

INTERVIEW WITH HENRY THORNBERG  
NOVEMBER 20, 1974  
BY GEORGE SHERVEY  
AT THE HOME OF MR. THORNBERG

Q: Today is November 20, 1974. My name is George Shervey and I....I am about to interview Mr. Henry Thornberg of Elbow Lake. I'm going to ask him a few questions about his life's history. And also about his experience as a soldier in World War I. Mr. Thornberg kept a diary with the dates and names of the places where he was during his term in service. When were you born Henry?

January 3, 1891.

Q: And Sanford Township (sanford) in Grant County. When did your parents come to Minnesota, or Grant County?

Well, I think they come in 1888 in the Spring.

Q: And why did they leave Europe to come here to live?

Well, I suppose it was to, more opportunity here.

Q: And how did they come to Grant County, by, by the railroad?

By steamship.

Q: Yah, they came across the ocean by steamship, yah. And who did you marry?

Lillian Holtender.

Q: Lynn Holtender? From, from the Elbow Lake township?

Yah. \_\_\_\_\_

Q: Do you have any children?

No.

Q: How much schooling did you have?

Oh, about 6th grade I guess.

Q: That's about the same as mine. And where did you go to school?

In district 48.

Q: In Sanford Township?

Yah. In Sanford Township.

Q: And who was your first teacher?

Agnes Godward.

Q: And did you play any tricks on the teacher or the boys, other boys?

Well, I sup..I suppose they did but I...

Q: Can't remember huh?

No.

Q: I understand you served in World War I?

No. Yeh.

Q: And what date were you drafted?

Twenty-third of July.

Q: And in the year was 1918?

1918 yeh.

Q: And how old were you then?

~~Twenty~~-six.

Q: Twenty-six years old. And, sure it must have been a feeling of mixed emotions when you learned you had to go to war?

Well, it kinda was, on a count of it was right in havvest you know?

Q: Who notified you, you had to go?

Well the first was a banker from \_\_\_\_\_, come out we were \_\_\_\_\_ up the Fourth of July out by \_\_\_\_\_ Creek. And he told a couple three of us there we were drafted to go and, ~~Twenty~~-third of July.

Q: So then you had to leave your crops?

Yup. Dad, dad come out there and took care of that after I left. It, it been a \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: That was in South Dakota?

That's in South Dakots. 'Til they got it threshed then they shipped my stuff back here again.

Q: Did you, were you married or did you have a girl friend at that time?

No.

Q: And where did you leave from when you went to boot camp?

Isabel, South Dakota.

Q: That's where you left from?

Yeh.

Q: And, what, station was it? Your first?

We come to Camp Dodge Iowa.

Q: Camp Dodge Iowa. And what branch of service were you in?

Well, I was in the infantry division. I suppose I should've read up the things I had hwre. I was in Three hundred thirty-third regiment, Company M. eighty-fourth division, American Expedition Air Forces.

Q: How long were you in boot camp?

Well, we were there, I think it was three weeks. I had that t..and then they, we left from there to Camp Sherman Ohio and we was there a couple a days. And then we left from there to Camp Mill, New York. Long Island, New York.

Q: Is that where you left from when you went across?

That's where we left New York, from \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: That's when you went across?

That's when we went across.

Q: Yah. Can you tell us about your trip across the ocean?

Well, it went good across the ocean, it took us seven days to, going from there to South Hampton, England. Then we stayed there a couple three days and then we went from there across to France.

Q: On the way across the ocean did you have any scares of any kind?

No. Only once that they, that there was something, I think it was mostly something that they throwed out, then they shot at, 'course we never got to know anything like that you know.

Q: No. Then you, from England you went across to France?

France, yah.

Q: And did, do you happened to have the date when you landed in France?

Yah, thought I has it here someplace. No I don't think I had, but we...

Q: What month, do you remember that about?

Well, that was in September you see, we left here September 2nd. And then we were a couple a three days in England and then we left from there for France, you see.

Q: Where you in the trenches?

Yah.

Q: Were there times when bombs or bullets come dangerously close to you?

Yah. Yah they got pretty close.

Q: Did you or any of your buddies get hurt?

Well, the first morning when we went up to the front lines, then they sent a big bragge of artillery behind us you see. And the boy that was to the right of me, he had his whole cheek blowed off. And I got down behind a telephone pole that looked as big as a wall to me. We all got orders to... and they, we got in to a town right after that, a small town then there and we, we went all over that to see if there was any one left in that you see.

Q: Any enemies?

Any enemies. Yah, and then we went right on from there, kept going. As the enemies moved ahead of us we kept falling up you see.

Q: And then after while you had to dig in?

Yah. When it got to much, you see, then we got orders to dig in. We fell order, oh where the enemy had been into there.

Q: In trenches?

Yah, trenches or holes, what ever they had.

Q: Were you ever cut off from your company?

