

**Interviewee: James Beck**

**Interviewer: Thomas Saylor**

**Date of interview: 14 September 2001**

**Location: the living room of the Beck home in Cloquet, MN**

**Transcribed & edited by: Thomas Saylor, November-December 2001**

James Beck was born 21 May 1921 on a farm outside of Palisade, Minnesota. He attended the local country school through eighth grade, then worked full-time on the family farm. In 1939, following the German attack on Poland, he enlisted in the US Army and after basic training was stationed at Ft. Lewis, Washington. With the US entry into the war in December 1941, James' unit, the 41<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery, 3rd Infantry Division, was sent into action. They participated in the landings in Morocco in November 1942, and fought across North Africa. Following this, Jim's unit landed at Sicily in 1943 and in Italy later that same year. Jim was at Anzio in early 1944 when he was selected for rotation back to the United States. Once stateside, Jim was stationed at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, as an infantry instructor. He remained here until being discharged in July 1945.

In July 1944, while at Camp Wheeler, Jim married Velda, whom he had known since childhood in Palisades, and they lived in nearby Macon, Georgia. After Jim's discharge the couple moved to Minneapolis for two years, where Jim completed training as a construction electrician. They then lived and worked in several smaller Minnesota towns before settling in Cloquet in 1950 and raising their children. Jim was a member of VFW Post 3979, Cloquet, for more than fifty years, stayed active in his church, and kept busy with a number of hobbies.

James Beck died in October 2001, several weeks after this interview.

**Interview key:**

**T = Thomas Saylor**

**J = James Beck**

**[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation**

**(\*\*\*) = words or phrase unclear**

**NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity**

**Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.**

T: Today is 14 September 2001, and this is an interview with Mr. James Beck. First, Mr. Beck, I want to thank you for taking time to sit for the interview and answer some questions. I appreciate this very much.

J: You're welcome.

T: I want to start with some basic information. When and where were you born?

J: I was born in Palisade, Minnesota, on a dairy farm, five miles from town.

T: What's your date of birth?

J: 21 May 1921.

T: That means you just celebrated your eightieth birthday.

J: Yes.

T: Now you went to school for a number of years in a small schoolhouse, right?

J: Yes, eight years.

T: And after that you went to work on the farm, is that right?

J: Right.

T: Were you the oldest child?

J: Yes.

T: Did that mean necessarily more responsibility for you on the farm?

J: Yes.

T: Not long thereafter, before World War II began, you enlisted in the Army.

J: Yes.

T: What prompted you to enlist in the Army?

J: The fact that England had just declared war on Germany, because Germany had just invaded Poland. I could see that we were going to get into it, so I went down and enlisted.

T: Do you remember a lot of other fellows going to enlist at the same time?

J: No. One neighbor's son went down with me to Minneapolis, Ft. Snelling, to enlist, but he didn't make it—he had flat feet. So I went on alone.

T: Did you perceive joining the Army as a way towards something else, or as a way to get off the farm?

J: Well, it had a dual purpose, I guess, to get off the farm, and also I wanted to be part of the military when we went to war.

T: That suggests again that you firmly expected something to happen involving the United States?

**(1, A, 051)**

J: Yes.

T: And a sense of idealism to want to be part of that effort?

J: Yes.

T: How did you folks react to your joining the Army?

J: At that time, if you weren't twenty-one years old, your parent or guardian had to sign for you, so I brought the papers home, and it took my dad about two weeks before he would sign them.

T: Did he try to talk you out of it?

J: Not really, I suppose, he just debated with himself if that was the right thing to do or not.

T: Do you remember discussing it with him, or was he kind of quiet about it?

J: He was pretty quiet about it, and I didn't press the issue either, because I didn't want to coax him into it.

T: The enlistment was twenty-one, not eighteen, at that time?

J: Yes, twenty-one. That changed once we got into the war.

T: Where were you, then, when the attack on Pearl Harbor came?

J: I was in Ft. Lewis, Washington, and when Pearl Harbor was bombed, Ft. Lewis was evacuated. Roughly fifteen to twenty thousand troops, I would say, we all went out in the field, you know, away from Ft. Lewis, because we expected that to be bombed at any time.

T: So the whole fort was evacuated? That's a lot of soldiers to move.

J: Yes.

T: Was there a sense—your reaction—of fear, or anger? How would you describe the way you felt?

J: I was angry. We had, of course, been briefed often about world affairs and what the likelihood was of us getting into the war, so we knew what was going on as well as anybody. So I guess it wasn't too unexpected when it happened.

T: Where did you do your basic training?

J: In Ft. Lewis. In late 1939 I left from Minneapolis on a train, and went to Ft. Lewis.

T: Was that the first time you had spent a good period of time away from home?

J: No, in the fall of 1937 I went to Dakota and worked in the harvest. It was only for like six weeks or so, but the wages were good compared to (\*\*). In 1938 I went to southern Minnesota, where they have the big wheat fields and that, and worked in the harvest, so I had been away from home on two occasions for over a month.

T: So that wasn't new for you. That part of the country, was that new for you?

J: Yes, it was.

T: How would you describe the basic training experience?

**(1, A, 112)**

J: Well, it was not like you see on TV, about the Marines training, where you are insulted from morning to night; it was done in a civilized manner. Of course if you did things wrong you were corrected, but it was not like they portray the Marine Corps training to be. Of course we had the obstacle courses and all of that, but it was nothing for an average farm kid to comply with all the rules and that and the

obstacle courses, because we were in good condition. Which might have been different for a city kid.

T: Was the Army segregated at the time you joined?

J: Yes.

T: Did you come into contact at all with minorities during your entire time in the military?

J: Not really, no, except probably we would have foreign troops fighting alongside of us, like Senegalese, Ghurkas, and other tribes that were fighting for England. But not in close contact, no, we just saw them.

T: How about American blacks, for example, were they...?

J: Yes, we had our transportation part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, truck drivers, they were mostly black. That was the Quartermaster Corps; they handled the supplies, and hauled them up to the front. It was segregated in the respect that that was the only jobs they had—they weren't mixed in with infantry.

T: How would you describe the general relations between the white soldiers and the black soldiers?

J: No problems whatsoever. They kept to themselves, and so did we. We didn't really mingle at all.

T: Does that mean during leave, for example, if soldiers went out in the evening, that the blacks and the whites would not go out together?

J: No. That's true, they wouldn't.

T: Now, you were in Ft. Lewis from the time you did basic training until when?

J: *(pauses about seven seconds)* I don't recall dates, but I would say in the early spring of 1943 we went to Camp Ord, California...

T: 1942 or 1943?

**(1, A, 164)**

J: 1942... to Ft. Ord, it was Camp Ord at that time, to build the place. We lived in tents, and so we spent several months there. Then we came back to Ft. Lewis and then six months or *(pauses ten seconds)* possibly a year later we went down to Ft. Ord again. By then they had built an army post out of it, all wooden barracks and that, and so we spent a number of months there. We went down to San Diego and

practiced amphibious landings, because it was the winter months and it was warmer down there. So we were in an amphibious division actually, we were designed to make all the invasions. As I recall, we left Ft. Ord and got on troop trains and went south through Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, on into Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, and Virginia and on up the coast, ten days on a troop train to Camp Pickett, Virginia. And from Camp Pickett we went overseas.

