

## **Clements AMERICA 250 Transcript**

**Biographical Sketch:** Earl Clements served in the US Army, 88th ID, in World War 2 and gave this interview as part of the Veterans History Project. Clements was born in Okaloosa, IA in 1923 where his family were chicken farmers. He enlisted in the US Army in February 1941, served Italy as an infantryman until November 1945, and received 2 Bronze Stars and 2 Purple Hearts. After the war, he moved to Ft. Benning, married, and moved to the Dothan, AL, area. Mr. Clements died in 2005.

### **00:00:00 Marty Olliff**

Earl Clements spoke with Wicksburg High School teacher and serviceman Kenny Fondren in 2004. He discusses the Italian campaign of World War II, 389 Days of Hell, as he called it.

He was an infantry rifleman with the 349th Regiment, 88th Infantry Division, as U.S. troops pushed from Naples to the Austrian border. Mr. Clements won two Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts. He discusses his recruitment, his deployment to Italy, combat in the Italian mountains, how he received one Bronze Star, and his discharge.

Mr. Clements also emphasizes the importance of remembering that the US Army's penetration of fortress Europe began in Italy and that Rome had fallen to Allied troops before D-Day.

After his discharge in 1945, he re-enlisted for a second stateside tour of duty from 1947 to 1951.

In this first clip, Mr. Clements notes that he enlisted 10 months before Pearl Harbor, and he describes moving from base to base as he trained.

### **00:01:12 Earl Clements**

I volunteered February the 12th, 1941. For 13 weeks in basic training at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. After basic training, I went right to the 2nd Infantry Division, which is stationed at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. I stayed with them for about a year and went to **Camp Cliff**, Texas to train troops. From there, I went to the 103rd Division in **Camp Cliff**, Louisiana. From there, I went back to Port Samuel and joined the 88th, and we left from there going overseas.

### **00:01:56 Marty Olliff**

Clements discusses the 88th's 1944 deployment, first at Casablanca, Morocco, then to Naples, Italy, for the year-long push to the Austrian border. He recounts combat in the Italian mountains.

### **00:02:11 Earl Clements**

We left Christmas Day and landed in Casablanca, North Africa, January the 1st, 1944. We spent two months in North Africa. Then we went on to Italy, got up on the Gothic Line just north of Naples, and there on when they pushed through and on the Po Valley, on up into the Brenner Pass, which was the Austrian border, and that's when the war ended.

We was in combat 389 days. You didn't know one minute to the next whether that bullet had your name on it, and it was 389 days of hell.

We pushed off May 11, 1944. The Germans surrendered in May of '45.

They had caves in the side of the mountain with tunnels, and they kept the supplies in there. Guns pointed out, they could pick us off like rabbits. And to find them wound up, they hit them with everything, artillery, even the air corps. But there were so many caves, and that tunnel connected them.

So like I said, they had more supplies than we had. Now we run out of supplies. Lots of times we'd get so far ahead, these supplies couldn't keep up with us. But then too, when we'd get holed down, they'd have to bring it up by mule train. One at a time, **tailed ahead**. And that's the way we got supplies.

But even then, the Germans would get lucky and hit the supply line. There were the boys that went to the front line and got killed before they got there.

**00:04:03 Marty Olliff**

Mr. Clements talks about how he received one of his Bronze Stars.

**00:04:08 Earl Clements**

I went out on more patrol than anybody in the company, so I'd take other men places. I was single, didn't have **none therefore, and never happened to me.**

**00:04:21 Marty Olliff**

Clements notes his discharge in 1945.

**00:04:24 Earl Clements**

**A way of my own was very fast, which is the Austrian border, and then the Foreign Trust Division, and they was there from 45.**

It was discharged by points, and I had enough points to go home. I went home and got out.

**00:04:46 Marty Olliff**

Mr. Clements reminds us of the importance of the Italian campaign that captured Rome before D-Day, and how the Italian campaign has been swamped under our attention to the D-Day invasion.

**00:05:01 Earl Clements**

According to historians, the world European dealers started with D-Day. What I'm trying to do is to set it straight. We had taken Rome when D-Day ever occurred. And that's why I say. They don't go back to the, I think, the North African campaign with the Big Red One, the American Division. There's five military cemeteries in Italy alone.