

Interviewee: Angelo Legueri

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 28 September 2002

Location of interview: dining room of the Legueri home in Nashwauk, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, October 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, December 2002

Angelo Legueri was born 26 February 1916 in Westerly, Rhode Island. The oldest child of Italian immigrant parents, at age five he moved with his family to the Iron Range town of Nashwauk, Minnesota, where his father had found work in the local iron ore mines. Here Angelo grew up and attended school, graduating from Nashwauk High School in 1934. Following high school Angelo did what many young men did—he went to work as a mineworker. For eight years, from 1935-43, Angelo labored in the mines. Angelo married in 1940 (wife Dorothy Hughes Legueri), and was building a home when in late 1943 he was drafted into military service.

In the Army, Angelo was assigned to the 1306th Engineer General Service Regiment and in 1944 shipped out to Europe. From mid-1944 until the end of the war in Europe, Angelo's unit saw action in France, Belgium, and Germany; duties included bridge building and the clearing of land mines. During this time in Europe his first child was born. After V-E Day (May '45) Angelo's unit was sent to the Pacific, saw action in the Philippines, and after V-J Day (Aug '45) spent several months in Japan building accommodations for US occupation troops. In November 1945 Angelo was rotated back to the US and discharged with the rank of tech sergeant.

Back in Nashwauk, Angelo was reunited with his family and returned to his job at the M. A. Hanna mining company; he retired in 1978 with 43 years service. Dorothy and Angelo remained in Nashwauk, where they raised a family of five children.

Angelo describes work in the mines on Minnesota's Iron Range, where he worked until 1943, and then offers detailed insights to his Army service in Europe (1944-45) and the Philippines (1945). Also valuable are his observations about occupation duty in Japan (1945).

An interview with Dorothy Legueri is also part of this collection.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

A = Angelo Legueri

[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 the 28th of September 2002, and this is an interview with Angelo Legueri. First, on the record Mr. Legueri, I want to thank you very much for taking time today to speak with me.

A: You're welcome.

T: Just let me go over some of the things I have learned from you as we talked before the tape was on. You were born the 26th of February 1916 in Westerly, Rhode Island, but moved to the Range with your folks before you were five years old. Attended schools on the Iron Range, graduating from Nashwauk High School in 1934. Went to Coleraine Junior College briefly before going to work on the Iron Range as a mine worker. You worked as a mine worker for eight years, until 1943, when you were drafted in to the US Army; you served in the US Army in the 1306th Engineer General Service Regiment until November of 1945, when you were discharged with a rank of tech sergeant. You were in the European Theater, and also in Japan after the war ended. After your discharge from military service you returned to the Iron Range and worked for M. A. Hannah here on the Range, in Keewatin, retiring in 1978. You've been a resident of Nashwauk for nigh on sixty years now.

A: Yes.

T: I want to start by just asking about your time after high school. You worked on the Iron Range. Can you describe briefly the kind of work that you did when you began to work on the Iron Range?

A: I worked as a common laborer to start off with. I worked that way until they got... They used electric locomotives and railroads. Then they promoted me to a brakeman on one of the locomotives. Then they made another change. They got rid of all the locomotives and they got diesel trucks to do their work. I got to be a truck driver until I was drafted in the Army.

T: So you drove truck on the Range for a number of years then.

A: Yes.

T: The US got involved in the war at the end of 1941, meaning that you worked a couple of years in a wartime economy as a civilian. First question I want to ask is about the 7th of December 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the US getting involved in the war. Do you remember what you were doing when you first heard that news?

A: Yes. We were on the job and the first we heard about it was we were in the dry house waiting for a change of shift. Somebody came in and said the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. That was when we first heard of it.

T: How did you react and how did those around you react to that news?

A: Everybody was mad. They thought it was an underhanded deal because after all we considered it murder because we were not at war with the Japanese at that time. They killed all these young guys. As a matter of fact they had envoys in Washington talking peace and all the while preparing for an attack. Everybody was pretty upset.

T: At the age of twenty-five at that time, did you wonder how this would affect you personally with the US being at war?

A: We thought that we were in a vital industry and that they wouldn't draft us.

T: Were you told that or was that something you just thought?

A: No, no. We just thought that. We weren't told. As a matter of fact, we asked the superintendent about it and he said there was nothing he could do about it. They declare workers that they had to have, because we could be replaced.

T: Did you have a draft card at that time?

A: Yes. I had a draft card. Of course that was 1-A (*laughs*).

T: A lot of folks were 1-A, weren't they? If you can recall, how did your job change specifically once the war began, once the US was actually in the war?

A: They needed a lot of ore because they needed to make tanks and things, and so we worked seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day even after it got cold and the ore would freeze in the chutes. They had to put heaters on there. We worked seven days a week, twenty-fours a day. Different shifts.

T: So there were shifts added to increase production?

A: That's right. I'm not exactly sure about how many million tons of ore were mined at that time but, it was terrific.

T: Now, for you, did it mean more hours to work per week?

A: Right. We had to work overtime hours. They had a certain quota to make. We had to be there until it was done.

T: So you noticed an increase in the number of hours you worked per week.

A: Oh, yes.

(1, A, 98)

T: Did your pay increase?

A: The extra time only, but not per hour.

T: So there was definitely an increase in the number of hours worked per week.

A: Right.

T: Was there a turnover in the men working there? Did you notice people leaving for service and being replaced by other people?

A: Yes. That happened because as those were being drafted they were replaced by people from other parts of the country that were supposed to be nonessential. They came and took our place.

T: As people were being replaced, were they replaced by older men, or were they replaced by women in some cases?

A: In some cases yes, by women. But in most cases not older men. A little bit older I would say. They were probably about ten years older, but they had all come from the farming communities.

T: So they were drawn to the cities and towns of the Range to do that kind of work.

A: Yes. They came here and took our jobs. Yes.

T: You mentioned women. What kind of jobs did you now see women doing that they hadn't done before?

A: I think in some cases they became samplers. When they loaded the ore they had to take samples from each car and then check the samples so they could determine the ore content, the iron content in each one. So they took those jobs. And other jobs too. I don't remember jobs in the pit. Driving truck; they were truck drivers. Some of them were really good at it, too.

T: So what had been a pretty much male dominated environment, now had men and women working in the same area.

A: Right. That's quite correct.

T: How did you feel about women on the job?

A: Those that I worked close to I thought were really good. They did a real good job, but not all of them. Of course there were problems because you get a bunch of men and women together there's going to be men and female problems. That eventually happened.

T: What do you mean by that?

A: Some of the guys would come along and they would pester the women. Maybe even worse than that if they could. And the women, the only way they could defend themselves was to turn them in. Some of the people lost their jobs because of that. Because they were pestering the women.

T: So there were, shall we say, some adjustment problems to having women on the job?

A: Oh, definitely there were. We had to have private dry house for them. Private lavatories. They couldn't be the same place as the men had them. They had to have their own. For instance, there was some problems, men and women problems. So whenever a woman wanted to go to a bathroom or wanted to do something, you always had to take a witness along with you to prove that you didn't molest them.

T: No kidding!?

A: Because sometimes if they got mad at you, they could say, "He's been bothering me." And then you were in trouble. So you had to have proof.

T: All kinds of adjustments then.

A: There sure were.

T: Did you notice that older guys had more difficulty adjusting than the younger guys, or wasn't there really a difference there?

A: No. The older guys didn't have any trouble adjusting. They accepted them, as long as they did their work. They did their work. They did a good job. But the younger guys were the ones that were the problem. That caused a little problem.

T: At this time were you living at home with your folks?

A: No, no. We were married. At the time when I first started to work. This point that I'm reciting now, was after the war had started. Just before I was drafted.

T: What year were you married?

A: July 27, 1940.

T: So when the war started, you were already married. But you didn't have any kids yet.

A: No.

T: The two of you were living here in Nashwauk?

A: Right.

T: Let me ask you about changes around town. The young men were leaving the area to go off to war. How did life in Nashwauk change as a little town?

A: Not noticeably, except that a lot of the guys that you used to meet on the street to visit with, they weren't there anymore. So you didn't have that part with the small town. You walked uptown. You meet someone. You stop at the corner and start to visit. You didn't have that anymore because the guys were gone.

T: And when you went by November of 1943, you were one of the last to go?

A: Right.

T: So you stopped on the corner and talked to yourself, I guess.

A: Yes *(both laugh)*.

T: Angelo, were you impacted by rationing at all? Things like automobile tires or gasoline, things like this for your personal use?

A: Yes. We did. We had an old car, and we had a lot of problems. You had to have gas stamps to buy gas with. Of course that means that you couldn't get out and do anything, go anywhere with the car. You had to use it for going to work, and that's about it.

(1, A, 178)

T: Did you think that you didn't quite have enough gas stamps to live life the way you had before?

A: Yes. You never had quite enough.

T: Was it possible to get gas on the sly, on the Black Market, or buy stamps from someone else?

A: You could sometimes get stamps from someone else, someone who didn't need them, but not on the Black Market. We never were exposed to any of that.

