

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
GILBERT ARPS
32nd Division, Army, World War II
2000

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Arps, Gilbert, (1913-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 43 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 43 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 43 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Gilbert Arps, a Kaukauna, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service with the 127th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Division Wisconsin National Guard in the South Pacific. He talks about enlisting with the National Guard in 1937 and attending summer encampments at Camp McCoy (Wisconsin). Arps recalls being inducted into federal service, travelling to several camps, and being shipped out of San Francisco to Port Adelaide (Australia). At Camp Cable (Australia), he reports running into a branch in the dark and being hospitalized for a month, and then flying into combat in Buna (New Guinea). He expresses respect for the Japanese Marines and mentions the high number of losses at Buna. Sent afterwards to a rest camp at Coolangatta (Australia), he comments on “Green Death” Australian beer, the Red Cross and Australian Salvation Army, and getting along with the Australian soldiers. He relates the weight loss caused by jungle fighting and recalls being startled at night by land crabs that sounded like people walking. Arps describes participating in the invasion of Aitape (New Guinea) and then developing a jungle ulcer on his leg in Hollandia (New Guinea). After a few days in a hospital in Biak, he recalls being flown to Hickam Field (Hawaii) and later to Winter General Hospital (Kansas) where he stayed for over three months. He describes treatment for the ulcers which had spread to his feet and mentions having hearing loss, malaria, dengue fever, and double pneumonia, and he discusses not receiving any disability compensation. Arps describes reverting to National Guard status, joining the 808 Tank Battalion, 84th Infantry Division, becoming a master sergeant, and being in charge of the motor pool during summer camps at Camp McCoy and at Fort Knox (Kentucky). He explains he is a member of the 32nd Division Association, though he does not attend reunions. Arps reveals he had one brother killed in action during the war and another who was wounded with shrapnel.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.

Transcribed by Katy Marty, 2008.

Checked by Channing Welch, 2009.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2009.

Transcription:

Jim: We're speaking to Gilbert Arps. It's 21 June, the year 2000. When were you born Gilbert?

Gilbert: June 16th, 1913.

Jim: In Kaukanna?

Gilbert: In, no, in Bovina.

Jim: Okay. You went into the service in –

Gilbert: Well, we first –

Jim: You were inducted in '39

Gilbert: Ah, well, inducted federal service –

Jim: When?

Gilbert: In '39.

Jim: Right. There was a – you were drafted?

Gilbert: No, we were in National Guard.

Jim: Oh, the National Guard, the 32nd.

Gilbert: In 1937 I joined the National Guard.

Jim: Oh, well, that's even earlier. How many meetings did you have to attend in '37, one a month or --?

Gilbert: Oh, we used to go once a month.

Jim: Then you had a summer encampment?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah. I went to summer encampments.

Jim: Where were those usually held, Camp Douglas?

Gilbert: Camp Mc Coy.

- Jim: Camp Mc Coy. Well, that's the same area, right. And what was your job in the National Guard at that time?
- Gilbert: I was – well, when I first started I was a Private. (laughs)
- Jim: I understand. [unintelligible] started [unintelligible].
- Gilbert: And then after a while I was assistant squad leader.
- Jim: Did you get an MOS number, an MOS number for --?
- Gilbert: Yeah, mm hmm.
- Jim: For what? What?
- Gilbert: And then one year we were down to, after I got back from service we went down to Fort Knox because I reverted to National Guard Status.
- Jim: When?
- Gilbert: After I got discharged from the Army.
- Jim: Well, wait a minute. How did you jump to discharge here? I'm just getting you in the Army.
- Gilbert: Well, ah –
- Jim: I'm talking about the National Guard. What did you do in those summer encampments?
- Gilbert: Oh, I – at summer encampment? Oh, well, I used to go over and over the everything (?).
- Jim: What was your job?
- Gilbert: Well, my job, well, just take part in maneuvers, you know, at first until I got to be a noncommissioned officer.
- Jim: Right. But then you always have some specific duties.
- Gilbert: Well, I would say, the motor pool, clean the trucks and the tanks and, ah, participate in, well, whatever they did, like cross rivers and everything like that (laughs).
- Jim: So, and that went on for a couple of years, and then you left the National Guard?