T: Where did you land overseas?

J: We landed in French Morocco, just about seven or eight miles from Casablanca.

T: Was that already in Allied hands by that time?

J: No.

T: So these troop transports assembled offshore, and then LCI's took the troops to...

J: No, LCI's hadn't been built then yet. We were on big old troop transports; we climbed down cargo nets into small landing boats, like ten to twelve guys, a squad in each landing boat. Then you paddled for shore.

T: Were the Germans firing from shore towards the troops?

J: Yes. A lot of shelling of the ships. The ship that I was on was the *Routledge*; it was built in 1913 and the top speed, depending on the waves, was thirteen knots. We got within about five miles of the coast, the beach where we were going to land, and she took one torpedo through the middle of the ship and in seven minutes it sank.

T: Were you still on the ship?

J: No, we were on our way to shore. We lost quite a few men, like cooks and bakers, they were still on the ship. But most of us were in the landing boats, heading for shore.

T: And you could see this ship take a torpedo and sink very rapidly?

J: Yes. It was an old ship.

T: Did most of the guys get off or not?

J: Oh yes, most were off. From my company, I think we lost maybe three or four guys. And so the loss of life on the ship probably wasn't over one hundred.

T: Just those service personnel you mentioned.

**(1, A, 217)**

J: Yes, that would come ashore only later.

T: That's fortunate. Had that happened an hour or so before it would have been full of troops.

J: Yes, it would have been much worse.

T: Can you describe the experience of being in this landing boat and heading for shore? From your perspective.

J: Well, something that's not well known, this was our first invasion. And everybody was given a little white pill, and I found out later it was codeine. They said, "This will prevent you from getting seasick in the small boat going to shore." So I think that codeine pretty well calmed any nerves. I mean, I don't have any recollection of being scared. Of course, that changed once we hit the beach and the planes started strafing up and down the beach.

T: Did this boat let you out right at the beach, at the water's edge?

J: Yes, they would ram the beach, and then drop the front, and then we would run out on a ramp and maybe get in water up to our ankles. They would drop anchor before they hit the beach, so as soon as everybody was off they would reel in their anchor and pull themselves out. Otherwise they would be stuck on the beach. Of course there were so many boats that were hit and wrecked there, some in the high surf were tossed up on the beach sideways, and so by the time the boat I was in landed we couldn't land on the part of the beach we were assigned to. We had to go over to the right three hundred yards to find an open spot on the beach where we could still get the ship on the beach.

T: What happened to the spot where you were supposed to land?

J: There were other boats ahead of us trying to land there, and they were either hit by artillery, or the guy operating wasn't a very able seaman, and they'd get washed up on the beach sideways and they couldn't get off.

T: Once you hit the beach here, did your unit take casualties on the beach as well?

J: Not my gun section that I was in, no. That included about ten guys. Although we were strafed a lot. It sounded like a hard hailstorm.

T: You mean the sound of the bullets hitting the sand?

J: Yes. So we were fortunate.

**(1, A, 260)**

T: What is the first thing you yourself did when you hit the beach?

J: Well, there was a strip of trees, they reminded me of poplar trees, and we headed for that as quickly as we could. When we got there then we stopped, reorganized, checked the maps, and looked how far we were supposed to go before we set up the gun to fire.

T: So your gun was with you?

J: Yes.

T: How big was this gun?

J: When we landed we had a pack howitzer. They were seventy-five millimeter, which was very small as far as artillery goes, and they come apart. One guy carried the barrel, one guy carried the base plate; it was divided up amongst eight or ten guys. When we got to the position where we were supposed to set up, we put it together, and we were ready to fire. That was the only invasion we made where we used the pack howitzer. From then on it was 105 millimeter, which were towed by trucks.

T: This pack howitzer in pieces—what if a couple of guys were casualties? Wouldn't you have to take their pieces as well?

J: Yes, somebody would have to carry double. I'm sure it happened, but not to the crew I was on.

**(1, A, 278)**

T: This landing, did you get the gun set up pretty quickly?

J: Yes, I suppose fifteen or twenty minutes. By that time we would have been perhaps one hundred yards in from the beach.

T: Were there German troops on the other side?

J: It was a combination of French and German troops. All the officers were German. We heard wild stories about any Frenchman that wanted to give up, which I think there were numerous ones, the Germans would shoot them. So they had no choice but to fight us as well as fight the Germans.

T: How did this first landing, this first campaign progress, from your perspective?

J: Actually, it may have been twenty or thirty days until the French and Germans surrendered. Because there were other troops that landed north of us, at Oran [French Algeria], so it didn't last very long there.

T: Had your unit taken casualties by this time?

J: Yes, there were several in a jeep that had hit a land mine. As I remember there may have been some wounded. Each gun section was quite a ways apart, so you weren't right together. I recall the two guys that were in the jeep that hit a mine; neither one was killed, but they were wounded, and I'm sure there were other wounded in other gun sections, but I don't recall anyone getting killed.

T: Your gun section was attached to some infantry? Is that the way it generally worked?

J: Yes. I don't remember the table of organization, but our gun would be attached to one infantry regiment perhaps. A lot of this stuff is vague after fifty-five years.

T: We are going on sixty years for these North African landings. Now, obviously there were further encounters with mostly Germans from here on out, or were they Italians?

J: Actually, after the Germans and French surrendered, then we were in a rest area getting new equipment, cleaning equipment, and resting while the generals decided where to use us next. At that time, it was November 1942, it was getting to be winter there, and it was cold, and I got rheumatic fever. Ankles as big as balloons, and knees twice that big.

T: How did you come down with that?

**(1, A, 320)**

J: From cold and wet, and laying on the ground. So they sent me to hospital, in Rabat, French Morocco. It was like a fairgrounds or something with big stands, and underneath those stands they had made a hospital under there. I don't recall, but it was somewhere between two and three months that I was in the hospital, with so much pain in my knees and legs that they had hoops over the bed so the sheet wouldn't touch. It was very painful. The only medication I got was eighteen aspirins a day. When I got out then, I had a doctor come and talk to me, and he says, "You can live a normal life, but you have to avoid all stressful situations and avoid excitement." I said okay, and they sent me back to my outfit.

T: That's how you avoid stressful situations, I guess!

*(both laugh)*

J: A few days after I got back to the outfit we moved up to Tunisia. And then we started fighting Rommel's Afrika Corps, and Italians. I fully expected to be sent back to the States, because I had a heart murmur and an enlarged heart. But I guess they

needed me. I was fortunate to survive through the war with that condition; now I get one hundred percent disability.

T: During the campaign against Rommel and the Afrika Korps, did your unit move around a lot?

J: Not really, we didn't have a big part of it. We were at Casserine Pass, and the Germans shoved us back that one time a few miles, but we regrouped. They couldn't afford many troops to oppose us, because the British at that time were winning the battle for North Africa. They were pushing Rommel's troops back, so we didn't have a big part in that campaign against Rommel's troops.