T: But you could get stamps occasionally from someone else?

A: From someone else. As long as you had the stamps, you could get the gas.

T: How about getting tires and things like this for cars? Was that a problem?

A: I don't remember having any problem getting tires.

T: Do you think, in your opinion, in a small town like this, did the war bring Nashwauk together as a community?

A: Yes, I kind of think so. But I didn't know it that much. In small towns, they did get together more because so many of their young people had to be drafted. They were gone. That meant the other people were closer together because the young people were gone.

T: Did the community have things like food drives or war bond drives or metal drives, things like this to help?

A: War bond drives, yes.

(1, A, 197)

T: Was that at work, or here in the community?

A: It was here in the community, and it happened on the job too. They'd come over. Most of us would give an hour's pay for buying bonds, and things like that.

T: Did you feel encouraged to do that, or pressured to do that?

A: No. We felt encouraged to do that because we wanted to do our... whatever way we could help.

T: When you think about your financial situation during the war, did you perceive yourself as better off financially, worse off financially, or about the same?

A: Worse off when I was in the Army. I could never figure out. They gave us twenty-one dollars a month.

When I was working before I went in the Army, we made more money. We made more money. I got better income, because I remember we had to borrow money to build our house and we had payments, small payments each month. Well, when we started to work and make more money, we increased that payment and the bankers told us we didn't have to hurry up and pay it off. But we wanted to pay it off.

T: They were quite happy to have you stretch it out, and pay more interest.

A: Yes.

T: So you had a little extra money to the point where you could pay extra on your house note every month.

A: Right. We put the money into the house. Whatever we needed, we could pay cash for it.

T: When was the house completed? Before you left for service?

A: No, it wasn't done. There was quite a lot of work left on it yet. We were living in it and working in it at the same time.

T: So you were building a house during wartime, which itself was already rather rare.

A: Yes.

T: Let's turn to your military service, Angelo. Were you drafted or did you enlist?

A: I was drafted. Like almost everyone in town (*laughs*).

T: Do you remember getting that letter that told you it was time to report?

A: Yes. "Uncle Sam wants you." He pointed at you.

T: How did you respond to finally getting the letter that said it's time to report?

A: I wasn't very happy about it, because Dora was pregnant awaiting our first born. I knew I wouldn't be able to be home when the time came. So I was pretty unhappy about it for that reason.

T: And your first child was born in 1944, is that right?

A: Yes.

T: How did your wife respond, from your perspective? How did she respond?

A: She wasn't very happy about it either, of course, because of the situation we were in. The house wasn't done. She was pregnant. It was a poor situation for both of us.

T: Were you surprised that they actually called you up?

A: Yes. I was surprised, because they weren't drafting married people and they weren't drafting people over twenty-one years old. So here I was twenty-six. And they picked on me.

T: Were you one of a number of guys about the same age at your place of work?

A: Right.

T: So it wasn't they got you personally, but they got a number of guys the same base age.

A: That's right.

(1, A, 241)

T: And you were drafted into the Army. From what you said earlier Basic Training didn't happen right away.

A: No, it didn't happen until we got to England. I hadn't even seen a rifle up to that point.

T: So it was go to Fort Snelling, get into uniform and...

A: Away we went.

T: Do you remember the trip across the Atlantic?

A: Very much.

T: Talk about that.

A: Okay. There was this whole company. About a hundred and twenty-five men we had in our outfit. First they loaded us on the train and we went to New York because that was the port of embarkation. We got to New York and we were not there very long. They knew we were going to be gone so they let us go into New York. The guys from the small community kind of stuck together and became very good friends, so three of us that became very good friends went into the city together. We wanted to see a floor show. We'd never seen a floor show. So we went to this place where they were having one, and we went in there, and we asked the guy if we had to pay to get in. He said, "No, it don't cost you anything. Go right

in." So he let us go in for free. We went in and watched the floor show for a while. Then they had Radio City that we'd been hearing on the radio quite often. We wanted to see that too. We were going to go there and we were walking down the street, and some guy walks out of a shop and he gave us tickets for Radio City, so we could get in for nothing. So we went in there. They were filled, but being soldiers they could tell that we were from a small town, and they let us in and let us sit in the aisle and we watched the program. In person. So they treated us royally when we were there. Didn't charge us for anything.

T: You said you think they could tell you were from a small town.

A: Yes.

T: How do you think so?

A: I don't know. The way we looked around (*laughs*).

T: All the buildings looked so tall? That's very perceptive of you to see that (*both laugh*).

A: And then they loaded us aboard this ship. We thought we'd get on one of ours but it was a Limey ship. We called them Limeys. A British ship. They filed us in there. We had everything that we owned on our backs. They filed us into the rooms. It didn't seem to be much bigger than the living room. It looked small. And they packed us in there. On the floor. On the benches. On the table. And then they told us, "Okay boys, get comfortable because this is where you're going to be for the next two weeks."

T: How many people were in this room? How many guys?

A: I don't know how many of us got in this one room. Pretty near the whole company. So at night when we went to sleep you had to have people on the floor, on the benches, on top of the table and hammocks. Layers of guys.

T: To say it was close quarters was an understatement.

A: (*laughs*) It was close quarters but that we could put up with that. But the first time we went to get something to eat, we didn't feel very good in the first place [from] being where we were and the movement of the ship. We went up there, and the Limeys had a great big kettle on board ship. And there was a guy out there. He had dumped a whole bunch of stuff in there with water and he had a big paddle and he was stirring it around and gave us a pan for a whole squad. I looked at it. We were sick already and I got sick just looking at it. We thought that if they put American troops on the ship, they must have put American food on the Limey ship to feed us, so everybody complained. We got better food after that.

T: Did you?

A: The officers were eating our food. The British officers. So we got better food after that. They had our food. And if they wanted to get us all the way to England they better feed us something better. So they did.

T: Where did the ship dock in England?

(1, A, 290)

A: I don't remember the name. All I know is that when we landed in England, it was in Scotland. The first night we got there they unloaded us in Scotland. They kept us in a big warehouse. They weren't prepared for us. They weren't prepared for us to sleep anywhere. So they gave us body bags filled with straw.

T: Body bags with straw?

A: Yes. We used those for a mattress.

T: How welcoming.

A: They were called pelliasses.

T: Why was that?

A: That's what the Scot's people called them. All we can do it give you some pelliasses. So that's what we got.

T: So at least you were off the ship.

A: Yes. We were off the ship.

T: How long did you stay in England?

A: I don't quite remember dates again. But we stayed long enough to go through an intensive... No, from Scotland we moved down to the middle part of England. Inland quite a ways. There we stayed through the intense training session and then they loaded us on the landing craft and we went across. That was during the invasion.

T: During the D Day invasion of France.

A: We didn't go on the first wave because we were with the tank army and we had to have someplace to land the tanks. We went out there maybe about ten days after the initial invasion. We landed on the Utah Beach the middle of one night. One midnight. And we marched all night long until an area, until everybody was worn

out. Maybe for that reason, we had all of our packs on our backs. It was pretty heavy. Then we just hoped that the guy that was leading us knew where he was going because there were land mines all over the place. You only had a small trail to walk on. You didn't dare step off the trail. Then they moved us up into a big field and we had to dig our foxholes along the edges of the field. Then when we got enough tanks and things we had to go through a town that was right on the Cherbourg Peninsula. There was a small town there that we had to go through but the Germans had it. We'd go in there and take the town for a while then we'd get some tanks to go through. Then the Germans would retake it again because they knew what was happening. So we finally got enough power to go through. Went around in back, encircled the Germans, so they couldn't get any more supplies. So they had to give up. Then we went through there and we started picking up German prisoners. They were running out of supplies. They were getting hungry.

(1, A, 325)

T: Let me ask you, in this 1306th Engineer General Service Regiment, what exactly was your job?

A: There were a lot of young guys in our outfit. Our job was building bridges and clearing land. Some of these young kids knew nothing about carpentry work. Like the first bridge we built. When they start laying the beams across up there they didn't know how to go about doing it. So I said you always start from the middle and always work on the middle all the way through. Then it doesn't make any difference how wide a bridge is, it will always come out right. I had taken some geometry classes in high school and I remembered that.

T: So you were in with younger people who really didn't have much knowledge about to be an engineer or a builder?

A: No. Another good example is when we got the bridge built, we had to build railing and they wondered how to make them straight. I said, it's simple enough. Put a post here and a post on the other end and put a chalk line from one post to the other. Use that as a guide. Oh, okay.

T: So what, for you, was pretty basic stuff, was knowledge for them that they hadn't really thought about.

A: Yes. They were boys from the cities. A lot of them were real young. They didn't know anything about... I have to tell you this story about the time in the ammunition dump. The trucks were coming into this ammunition dump. We just happened to be driving by. I saw there was a cat pushing a truck by all the time. So me and my big mouth I said, why don't they build a corduroy road there and then they won't get stuck. Being from Minnesota. The loggers built corduroy roads across swamps. So the one guy, the officer, said, "What's that?" He never heard of a corduroy road.

T: Which is made out of logs.