- Gilbert: I stayed in until 1959, in the Reserves, and then I was discharged because I was over age in grade (??).
- Jim: But tell me, you were in the National Guard, though, when the war started.
- Gilbert: Huh?
- Jim: When the war started, 1941.
- Gilbert: Mm hmm, 1941 the war started.
- Jim: You were still in the National Guard at that time.
- Gilbert: Mm hmm. I was in the Army, yeah.
- Jim: Right. Tell me about the transfer from the National Guard into the regular Army. How did that get done?
- Gilbert: October 15, 1939 we were inducted into federal service. By then we left, I left my job down the mill and went to Fort McCoy. We stayed there for two weeks getting our stuff and everything. We left from Neenah, went down to Camp Beauregard, Louisiana. I was in a camp down there and a bad one. Then when that got better we moved to Camp Livingston and we stayed there for maneuvers and everything. Oh, we used to camp on the levees and everything else and different things around there. Oh, we went to, from there, from Florida we went to – we were called, they called the 32nd Division, and we went to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. We stayed there three months. I remember when the Normandie burned, and then we were supposed to use air transport over, but Normandie burned. Well, then MacArthur issued a call –
- Jim: Sabotage that set the thing on fire in the New York harbor just before the war started.
- Gilbert: MacArthur issued a call for 32 Division to Pacific.
- Jim: Right.
- Gilbert: And then we got – went to San Francisco, California. We got on the USS Mount Vernon. It was, ah, the formerly SS Washington. It was an auxiliary cruiser entered in the Navy as auxiliary cruiser. And then there was a Mari – Mari -- there was a [unintelligible] so our troops [unintelligible] from the 32nd Division. We had, ah, the Luline, the Mariposa, and the Monterey. Those were three Matson liners for the nurses and everything. When we went over to, left Francisco, it took us; I think it was twenty-eight days to

go to Port Adelaide, South Australia. And we had – the Indianapolis as an auxiliary, a escort all the way over. We landed there on Mother's Day in 1942, and as we got off the ship we were all counted. We were like cattle. (Jim laughs) because they, the United States government paid the British \$10 a head for every guy over there. They would come over. Tried to save them, and then they'd charge us \$10 because they knew it (laughs). And then we went to Port Moresby. From Port Moresby went to, we went to, we stayed there for awhile (??), we went to and then we went to 00 we flew by a C-47 over the Owen Stanleys, and we landed –

Jim: Not the whole division didn't fly it.

Gilbert: This was just the 1-2-7 Infantry.

Jim: How big was it?

Gilbert: Oh, I would say we had about; we had 160 guys in our company.

Jim: In your company.

Gilbert: But then we got more later on.

Jim: Yeah, but most of the 32nd Division stayed in Australia –

Gilbert: Well –

Jim: For awhile.

Gilbert: Oh yeah, but the 1-2-6 and the 1-2-8 Regiments walked over the Owen Stanley. They had a tough go of it, too.

Jim: Yes. We've interviewed the colonel who took the took the 126th over the Stanley.

Gilbert: Owen Stanley, yeah.

Jim: Herb Smith. He's up at Neillsville, Wisconsin.

Gilbert: Mm hmm.

Jim: Ninety-seven years old.

Gilbert: Ninety-seven?

Jim: Right.

- Gilbert: He had a tough go over there because that was a tough place to be.
- Jim: I know. He told us all about it. He took 1200 men over there, and he didn't lose one of them crossing up the mountains and then down the other side.
- Gilbert: Yeah, we had a rough going. We didn't have to, but they had to.
- Jim: Now you were in the 128th?
- Gilbert: Ah, 1-2-7.
- Jim: 1-2-7.
- Gilbert: 1-2-8 went over there, too.
- Jim: I know. The 26th and 28th and both of 'em were led by a man named Herbert Smith. Both regiments. Not the same guy, but they were both the same name.
- Gilbert: I remember him.
- Jim: They kept them apart by calling one "Red" and one "White" (both laugh) One "White Smith" and one "Red Smith".
- Gilbert: Yeah, that works out (??).
- Jim: Now, how long were you in Australia?
- Gilbert: Well, we came in '42. I think we left there in, well, I would say '44.
- Jim: You must of –you didn't stay in Australia that long, did you?
- Gilbert: Well, no, I was in the hospital in the first I was in the hospital at Biak. I found I; you know that camp at Cable. We got paid one night, there's no light around there or anything just camp fires, and I happened to go and run a branch in my eye. Well, I think I wandered around for two hours before I found somebody to take me to the hospital because I couldn't see. I lost my glasses, and I was practically blind. Blood was running out of my eye, and then he took me to the hospital there, and he took me to Redbanks.
- Jim: Okay.
- Gilbert: I stayed at Redbank maybe about, maybe a month or so and I came back and rejoined the company. And then we went into combat in Buna.

