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## **AS THE SOLDIER SAW IT**

*Interview by Martha Bodyfelt*

The following interview of Dayle Bates, a World War II veteran, was conducted by his great-niece Martha Bodyfelt on December 17, 1995. Mr. Bates served in the U.S. Army from February of 1941 to August of 1945. Mr. Bates saw combat in North Africa, Italy, and finally in Germany. One of his last war experiences was being present during the liberation of Dachau, a Jewish concentration camp.

AS THE SOLDIER SAW IT  
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Martha: Hi. Can I speak to Dayle please?

Dayle: Yes. This is he.

Martha: Uncle Dayle, this is your great-niece Martha. I'm your sister Virginia's grandchild. Anyway, I'm doing a project on the Holocaust for school, and I was wondering if I could ask you a couple of questions about it?

Dayle: Well, I did fight in the war, but I don't know very much about the Holocaust, so I don't know if I could be much help to you.

Martha: That's okay. I just want to know about what happened.

Dayle: That's all right with me.

Martha: Okay. My first question is, when did you decide to join the army?

Dayle: When did I decide to join the army?

Martha: Yeah, and why did you decide to join it?

Dayle: I was drafted.

Martha: Okay. What do you do when you're drafted?

Dayle: Well, Uncle Sam sends you a little notice to a station for the first time. The date and the time.

Martha: All right. How old were you and when did you join?

Dayle: Well, I actually went into the service in February of 1941, and they sent me to Cheyenne, Wyoming for my.....

Martha: Basic training?

Dayle: Well, no. That's where they swore me in, and gave me a uniform... Well, they didn't even give me a uniform. They took my finger-prints, and all of that, my life history. Then they put us on a train and sent us to Portiatele, Minnesota. That's where we got our uniforms, and our shots, and our hair-cuts, and the whole bit.

Martha: How old were you?

Dayle: Well let's see, I was 23.

Martha: So did you go through basic training or not?

Dayle: Oh yeah. I went through basic training. They sent me back from Fort Portiatele, Minnesota back to Cheyenne, Wyoming, where I took my basic training. I had it in Fort Warren.

Martha: Oh. So where were you stationed after basic training?

Dayle: Fort Riley, Kansas. In the horse calvary. After we got our basic training then they sent us to Fort Riley, Kansas and ended up in the horse calvary.

Martha: Okay. Then how long were you there before you were sent overseas to Europe?

Dayle: Let's see. In '41, and that was February, then to December seventh. What was that, eight or nine months there? Pearl Harbor was December seventh, and then on December ninth, they put us on a train with the horses to Arizona, to patrol the Mexican border, you know. They figured that they was going to be, that they might come across the border from Mexico. We were to patrol the Mexican border. We were there for the winter.

Martha: So you spent your Christmas there?

Dayle: Yeah. We were down in Arizona for Christmas! (Laughs.) We patrolled that border until January, I believe it was. I think we

were there for about two months. That's where I met Gladys.

Martha: Oh. She was your wife, wasn't it?

Dayle: Uh huh. Met her down there when I was in the horse calvary. She lived there on the border. We stayed there I think until February, then they took the horses away and gave us jeeps. And after they gave us the jeeps, they came along and asked for volunteers to joining the paratroopers, so I volunteered to join the paratroopers. Then after we left and got to basic training as the paratroopers, they sent us to.... I was up in Montana, and went from Montana down to Camp Crauder in Missouri. And that's where they gave us all new equipment, and let's see. I'm getting ahead of myself here. Yeah, and then they sent us to Florida, to landing on the boats, like we were invading the country. To train us how to land and everything. We were down there for a couple months, I think, three months maybe four. Then they sent us back to Newport News, Virginia. And there we were shipped out there over to Africa.

Martha: North Africa, right?

Dayle: North Africa, uh huh. Yeah, we lived there.

Martha: All right. When you began in the army, what was your rank, and did it change at all?

Dayle: Oh, well I was Private, just like everybody else. Then I became Technician, a Demolition Expert.

