other four have been identified as (starting second from the left) Guy Davis, Aubrey McDonald, Adrian Rivard, and Mr. Apostle, whose first name is also unknown. Please contact us if you can identify either of the unknown men or remember Mr. Apostle's first name.

WCGS Meeting

The Walton County Genealogy Society will meet on Saturday, March 9, at 10:00 A.M. at the Walton County Heritage Museum. We hope to see you!

Walton County History Fair

The Walton County History Fair will be on Saturday, March 16, from 9:00 AM until 3:00 PM at the Walton County Fairgrounds. We are once again teaming up with the Fair Association and the Chautauqua Cruisers to present a day of family fun with the History Fair, antique tractors display and tractor pulls, and a judged antique and classic car show. We thank this year's sponsors of the History Fair, the Milton Memorial Birthing Center and Walton Outdoors! Click [here](#) for the flyer.

Walton County Heritage Museum

Open Tuesday - Saturday: 1:00 - 4:00 PM

1140 Circle Drive, DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435

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Military Spotlight: David J. Rogers

In 1989, WZEP Radio broadcasted oral history interviews with citizens of DeFuniak Springs who served during World War II. The following interview with David J. Rogers was aired on September 18, 1989.



WZEP: I've heard you speak before and know you're a very good public speaker. I don't know a lot about your background. I've been knowing you for at least five years now but, first of all, let's find out a little bit about you and then we'll kind of delve into the past and go back 40-50 years.

DR: Sure. I was born here in DeFuniak, as you probably know and a lot of folks do, some time back, just at the right age to miss World War One but the wrong age to catch up with World War Two.

WZEP: Where were you in 1939?

DR: In 1939, I was a student at the University of Florida in Gainesville, and it was already evident to an awful lot of people that the European war, which had started this month in 1939, was something that would probably involve all of us sooner or later, and I had to make a choice at the time whether or not to go for the advanced Reserve Officers Training Corps program and, at that time, it seemed like a good idea to go ahead and to get a commission in the Army at the same time one was going to school, so I signed up for the ROTC program for the advanced training and received a commission in June of 1941, which was the same time

that I also got my Bachelor's Degree. I took a week off and was going to go back to do some graduate work at summer school when I got my invitation, let us say, to join Uncle Sam in his services and he invited me, if that's the way you would put it politely, to come out and spend the summer with him at a place in the middle of practically nowhere in Oklahoma, Fort Sill.

WZEP: It was kind of like a vacation then, wasn't it? A vacation resort . . .

DR: Oh, yes [laughter] it was a great vacation. It's the only place I know about where you could stand in mud up to your knees and still have dust blow in your eyes. [Laughter]

WZEP: What was the month and year for this again?

DR: This was 1941 -- I got to active duty.

WZEP: This was prior to the Pearl Harbor incident?

DR: It was indeed prior to it, and I had signed up for a year and was anticipating a year's service and then a retirement. Of course, in a year from then, it looked even more imminent that we would be involved, so I stayed in the services as did most of us. I don't think we were really offered any option. At the end of three months, I went from this training program in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in the field artillery to join an active unit -- combat unit -- and, would you believe it, this was General George Patton's Second Armored Division. We were stationed up in Fort Benning, Georgia. We went to Fort Benning, and there I began training for armored artillery service with the Second Armored Division. This was a brand new experience, of course, because the artillery up to that time had been drawn by horses, and here we were, all of a sudden, transferred to the use of tanks with the turrets cut off so that they could mount the 105 millimeter cannons that we used as our main weapon in the artillery. So we trained through that summer and, of course, you all know that Pearl Harbor came in December of that year, December the 7th. Of course, there are none of us that can forget that day because that changed the imminence into actuality of our participation in the war.

WZEP: Where were you on December 7, 1941?

DR: I was actually visiting my brother in Gainesville, Florida, when the first news broke over the radio, and I immediately jumped in my car and reported back to Fort Benning and, of course, everybody else did the same thing without any idea of what would be our actual activity. I guess everybody thought we were going to jump on a boat and head over for Europe all of a sudden and, of course, that didn't happen and couldn't happen. We weren't ready by any stretch of the imagination to do such a thing as that.

WZEP: You were an officer at this time, is that right?

DR: Yes, I was a Second Lieutenant. The war was a lot of fun really for a young officer as long as he were in garrison duty in Fort Benning. We did have to go on maneuvers every summer but, in between times, we were enjoying ourselves on weekends and so forth. I remember that we had 39 officers in our battalion and, of that 39, there were about 24 who were bachelors when we went in and, by the time we went overseas, there were only 10 of us left that were still bachelors.

WZEP: Were you one of those?