T: The type of unit you were in—field artillery—did you ever see the Germans?

J: Not very often. Of course we tried to get our artillery behind the hill where we lobbed the shells over the hill, but sometimes we were on high ground and then of course we could look out and see them. So we saw a lot more dead Germans than live ones. And that is something *(pauses 20 seconds; speaks with emotion)*... it's something nobody will ever forget.

T: Seeing dead soldiers?

J: The black, bloated bodies. And the smell... *(pauses 15 seconds; again with emotion)* I'm sorry.

T: That's quite okay. Was that type of response—the reaction to seeing dead soldiers, American or German or British—something that other soldiers shared as well?

J: Yes, you didn't have to look, but you couldn't get away from the smell. I think everybody at some time or another was vomiting. As the war progressed you got a little more immune to it. *(pauses 10 seconds)*

**(1, A, 372)**

T: By this time was your unit getting replacement soldiers from the USA? Younger soldiers?

J: Yes, I think we did get a few while we were in Africa, not because of casualties, but because guys were sick from the conditions we had to live under. There was a lot of guys in the hospital with pneumonia and various different diseases from being cold and wet for days at a time.

T: Describe these conditions you lived under.

J: Of course, as soon as we stopped, you immediately got your entrenching tool, your little shovel, out and dug a hole, so that with bombing, artillery, and that you had a hole to get into.

**End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.**

T: So digging a hole was a way to offer yourself some protection?

J: Yes. Along the coast, in French Morocco, of course we had a lot of rain. And so sometimes there was a lot of water in the hole. *(pauses five seconds)* But as we got further north, away from the coast, into Tunisia and Algeria, the weather was warmer. And dry. It was semi-desert, it was on the edge of the Sahara. Better conditions.

T: In general, did the health among the troops improve with the drier weather?

J: Yes.

T: How about food?

J: We had our ration allowance we were supposed to get every day. We had three cans, they were called C-rations: one would have meat and beans in it; another one had vegetable hash; and the third one had vegetable stew. And then there was one can of similar size, that had what we called dog biscuits. They were round crackers, I guess you'd call them; you could soak them in hot coffee forever, and they'd never get soft.

T: *(laughing)* They just stayed hard?

J: Yes.

T: Did they have any taste?

J: No, not really. But I suppose there was a lot of nutrition in them.

Now, in the can with the biscuits in it would be two pieces of hard candy *(pauses five seconds)*, and I believe that's where our coffee was. Instant coffee, little packages, you dump it into your canteen cup and you had coffee.

T: How did you eat those hard biscuits? Could you bite them?

J: Yes, you could, but nobody with false teeth could have done it!

*(both laugh)*

T: How popular were they among the guys?

J: Well, I'd say at least fifty percent were thrown away. I mean, nobody had any appetite. All of us carried a tablespoon, and of course that was usually stuck into the top of our combat boots. *(pauses five seconds)*

But the C-rations kept us going.

T: As you recall the stuff in the cans that you describe, what was the best of the lot?

J: I liked that vegetable hash a lot; it was similar to the hash that you buy in the store now in cans. That was the best. The stew had so much gristle and fat and all kinds of stuff in it that it was not very popular. And of course later in the war they came out with different rations, the waxed boxes, called five-in-one, and then ten-in-one. It was supposed to be for ten men, or a squad. Each one got an individual package, probably six to eight feet long, four inches wide and a couple of inches thick; they had a can of cheese... *(pauses five seconds)* I can't recall what all they had in them.

T: Did the quality of the food get better or worse as the war progressed?

J: It got better, it got more appetizing, I thought.

There would be a little package of cigarettes—four cigarettes—in there. I'm surprised myself, I can't remember more about just what was in there.

T: Did you ever get a hot meal that was actually cooked?

J: Yes, sometimes, as the war progressed we would sometimes spend sixty, seventy, eighty days on the line where we ate these cold rations, and then when we would get to the rear for a rest, then the supply truck and the kitchen truck would be back there. Then we could get different clothes, clean clothes, or at least get them washed. And the kitchen truck would cook a hot meal, like powdered eggs; scrambled, very tasteless. There wasn't much of a menu, but it was hot.

T: The C-rations were always just cold, or whatever temperature...?

### **(1, B, 105)**

J: I did have a chance to warm mine up. Shortly after we had landed in Sicily they made me a messenger, and gave me a jeep and a driver. So I could take these cans and put them on the motor of the jeep and heat them up.

T: Was that better for the taste a little bit?

J: It helped.

T: Did you have rest and relaxation when you were over in North Africa, Italy, Sicily?

J: No, not other than maybe five miles back behind the lines for a rest. A week, that would be about it, and then back up again.

T: What did you do on R-and-R?

J: Rest. And there was always someone around, natives, to wash clothes for you for a bar of soap or something. And take a bath. You know, on the line we could go the whole time up there—sixty, seventy, eighty days—without a bath, and sometimes no chance to wash your face and hands. What water you got—they tried to get you a quart a day, which was one canteen full—that was to drink. You couldn't afford to wash yourself in that.

T: With soldiers on R-and-R, were there problems with drugs or alcohol?

J: No, none at all. I suppose the reason for it was that they were not available. Any liquor establishment or beer breweries had all been bombed or shelled; there was no place you could get anything, any liquor. And of course were pretty much unheard of.

T: How important were the cigarettes?

J: Very important. We often would run out and share with each other. One time in Sicily we were being shelled pretty heavy, my group was under an archway over a dry creek where (\*\*), and the chaplain came crawling up there, during that shelling, and he got in there with us, and he pulled out a package of cigarettes and with a penknife he was cutting them in two and giving each guy half a cigarette. *(pauses five seconds)*

Chaplains did a great job.

T: Did you have a chaplain attached to every unit?

J: No, just to the division. So there was only one for every ten thousand men, roughly.

T: Boy, that's not very many.

J: But they were always around. Our chaplain, one time, had gotten a hold of a German motorcycle, and he used that motorcycle to get around with. But I think he pushed it as much as he rode it, because the roads were nothing but mud.

**(1, B, 160)**

T: There were difficult situations; you have described the initial landing we had, and you must have seen dead bodies more than once, I suppose. As the war continued through North Africa and Sicily and Italy, were there occasionally guys who suffered under the stresses of combat?

J: I'm sure there were, but there was none in the artillery battery that I was in that I

know of. Well, yes, one exception to that: our division commander... no, our battalion commander, Major Robinson; he had been with us from the time in Ft. Lewis when he was second lieutenant, and was very well liked and respected. He had made it up to major, and usually they keep transferring them, but he stayed with us. He had an Indian driver from North Dakota, Johnny Two Star, and when Major Robinson got killed, Johnny Two Star was driving the jeep, he was the only one I know of that just went all to pieces. They sent him back to the States.

T: The major was killed while he was in the jeep?

J: Yes. It's surprising what one guy in command that's well-liked and respected can do to the morale; it affected the whole artillery.