A: Yes. So he said, "Do you know how to do it? Do it!" So I said okay. So they sent an outfit there about two or three hundred guys in it and they went all over and cut trees. I told them to cut a ten foot lengths. In no time at all they had corduroys laid across there. Then we put just enough dirt on top to cover the logs. You don't want too much weight on it. The trucks were coming in and out like a highway. They weren't getting stuck anymore.

T: And what for you was pretty basic...

A: Yes. Some of the things. We knew how to do it.

T: By this time you were part of the war effort against the Germans. When you thought about the "enemy," the Germans, what kind of images did you have of these people?

A: The first prisoners we got we found out, I remember this guy. We were on guard duty. I saw him sneaking along the road. It was just getting daylight. Sneaking along the road. I yelled for him to halt. He stopped. I told him to put his hands up. He came walking towards us. We were supposed to search them because they will carry hand grenades in their pockets. This guy, all he had in his pockets, were some dried chicken bones. The poor guy was starving. So he put his finger up to his head because we were excited. We had the rifle right between his eyes. I said no, no. We had the rest of the guards in the guards shack.

We brought him in there and I told them what had happened and that the guy was hungry. We had a whole case of champagne we got from the chateau that was right close. Being young guys. Anyway, we took out a bottle of champagne and gave it to him and gave him something to eat. His eyes were just like that (*makes wide open eyes*). He thought we were going to shoot him. Instead of that we fed him. We found out he wasn't any different than us. He was the same. He had the same feeling. He had a family that he wanted to get home to just like we did. The only ones that were fanatics were the SS troopers. But the regular German Army, they were just the same as us. They were there because they had to be.

T: Was that the first [experience] you had with a German POW?

A: Right. That was the first one.

T: Were there others after that?

A: Yes. We had a lot of them. We used to get twenty-five or thirty prisoners in the company area. We didn't like that because that meant more guard duty because somebody had to guard them. They had prisoner of war camps not too far away. You get that many, we'd load them in a truck and haul them to a prisoner of war

camp. I remember this one time that we brought a bunch of them and dropped them off there and the guy, the American officer, came out and he walked back and forth. That was the time they treated the Jews, and the first thing he told those prisoners: "I'm Jewish. You better behave yourself." That's all he had to say. Never had any more.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 370.

A: One guy, a POW, came with me because he was pretty handy with tools. I used to do the maintenance work around the area. We get done with our work and then we'd go out somewhere by ourselves. It seems funny. He couldn't speak English. I couldn't speak German but we could communicate with sign language and stuff like that. We got along real good. He was the nicest guy. As a matter of fact, in other circumstances we probably would have been very good friends. Anyway, the next morning he came back again with a group that came there to work and I was in my tent sound asleep with my rifle laying beside me. I felt somebody shaking me. It was him. He could have shot me if he wanted to. He shook me. He said, "Come!" He wanted me to go with him to the mess to get something to eat. If I was with him the guys in the mess would never know he was a German prisoner because he was dressed in civilian clothes. Then we went to eat and we went out and did a few little chores and then we visited all day.

T: That's an interesting story. Was there an occasion when you saw German prisoners of war who weren't treated so well by Americans?

A: Yes. We loaded them in these great big semis. We were loading them. I suppose it doesn't hurt to say it because nobody was really hurt. Anyway they had loaded them up. It was semi-trailer. There were still a few more to get in there and they didn't have room so the guy that was driving truck said, "I'll take care of this." He moved forward and stopped quick, and of course, everybody moved forward. Then real quick we put the prisoners in there. They were packed in there just as tight as could be but they weren't hurt from it.

T: So in general, it sounds what you observed is that German POWs were treated fairly by Americans.

A: They had the same food that we had and that's about all you could say. War law said that you had to feed them the same food you had. That's what we did.

T: Your unit also, I'm looking at a map here, your unit made its way across central and into southern Germany before the end of the war. Did you come into contact with German civilians as you made your way through these towns?

(1, B, 415)

A: Not very often. Usually when the Germans retreated, the civilians went with them. We'd come into a town they were ghost towns.

T: Really?

A: Very seldom did you find a civilian in there. We had the run of the whole town. There were no civilians around.

One day we had a particularly tough day and when we moved into this town we went into their school. It was big enough to house all of us. I used to like to play mouth organ. So I went upstairs in the auditorium and got on the bench in the middle of the auditorium all by myself and played my mouth organ. Just for my own satisfaction. Anyway, then this Swede from North Dakota came up there. A young guy. Didn't even shave yet. He came up there and he found a mop, a mop with a white mop head, and he put it on his head and he was out there dancing with the mop handle all by himself. A couple of the other guys heard what was going on so they came up. They started dancing together and dancing with dolls. Before you know it the whole company was up there. Everybody was dancing on the top floor and me playing my mouth organ but nobody could hear me anymore (*laughs*). So we had to entertain ourselves quite often. That's what we were doing. Things like that.

T: These were enlisted guys in here weren't they?

A: Yes.

T: How would you describe the relationship between officers and enlisted men? At least from your perspective.

A: I thought it was very good. Our captain was a big, easy-going guy. And then the officers were too. They were strict, but I mean, you know, they had to be. Like, for instance, one time in Basic Training: I didn't like to shave every day. I got caught one time. The officer told me in no uncertain terms, "Soldier, you shave every day or else!" I knew you could afford to get caught once, but you never should be caught twice. So I had to figure out how I could get around it. So what I did, I'd shave up here every day, but every other day under my chin and he couldn't tell the difference. I got away with it (*laughs*).

T: So in general, you thought you were treated fairly.

A: I think so. Yes.

T: Your job as building bridges and clearing land mines. Were you involved in clearing land mines yourself?

A: Yes. Very much so. This is a good one too. A lot of times the whole company would have to go out and get an area and would have to clear land mines. There

was one time they sent a squad of us over to this one place. We had to build a bridge. It was just a small bridge and it was in the wintertime. They had just had a snowstorm. We had a Cat with us to build approaches to the bridge. The Cat started down toward the bridge and he hit a landmine. It didn't hurt the driver but it blew the pads off the Cat. What we thought was going to be a little job turned out to be a major job, because we had to go down and clear all those mines on both approaches to where we were supposed to work. The Germans laid the mines before it snowed and every place there was a mine there was a mound. So we knew exactly where they were. But we had to very carefully pick them all up.

I don't remember how many there were. We had to pick them all up and deactivate them. That was our training so we knew what to do. We had them piled up along the side of the road near where we were building the bridge. We worked all night on the bridge but we didn't get it done. When that outfit that was supposed to come through, the guy in the lead outfit, some officer, came out and he was pretty upset. We could see trucks and equipment that were parked. He said "They told us the bridge was going to be done." I said "We ran into a little bit of trouble. We ran into some landmines and it held us up." I said "But if you'd like to get done sooner give us some help. Help us finish this bridge." And he saw the landmines and said "No, no, no. You guys ahead and finish it." He saw what our problem was so he didn't argue anymore.

(1, B, 487)

T: How do you physically deactivate a landmine?

A: Most of the time they were too simple. For instance, an anti-tank mine had a detonator, an outfit about the size of a dollar, and then there was a hole filled in here. There would be a pin in there. Before they set it up. So we would come and put a nail through there and that way you couldn't set it off. They got wise to that after our mine detector used to pick these mines up. Then they started making them out of wood. So we had to go on our hands and knees and probe everything in front of us.

T: Literally. Probing in front of you.

A: Yes. Until you found a mine that way. When we found a mine we would have to dig around it and under it. Sometimes as you picked the mine up there would be a booby trap under it. It would set the booby trap off. So it wouldn't help any. A lot of the mines like that were made, some of them were not made to kill people, but they were made to hurt somebody. So every time somebody hit a landmine they'd get three guys because two had to help the guy back. So what there were trying to do was eliminate a number of soldiers.

T: When you're probing for landmines what goes through your mind as you're probing in the ground there?

A: You're very, very careful. You weren't allowed any mistakes.

T: I guess you only got one, didn't you?

A: You didn't even get one. Because if you got one that was it. Your first mistake was your last mistake.

T: As you're doing that, how would you describe the way you felt? Were you nervous, or calm, or...?

A: I don't know. I don't think I ever remember being bothered by any of that. I didn't think that anything was ever going to happen to me. Although we were exposed to all the dangers that the war would offer but nothing happened.

T: This feeling of nothing is going to happen to me, was that a conscious thing that you just figured you were going to make it through?

A: I guess I just figured I was going to make it through. I thought we had good training. The only way that something could happen is if I made a mistake. We were very careful that we didn't make any mistakes.

(1, B, 525)

A: One time we were bivouacked in there. We weren't picking up, checking any mines. They had what we called Bouncing Bettys. There were three little prongs that stuck out of the ground. If you hit one it would bounce up in the air about the height of a man and explode so that it would get more people around there. This one guy, when we started out across the field, he never had any business doing that. But he hit a landmine. He hit one of those Bouncing Bettys. And he hit the ground and he was lucky he didn't get hurt by it. So he thought, oh, boy, I better get back. He started back and he hit another one. And lucky, he got by with that one too. Then he started to scream for help. He was one of our buddies. So we had to go out there. But we had to work our way out there probing for mines all the way out there. It took us quite a long time to get to him and then work our way back. But we got back without any of them getting hurt.