DR: I was, yes. [Laughter] That really wasn't my idea. I would have been married but my wife, whom I'd met in Fort Benning -- she was an Army nurse -- **Connie [Ferrando]** was an Army nurse there -- and she and I were going together and actually became engaged before I went overseas, but she was smart enough to say, "Hey, we don't know whether we're going to make it through this thing or not. Let's not go and get tangled up in a marriage. Let's wait and see what comes off." I think that really was a smart move on both her part and mine. I had to agree, of course; she wasn't going to marry me otherwise.

WZEP: When were you actually pressed into war?

DR: The war began for us in the invasion of North Africa. I was not in the initial landings in North Africa. We came ashore at Casablanca very shortly after the invasion had already begun and off-loaded our tanks and equipment there in Casablanca.

WZEP: I don't guess Humphrey Bogart was there, was he? [Laughter]

DR: Maybe earlier but not then. [Laughter] Casablanca was a very nice place actually. I've never been able to go back, but I would like to sometime. Then it was a mess, of course, it was just invaded and the French Army had been defeated. There really wasn't any real resistance, but we did get a few airplanes strafing us and that sort of thing. The war in North Africa was a major endeavor at that time as far as the American troops were concerned. While there had been a very few troops that had gone in with the British Army over in the eastern side of Africa and Egypt, most of the forces landed either in Morocco as I did or in Iran, and we went ashore and then began another series of training. We had, all of us, a misconception of what North Africa was like. When we first found out that we were going ashore, they issued us winter uniforms and we thought they were absolutely nuts, but it turned out that they knew what they were doing because it was really, really cold in the nighttime. While somewhat warmer in the daytime, if you didn't have those winter clothes you would have been in real trouble. We were transferred from Morocco by French 4008 railroad freight train from Morocco clear to the east side of Algeria on the east side of a little place called Constantine, a very nice little city. That was about 150 miles to the west of the actual combat zone. We prepared then and went into position and action and participated in the containment of Rommel's Africa Corps that was being rapidly driven back up into Tunis, Tunisia, by the British Eighth Army, which was a wonderful fighting unit. Most of our activity was to man the passes and keep the Germans from breaking out and continue keeping them from spreading to the west. We wanted to try to crowd them further and further and further into the northeastern corner of Tunisia, which we were successful in doing except for one really major bad battle, which was our real first encounter with the first line troops of the German Army, at a place called Kasserine Pass. In a period of 36 hours, we lost better than two-thirds of our whole division in that one battle, which was terrible, but we came out of that much more experienced and went on, of course, as everybody knows, to complete the African campaign. On the very next to the last day of action, I was on a mission to support an infantry unit with our field artillery when we ran into a gunning placement that was directly astride the only road to the south of Lake Diserti. The whole advance was held up there while we tried to get those guns out, and nobody had been able to put their hands on them. Well, I found those troops where those guns were in place. I found it out the hard way. I topped a rise with my Jeep – my sergeant was driving the Jeep – and the two of us were poor observers -- that's what we were – we were too far forward. As a result, our Jeep was hit by enemy fire while one of the 88 millimeter guns had blasted the front end off the Jeep. I was knocked off into the ditch on the right and my sergeant was knocked off into the ditch on the left and, we didn't realize it, but the shell burst right on the front of the Jeep. Fortunately, it was instantaneous shell and not an armor-piercer or we would have been out of luck. Both of us, because of the blast of the shell, lost our hearing. We couldn't hear a thing. We had small shell fragments in us here, there, and the other place, but nothing that kept us from going. We picked up the radio out of the back of the Jeep. In those days a portable radio was not that portable really; they were pretty heavy. We took our radio out – he took the battery pack and I took the transmitter out – and we dropped into a little ditch over on the side of the road there and just above us was a little brick wall – it must have been about three feet high, I guess – not more than that. We set up our radio and, of course, we pushed up our fishtail antenna, straight up. We didn't think about this but, as soon as we put that antenna up, the Germans spotted our position and they started blasting us with everything they had because they knew who we were and what we were probably. We couldn't proceed to get any information. The reason we couldn't make contact with our radio, the reason we couldn't is because they were frantically calling us back, but we couldn't hear them, you see.

WZEP: You knew you were deaf at this point?

DR: We knew we were dead targets for those people.

WZEP: You knew you couldn't hear.