T: The chemistry of the unit?

J: Yes. I don't know why, but everyone seemed to feel, well, you know, if a guy like that can get killed, what chance do I have?

T: Were these thoughts of personal mortality something that were very much a conscious thing for you?

J: Not really, no. Although when we would be back for a rest, the chaplain would go around to different units and have services, and I hadn't been in church since I graduated from confirmation in the Lutheran church, when I was about thirteen or so, but I attended those church services. Actually, now that I think about it, it's strange that there wasn't constant fear. It was like, well, you know, if you get it, you do. You couldn't see on anybody that they were *(pauses four seconds)* afraid all the time. You had a job to do and you did it.

T: Is that something—this approach—that you acquired only with time?

J: Yes, that's right. And we were always of course told, like I imagine a lot of other units were told, that we were regular army, and we had been soldiers a long time, and they expected us to be leaders, role models for replacements that came in. So there was a matter of pride a lot, which I think the Marines drilled into their troops. A matter of pride—no matter how frightened guys were, they'd do everything in the world not to let anyone know it.

T: There was likely a certain amount of fear in most guys in critical situations, but you were loath to show it, in other words.

J: Yes, that's right. *(pauses five seconds)* And after the drastic situation was over, then you were back to normal. It wasn't like you'd walk around shaking or anything; it's a fact that, in my outfit, you were a soldier, and you were regular army, and you expected to be better than National Guard troops, which got very little

training. And that's the difference, training. Otherwise men are pretty much the same.

T: Did you have National Guard troops that had been called up?

J: We fought alongside of the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, from Minnesota and Wisconsin, National Guard, and they had almost as much time in combat as we did. It's a matter of... they improved all the time. You know the old saying, you've got to be quick or you're dead.

T: Is there some truth to that?

J: Yes, absolutely. Contrary to what some believe, if you are alert and you hear artillery go off, you do have time to hit the ground, but you've got to be quick. Except with the German 88 [mm artillery]; that was a flat trajectory, and there was just a fraction of a second for that shell to get there.

T: Because it was shot right at you, as opposed to up, and then down again?

J: Yes, that's right.

T: You bring up an interesting point about survival. I'm wondering how much you attribute survival to alertness or training, and how much you attribute it to luck?

**(1, B, 243)**

J: Well, luck has an awful lot to do with it. By the time I came back to the States [in 1944], there wasn't, I suppose, in an artillery battery of 150 men, more than fourteen or fifteen men that came overseas with us. Attrition was what got you. The longer you were there, the less your chances were.

T: These were guys who were sick or had illnesses, you mentioned pneumonia, as opposed to casualties?

J: Yes. Of course, some of them would come back to the outfit, some would be transferred to other outfits. *(pauses five seconds)* It even happened a few times when we were back for a week or so of rest, and some other outfit on the line in our place would be pushed back and that, they'd even send some of our guys up there to fill in a gap.

T: Luck mattered, in other words?

J: Yes. And of course training, but...

T: Can we move to the invasion of Sicily [in 1943], which you were also part of?

J: We invaded Sicily in a little different manner. After we had captured a couple hundred thousand of Rommel's troops—a few tried to get away through Tunis, and (\*\*\*), but there wasn't very many; they had to surrender—we then had those two ports to operate from. By then the Navy had LST's; that stands for Landing Ship Tanks. They were about three hundred feet long, thirty to forty feet wide, with a huge ramp on the front that opened up, to drive tanks down there. We happened to pick a time to leave Tunis and head for Sicily across the Mediterranean in a heck of a storm, and those LSTs, they'd hit the waves, and then they'd stop and they'd just go sideways. And then they'd go again (*motions with hands*), hit another wave, and that's the way that whole trip went.

T: Were you on one of those LSTs?

**(1, B, 277)**

J: Yes. You could stand on one end of them, and you'd be level there, and you'd look at the front of the boat, and it'd be twisted like that (*motions with hands from side to side*). It was just light metal, light as far as a ship goes, maybe an inch or two thick. They weren't meant for ocean travel, and the Mediterranean is pretty wide. The storms were pretty bad there.

What was interesting on the LST I was on, there had been a wooden ramp built up above the deck, where guns and trucks and that were, and a little ramp built up above there, and we had a L-5 observation plane, like a little Piper Cub. When we got fairly close to shore, I suppose eight to ten miles out, then a bunch of us held up the tail of this little plane, and the pilot got in and a guy on each side pulled the blocks away from the front wheels when he was ready. We'd run with the tail up in the air and give him a push, and he'd take off in maybe fifty or sixty feet.

T: That's not much at all.

J: I recall the pilot saying, "Well, by the time I run out of gas you guys better have me a piece of road I can land on." Fortunately, that time we had got that far off the beach, and there was some road.

T: Was the Sicily landing more or less difficult than the one at North Africa?

J: Well, it was more difficult, although... (*pauses five seconds*) I hate to distinguish between one people and another people, but... We were always glad when we were told what units we were facing. If you told us the Herman Goering division was going to be in front of us, well, that was always bad news. But when we were told we were being opposed by an Italian division, we felt much better.

T: Why is that?

J: They didn't want to fight. It was pretty much that they were forced. I don't suppose that's true of every Italian, of course it was their homeland so naturally

some of them were fighting for that, but most of the Italians didn't have any time for the Germans. Invariably there would be German divisions in back of the Italian divisions, then if they headed the wrong way the Germans would shoot them.

T: From your perspective, the Germans didn't trust the Italians very much either.

J: No, they didn't consider them good fighters at all.

One thing we learned was a lot of respect for the German soldiers.

T: As far as the quality of the German soldiers?

J: Of course towards the end of the war it was old men and kids, but *(pauses five seconds)* the elite troops...

T: The ones you faced in North Africa in '42 or in Sicily in '43, those were Germans you encountered both times there?

J: Yes. They were good troops; the Afrika Korps took great pride in their units, and most German units that early in the war were good troops.

T: Was there a certain amount of respect for the German soldier, just as a soldier, or as a human being as well?

J: Well, as a soldier. Of course not having been an infantryman, but of course knowing a lot of them who were friends of mine, you just couldn't think of them as being a human being. It was just *(pauses three seconds)* the enemy, you know. You did what you had to do.

T: Does that mean not making a human being out of that enemy?

J: That's right. If you start thinking about the guy and his parents back home waiting for him, his wife and kids, you'd never fire your gun. You couldn't think like that.

### **(1, B, 333)**

T: Let me ask on a different subject here. Was there a person who had a positive impact on you? Someone you looked up to, or remember for some certain thing?

J: Not really, except Major Robinson that got killed. *(pauses five seconds)* Being a messenger, I was pretty much by myself. I had a driver for a while, but he got wounded and I never got another driver, so I had to keep going day and night by myself, driving myself. Half the time I was walking; I couldn't drive up to the units. No mines had been cleared, so it was kind of hairy situations.

T: So you had less contact with other soldiers, it sounds like, than most others?

J: Yes, after I got to be a messenger.

T: And that was on Sicily you became a messenger, or before?