T: Lucky for him.

A: Lucky for him.

T: Angelo, let me ask you, after you landed in June in western France and made your way across towards Germany, do you remember the first time you had a serious combat situation?

A: We hadn't been there very long. Our outfit wasn't designed for any major battles but we had a .50 caliber machine gun with us. We landed and we started to move in.

We got caught in a German counterattack. In order so we wouldn't have to deal with it they moved us back into some heavy woods until the German counterattack could be taken care of. That was the very first time we thought we were going to get into a major battle. We weren't equipped for it. All we had was our rifles and the Germans had their tanks and everything else with them. So we had to have our tanks to counter them.

T: How did this close proximity to a combat situation make you feel?

A: It didn't change our feelings very much except we were relieved that we didn't have to take part in it. That's about the way it was. Then another time a German plane came flying over and we were told not to shoot at him because all we had was our rifles and a .50 caliber machine gun. You couldn't do anything to a plane. One of the characters in our outfit shot at it. I think he hit it. But he didn't hurt it at all. The pilot looked down and he saw who did it. He swung around and came back and started to strafe us. We ran into a clump of woods to get out the way because there was nothing else we could do. One of the shells landed about that far beside me. Bounced me up off the ground. Just missed me.

(1, B, 565)

T: Was that your closest call when you were over there?

A: No. I'd been shot at more than once. One time we were going through a small town. We were going to go to a church. They had a bridge over a railroad track, a walking bridge. So we got up on top. As soon as we got on top we heard a shot and heard the shell hit the bridge. We ran back and hid on the side away from it. Hid there. We were figuring out what we could do and here's the mentality of young people. It didn't make us turn and go back. What we did was we drew straws to see who's going to be the first guy to run over the bridge. Then we said if somebody shoots at you we can tell where he is (*laughs*). That was our mentality.

T: As we get older we might look at things differently, don't you think?

A: Anyway, the guy who got the shortest straw had to run it so he got up, turned, and ran across the bridge. Nobody shot at him. So we said, when you get on the other side, you watch over there. And we all had turns running across. We made it okay. We went into this small town, walking down the street and we hit a T. Just as we got to the T there was shot and right over my head the plaster came off the wall right beside me. So we moved back. Somebody said, shall we go look at that... pretty flowery language. I said I don't think so. He can see us but we don't know where he is. Before we could get too far he will probably get some of us. So we just backed up. But we went ahead and went to church anyway.

T: So that's two close calls you had.

A: Yes. That's right. Right at the same time.

T: Clearing of landmines is something you must have done...

A: Many times.

T: Was there a time when somebody did make a mistake or didn't get the time out of the ground?

A: No. Not a single guy ever made a mistake. I'll tell one case we had about landmines. We hadn't been there very long. We were clearing a pretty good sized minefield. That was the kind that we had to probe for. Right on the highway not very far from us there were some infantry men. They had a bunch of prisoners and they were escorting the prisoners to a prisoner of war camp. They came by and they were pointing at us and laughing. Ha, ha, ha. Because it was a minefield. So I said, "Let's take care of those blankety-blank characters. We'll change that laughter."

So I went to the officer in charge and said, I want to go over and get those guys. They put the mines in here. Let them come and clear them. The Germans. So I started over there and they knew what I was up to. So they quit laughing in a big hurry. But the officer came to me. He said no, we can't do that. You can't use the prisoners to do things like that. I said they were laughing at us. He said I know. So we had to go back through the minefield ourselves.

T: That must have been pretty frustrating watching them laugh.

A: Laughing at us and they put the mines there (*laughs*).

T: Luckily no one was hurt. So really, it was slow careful work but you did it successfully. Switching gears a bit. Was there a time when you had leave or time behind the lines?

(1, B, 605)

A: Yes. That's a good one. We had been on duty. I don't know how long it was. When you're out there you're on duty seven days a week and twenty-four hours a day. You can be called up any time. You had to be prepared at any time. After--I forget how many months it was. We had decided that we should go back to a rest camp. Back in France for a week. So we did. We went back to this rest camp and we could take it easy. As a matter of fact it was one of the towns we had gone through originally. We were treated as heroes. Waving American flags. Some of the people running alongside the truck with water pails of cognac and handed them up to us so we could take a drink. We got back there until the general came over one day. He wanted to know how we were being treated. He knew what we'd been through. We said we don't have enough beer to drink and the Red Cross was there and they should be open twenty-four hours a day. Because any time we wanted something to eat we wanted to be able to get it. He said, okay, we'll take care of that. So the next

day there was beer stacked up. All the beer we wanted to drink. And the Red Cross had to keep their place open twenty-four hours a day. They didn't like us very much (*laughs*).

T: Do you remember the name of that little town?

A: No. I don't remember the name. I should remember it.

T: That was in France though.

A: Yes.

T: And it was after we had gone through.

A: We came back. They had the rest camp there. One thing about it. The occupation troops. When we went through there we didn't have too much time to create any mischief. But when the occupation troops came in they had a lot of time to get into mischief and they were causing problems that civilians didn't like. So when we got back there they wouldn't even let us in the beer joints.

T: Really. So there was...

A: Because we were all treated the same.

T: The mood had changed.

A: Yes. Because of the way they thought some of the American soldiers were. I suppose of them were kind of hard to put up with. But when we went through there we were heroes.

T: How did that make you feel really, seeing both ends of the spectrum here? From hero to kind of...

A: We were surprised at that. We didn't think we should be treated that way. Because, after all, we were the ones that relieved the city. We were the first ones through there.

T: What do you do when you're on leave? How did you pass your time?

A: Never had any leave.

T: I mean this time at the rest camp. You had time away from the front line. How did you pass your time?

A: You just kind of relaxed. You had a chance to relax. You could see the sights if you could because it was safe. There was not much. Most of the time what we

missed the most is when we got [the opportunity] to get to Paris. Everybody wanted to get to Paris. We came to a Y in the road. One sign said Paris the other side said I don't know what. Instead of taking the road to Paris we had to take the other road.

T: The road to I don't know what.

A: Yes (*laughs*). Anyway, they told us the reason for that was that the Free French wanted to take Paris. Because they were really mad at the Germans. The Germans treated them pretty rough.

(1, B, 642)

T: You mentioned having all the beer... the beer supply was good for a change. Was drinking or was alcohol consumption a problem as you observed it?

A: Not so much because we never had a chance to get at it. It never came in our rations. Our rations were tobacco and cigarettes and stuff like that. But never anything to drink. But like you asked before about getting into a town, the first place we'd go to look was the liquor store. Or a bar. We came into this one town. They never had a chance to clear their bar out because they had to run so fast, so the back bar was all full of different kinds of liquor and the basement was full of liquor. So we came out with armfuls of bottles like that. The whole company. And before you know half the guys were laid out in the truck.

T: From the liquor.

A: Yes.

T: Did officers attempt to keep this kind of alcohol away from soldiers to make sure situations like that didn't happen?

A: No. That didn't happen very often. As a matter of fact, I think that was the only time I can remember of that happening. That was hard liquor. Another time we got into a place. We got into a little town. We got a big case of wine. We were all drinking a little bit of wine and one of the officers came in and he said, "Say, you know the rule about looting." So he came over and helped himself to about four bottles of wine. He said, "Remember that now." (*laughs*)

T: Did it make any difference for you when you came into a French town or a German town how you treated the people or the kind of things you felt justified in taking?

A: That's a good point. We were surprised. During the Battle of the Bulge, Bastogne was destroyed by the German artillery. They had the town ringed and they held what they called point blank range. They could see where they were shooting and

they went up and down each street and demolished everything. When we made the breakthrough and got in there some of the civilians were still there. They couldn't get out. They came up and they accused us of causing the town to be destroyed because we didn't give up. If we had given up they wouldn't have destroyed the town. Anyway, there was a bunch of them and they came and they surrounded us and they were going to attack us.

(1, B, 669)

T: The civilians.

A: Yes. They were going to attack us. But there were four of us. We had our rifles so we pointed our rifles at them. Then they said no, no, no, no. And they took off and ran. But we would have had to shoot them if they did. But we didn't have to.

T: That's quite interesting because one often hears the story of the Belgians, the civilians there, seeing the Americans as liberators, and in this case, what you felt was exactly the opposite from them.

A: Right. Right. Because it is one case. Otherwise everywhere else we went we were treated as heroes.

T: How did that make you feel in Bastogne?

A: About what?

T: About the way that you were received by the civilians.

A: We were hurt by the way we were received by them. After all we relieved the town. They were free now. And yet they were mad at us. What is war? People get killed in a war. Stuff gets destroyed in a war. We did what we had to do to win the war. And if that's what we had to do that's what had to be done.

T: Did you have more contact with French civilians than you did with German civilians on your way through?

A: I don't remember. Not much with the French civilians. Because we didn't have time. We were moving all the time.