Martha: That means you blew up things, huh?

Dayle: Yeah, well bombs and booby-traps. Then they gave me a Tech Five. That's a Corporal's rating, but not the rank of a Corporal. It had the same pay, though, and all of that stuff.

Martha: So it was the same thing as a Corporal, but not as prestigious?

Dayle: Uh huh. A Technichian, that's why they called us T-5's. And that's the highest I ever got.

Martha: All right. Then what was your military specialty?

Dayle: Well, I was Demolition Expert, that was like booby-traps, bombs, mines, and all that stuff. So my technician's work, so when we got to a mine field, you had to get in there and dig up those mines and check them all out. If they wanted to blow up a building,

then you go in and put demolitions around the building, and blow it up, or a bridge. So we was always looking for booby-traps. My particular job was looking for booby-traps. You go into a place, or into building or something, you had to go in there and and check it out and make sure that there were no booby-traps, or a big bridge somewhere, the same way, you had to get out and check the bridge out. We had a little geiger counter that we carried around with us, and then you used your bayonet, you know. We didn't have the equipment that they have today, we had to do everything by hand.

Martha: So were you the Demolition Expert all throughout your time?

Dayle: Yes. Well, I drove truck too, you know.

Martha: Okay. When you were over in North Africa and over in Europe, were there any other men from Wyoming in your platoon?

Dayle: Oh, yeah. There was one from Sheridan, and we had a Lieutenant, not from Rock Springs but from Evanston. He was the lieutenant in our outfit, and the guy from Sheridan was there. But that was about all of them, from WYomming. The rest of them, most of my outfit, were from Minnesota.

Martha: Okay. What were your army buddies like?

Dayle: They were just ordinary guys like you meet today. We were all in there for the same reason, and all scared to death, not knowing was what going to happen. But we'd go out and have fun. We had a lot of fun. We'd go to town, and chase all the girls, and drink all the booze, and gamble. It'd be pay-day, and we'd gamble all of our money away.

Martha: So that's basically what you did in your free time.

Dayle: Yep.

Martha: When you were out in battles, what'd you guys eat?

Dayle: You'd carry your K-Rations with you. You'd probably have your C-Rations and K-Rations. I'd always call them the dog food. They came in about the size of a dog can. In it was cheese, two dry crackers, it had cigarettes, two sticks of gum, and toilet paper. Two cigarrets and toilet paper with this dry food, these crackers.

Martha: Did you get those everyday?

Dayle: Yes. Three each day, one for each meal. The chow wagon would

come up every night. We would get one for breakfast, one for dinner, and one for supper. Then we usually got the cheese because nobody liked the cheese and when they sent ours up to us we got the leftovers and we'd get all the cheese. Some of them had beans and wieners, and some of them had hash, but we always had cheese, because nobody liked that, so they'd always send that up to us.

Martha: (Laughs.) Okay. What did you miss most about home? You know, if you ever got home-sick?

Dayle: Well, to tell you the truth, I never did get home-sick. A lot of them did.

Martha: You mean to say that you never got home-sick?

Dayle: No I didn't. I don't know why. It didn't bother me at all.

Martha: So you didn't really miss anything from home?

Dayle: Well, you miss some things. You miss your family and all of that, but I was never home-sick. I had seen guys sit down and cry, big guys, sit down and cry. I had seen guys, big guys, scared to death of the dark. They'd go out on patrol and be scared to death. Of course, we was all scared, but some of them would be sitting out on patrol at night, you'd be in No Man's Land out there, and you didn't know where you going, and there'd be guys scared to death.

Martha: When you wrote letters home, if you did write letters home, how long did it take to get home, do you know?

Dayle: Well, we had those things called V-Mail, they flew those things home. It was like a telegram, you know. So I don't know how long it would take. All I know is that when we would get our mail sometimes we wouldn't get it for three or four weeks at a time and you'd have a whole pile of them. I got as high as sixty letters at one time. They were from Mom, Gladys, Thelma, and all of them.