J: Yes, it was in Sicily.

T: Final specific military question: You also made the Anzio landing [in 1944], your third landing. How did it compare to the other two?

J: That was the biggest blunder of the war, but it was such a surprise to the Germans that anyone would even dream of landing on that little flat area that extended eight, nine, ten miles inland, with the Germans sitting up in the hills and mountains looking down at us. And of course our intelligence was faulty there, because the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, when we landed, had one battalion of [Army] Rangers that landed at the same time, and that was all. There were four German divisions, which they didn't realize.

T: Our intelligence missed those German divisions?

J: That's right. Actually we got inland about as far as we ever made it on the first night. We were forced back some (*pauses five seconds*), and the whole Ranger battalion was lost. We were constantly attacking, and then they would attack us back, and we were swapping a hundred yards of ground.

T: The Germans and the Ranger battalion?

J: No, the Germans and the whole division. But the one attack we made, they just kind of backed off where the Rangers were, and so the Rangers forged ahead. Until the Germans closed in behind them, and captured the whole division. I think when I got off of there, it's just a guess, but we were probably about six miles inland; we had lost that much.

We had hospital tents set up on the beach, with big red crosses on them. But whether on purpose or not, no one knows, they were bombed by the Germans with anti-personnel bombs, the ones that explode off the ground. There were eight Army nurses killed there that I was aware of.

T: Did you encounter women in uniform from time to time?

J: In the States. I had a sister who was in the service.

**End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.**

T: Before we took a little break there we were talking about your time at Anzio. It was from Anzio, if I recall correctly, that you were rotated back to the US.

J: Yes, I got on this freighter that [had] come in with supplies, and left there and landed in Naples, Italy. I was there for possibly a week or ten days; we were sleeping in a bombed out Italian army barracks on a concrete floor, but we were there. It wasn't too pleasant, but we were on our way home.

T: Naples was behind, well behind, the lines?

J: Yes, that would be out of bombing range. Then I got on another ship—now everything was heading towards the front, very little going back. So I got on another ship and got as far as Palermo, in Sicily, and spent possibly a week there waiting for more transportation. The next step was from Palermo (*pauses five seconds*) to Oran, in Algeria, in North Africa.

T: It sounds like you're backtracking the steps you've made.

J: Yes. And that [from Palermo to Oran] was on a British ship. If I remember right, it only took two days, but we were given hammocks. And they had hooks above the dining area, so when you wanted to go to bed you hooked your hammock up there and crawled into it. We had two meals a day. It was about nine in the morning; at the end of the table was a big dishpan and a huge coffee pot, probably fifty cups or thereabouts. One guy would take the dishpan, and one guy would take the coffee pot, and you'd go down to the mess hall and bring up food for the table. Then about four in the afternoon, same routine again. So it was always one type of food, whether it was soup or stew or whatever it was, twice a day. And that was what you got to eat, like it or not. So that didn't sit very good.

We landed in Oran, and there they expected quite a delay, I imagine, because we had tents set up for us. It was quite a number of us, maybe thirty or forty, from different units.

T: The one or two guys from each unit [being rotated back to the US], all together?

J: We had five- or six-man tents set up, and they had cots set up in them, canvas cots, and so we were quite comfortable there. And the food was not bad, but we were anxious to get home. After possibly ten days, maybe two weeks, we got on a freight train, heading across that part of Africa, to Casablanca. By the way, on that trip we lost one guy from my outfit—the train had stopped, everybody got off to walk a little bit, stretch their legs, and he had wandered a little too far away. So when the train started up again, he ran, and he caught up to it, but he grabbed the bars on the side of the car that they used to climb up on top of the car, and was hanging on there. But the train came to a telephone pole, or telegraph pole, and it was so close there wasn't room for him. (*pauses five seconds*) So we lost him on the way home.

We got to Casablanca and we again had to wait a number of days for a ship.

**(2, A, 090)**

T: You were doing a lot of, of... killing time.

J: Yes, and it was difficult when you were headed home after several years, and had pretty much given up hope of ever getting home. So we were there a number of days, I don't recall any longer how many. Then a ship came in there (*pauses three seconds*) for some reason, somebody told us it was a new Victory Ship, and it was fast. Of course submarine warfare was very intense yet, but they said we were going to leave right after dark and, using a lot of speed, head across the Atlantic to outrun any submarine. That sounded pretty good to us. Now sometime during the night everybody woke up, because there was a loud conversation between the engineer in the boiler room, and the captain up on deck.

T: You were already under way by this time?

J: Yes, we were probably half way across, or maybe less. We woke up with all this talking back and forth, and for some reason somebody had pushed a switch so that the intercom between the boiler room and the bridge was broadcast around the whole ship. Of course that was a mistake; they would never do that intentionally. Here we were motionless...

T: In the Atlantic?

J: Yes, with submarines all around. They were discussing what was... what happened. That guy in the boiler room, he says, "Somebody turned the wrong valve, and we lost all our fresh water for the boiler." And so the captain, he asked, "Well, what can we do about it?" And he was told he could pump saltwater in the boilers. So the captain wanted to know, "Can we make it to Virginia with saltwater in the boilers?" The engine room commander, he thought we could, so that's what they did—they pumped in saltwater and got underway again. We made it, but of course once we got to shore all the boilers had to be replaced.

T: The saltwater ruins them?

J: Yes. So that was some awful anxious moments, when you are practically home. We got to Newport News, Virginia, and we got some clean uniforms. And the thing that I recall vividly is that we got off at the pier, and they had Army trucks waiting, so we climbed into the back of the trucks and they took us to some barracks and gave us like ten or fifteen minutes to wash up and that, and then said to meet over in the mess hall. They pointed out where it was. When we got to the mess hall, they had a quart of milk at each plate and they were frying steaks. Half a dozen big grills, full of steaks being fried. We ate like kings then; we had huge steaks and we had a quart of milk. In two years I had never seen milk. So that was something to remember.

Then after... (*pauses three seconds*) it was probably the next day, we left there and got on trains—I don't know the final destination of that train, but it stopped in Ft. Sheridan, Illinois. In Newport News I had had a chance to buy a pair of brown oxfords to go with my uniform, because we still had the combat boots and

everything on, and I had walked enough by the time we got to Ft. Sheridan, Illinois, when we got off the train and they lined us up and marched us to the mess hall. But at any rate I was limping, because I had worn a blister on my heel from those new shoes. So somebody noticed that and they pulled me out of line and says, "You are going to the infirmary." And I thought that was alright; they'll put a band aid or something on it. Well, when I got there, they put me in hospital.

T: For what?

J: For that blister on my heel! I was then within a couple hundred miles from home, and they put me in hospital. I was pretty wild, but there was nothing I could do about it.

T: That's ironic—I can't help but think what you told me about the rheumatism in your knees and ankles over there in North Africa, when you could barely move, and they wouldn't send you back, and now here you are with a blister on your heel and they put you in the hospital.

