

# Transcribed and Condensed Excerpt Provided by the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project from Interview with Conscientious Objector Rothacker Smith, March 24, 2006

## *Excerpt Begins at 2:15*

**Rothacker Smith:** I remember lying down under a tree, on D-day when more than 4,000 men were killed on the beaches of Normandy, I was stretched out under a tree looking at the sky and saw an armada of planes which had formed up and headed toward Southern Europe. But two months after D-day the Government decided that Black troops could go into combat, and the first elements of the 92nd division were landed in Italy in August of 1944. By December our regiment was assembled together and we were attached to the 92nd division. So I went on the front line on the first of December, 1944. We were greeted by our General, who was from Virginia, and he told us that "I didn't ask for you, and I didn't want you, you have too many high ranking officers," and some other things of like manner. So our ammunition was rationed. Each weapon received 16 rounds per day. This led to some rather strange happenings, but on the 26th of December, the day after Christmas in 1944, I was stationed in a small Italian town called Somacollona on top of a hill in the mountains, and the Germans were just across the little shallow valley on the next hill and on the 26th of December we were attacked by the enemy. They decided that they wanted to take back Somacollona, and as much more as they could, to see if they could break the Army supply line. In the fighting that day, I was hit by a 120 millimeter motor shell, and had many wounds, and then we were surrounded. One piece of shrapnel hit the crazy bone in my right elbow, so that hand became numb. I had a hole in my shoulder, I had a piece of glass under my eye, and a rather large hole in my hip.

During that time I had to treat the Sergeant who was in the same room with me when the shell exploded, and had to bandage his wounds. The little finger on his right hand was hanging down by his skin. He had a hole in his upper thigh. I put a 4x4 bandage on his thigh. I went through the hole instead of covering it, and I had to tie his bandages with my left hand and my teeth, because my right hand was numb for about three days.

During this time I had been baptized as a Christian, and I had been serving the Lord partially, but I knew that if I could feel blood running down both legs, and my arms that I was about to bleed to death, and that when I woke up I would be facing eternity. I was in a panic, and at the same time the Germans were advancing, bullets were ricocheting, and men were screaming and I had to dress the Sergeant's wounds. I was trying to pray and to confess my sins, and that was a most agonizing time. I finally was able to get an answer from heaven that my sins were forgiven, and then a great peace came over me. I knew that I was going to die because it had been rumored that the Germans took no Black prisoners. I later found out that it was true that Hitler had issued a standing order to that effect and so I didn't expect to live, but I felt that when Jesus came again that he would awaken me and that he would look me in my face with a smile on his face because I had accepted him, and so I was at peace.