T: Pretty quickly. And in Germany you said most of the civilians had left before you got there.

A: Yes. In France, this one day we had pulled in for the night. We dug our foxholes. We always had to dig them every night before we turned in. Anyway, we dug our foxholes and they said come on and fill them up, we've got to go again. It was just getting dark. We traveled all night. That's when we got to Metz. The only reason

that we stopped then, Patton made a breakthrough, and the only reason he stopped is he ran out of gas. Tanks ran out of gas. He had to stop in Metz. That's where we went and stopped there.

T: It sounds like you were really on the go more than you were stationary.

A: Never stopped very long in one place. Moving all the time.

T: In your unit, the kind of things you were doing, construction, mine clearing, you drove truck, so you had truck drivers in your unit too for moving equipment and things like that.

A: We just had trucks to move men. We didn't have to move equipment. We didn't have that much equipment.

T: Just whatever you poked in the ground with.

A: Yes.

T: And a box of nails.

A: And some nails.

T: In your unit, were there different races? Were there whites, blacks, Indians, Mexicans, things like this?

A: Just whites.

T: Did you come into contact with minority groups?

A: Yes.

T: Which kind of people did you come into contact with?

A: Mostly blacks.

T: What jobs did they have?

A: Most of them were truck drivers. The way we looked at it at the time. Although when we came from Marseilles, France, to the Philippine Islands there were black units and it was all mixed together.

T: On the ship.

A: On the ship. There were some of us that liked to play bridge and there were some of the blacks that were really good at it. And so we all grouped together and played bridge. On the ship.

T: When you came into contact with blacks while the war was still on in Europe, was that the job you most often saw blacks doing, driving trucks?

A: That's what we thought. But that might not be, because we only met a few of them and they were truck drivers.

T: What was your impression of them as soldiers?

A: We didn't think they were any different than the rest of us. Except some of them. I never thought they were any different. Because they were there for the same reason we were there. We didn't want to be there either.

T: Did other people treat them the same way you did?

A: No. Not really. There's some I don't even like to mention it.

T: Go ahead.

A: Some places in England they had problems. Some of the whites and some of the blacks. It wasn't very nice, I guess. We never thought that way because, being from this part of the country, we thought everybody was the same. But some people from the southern part of the country, they didn't think so.

T: What kind of things did you observe then when you saw white southerners and blacks?

A: What they said when we first got there. They had some general come and give us a pep talk. He said you want to understand you're going to see black soldiers walking with white women and I don't want to see any problems. There was a muttering in the crowd. Some of them didn't like that. But that's what happened.

(1, B, 708)

T: That was a different experience for most of those guys in the south.

A: Yes.

T: Did that friction between blacks and white change once you got to Europe, to France and Germany, or was it essentially still there?

A: We were never exposed to that anymore. Where we were we never had that problem. So I don't know what happened after that. We were on the go all the time

and we never stopped in one place very long. It seemed like you stopped one place and you were ready to go to another place. There was no time off hardly.

T: It does sound like you were on the move, on the go most of the time.

A: All the time.

T: Being on the go, switching topics here. How did you stay in touch with family and loved ones back home? Because by this time you had a wife and soon you had a child.

A: We had what we called a daily report. I'd write to her and she'd do the same to me.

T: Were you a regular letter writer?

A: Yes. Every day tell her that we were okay. That was the only way she could know that.

T: So you made a point of sending regular reports as much as you could of what you were doing.

A: You couldn't say very much of what you were doing because otherwise it would be censored and it would all be cut out.

T: But just by sending something, I guess that your wife would know that you were okay anyway. You hadn't been captured or wounded.

A: Yes. As a matter of fact, there was one time a number of days, they had a short of escorting a bunch of prisoners and one of them looked just like me. They thought it was me. Aunty Mary thought it was me.

T: How important was it to you to get mail from home?

A: Oh, very important. Everybody was so happy to get mail and packages. She used to send packages to me with goodies in it. But it wouldn't last very long. When you got a package everybody said, oh, boy, a package from home! It would disappear that quick.

T: So whatever you got was automatically shared.

A: Everybody helped themselves.

T: How often, being on the go like this, how often did you actually get mail or packages?

A: Sometimes there would be a delay. Sometimes some of the packages or mail had burn marks on them because they were exposed to some fire of some kind. Then there would be a delay.

T: Did you get things in bunches? A number of letters at a time sometimes?

A: Yes. Sometimes you would.

T: When you got a number of letters at one time were you the kind of person that read them all at once, or did you put them in order and read them slowly.

A: I put them in order. I wanted to see how they progressed. I would read them all at once. Because she always had some progress in there. She had written something about him. I had to find out what was happening.

T: You didn't see your son then until he was well over a year old.

A: Pretty near two.

T: Near two years old before you saw him. How hard was that? Being away from your wife and your son?

A: I thought it was hard because I missed out on important parts of his growth. When he first learned to walk and he first learned to start talking. I missed all that.

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

A: I missed all that part. That's the part that hurt me the most I would say.

T: Did you find yourself thinking about your wife and your family a lot or were you too busy to do that?

A: Every spare moment. All the time. At night.

T: Was that when it was worst? When you had time to sit and think?

A: Yes. When you had time. That's why I think they tried to keep us so busy all the time. So that we wouldn't do things like that.

T: From your perspective, was it harder for married guys than it was for these young, single guys?

A: Harder for married men. Yes. I think in a lot of cases the thing was if they weren't in too much danger they kind of enjoyed it I would think.

T: That's interesting. Did you know other "older" guys your age, late twenties married guys in the same situation?

A: Yes. We had about three like me in our outfit. They were married guys. One guy in particular that I know was really unhappy. He had the same situation that I had. His wife had their first child while he was in California. It took too long to get there. I got a chance to go home and he didn't, and he cried because I could go home and he couldn't. He wanted to see his son too. I said it wasn't my doing. I said you're just too far away.

T: In conversations about getting mail, did you ever observe guys getting what we might call tough mail from home?

A: Yes. We had one guy in particular that I know got a "Dear John letter." We called it Dear John. His girlfriend got interested in somebody else. Wrote him and told him. He was just devastated.

T: How did he take that?

A: He took it pretty hard. There was another case. This guy got a letter from his girlfriend. On the bottom there was something like scribbling. They used to rely on me for a lot of the information they wanted. So he brought the letter over to me and he said, what's this? I looked at him and I said it says I love you. It was written in shorthand. I knew shorthand. So I was able to read it for him. He smiled and took his letter and walked away (*laughs*). They used to rely on me for a lot of things.

T: Did you see yourself or did other people see you, particularly these younger guys, as a father figure in some ways?

A: I think so. I didn't so much but I think a lot of those young kids did. They came to me for a lot of help all the time. When something had to be done they always had me go out and do it. Like we were building. One time I told one of the guys, it was a simple thing. I said for crying out loud, can't you see that. It's simple. He said, no, I can't see it. So I'd explain it to him.

T: Some of these guys were eighteen, nineteen years old. So for them you were an old guy.

A: Yes. I was an old man. They called me "Pop."

T: Yes. How was it? Did they ever come to you with personal problems or asking you advice on how to handle something?

A: Not very often. They usually kept them to themselves. Although another incident. We were building a bridge across the Rhine River and another case like that came up. It was obvious. Anyway, when the Germans went through there was

a wooden structure built and they burned it down. Down to the water level. There were little stubs about that high sticking up all the way through. So we had to go out there and saw them, saw the points of those stubs off so we could lay a beam across. Every time the sergeant came by he put a level on our sawing and he said it was always level. He said, how come you're always level and the other guys aren't? I said, well, the water's level (*laughs*).

T: A common sense thing.

(2, A, 74)

A: Yes. A common sense thing. So we set our saw there, checked the water level and then we sawed it.

T: Seems like two plus two is four, but they weren't getting it were they?

A: I could see those things and every time something happened, all the awards that had been given out--they didn't have any more for noncommissioned officers. Every time somebody got hurt or got shot they'd move me up a notch. From private first class to corporal then to a sergeant. I think the time I got a tech sergeant rating I was surprised to tell them because I could never see eye to eye to our squad sergeant. We argued a lot. Because I was older and a lot of times I didn't believe in some of the things they were doing.

Anyway, the first sergeant of ours got involved with a booby trap. We warned him about it. We were building a bridge and we had these landmines you run into. We also ran into a German ammunition dump. There was all kinds of ammunition there. Hand grenades. We noticed some of the hand grenades were painted differently. So we figured some would go off in three seconds, some five seconds, and some were used as booby traps. He picked up one of those. And we told him, "Put that thing down! That darned thing might be a booby trap!" We weren't sure. We said, "Don't monkey with it." He was a typical tough sergeant. "Aw, you guys don't know what you're talking about."