**(2, A, 175)**

J: Then when I got in the hospital bed—it was a pretty big ward—there was eight or ten guys or something all in one end of it, so I was perhaps thirty or forty feet, I suppose, from any of the others. For some reason or other they had been told, or found out some way, that I was a combat veteran. *(pauses ten seconds—a bit of emotion in his voice)* They just looked at me like I was from Mars or something. No one ever spoke to me, and every time I'd look over there they were just staring at me.

T: These were also Army guys?

J: Yes, they were stateside guys; never been overseas. That kind of bothered me. I was so upset, that when the nurse came around at nine o'clock to turn the lights out—I don't remember the conversation we had, but at any rate I knew I couldn't sleep—she said, "Well, come on into my office and talk for a while, and maybe you'll get sleepy." So I went and sat in her office, and the sergeant that was in charge of all the wards came in, and the nurse asked if he had anything to drink. He says, "Yes, I got something." So he went to his room and came back with, I think, a pint or a half pint of some kind of liquor, I suppose it was whiskey, and I had a couple drinks of that, as well as the nurse did, and the sergeant. By then I was calmed down enough that I went to sleep. I went to my bed and went to sleep. I was there, I think, about eight or ten days, and each night then the nurse would say to come on and sit in her office for a while, and so I'd do that and have a couple of drinks of liquor and I'd be okay, I could go to sleep. Without that I would have had a rough time; I couldn't have... You know, just the thought of being that close to home, and for such poor reason to be there.

T: Eight to ten days—when you said that, I was just speechless.

J: I did write to... I don't remember if I wrote to you (*motions towards wife Velda, standing in doorway*) and my folks both, or if you just let them read the mail. Anyway, I just said that I was in the hospital at Ft. Sheridan, and that I would be home in a few days, and she wrote back, with nothing but my name and "Ft. Sheridan Hospital" on the envelope, but that letter got to me. I couldn't believe it when the nurse, or somebody, come along and threw that letter on my bed. They went to great lengths to deliver it.

Another thing I remember well is, I got home, and I was told I could go to the OPA [Office of Price Administration] office, where they rationed stuff, and I could get some gasoline so I could drive my dad's car and go visit people or go someplace, do what I wanted. So, after two years fighting, then they gave me a ration coupon for five gallons of gas. That was it. Five gallons of gas. That made me wonder, what was my service worth? Of course all the farmers around there, they had ration stamps for tractors, and the local gas station—of course it was against the law to accept them for putting gas in a car—they gave me all kinds of tractor stamps, and the gas station honored them. So I was able to use my dad's car while I was home.

**(2, A, 236)**

T: How long were you home?

J: Thirty days.

T: Now when you were home, is that when you got married?

J: No, we renewed our courtship that had been going on before the war... no, it wasn't before the war, it started when I was home on furlough in 1942.

After a month, then, I had been assigned to Camp Wheeler, Georgia, so I went down there as an instructor in the infantry. That was when I got the package of two-month-old cookies that were all crumbled up and falling apart (*refers to a story told by Velda Beck upon my arrival, as the cookies she had made that day were the very same recipe*).

T: When did you report to Camp Wheeler, do you remember? Was that about April 1944?

J: I wonder if I... It seems like I was home in April, so it could have been May '44. May, probably.

T: So you were home here in Minnesota in April, and got down to Camp Wheeler in May. And you were married in July 1944, right?

J: Yes. I wrote her (*motions towards Velda, sitting across the room*) a letter and told her to come down and we'd get married. We had planned on waiting until the war

was over, but I didn't know if I'd get sent back overseas, although we were told when we were selected to go home on this rotation policy that *(pauses three seconds)*... the words they used was: "You'd be assigned to the closest Army post to your home for light duty." So they sent me to Georgia as an infantry instructor!

*(both laugh)*

T: Was your impression that you could very well end up back in Europe again?

J: They had promised us, at the same time that they promised us light duty close to home, that we wouldn't have to go back overseas. But, you know, that promise didn't mean anything, so... *(pauses five seconds)* What would have ensured me going back overseas, and of course I know they looked at my records, but for some reason they decided I was a good candidate for OCS [Officer Candidate School], to be an infantry lieutenant. I don't know how they came to that conclusion, but they did. One officer after another, including the battalion commander, spoke to me quite a few times trying to con me into OCS, but that was like three months or something, and the next boat I'd have been across again. So I said, "No way."

T: Sounds like it was a pretty easy decision to make.

J: Yes it was, for me. I'd had enough.

T: You had been over there just about two years, right?

J: Yes, it was right around two years. Well, no, I think it would have been a little less.

T: Well, only a couple months less.

J: Of course, I was so fortunate, because the rest of my outfit, after the breakout at Anzio—they had poured in more reinforcements after I got off—they captured Rome [in June 1944]. And then after my outfit had gone through Rome, then they got on ships and went down to the southern coast of France, and [in June 1944] invaded France there. This was a few days after D-Day. So they came all the way up from southern France, all the way into Austria, where Hitler's hideout was. So my outfit ended up there [in May 1945] in Hitler's hideout. It must have been a year or more it took to do that, so a lot of my friends survived for three years, or maybe a little more.

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T: From the very beginning, when we invaded North Africa, to the very end.

You mentioned letters a little bit ago, writing letters. Were you a good letter writer? Did you write a lot?

J: No. Conditions were so unhandy, that... well, you only had a couple of shirt pockets, and it was hard to carry paper, envelopes, and stamps and stuff. So I did write some, but I never tried to write when we were up on the line. But when I'd be

back for a rest I'd write little notes. They had come out with that V-mail then; I don't know what process they went through, but apparently they put it on film and then put it in letter form again after it got to the States. Of course that was just a small page, so you could fill that up easily. And there wasn't much to write about; I couldn't say anything, you know, except maybe to talk about the weather, because they'd censor it. You couldn't even say where you had been. So it was difficult to find anything to write. But I overlooked the fact that, when I got home—I'd been roughly six weeks getting back home—of course all the mail I got after I left was all bundled up and kept for, I don't know how long, before it was sent to my folks. So before I got home, here come all that mail back again. I hadn't been able to tell them I was coming or anything.

T: How important was getting mail?

J: It was the most important thing there was.

T: Getting mail?

J: Yes, you bet. You could see the morale of the guys after mail call, and if they didn't get anything, you know... That was very important.

T: How often was mail delivered?

J: I don't recall ever getting any mail when we were up on the line, it would be back for a rest, and that varied. I suppose sometimes we had a short stay up front, maybe thirty days. We set some kind of record there one time, something like seventy, eighty days...

T: On the line?

J: Yes. Then the mail would get to the unit, but be kept in back. You know, it would be where the supply truck was, the kitchen truck, and all that stuff.

T: Did you get news in any form? *Stars and Stripes*?

J: Well, once in a while we would; somebody, somehow would have gotten a hold of a copy, and that would be passed around. I don't recall after we left North Africa, but in North Africa we'd go to the battalion headquarters, and they had a big radio set across the back of a jeep, a powerful one. We could get BBC, so we'd stand around and listen to that. *(pauses five seconds)*

Same theme all the time, it would be Axis Sally talking about the Americans in England, and she'd say, "What do you Englishmen think your girlfriends are doing now, with all those American there?," and stuff like that. Just to disrupt them. Then they had things to say about us, "What are your girlfriends doing at home, now that you're here?" Anything to make you homesick, I guess.