Martha: Do you know if the letters were censored or not?

Dayle: Everything was censored. You'd write, they'd open up and read them, and everything that I would write they would open up and read.

Martha: So if you were to write to someone saying "I'm moving on to whatever," they didn't want them to know that? They'd censor them from your families?

Dayle: Yeah. We would put our letters in a P.O Box, and we didn't know where it went from there. It could have gone to Africa, it could have gone to England, it could have gone on China, or someplace else. We never knew.

Martha: Did you have to learn any foreign languages?

Dayle: No. Once we got over there we picked up a lot of words in the foreign countries. Everybody over there wanted either cigarettes or chocolate bars. Things like that.

Martha: All right. Then how did you communicate with the Germans or Italians or whoever?

Dayle: Most of them over there understood English. But you could always maneuver trained hand signals. But we never had any trouble with that. We got by.

Martha: How did the North African campaigns differ from the Italian ones?

Dayle: Well, that's a pretty good question. You see, most of North Africa at that time was French. There was some Arabs, they were the natives, but most of the cities and towns in there were French. But they had regular cities, just like us. You could probably put Rock Springs right in the middle North Africa and you would never know the difference. Except for they didn't have the modern electricity or running water like we did.

Martha: And so, then what were the Italian campaigns like?

Dayle: Well, Italy was old and was dirty, and it was run-down, and it stank. It was filthy. We went to Naples, Italy, and even in Rome. Everything was so old and it smelled. It would never be kept up. Those cities there were hundreds of years old, and they were all made out of stone, and it was weather-beaten, and it smelled mothy.

Martha: Where in North Africa did you fight?

Dayle: We fought in a place called Oran. It was a big city on the coast there. It was a port in Oran, we landed there and then we went east to Tunisia. And that's where we fought from there, all the way to Tunisia. Of course, that's desert over there, wide open desert, so that's where they used tanks. So we followed the tanks,

we didn't do much fighting in North Africa. We was following the tanks all the time.

Martha: And where did you fight in Italy?

Dayle: Well, we landed in a town thirty miles south of Naples. I can't remember the name. We went in on little boats early in the morning. Time don't mean nothing over there. When we landed there, they had these little boats on the ships, set them down in the ocean. Probably about two or three miles we landed in these little boats, pretty good sized boats. So if I remember right there was probably thirty or forty guys in each boat. They'd run us in on the beach, follow that beach, and get wet.

Martha: So what battles were you in? Did they have any specific names?

Dayle: Gosh, I don't remember if they did or not. I was in the Battle of the Bulge up in the... I can't even think of the names anymore

Martha: What date was that? Do you remember? Do you know?

Dayle: I think that was in the winter. I know it was Christmas-time. I guess it had to be '44. I'm pretty sure. Don't quote me too much on that, but I've forgotten the dates. I couldn't tell you for sure.

Martha: I could go look it up on an encyclopedia.

Dayle: Yeah, I was gonna say, "Why don't you go look it up in the encyclopedia?"

Martha: Were there any other battles you could remember?

Dayle: We did a lot of battles, but I can't remember any of them having any names on them, you know.

Martha: Oh, so they were just untitled.

Dayle: Yeah. We crossed the Rhine, had a big battle there, but when we captured Dachau prison camp down there, that was a big battle.

Martha: How did your first battle differ from the last one? Or did it differ at all?

Dayle: Well, it didn't differ at all. You're scared to death, and when the order comes, we pull into Naples there. On the ship, you know. You got a 30-pound pack on your back, your bed-roll, and



everything you own. You have a bandolier of shells across here, and then you have a webbed belt that's full of ammunition and then you have your rifle. And then on your belt you have your canteen, and then a little pack of a first-aid kit. That's on your belt, you know. You have everything that you own right with ya. So when the order comes to go over the side, you know we were on the ship, it's a rope. I don't know if you've ever seen them or not but it's kind of like a rope-ladder, but it's a long one on the side of the ship. We lowered about eight or nine of those little boats at one time with people going on the sides down this rope-ladder into your boat. You see, you're assigned a certain boat, and they'd say, "Over you go" and you'd land in this little boat. Of course, this is in the night. But you're scared to death and there's these lights going around in this port all of the time, you know watching for air-planes. But it's hard to describe.