So what did he do, he pulled the pin. And it blew up in his hand. His eyes too. It didn't kill him but he wanted us to shoot him because he was blind. He said, "I'm blind and I want you to shoot me." No, we loaded him in the trucks and sent him to a hospital. What did he do? They set our platoon sergeant up as top sergeant. I looked at the schedule and he had me there as sergeant so I went to talk to him. I said, "Why did you do that? I didn't think you liked me." He said "I don't like you but now," he was from Missouri and had pretty flowery language, "you're going to have to put up with the rest of the guys like I had to do to put up with you." And you know, he was right (*laughs*). He got even with me.

T: You had guys under you now.

A: Yes. I had guys under me. I had to tell them what to do and a lot of them didn't like it. They'd argue about it.

T: How was it suddenly to be a person in charge?

A: The responsibility sometimes was great because sometimes you had to tell somebody to do something they might get killed doing it.

T: Did you enjoy being a person with some authority?

A: I didn't mind. Let's put it this way. I didn't mind the authority because I knew I could be of some help. Having a job like that.

T: Did you make lasting contacts during your time in the military? People you stayed in contact with after the service?

A: Only two. One from St. Cloud, and then Donaldson. He was from North Dakota. He came and visited once. And Philaby came and visited once. Those are the only two. You get pretty close with people in your area. Philaby was from Minnesota. Therefore we became friends. Donaldson, North Dakota, so close to Minnesota. We became close friends.

T: Would you say you had a lot of close friends while you were in the service or just a few?

A: Not very many. Just a few that you had. Most of the time you had people from your area you became real friendly with. I suppose it was because we thought alike. Some of the people from the southern part of the state, we had quite a few, I got along with them because they called me the Minnesota hillbilly.

(2, A, 136)

T: They would, wouldn't they.

A: Yes.

T: Have you had anything like unit reunions, where your unit gets together after the war?

A: No. Never had any.

T: Is that something that you wish you had had or that you would be interested in?

A: I wished we would have had a get together because it would have been interesting. But the people were from so many different parts of the country. Of course, you could have had it in one section of the country. But some of them from the East Coast, New York, and quite a few from the South.

T: Right. A lot of southerners. Did your unit take casualties and have replacements coming in?

A: Yes. Like I was saying, any time it was a noncommissioned officer then I got a step up in rank.

T: When people were casualties what was the most common way that they were injured or hurt and moved out?

A: When the first sergeant got involved with a booby trap. The other one, another one, I was telling you about when we were going over this incline to go to the church in this little town, when he ran over the bridge and jumped on the other side, the gun went off and he shot himself in the foot. We call that a million dollar wound because then he was discharged. He was sent home.

T: It was really an accident.

A: It was an accident. He didn't expect it to happen.

T: You were in stressful situations too. Talking about casualties. Were there times when guys were just not up to the stress and cracked under the stress?

A: Sometimes it bothered us pretty much. But the time we were building this bridge we built across, I forget the name of the river. Anyway, we quickly built a Bailey Bridge across...

T: Which is what?

A: A Bailey Bridge is like a giant erector set. You put it all together because we had to have traffic cross it right away. That was quite large. We had to build what we called a "double double" because that reinforces the bridge. But we didn't have very much of that kind of material. So we would build a Bailey Bridge. Then we had to build what we called a fixed bridge under the Bailey Bridge. We were building this fixed bridge under the Bailey Bridge and we had guards on both sides. And this one guy led an outfit that was carrying a bunch of tent cracks with him. He had a heavy load. They weren't supposed to send him across because the bridge wasn't strong enough to hold it. And the bridge collapsed on us. And caught four of the guys under it. One of them was caught trying to jump off. He tried to jump off and his leg got caught in the bridge and he was wedged in there and he was just hanging by a shred. They had to cut his leg off to get him out of there. While they were doing that, the guy was hanging over the edge there. Some pompous officer came along and said that the law said that you had to have your helmet on at all times. He came over and started giving the guy hell because he didn't have any helmet on. He had gone and told him in no uncertain terms what he thought about that. That guy. And everybody else that got him the hell out of there.

(2, A, 183)

T: The officer.

A: The officer. Yes. Because here this guy was hurting back there and he was hanging upside down ready to fall into the river.

T: With his leg crushed.

A: With his leg crushed. And he came in there worried about a helmet. But you had some of those kind of characters that you had to put up with.

T: Were there times when people were, do you think, psychologically unable to handle the stress of a situation and broke down?

A: I think we had one that way. But I don't know if it was that so much. When we were in England he got involved--he was married--he got involved with an English girl and they got pretty thick I guess. Some of the guys tried to talk him out, tried to change his mind because he was married and had a wife at home. I think it bothered him so much they had to send him back to England. Never heard any more from him though.

T: You were in Germany judging by this map here when President Roosevelt died on the 12th of April 1945. Before the war ended. Do you remember hearing that news?

A: Yes. I think I do. I don't remember where we were or what we were up to when it happened. All the guys were kind of worried that maybe the next guy that got in there wouldn't be able to handle things like he did. But it turned out Truman was a better president.

T: Where was your unit when the war came to an end in Europe?

A: We were in Austria, in Salzburg, in the woods, at the base of the Alps Mountains.

T: So in Salzburg. Near the border with Germany, there.

A: Yes. They called it München.

T: Munich, right? So when the war came to a close your unit was down in the Salzburg area, near what is today the German-Austrian border.

A: Right.

T: What do you remember about V-E Day? The 8th of May 1945.

A: There were a bunch of happy people, I can tell you that. Because we figured now we can go home. We had been there for almost two years and now we could go home. We thought we'd done our duty and we could go home.

T: How did people celebrate the end of the war where you were?

A: When they got news that the war ended they put us in an enclosed area. A school area that was a big fence all the way around us, and wouldn't let us out.

T: Really? Why is that?

A: They were afraid that we would go celebrate too much. And then that there would be trouble and from then on anybody got killed it would be considered murder. And they were afraid that people celebrating would get into trouble and maybe shoot somebody. So we were confined. We couldn't get out.

T: Was there a celebration in this compound, or in this area?

A: We were happy that it ended. That's about all we could say, we could do because we couldn't do anything else.

T: How soon was it before you got to the closest town?

A: The next thing, the first thing they did was when they loaded us on this train and shipped us out. That was that 40 and 8 [boxcar].

(2, A, 228)

T: Was that pretty quick after the war ended?

A: It was soon after. They kept us confined for I don't know how long. Then they got the orders to move.

T: That was pretty quickly then. You were out of there to Marseilles, France, by train.

A: They didn't want us there because we weren't in the occupation troops. We were the first troops that came through and the feeling was different between us and the occupation troops because we had seen the problems. But the occupation troops hadn't.

T: Right. What difference do you think that made?

A: I don't know. Some of the guys might have bitter or something like that. But not all.

T: As far as being bitter about the Germans, were there times that German civilians perhaps that you saw were not treated all that nicely?

A: Most of the time the civilians were treated nicely. They felt, like I was telling you about that accident we had, there was a German lady that came running out with a bunch of first aid stuff to give to us. To take care of some of the people that were hurt. So they felt like we did, I guess.

T: For you the German civilians were something to keep separate from the German military as far as how you treat people?

A: Yes. That's right. They were treated with respect. But some of the German civilians thought that the American soldiers were mean. Not all.

T: So quickly after the war ended you were on a train down to the south of France.

A: To Marseilles.

T: Were you under the impression at that time that you were going back to the States, or did you know you were headed to the Pacific?

A: No. We thought we were going back to the States. As a matter of fact, I had relatives in southern Italy and I asked for a pass because I wanted to go to visit them. So they said okay.

T: Do you speak Italian, by the way?

A: I spoke a little bit of it, yes. Anyway, they said okay, we can give you a month off. I thought they were going to be there for a month. Fine. So I got all ready to go. They said, no, you can't go. Stay here. We stayed there and started packing all of our stuff. They still didn't tell us what we were going to do. I couldn't figure out why we had to pack all our stuff. Put it in crates and stuff like that. Make such a good job of packing it. Then on the train we went to Marseilles.

And we still thought we were going home. Even after we got on board ship, went through the Straits of Gibraltar, and we headed south. We still thought we were going home. But then pretty soon the weather started getting moderate, getting warm. Oh, oh. Something's wrong. We're not going home. And then we realized that something was true. We weren't going to go home. Then we wound up in the Panama Canal.

(2, A, 260)

T: By that time had it been officially told to you guys that you were going to Japan, or was it just pretty clear?

A: It was just clear that we weren't going home. We were going to the Philippine Islands. What they told us was that they needed some seasoned troops. We thought we had to be seasoned the hard way. Let the other group be seasoned the same way we were. We had done our duty. Let someone else do it.

T: The Army didn't see it that way, did they?

A: No (*laughs*).

T: Do you remember when it was you arrived in the Philippines?

A: I think it was right after our anniversary. I remember that passing. Our anniversary happened while we were out at sea yet.

T: That's at the end of July.

A: July, yes. I remember passing the International Date Line and they told us about it. You were one day and the next day and before you know it, it was another day. You didn't lose any days. It didn't seem like it, but the time did.

T: You weren't in the Philippines very long were you?

A: Not very long, no. We went through another training session because we had to get used to the weather. The first week there we didn't think we were going to make it. Hot, humid weather.