T: Sure. Jim, did you make any lasting contacts during your time in the military?

J: Yes, one of my best friends from International Falls, Martin Steinbach. I didn't know him until he came in, possibly a year later, as a first draft or something, he came to the outfit. We became friends then, not real close friends while we were in the Army, but... You know, unless it's a guy from your home town, you don't try to get too friendly with anybody. Anyway, Martin Steinbach and I got to be good friends. He was one of these guys that kept going; he was in three years or more. Since the days in the service, we have seen each other often.

T: Does he still live in International Falls?

J: Yes. And we both joined the VFW right away, 8<sup>th</sup> district, so we would see each other at least every three months. And then we have had an Army reunion every year since the war, in various parts of the country. And since 1970, roughly, we (*motions to wife Velda*) have been to almost all of them, and he has been to almost all of them. When we get together we get adjoining rooms and stuff. So we have become best friends. (*pauses five seconds*)

A guy from Ada, Minnesota, that I got to be best friends with stopped here a week or so ago and spent some time here, but he had two of his sisters with him, so he didn't want to spend the night. He stayed in a motel, but we met the next morning for breakfast and had a real nice visit.

T: He lives in Ada?

J: Yes.

**(2, A, 362)**

T: Now, the time at Camp Wheeler—were you pretty much doing just training there?

J: Yes, it was some classes I'd teach: disassembling and assembling rifles, machine guns, and I'd give lectures or talks on personal hygiene; different kinds of classes.

T: These are new recruits?

J: Yes. And then part of the time, when we'd go out in the field for different combat simulated exercises, then I was a platoon sergeant. I'd lead some of them. One place was a big, steep hill, with ravines, stumps, rocks, probably half a mile long, and pop-up targets—they had live ammunition. We'd run up that hill, shoot those targets. Of course, you can only have so many going at the same time, for safety. I'd take one squad, and this was in Georgia, in the summertime--

**End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.**

J: --of course I wasn't ahead of them; they were shooting live ammunition! (*laughs*)

T: *(laughs)* Especially being recruits, you stayed behind them?

J: When we'd get to the top of the hill, I'd have to collect all unused ammunition. Then we'd wait for the trucks to come around, and we'd go back—we'd have left the rest of the platoon in charge of one of the sergeants—and I would take another squad and go up that hill. So the recruits did it once—I had to do it four times! I only weighed 130 pounds; I was in good shape. It was tough.

T: Harder work than you expected it to be?

J: Oh, yes. And then we'd go on twenty-five mile hikes.

T: And you had to go with them?

J: Yes. Of course, I had to carry a rifle, to set an example, and a pack on my back. But I knew my pack wouldn't be inspected, so I had rolls of toilet paper in there instead of shaving articles and rations and whatever you're supposed to have.

T: So your pack weighed a good bit less than the recruits?

J: Oh, yes. We'd have one break after about half of the twenty five mile distance, and everybody would just flop down. But I had no need to sit down or anything; I'd walk back and forth, talk to the guys, see if anybody had blisters or this and that. *(pauses three seconds)* There would always be somebody that couldn't go on, and there'd be a jeep following that would pick them up.

T: Mostly young kids, these recruits?

J: Yes, mostly young. But towards the end of the war they were getting more desperate for men, there wasn't so many young men to take anymore. One example was—it was a group from the Chicago area—one of the guys, I forget if he was forty, forty-one, forty-two, something like that, and pretty heavy, he told me right away, he didn't know if he could take it. He said when he was eighteen or thereabouts, when he graduated from high school—apparently he had taken typing and that—he went to work in an office. So all those years, from twenty to forty, he had sat at a desk. Get up to that age... He kept trying, kept trying, and somehow or another, he did make it. There were others that didn't make it, but he did. He was determined.

**(2, B, 065)**

T: You were at Camp Wheeler when President Roosevelt died, 12 April 1945...

J: *(pauses five seconds)* Yes, I guess I was.

T: ...because you were discharged from Camp Wheeler in July 1945. Did President Roosevelt's death make an impression on you?

J: Absolutely, yes. He was very well-liked and admired. That affected the morale of all the troops.

T: How would you describe the attitude?

J: Sadness, and a feeling: "What else can go wrong?"

T: You were also at Camp Wheeler when the war in Europe ended, on V-E Day, 8 May.

J: Yes. What I recall about that, *(pauses four seconds)* as soon as we got the news of that, as soon as the work day was over, everybody headed for the busses, to go into town, and celebrate a little. We got into Macon, Georgia, everything was closed down; there wasn't a restaurant or beer joint or anything open.

T: Why not?

J: They were afraid everybody would have gotten drunk!

T: Is Macon close to Camp Wheeler?

J: It was about eight or ten miles maybe. So that was a safety precaution, I guess. *(pauses four seconds)* Some guys might be beyond control after what they had been through. I'm talking now about the veterans that had come back.

T: Camp staff as opposed to new recruits.

J: That's right. The recruits couldn't even go to town; they couldn't get passes. There were some stateside cadre people, trainers and that, but it was the overseas veterans they were worried about. I don't know that it was warranted but, anyway, everybody wanted to celebrate somewhere, but everything was closed, so all we could do was come back to camp.

We were pretty much the same after we got back from overseas. Everybody had changed; I mean, a lot of guys who had never dreamt of taking a drink or a beer or a smoke before they went over, by the time they got back they'd drink anything in sight. *(pauses four seconds)* It changed everybody. I wasn't that much of a goody-goody guy when I went in, I had had beer and liquor before I went... *(pauses four seconds)* Anyway, there was no celebrating.

T: Macon was closed for the day?

J: Yes.

T: You mentioned this process of change. If you look at yourself, how would you describe the way, or ways, that the war changed the course of your life?

J: One way it changed, if it hadn't have been for the war, I probably would have kept working on the farm, inherited the farm, and spent my life as a farmer in Palisade, Minnesota. There would have been no furthering my education. I had earned four years of school, so I took advantage of it, a long two years at Dunwoody Institute [in Minneapolis]. Of course that education assured me of a well-paying job. That's one way it changed. I'm sure I have changed in other ways (*pauses four seconds*), but I don't know how I would explain any of it. But I don't think anyone remains the same.

T: To fast-forward here, you were discharged in July 1945. So after V-E Day, but we were still at war with Japan. You were discharged, you mentioned, because you had double as many points as you needed.

When you heard the news about the atomic bombs being dropped on Japan, did you feel the US government was correct to use these new weapons?

J: Absolutely. (*emphatically*)

T: How have your feelings on that issue changed since 1945?

J: Not a bit. Those two bombs, the conservative estimate of all the big shots, the generals and that, say saved at least a million lives. As hard as the Japanese fought for some remote islands, think of them fighting for their homeland. There would not have been any left; you would have to have killed them all. Even on those islands, like Iwo Jima and Okinawa, very few of them ever surrendered.