Yah. That same day as the armistist was signed. That evening then I was cut off from, I was alone all night. There was a big wagon standing there two wheeled cart and I dug myself down there with, with my mess kit cover, cause I didn't have no shovel. So I stayed under that wagon all night. Bullets they were hitting from, then the next morning I got up and walked around, but I didn't know where I should go and, mixed up in directions you know, so and then I met another boy there then, another he had been a runner too like I had you see, and he didn't know where his company was there either so we took a road that went through the woods there, and there we met our companies coming up. So we fell right in with them. But we didn't know the armistist was signed you see.

Q: How about meals, were they sometimes far between?

Yah. There were a couple a days sometimes.

Q: How was the food?

Oh, so-and-so.

Q: Did you ever have to sleep in the...

We had a what they called a slum-glueum so you know just...(laugh)

Q: Did you ever have to sleep in the trenches?

Yah.

Q: About how many nights?

Oh, that was a quite a few nights that we never was in the building. We sent, then we had our tent, you know pup tents we put up just so we could crawl in and lay there.

Q: Did you ever get very wet or cold?

Oh, yah. It even snowed a little sometimes you know.

Q: Did you ever get hurt or sick?

No, I was sick for about four days down there in southern France.

Q: What did you say about the buddy of yours, got his gun...

Yah. We were dug in then, you, we got orders to dig in you see. And we, and then there was a shell that come, and we could here it coming and we crawled down as tight as we could in there. It went through the            and knocked part of his gun off, and it went through my pack, so you see, it went right above us. It was close enough.

Q: Yah that was to close for comfort.

Yah, it's too close, yah.

Q: Were you so close that you could see the enemy?

Well not really though...

Q: See the men?

Because they....

Q: No. Did you ever get a chance to take a shot at any of they?

No.

Q: Yah. What else can you tell us about your experience across the sea? In France?

Well, we moved from up there, we stayed up there at the, where the armistist was signed in the town there for a while and then we moved back to a town named Wahtoo, Belgium. We stayed there 'til the last of December and then we started oh, for France again, we hiked most of the time.

Q: Was that 1918 also?

That would be 19..1919 to January. I had it here what are, we lasted, we last the last days of December up there at Wahtoo.

Q: How many months, or how long were you across?

I was seven months over there.

Q: In Europe?

Yah.

Q: And when did you come home?

The twenty-third of April.

Q: 19..19?

1919. Yah. We come back, I come back to, back to Camp Dodge and I was mustered out there. And I took the \_\_\_\_\_ down to Desmoines and then I left from Desmoines and come home. Come into Minneapolis and then I changed trains there and come home. That was the best trip I had.

Q: Yes I'm sure. (laugh) It must have been a joyous occasion?

When I left Minneapolis I knew I wasn't far from Elbow Lake.

Q: That's good. What was the first occupation you got into after you left, come home?

Well I stayed there and then I built a granary for, my brother-in-law, Vern C. Erickson. And then that summer then I worked for Martin Anderson.

Q: And later you farmed for yourself?

Yah. There was, in 1920 Oscar and me farmed out there on, we rented the \_\_\_\_\_ place out there. We farmed there one year. And then we sold out and then I, carpentered quite a bit from then on. I worked out to F Flints there about two years. And then in 1927 I bought out Martin Anderson. Farmed to 1951 and then I moved to Elbow Lake.

Q: Then you worked for a..after you moved to Elbow.

Yah. I worked for a couple of years to \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: Hogue, (yah) \_\_\_\_\_ Hardware?

Yah.

Q: And did you ever belong to the legion?

Yah. I did for a while, and I still belong to the V. F. W.

Q: And when did you retire?

In '51.

Q: 1951? And how are you enjoying your retirement?

Good.

Q: What do you do for a pass-time?

Well I cook and keep house and go up town an have lunch and get the paper read the news, listen to...yah.

Q: Do you help with the janitor work in the church also?

No, no. yah.

Q: Yah. It's been very interesting Henry.

Yah. I wouldn't like to go through some of that no more, again.

Q: No.

No.

Q: In other words you think that war is terrible like everybody else?

Yah. We was kinda, while coming across, coming home on the, well it was, exactly two weeks coming back on the water.

Q: Was it such bad weather?

Yah, it was that too. Yah. Yah, it was really bad there one day, night they, oh the ship leaned over so much you about the with the water come in there you know, and the next morning we could, they had to tie ropes around us so we hung on to ropes when we were come for breakfast. We couldn't walk we had to crawl and hang onto rope. So you see that boat was really, really...(rocking) yah. And the funny part is the weather had been so nice the day before. You know it was so still and calm out there you know. And about one o'clock in the night. And we was on a freighter coming back so we slept in hammocks, you know. Four or five hammocks above you. Some of the boys tried to, they took their rope off of their bag and tied around so they wouldn't fall out of bed, you know.

Q: Yah. Well, thank you very much Henry, this is very interesting.

Yah.