Martha: Oh, okay. So you just had to be there, right?

Dayle: Yeah.

Martha: Okay. These following questions I'm going to ask, if you feel too uncomfortable to answer them....

Dayle: Oh, no. I forgot most of it anyway.

Martha: All right, but just tell me if, you know, you don't want to answer them.

Dayle: It don't bother me no more.

Martha: When you were fighting in the war, did you or your family back at home, did you guys realize what was happening to the Jews?

Dayle: Well, we heard of it, but we didn't know.

Martha: So you didn't really know about the concentration camps?

Dayle: Well, we heard about what they was doing to them. I mean, we had the little radios that once in a while you could get news over it, but it wasn't like being there.

Martha: So did you know if your family back home know about it?

Dayle: Yeah. They knew that the Germans were killing all them Jews.

Martha: What camps did you liberate?

Dayle: Dachau. That's one of the big ones. I got pictures of that. If you'd like them, I'll send them to you to you can see them.

But I want the pictures back after you get through with them.

Martha: Yeah, well I could possibly make copies of them since I have a copy-machine.

Dayle: Well, there're old. But you can get an idea of how they treated them people. They had bodies stacked up there like cordwood. Trains would come in. Train loads of dead bodies. From around the country, they'd kill them and then haul them into the prison camps. They had big furnaces there where they would cremate all of them.

Martha: So that was the only camp you liberated?

Dayle: Yeah, that was the only one.

Martha: That was the one in Russia, wasn't it?

Dayle: No. That was in Germany. Just outside of Munich in Germany.

Martha: Oh, I always thought that was in Russia!

Dayle: No, but they had a bunch of them up in the northern part of Germany, near Russia.

Martha: And that was a concentration camp. Not a work camp, but a concentration one.

Dayle: Yeah.

Martha: Since you were one of the liberation soldiers, upon entering the camp, what was the first thing you had to do?

Dayle: I'm sorry. I didn't understand you.

Martha: Upon entering the camp Dachau, what was the first thing that your officers ordered you to do?

Dayle: That's a good question because before you could get there you could hear those prisoners, they knew we were coming. And you could hear the screaming and the hollering. And the Germans were killing a lot of them. They would start screaming, and they would shoot them down. But our orders was to liberate that place. So we killed a lot of Germans.

Martha: So you'd kill the German officers?

Dayle: Oh, yeah. Some of them we took prisoners, and some of them we shot down, they put up a fight. Our orders were to get rid of them. We had fixed bayonets on them rifles, and we went into that camp. Anybody with a German uniform, we didn't even bother, we'd

just shoot them down.

Martha: When all of the shooting was over with the Germans, what did you do with the Jewish people that you liberated? Did you feed them first?

Dayle: They fed them right away, but they kept them in the prison there. They didn't turn them all loose at one time. No, they brought in food and clothes, and everything. And then showers, so they could take a shower, and fix them all up. They gave them clothes, and brought in beds for them, stuff like that. But they kept them under guard. We was there for about a week I guess, with them people. Then they had a chance to go back from where they had come from, find out where they had come from, find where their homes were, so they could send them back. But they didn't just turn them loose. But they took care of them.

Martha: So, what was the first thing you saw when you entered the camp?

Dayle: (Pauses for a minute, thinking.) All these people standing there, starving to death, screaming their heads off, with their arms waving. There was a barbed-wire fence, so you could see them. We could see the camp about five miles before we got there. It was down in kind of a flat country. They had all these barracks, and these big ovens. That was the first things we actually saw, were these smokestacks, with ovens and fire.