T: Do you recall V-J Day, which came very soon thereafter, on 15 August?

J: Yes. I was discharged, and we must have been spending a weekend at my folks, because when we heard the news that Japan had surrendered we were at the county fair. There were friends with me that I had grown up with, so right away we all went up town, going to celebrate.

T: Which town?

J: Aitkin. And again, everything was closed!

T: (*laughs*) So you struck out twice—Macon, Georgia, and Aitkin, Minnesota, were both closed for the evening!

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J: It was probably a good decision; it might have avoided a lot of trouble. (*pauses five seconds*) You know, a lot of us were pretty carefree after surviving the war and coming back. We were just looking for fun.

T: Sure. So you spent another quiet evening at home?

J: Yes. *(laughs)*

T: Well, those are two memorable evenings, if for different reasons than I have heard from other people.

You are talking here about being out of the military. What was your initial reaction to now being a civilian?

J: It was, how are we going to live? I didn't have any money; I didn't have any clothes, other than Army clothes. Fortunately, one of the supply sergeants was from Albany, Minnesota, and we got to be good friends. So when I was discharged he asked if I needed anything. I asked, "What can you do about it?" He says, "They're not checking anything anymore." So I got, I think it was, fifteen sets of khaki pants and fifteen khaki shirts.

T: Fifteen sets of shirts and pants?!

J: Yes. And that is all I wore at Dunwoody Institute, and even after I went to work. Those khakis lasted for years. Little by little, as I got some money, I'd buy some civilian slacks and shirts and stuff. But it was tough; there were still some jobs available in some factories when I got discharged that I could have had employment for a while. But what skills did I have? That was very valuable to me, that additional education I got that I had missed. *(pauses five seconds)*

I was out of the service one week when I signed up at Dunwoody. I started school immediately. They were strict at Dunwoody. The government was paying the ex-servicemen's tuition; at that time it was thirty-five dollars a month. Now I suppose it would be several hundred. If you got one failing mark, they called you into the office and warned you that the government won't tolerate that. If you get another failing mark, you're out. It was tough. Within the months after I had signed up there—there was initially only a couple hundred—after a few months there was two thousand, and there was a waiting list of another two thousand that had signed up.

T: A lot of them veterans?

J: Practically all of them; I didn't know anybody that wasn't. *(pauses ten seconds)* They made you study.

**(2, B, 213)**

T: There was some pressure to stay in there, then?

J: You bet. You couldn't take a chance on getting a couple of failing marks.

T: What was the hardest thing you think you faced readjusting to civilian life?

J: *(pauses ten seconds)* I don't recall anything that was *(pauses four seconds)* unusually hard to adapt to or anything. Perhaps the fact that you couldn't go to the store and buy anything you wanted. The fact is, the little apartment we had, across the street was a little, tiny grocery store so we'd get our groceries there.

No boxes, no paper bags, you stacked them on your arm and carried them home! Now why were paper and boxes that scarce?

And it was hot in that upstairs apartment. She [Velda] went all over Minneapolis trying to buy a fan, and they'd just laugh at her! "There is no such thing to be bought as a fan." You know, it's made out of metal. Things like that were annoying. I guess by then the rationing must have been off.

Speaking of rationing, one Saturday in Macon, Georgia, I got off at noon and she worked until five or so on Saturday. She had left a note for me to take the ration book and go get some kind of meat. So I walked into the butcher shop—it wasn't no big supermarket then—and I forget what I ordered, but I handed this coupon book to the clerk, and he started laughing. He says, "This book is for shoes!" Well, I didn't know one ration book from another. So I had to go back to the apartment.

## **(2, B, 243)**

T: Let me ask these wrap-up questions here. What did the war mean for you personally, at the time you were engaged in it?

J: Well, I guess it was a job that had to be done, and the quicker we get it done the quicker we could go home. *(pauses five seconds)* I wouldn't say that anybody was really motivated by patriotism, although we knew we were fighting for our country, but all the time I was overseas I don't know if I ever saw an American flag. There wasn't time for that kind of stuff. So it became a job that had to be done... *(pauses five seconds)* and it was your duty; you had to play the cards that were dealt to you.

T: How do you reflect on the war now?

J: Well, it's hard to believe that it ever happened. *(pauses five seconds)* Just hard to believe.

T: Is it because of the passage of time, you mean?

J: That the good would survive something like that, even for two years, which was a short time, as I mentioned, for some of the other guys. And how we could survive the conditions we lived under, cold and wet, mountains in Italy with the snow and just those leather Army boots, soaked through with water. We were supposed to have what they called at that time a combat suit—it was blanket-lined pants with knit cuffs and a jacket that was blanket-lined with knit cuffs—but there were so very few. As soon as somebody was wounded or killed, the first thing that happened, if they had a combat suit on, or one piece, it was taken off of them.

T: By the soldiers who wanted it?

J: Yes, for somebody else to wear. And we were supposed to have rubbers over our leather boots, but I doubt there was more than one or two men per hundred that ever got any. (*pauses five seconds*) They couldn't make them fast enough, I suppose. And of course I was in hospital in Naples for about ten days or so from the filth we lived in, unwashed for a month or more at a time.

Everybody would get these big pus sores on their hands and fingers, some the size of a dime and puffed up a quarter of an inch, full of pus. And the medics assigned to each company would come along, and with a tongue depressor he'd just scrape all that pus and stuff off (*makes hand motions*), sprinkle sulphur powder in them, and that was it, that's the treatment, no bandages, no nothing.

I got lead poisoning in my arm, so when I noticed that I had a big red streak going up my arm, and when it got to my armpit it got to be real painful, then I showed it to the medic, and he figured I ought to go the hospital, so he talked to somebody. They put me in the hospital in Naples in a (\*\*\*) hospital tent. I was there for, I suspect, about ten days to clear up that infection. I went back, but the same thing happened again, with the hands.

They of course gave us a lot of shots, different kinds, that may have helped and the fact that we in good physical condition helped. Otherwise, how come everybody didn't get pneumonia? Cold and wet...

T: Do you think, when you look back now, do you see the war experience, for yourself, as more than a job to be done? Are you more idealistic about the whole purpose, or has that not really happened with you?

J: No, of course I... all my years, fifty-five years, active years, in the VFW (*pauses ten seconds*) I don't feel that I'm owed anything, I feel that I did my job, (*pauses ten seconds*), and that's it. I have been patriotic, as well as my wife, all our life, and do everything we can to help veterans that are needy. That's what the VFW stands for, veterans helping veterans, and visiting veterans homes, up at Silver Bay and St. Cloud, and also a lot of rest homes. (*pauses five seconds*) As far as making me more patriotic, no, I still feel that we had a job to do, and we did it, during the war.

T: I am finished. Is there anything else you want to add to the tape?

J: (*pauses ten seconds*) Well, I think I mentioned I got one hundred percent disability now (*in 2000*).  
[discusses current health problems for several minutes, unrelated to interview content]

## END OF INTERVIEW