T: How did you adjust to the weather change?

A: I didn't think I was going to make it. But you know, it took about a week. Then it didn't bother any more.

T: How would you describe the weather over there in the Philippines?

A: It seemed like it rained every day, so there's where it became humid. And some of the days it rained in the afternoon. Some of the days when it rained we'd all run out naked and take a shower in the rain.

T: So it was hot too.

A: It was hot. You'd run outside. It rained about fifteen minutes. You had to take a quick shower (*laughs*).

T: You knew, or you suspected, I guess, by this time that your unit was going to be part of the planned invasion of Japan.

A: Yes. We knew it.

T: What kind of thoughts were going through your head then when you thought about being part of the invasion of Japan?

A: We didn't think too much about it. They kept you busy all the time. They keep you doing things all the time so you don't have time to think about stuff like that.

T: Let me ask you things you may have seen in the Philippines that you found interesting.

A: They had supplies hauled in there so fast they didn't have time to put them under cover. Like they couldn't get sugar here but they had hundred pound sacks of sugar piled sky high. Great big places there in the court. Brown syrup running out from underneath them because it rained on them every day.

T: They stacked them out in the open?

A: Yes. They didn't have time to build warehouses. Because things got in there so fast. Then they had clothes. Shoes and uniforms. They came in cardboard boxes. Big piles of them. So when it rained for a long time and got the top layer all soaked, they'd peel the top layer off and go burn them. Then it would keep raining and they would keep peeling them off until they got down to nothing. Then they would haul some more in. And you couldn't get any sugar and you couldn't get any clothes. Then they had equipment like trucks and things were parked out in the jungle and trees would be growing through them. The waste was terrific.

T: Was that the first time you had seen waste with respect to the service or was this something that was throughout?

(2, A, 299)

A: That's the first time we saw waste. We never saw anything like that in Germany. As a matter of fact, in Germany when we needed anything, for instance if we were building a bridge and needed lumber, we would just go to a lumberyard and help ourselves. Take what we wanted. They would complain about it and we'd tell them to talk to the Army; they'll take care of it. I don't think they ever got paid for it but maybe they did.

When we got to Japan we needed lumber to build these tent cities. To build a platform and a railing all around it. Put a squad tent on top of it. Anyway there was a lumberyard right next to where we were going to build the first one. So I said let's go and help ourselves. We went over there. They had a big wooden fence around it. We pulled the fence down and started hauling material out and the little Japanese he was hopping mad at us. We just pushed him out the way. So he went to see the captain. He came back and he said, "Listen, you guys, we're not at war now. You can't do that anymore."

T: The rules had changed.

A: Yes. The rules had changed. We had to bring all that stuff back and fix the fence.

T: No kidding.

A: We had to bring it all back and fix his fence for him.

T: You were preparing for the invasion of Japan when the war against Japan, rather suddenly, ended on August the 15th. Do you remember how you reacted when you heard the news that the war against Japan was over?

A: We were just as happy as could be because we thought, we knew what we were going to have to do, and we thought that most of the guys in that unit were going to be killed.

T: Did the end of the war against Japan mean something different for you than the end of the war in Europe, because you experienced them both?

A: It was kind of a relief because we knew that we wouldn't have to be in any danger anymore. The war in Germany we were confined. We couldn't do anything about it. Couldn't celebrate it. No.

T: Was it different when you were in the Philippines?

A: When we were in the Philippines we could celebrate because we didn't have to worry about the Japanese although there were still a lot of Japanese around.

T: How was the end of the war celebrated in the Philippines?

A: Everybody just had a good time. I would say you were happy. Stuff like that.

T: Were there impromptu or planned celebrations, parties, these kinds of things?

A: No. Everybody would just get together and have a few drinks. It just felt good because you knew it was all over with.

T: Did the military make alcohol available?

A: No, not for us. We had to go buy our alcohol, beer and whatever. They wouldn't supply any of it for us.

T: The war ends. Did you once again think that you're now headed back to the United States?

A: Yes, we thought we could make it. As a matter of fact, we were going to come back on the next ship that was available for us. Then the lieutenant over to me. "Say," he says, "how would you like to sign up for another tour? We'll make you a staff sergeant, give you a private jeep, private room, everything private. All by yourself. If you sign up for another one." I said no. "I think I stuck my neck out enough times and I've still got it, and I want to go home."

T: So you didn't think even for a minute about staying in the military?

A: Nothing at all. Besides, I wanted to go home and see my wife.

T: But instead of going home you had to go to Japan.

A: We were in Japan then.

T: Then let's back up a step, because from the Philippines, instead of going back to the United States, now that the war against Japan had ended your unit was sent to Japan.

A: That's right.

T: How did you take that news that once again you were not going back to the States and instead were going over?

A: We weren't very happy about that one, either. We couldn't understand why they kept picking on us all the time, why they kept doing that to us. They were all good soldiers. Everybody did their duty. Everybody did their job. Yet when the time came for something like that, I think maybe somebody was goofing up on us.

T: Your unit landed in Japan pretty quickly after the Japanese surrender.

A: Oh, yes. Soon after.

T: Do you remember actually landing in Japan and what you saw when you got there?

A: We landed near the waterfront, in Yokohama, and the Japanese, a lot of their structures were made out of wood and their warehouses and things. They were all destroyed. They were blown apart or burned. They dropped a lot of incendiary bombs on them, and burned the place down.

T: So it looked quite different in appearance, I guess, that Germany had looked?

A: Oh, yes. I'll tell you one thing about Germany. The first thing we noticed about Germany it was a lot like our part of the country. The same kind of homes. Same streets and everything. It was a lot like we were at home.

T: How about Japan?

A: In Japan we didn't get to see the areas where the people lived. We were pretty much confined to this one area, and once in a while get a pass to Yokohama.

T: Did you get a chance yourself to go to Yokohama?

A: Yes, I got one pass. I always remember that one. The Japanese, there was a train went through there. The Japanese would stand out in the middle and hang onto the railing. One time a little girl about this high (*chest high*) was walking, and she was bent over. I think she was carrying something on her back. Looked real heavy for her. So I reached over and touched it, and she pretty near fell on her face. I picked her up by the shoulders and put her over on a bench and sat down. The Japanese don't show any emotion or anything. Many of the Japanese looked at me, but I couldn't tell whether they agreed with what I did or whether they didn't like it. The only ones that disagreed, there were four guys there that were occupation troops, and they started to mutter about that blankety-blank Japanese. And me being a sergeant, I gave them hell. I said, "What did she have to do about the war? She had nothing to do about it." Here she's carrying a few bricks. Maybe she carried two or three every day to build up. I said she had nothing to do with it, and then they shut up. They couldn't talk back to me; I outranked them.

T: What did you make of the Japanese people?

A: That's a good question. This one guy, he was a young guy. He was a Japanese attorney. He spoke English. Pretty good English. I would say he was about my age. I used to smoke a pipe. I was the only one in our outfit that smoked a pipe, and in our rations there was always pipe tobacco. So therefore I had a lot of pipe tobacco, a lot of cans of it piled up right behind my bed. He came to me. He smoked a pipe too, but he didn't have any tobacco. He came to me and he wanted to know if I would give him some tobacco. I enjoyed talking with him.

I knew if I gave him some tobacco, he'd never come back. I had him come back about three days. Every day he'd come back for some tobacco. Finally I said I would give him some tobacco. I gave him some tobacco and he never came back.

T: When you got together with this guy and you saw him a couple times, what kind of things did you talk about?

A: General conditions. We never talked about the war and stuff like that, because some of them, like he, were embarrassed at what they did. He knew what happened, and he didn't like to talk about it. So we just talked about conditions. Talked about home, and stuff like that.

T: So it was almost as if this enormous subject of the war was politely avoided?

A: Right. He didn't like to talk about the war.

T: Very interesting. How did you meet this guy?

A: He came into the company area that one time. He must have looked into the tent and saw all those tobacco pouches. He was looking for some. I wasn't there so he came back the next day, and I was sitting on my bunk and he came in to talk to me.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 382.

T: He looked at the tobacco?

A: I don't know. I didn't say anything, but I figured that he wanted some. So then pretty soon he did ask me for some. I said, "No, I want to use it." He didn't argue about it. He just talked for a minute longer and then left. But he came back for three days, and each day the same story. So I thought, well, what the heck, I might as well give him some.

T: Did you have Japanese working around your camp compound?

A: No, we didn't. They used to come. They were free to come. They used to come, but we didn't have anyone working there.

T: Were contacts between soldiers and the Japanese discouraged, permitted, encouraged?

A: I don't know what happened, because we never saw very many of the Japanese. One time, I remember, one Japanese young guy came in there. I don't know whether he was caught doing something, but a bunch of the guys got after him. He got away, but there was never anything done. I don't know if they just weren't allowed to, or whether they were told not to go into our camp area, because we never saw any except that Japanese attorney. But he behaved himself, so nobody bothered him, because he could speak English and stuff like that.

T: What did you make of that guy? Here was a guy who was educated and spoke English. Did you wonder, what did he do during the war, or why is he here?