Martha: All right. So how many soldiers liberated the camp? How many were with you? Was there like twenty?

Dayle: It was the whole division, the 45th division. There must have been several thousand people there.

Martha: Several thousand soldiers?

Dayle: Well, yeah. We would come in from three different sides. And in our company alone there was 160-some people in our company alone. And in our platoon there was... well, it was broke down into squads, and since there's six men and a corporal, and they were at the head of each squad. And there's four squads in each platoon. And there's four to six platoons in each company.

Martha: So, needless to say, there was a lot of people.

Dayle: Yeah, well there was a lot of them. Of course, I was in the division, and that's a big outfit, the division. And they have different divisions there, and then you have your artillery, and you have your tanks, and your infantry, and everything is in a division. And the demolition squad, and the whole works. I can't remember a lot of that.

Martha: That's okay. Once the Jewish people left the concentration camp, what did you do? Did the soldiers stay there, or did they leave, too?

Dayle: Well, no. You see, the quartermaster takes care of all the supplies, they can bring up the rear. And they were the ones that took over after we liberated that place. The quartermaster moves in, and they took over. We left. We were there for maybe four or five days, but after that, we were gone, so I don't know what happened after that. But the quartermaster came in, and they took over the people, and sent them home, or however they do it.

Martha: I think you answered this one before, but in another form. But when you got to the camp, were there any enemy soldiers left to arrest? Or did you guys just shoot them all?

Dayle: Well, we shot most of them, but I think there was some left, you know. There were other outfits that took prisoners, but in our outfit we didn't take prisoners.

Martha: So did you personally take any prisoners-of-war?

Dayle: Not us, no.

Martha: Do you know where they were sent? The prisoners?

Dayle: Oh, they had prison camps around.

Martha: Where were they around? Were they back in the United States?

Dayle: Well, yeah. Clearmont had a prison camp.

Martha: It did?

Dayle: Yep. Right across the ditch from Grandpa's house.

Martha: Clearmont had a prison camp.

Dayle: Well, yeah. You go ask your mother. She knows all about this.

Martha: My mom doesn't tell me anything!

Dayle: I mean your grandma.

Martha: Oh. I could have asked her.

Dayle: Why don't you talk to Thelma. Thelma was there when the prisoners were there.

Martha: Oh. I didn't know that.

Dayle: Oh, yeah. You remember grandpa's old house down there? And that ditch down there? Well, right across from there was the German prison camp. In fact, there was Germans there when I came home. They had a running count in Clearmont.

Martha: Oh. I thought they were like in Georgia or something.

Dayle: Oh, no. Well, a lot of them German soldiers liked the American people. They didn't want to fight, but they had to fight for their country and all. Some of them were bad, but not all of them. It's like every place else. Today we have good ones and we have bad ones. I was in German homes overseas, when I was in Germany. I had dinner with the people down there.

Martha: Let me see. Did you work with any allies? You know, from England or France?

Dayle: Oh, I fought alongside them damn Englishmen. Too bad we didn't kill all of them, too at the same time.

Martha: Why do you feel that way? (Laughing)

Dayle: We called them damn Englishmen lymies.

Martha: (Still laughing.) Why didn't you like them?

Dayle: Oh, they thought they was so white (proper). They would have their tea at 10:00, and then they'd have their tea at 4:00. And they had to come to a complete stop at teatime. We was having a battle over here someplace, and they would come to a complete stop to have tea.

Martha: Are you serious? They'd stop in the middle of the battle?

Dayle: As serious as a hound's tooth. You ask anybody that was out there.

Martha: So needless to say you didn't like the British people.

Dayle: I didn't like the British and I still don't like the British to this day. In fact Gladys was British. Her dad came from England. (Laughs.)

Martha: When you finally came home, when did you come home? You know. Come back to America?

Dayle: Let's see. I landed in New York on V-J day.

Martha: When's that?

Dayle: It's in August. Wait. When is V-J day? Hell, I don't know.