DR: When I started shouting at my sergeant and he started shouting back at me and all we could do was see our mouths open and close with hearing no sound. There wasn't that much pain. I guess we were just too numb or something. We were too interested in getting rid of those people, but we did. We got back to the top of a long hill, which was a wheat field. Up at the top of the hill was another lieutenant, who was also a forward observer for the artillery, and he was lying down in the wheat field. He had seen us coming up. He was laughing like crazy. He said, "I thought you two were Arabs being chased by the Germans up that hill." We didn't think he was very funny, but we told him the story. We pointed out to him where this gunning placement – there were about six of these big anti-tank guns sitting there waiting on us. I knew exactly where those rascals were then because I'd gotten that close to them to see them. I proceeded to go ahead and call fire from our artillery down on there, and that made our advance keep on going and they poured on through. As a result of that action, I was wounded. I received a Silver Star and also got the Purple Heart naturally for being wounded in action. That was the end of my combat duty but not the end of my active duty at all.

[Break for commercial: **Adams Farm**, great peanuts for boiling, 50 cents a pound.]

WZEP: You say that when you were injured and received the Purple Heart that took you out of combat duty for the remainder of the war. How did you wrap up your tenure of service?

DR: They put me on what they called limited service. That was sort of a no-man's-land of the war because they didn't have much place for us. I spent a little bit of time actually as an administrator in a prisoner of war camp over in North Africa. They wouldn't let me come home incidentally. I had to stay over there until I finished up my tour. After they found out that I wasn't exactly suited for the duty to take care of prisoners of war – I didn't have a great deal of sympathy for those fellows because they had been shooting at me just recently – they transferred me to another outfit, and I was there transferred to an interesting duty of trying to train the French people who had escaped down from France into North Africa. They came down to join General Charles DeGaulle's army. They came with

nothing but their own clothes on them. We supplied them with all of their equipment – everything from weapons right on down, clothes included. They needed training. They didn't know about the American equipment, and I was available to help train them with artillery type weapons.

WZEP: During that time, France was taking quite a beating in Europe.

DR: France had already been taken over by Germany by then.

WZEP: I guess every French man who could walk and stand was probably in the service of the country in some way.

DR: Yes, either in their underground or they tried to escape, as many of them did, and get down through Spain and through Morocco to join us down there. Interestingly enough, at that time when I was in that service, I ran into the only person I met in the war that came from DeFuniak Springs. That was a fellow named **Van Alford**. He found me. He was in the Navy, and he and I got together and enjoyed being together quite a bit. After that, I just knocked about training Frenchmen until shortly after D-Day; I was finally rotated home. D-Day in Europe, that is. After that, I had a couple of other funny little jobs. I was a sea-going soldier. For instance, I was transferred to the Transportation Corps and that job there was the softest spot that anybody ever had. All I had to do was to sign for Army equipment on board a Merchant Marine vessel after it had already been loaded and then, when we got to Europe, to sign off to the port officer, and that was all I had to do in going back and forth. That was the neatest duty that anybody ever had. I had a lot of time to sleep, I had a lot of time to read, and I got to enjoy the ocean very much then as a sea-going soldier. Finally the war was over and I got back home, Connie got back home from overseas, we got married in 1945. The war was shortly over in Japan.

WZEP: She waited for you, and you waited her.

DR: She waited for me, and I waited for her. We finally got married in the summer of 1945. That was the end of the war. I was ex-GI thereafter.

WZEP: You'll have your 50th wedding anniversary here in about five years.

DR: That's right. Just about five more years.

WZEP: 1995.

DR: That's right.

WZEP: Does that seem like yesterday or does it seem like many, many, many years ago?

DR: Well, I suppose I'm like most people. As they get older, the earlier time seems to be much more clear than they have been, but I don't think very much about it. There are too many interesting things going on in DeFuniak Springs right now that I find to do, and I don't dwell on that past very much. I get a little tired of trying to tell people about it and this sort of thing, you know. I know how they feel about this – it's ho-hum, you know, that's ancient history – so, I don't dwell on it at all. I have a few mementos left over, but I don't even know where they are right now, Scott. They are stacked away in some box, and I can't even tell you where they are at the moment.

WZEP: I hope you have that Purple Heart hanging up somewhere.

DR: That and the silver star, of course, which is also a gallantry in action type. I remember that, yes, it's in the safety deposit box.

WZEP: I appreciate you sharing with us this morning. Enjoyed your talk. This will be presented to the DeFuniak Springs Public Library so that they'll have some more in our continuing series of oral histories from the remembrances of World War II veterans such as yourself. I appreciate your sharing with us.

DR: Thank you, Scott.

David Rogers had an illustrious career after his Army service. He was the curator of economic botany at the New York Botanical Garden and a professor of biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He and his beloved Connie (Constance Ferrando Rogers) co-authored the book *Woody Ornamentals for Deep South Gardens*, which is available for purchase at the Museum gift shop. Exhibits of their belongings from their military service are on display in the military section of the Museum. We thank their daughter, Walton County Heritage Association board member **Rose Rogers**, for sharing this interview.

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