A: I don't think he took part in the war. I gathered that from the way he looked. I don't think he did. He was younger, probably not old enough to get in at the time. And the fact that he was an attorney, I suppose, probably could have excused him.

T: And he spoke English.

A: As well as we do.

T: That means he might have been educated somewhere outside the country as well.

A: He could have been, yes.

T: That's very interesting. Angelo, your job there was to build a tent camp—I think that's the way you described it—for more permanent occupation troops.

A: Right.

T: So your job there was completed rather quickly?

A: Yes. It didn't take long, because there were other outfits probably doing the same thing in different parts of Japan. We took care of this one part, and the occupation troops moved in there. They patrolled that area and took care of that area. Then there was another camp somewhere else, so we just built the one camp.

(2, B, 431)

T: Was the mood for you and the troops in your company fairly relaxed now that the war was over or was there some stress still?

A: No. Fairly relaxed. Just anxious to get home. It seemed time would drag. It took so long. You're waiting. Finally the order came that there was a ship available to go home, and boy everybody was happy.

T: So you took a ship across the Pacific.

A: The North Pacific. A really rough ride.

T: Do you remember that ride?

A: Ooooooh! Just like it was yesterday. When we were coming in the whole trip the seas were really rough and the wind. When we went from our sleeping quarters to go to eat it you didn't hang onto the railing it would blow you right off into the sea. We never thought we were going to make it out. We thought the ship would fall apart. It was one of those liberty ships. One that was built. That's what we were afraid of.

T: Were you traveling with other ships, or just the one.

A: Just the one. We were just all alone. If anything had happened life boats wouldn't have meant a thing, because the seas were so rough.

T: So it was a rougher crossing than you had before.

A: Oh, really rough. But the only thing I could say, I think most of us got used to being aboard a ship and we didn't get sick.

T: Because you had been across the Atlantic and back and now across the Pacific going over...

A: The only time we got sick was when we went across the Atlantic the first trip. Then from then on we didn't get sick.

T: Was this the roughest of the voyages you made?

A: Yes.

T: Where did you dock in the States when you got back?

A: In Washington. When we were coming home they promised us all a big steak where we landed there. At this place where we were going to land. When we got there they said they ran out of steaks so they gave us pork chops (*laughs*).

T: To the very end there was some kind of disappointment.

A: Yes. There weren't enough steaks left.

T: Did you have a chance when you landed to call back to Minnesota to your wife?

A: Yes.

T: That was the first phone conversation that you'd had.

A: Yes. That was the first one.

T: Do you remember that call? Remember calling home?

A: No. I don't remember what was said. Except that we were in the States and we were going to go to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and be discharged. At that time they had dismantled Fort Snelling. They weren't using it anymore.

T: That's right. So you were actually discharged from Camp McCoy.

A: Right.

T: You were discharged in November of 1945. How soon was it before you actually got back here to Nashwauk?

A: That wasn't very long. They were going to have a train take us to Minneapolis and she was going to be there waiting for me at Minneapolis. But as it was, one of the guys had a car and we all pitched in for some gas and he gave us a ride, but he

dropped us off at the train station so we got there earlier than she figured we were going to be there. So then I was sitting in the train station when she came.

(2, B, 486)

T: So you were there before she got there.

A: Right.

T: Do you remember the time when you first saw each other?

A: Yes. I went over and grabbed her (*laughs*). I remember grabbing her. She looked like she was kind of scared. She didn't know who it was at first.

T: That must have been something. It had been a couple years.

A: Oh, it was.

T: Did you spend some time in Minneapolis then, or come right back up to Nashwauk?

A: We didn't spend much time there, did we?

Wife: No.

A: We came home because [our son] Joe wasn't with her. She was by herself.

T: Right.

A: My son, Joe. So I was anxious to get home.

T: I bet you were. What was your initial reaction to being out of the military?

A: I thought it took a long time to get over it. To be disciplined and to have freedom all of a sudden. You didn't quite know what to do with it. It took me a long time to get used to the fact that I didn't have to jump at somebody's command or something like that.

T: Was it comforting in a way to be in the service, where you basically everybody told you what to do?

A: You didn't have to do much thinking when you were in the service. Somebody else was doing it. They told you what to do and you better do it. In a wartime area when somebody told you what to do you better do it because if you disobey them, you're in trouble.

T: When you got back here to Nashwauk, how soon was it before you went back to work?

A: I went back to work. I didn't like to sit around and do nothing. I went back to work a little bit too soon because they were talking about strike; and while I went back to work, I worked for a short while and they went on strike.

T: That was early 1946?

A: So therefore, because of that, I wasn't eligible for unemployment insurance. If I hadn't...

T: So you couldn't get 52-20 because you went back to work?

A: Because I went back to work.

T: So, in a sense, now when you thought back, it would have been better not to go to work.

A: Yes. I could have stayed home and finished the house instead of going to work.

T: But you did go back. How long did that strike last in '46?

A: It was through the winter. They pulled the strike at the wrong time. They don't work in the wintertime anyway. So you stay home. Then in the spring you went back to work again.

T: When you went back to work then, you'd been off the job more than two years, two and a half almost. How had your job changed in the time you were gone?

A: Not very much, except that I was able to get a better job than when I left. A better paying job.

(2, B, 528)

T: That's right. You mentioned that before we started to tape. You had noticed before you went into the service and the war was on, you had noticed women in a number of different jobs. Did that change now that the war was over?

A: Some of them quit and went back home. Some of them were married and just wanted a home of their own but some of them stayed right there and worked. They kept them on.

T: So that was a change that was permanent from the war.

A: Yes. Permanent for some. As a matter of fact, I think some of them are still there. Could be. Unless they're ready to retire because it's been a long time now.

T: It sure has. What was the hardest thing for you readjusting to civilian life?

A: I don't know. I didn't notice anything that was difficult.

T: You came back to the same town, really to the same house.

A: The same job. Everything was the same. There was just a pause in there you might say that was different then it back to the same thing.

T: To conclude a couple questions. This is a chance to be a philosopher, and everybody gets their chance. When you were in the service and you were in Europe there, what did the war mean for you personally? What was it all about?

A: At that time we didn't give much thought to anything like that. We thought that it was the Japanese attacked us and therefore we had to attack them. That's what everybody thought. We couldn't understand why, if we were mad at the Japanese, why we had to be in Europe. So that's what we thought. We didn't like the fact that it was a combination thing and had to end one war and go to another one.

T: Do you think then that you would have felt you were making more of a contribution if you were fighting the Japanese?

A: The only thing we didn't like about it was the fact the soldiers that were fighting on some of those islands, the conditions were not very nice. They had to suffer a lot, and when we came to the Philippine Islands they were kind of mad at us because we'd had better fighting conditions than they did.

T: Over in Europe?

A: Yes. We said, we got killed just like you did. Our men got killed just like you did. What's the difference? Yes, but you didn't have to suffer before you died.

T: It's all a matter of perspective, isn't it?

A: Yes.

T: What's the most important way that the war changed your life?

A: I don't know. I didn't notice that there was much of a change. When we came back we had the same thing. We had to have a family. We had to finish our house. I didn't have time to change things. I was interested, I was kind of a dreamer, I was interested in lakeshore property and I would dream of something. She always went along with me. She always agreed with whatever I wanted to do. She'd go with me.

She'd do it. So we were able to do things like that and keep things interesting. We were busy all the time. Buying land. We built two cabins out there and stuff like that.

T: Did the war change you as a person?

A: I don't think so. I was easy. I don't like to remember the bad things that happened, things that make me feel bad. I like to remember the good things that happened. And there were some things that were nice that happened. People that treated you nice. Like one case, for instance, we got to a small town in Belgium, and it was Sunday. There were a lot of church-going people in our outfit because there's not very many atheists in the Army. Anyway, we decided to all go to church on this Mass on Sunday. It was quite a few of us. So we went to church. And when the priest gave the sermon he spoke in English. Real good English. So we cornered him afterward and asked him how come he could speak such good English. He said we were some of the first groups that landed in this town. He said when you guys landed on the Normandy Beach I started taking English lessons so I could give a sermon to you guys when you got here. So he was able to fulfill his... so that was pretty nice. Then he said he wanted to come with us and be our chaplain, but he couldn't come because he wasn't an American citizen.

Another case. This one time, this was in Belgium again. It was in the wintertime and we moved in this house where this old couple was in there. And there were six of us. There was a spare room. We just slept on the floor. Anyway, we came in one day and she had the table all set with a roast pig in the middle of it and a bottle of wine at each dish. She invited us in there. She was giving us a Christmas dinner, I guess. She invited us in there and every once in a while she would peek in there to see if we needed anything else. We needed anything else, she'd bring it in to us. We had the nicest meal. The nicest people. I'll remember that for the rest of our lives, the way she treated us.

(2, B, 588)

T: For you, in your time in the service, did the good outweigh the bad?

A: Yes.

T: That's a good note on which to end.

A: Yes. That was really nice.

T: On the record let me thank you very much for talking with us today.

END OF INTERVIEW