Martha: Was that in 1945?

Dayle: 1945, yeah.

Martha: Can you hold on for a second? I need to turn this tape over. (I had been recording it by phone.) All right. My tape recorder is working now.

Dayle: You know, I brought a few home. I've got a German helmet and a bayonet, stuff like that. You know, things that I brought home.

Martha: Oh, okay. What was the process you had to go through? Did you have to go through any process?

Dayle: To get out?

Martha: No. To get back into America.

Dayle: No. We came home on a regular ship right into New York. Then they kicked us off, put us on buses, and sent us across to home.

Martha: Did you have to pay for that ticket or did they pay for everything?

Dayle: No. They paid for everything.

Martha: All right. After the war, did you get any awards or citations?

Dayle: Oh, I don't know, I imagine. I didn't get any medals or nothing like that, though.

Martha: Did you get a Purple Heart or something?

Dayle: No, I didn't get one. I could have had one, but I didn't put it in.

Martha: You mean you could have had one if you worked harder?

Dayle: No, a Purple Heart is when you get wounded.

Martha: Oh, and you didn't get wounded?

Dayle: Well, I got wounded. I had a bayonet run across my thumb here. It damn near took my thumb off.

Martha: So you had to be seriously wounded to get one then, right?

Dayle: Not really seriously. I'll tell you something. I hate to say

this in front of a young girl like you, but have you read about them venereal diseases and all that? Well, when I was in the hospital, they came along and gave a Purple Heart to everybody. The guy that was sitting beside me had the venereal disease. And they gave him a Purple Heart for that because he was wounded in action. Your mother could probably tell you what I mean. (Laughs.)

Martha: I get it. I know, I know. I learn about this stuff in school.

Dayle: I didn't want to take that damn thing. You can keep it. What honor was that? I threw it right back at them. I told them I didn't want it.

Martha: So you had one, but you gave it back.

Dale: I still have the scar on my hand today. This guy, he had been shot, and he wanted some aqua, you know that's water in Italian. I felt sorry for him, so I picked up the canteen, kneeled down to give him a drink of water, and he came up with his rifle and bayonet, and I threw that canteen up and it (bayonet) cut my thumb. And so that's the only wound I actually got. I could have had a Purple Heart for it, but in my book it wasn't one. It was a sham. I didn't want it.

Martha: But any other than that? Did you get any other citations or anything?

Dayle: No.

Martha: No? All right. This is kind of like linking past to the present, if you want to call it that, but how do you feel, since you fought in Europe during World War Two, how do you feel about the sending of the troops to Bosnia?

Dayle: I'm against it. We have no damn business over there. That's not our war, that's just another thing for a politician.

Martha: All right. Do you think that the stuff going on there, do you think that there's some stuff that they are doing that the Jews had done to them? Does that make sense?

Dayle: No. It's more like a civil war over there. It's just one nationality against another. It's a civil war, not a national war.

Martha: So you don't think there's any ethnic cleansing or

anything?

Dayle: Well, I don't know. There could be. All we basically know about it is from what we see on T.V., but we can't be too sure.

Martha: That's true. Well, you pretty much answered my questions, and you've given me a really good start.

Dale: Well, I've forgotten a lot of it. Do you want those pictures?

Martha: Yeah, sure!

Dale: Okay, I'll dig them out and send them to you, what I can find. I hope they help you with what you need, but I feel bad about not remembering much.

Martha: Yeah, I understand. You see, it's for a school project.

Dale: You could show the pictures and make them understand how the people were treated.

Martha: That's true. If I have any other questions, can I call you?

Dayle: Oh, sure. But like I've said, I've forgotten a lot of it, but I hope I can help.

Martha: My mom said I can call you collect next time.

Dayle: (groans) Don't worry about it.

Martha: Well, I'd like to thank you for your time, and, I guess, just thanks. Oh, and Merry Christmas.

Dayle: Thanks. And the same to you.

Martha: Um, all right. Bye.

Dayle: Bye.