- Jim: Now how did you get to Buna?
- Gilbert: We flew by C-47.
- Jim: Was that after the 126th and the 128th had taken it?
- Gilbert: Well, we landed at Dobodura. Airstrip and (laughs) after we got there we headed right off the plane because there was snipers around. Well, then after Buna then we went back to Australia, and we went to Coolangatta.
- Jim: How long were you at Buna?
- Gilbert: I would say we were there about six weeks.
- Jim: What was your duty there?
- Gilbert: Well, just to do – I was just a common infantry man because they were this far away from the lines. The Japs were there, and we were there. They were that close together. That was the 19th Otsulea (??) landing force and they all Imperial marines, and they were good. (clock chimes)
- Jim: What were – you just had your rifle, or did you have another weapon besides your regular rifle?
- Gilbert: A rifle, let's see, I acquired a side arm. I had a 38 pistol besides. But outside of that I was just a rifleman.
- Jim: Your rifle was an early Springfield 1903 wasn't it?
- Gilbert: Yeah, just rifle and grenades and that.
- Jim: Right, but it wasn't the new Garnand rifle.
- Gilbert: Well, we had a M-1.
- Jim: Okay, and how about those – so tell me about your battles with the Japanese. What was that like?
- Gilbert: What?
- Jim: Tell me about the fighting with the Japanese. What was that like?
- Gilbert: Well, I tell you what, they could be that far away and you'd never even see 'em.
- Jim: But you could hear 'em and smell 'em.

Gilbert: You could smell 'em.

Jim: Right.

Gilbert: But not for – like I say, they were good soldiers, but they had been there for awhile, and established rather good relations, with the natives, but then I

Jim: Okay.

Gilbert: So – by then I guess they balled up someplace, and they turned against 'em. Then after Buna there was just four or five of us left at Buna from our company now.

Jim: Four or five what?

Gilbert: Men.

Jim: What about 'em?

Gilbert: Well, we suffered a lot of casualties. We lost our 1st sergeant, we lost our company commander, we lost our executive officer, we lost platoon leaders, the lieutenants. We didn't have nobody left with four – one sergeant was a commanding officer.

Jim: And you.

Gilbert: No, not me. I wasn't a hero that went in. (laughs)

Jim: Did you get wounded?

Gilbert: No, I never got hit. I never got hit.

Jim: Was your line overrun by the Japanese? Were you overrun?

Gilbert: Well, no, we chased them on.

Jim: Right.

Gilbert: But later on, after we got back to Australia, then we went to Coolangatta for a rest camp and then we were there for maybe about five months.

Jim: Where was this? I can't catch that one.

Gilbert: Coolangatta.

- Jim: Coolangatta.
- Gilbert: It was a rest camp for Australians and Americans and British troops were all there, you know. We lived very well. When we come back I weighed 107 pounds.
- Jim: From Buna?
- Gilbert: From Buna. [unintelligible]. For Christmas Eve is when they made the attack on government guards. (??) We had a piece of candy. That was it. (laughs) But Christmas Eve our 1st sergeant got a bullet, leg blown off when he fell on a grenade between the company commander and [unintelligible]. And, ah, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, [unintelligible]
- Jim: Mm hmm.
- Gilbert: So from here on it was kind of nip and tuck. We came back to Australia on David Bushnell. That was a liberty ship and ah we had, ah, the Red Cross was set up here, the salvation Army from Australia was set up down here. The Ree for your stuff. The Salvation Army they gave it. We didn't have no money in our pockets because we didn't get paid for five, six months. (laughs)
- Jim: Right. What was this, this rest camp? What was that like? The rest camp.
- Gilbert: Oh, it was all tents, maybe eight, ten guys in a tent, you know. And we didn't do nothing; actually, took it easy.
- Jim: But you got some decent food.
- Gilbert: Oh, we got very decent food and took – put on weight, you know.
- Jim: Mm hmm. Did you get any beer? Did you have beer?
- Gilbert: Oh, beer – “Green Death.” That was –
- Jim: Australian beer –
- Gilbert: The Australian beer was “Green Death.”
- Jim: Was it too strong?
- Gilbert: They'd make it one day, you drink it the next. (Both laughs) Boy, we used to drink enough of it.

- Jim: Well, I'm sure you managed to get it down, and I'm sure you managed to drink it no matter how bad it was.
- Gilbert: Well, we made it all right. (Both laugh) So far, I mean, it was all right, I mean. But then we went down we went back to Camp Cable and we trained there until we made the invasion on Aitape.
- Jim: How do you spell that?
- Gilbert: A-t-i-t – I got it in the –
- Jim: Oh, you have it –
- Gilbert: In that whatchamacallit. A-t-i-t-a-p-e.
- Jim: Oh, yeah. [unintelligible]
- Gilbert: And we set up a line of defense there. 31st Division was on our flank, and the 32nd was in – I mean our division was here, and the hospital was in the banana plantation up further.
- Jim: This was west of Buna? West of Buna?
- Gilbert: No, south, no, north of Buna. I don't know.
- Jim: North [unintelligible] okay.
- Gilbert: Anyhow, after they were made an attack, and we learned about the attack from a runner, of their runners. He said they were going to make an attack on [unintelligible] preceded by a mountain gun barrage. And that was one, too. Boy, they really hit. But then they said, they were told according to what we picked up later on that there were ships waiting in Aitape harbor for them to take 'em home. And there were 80,000 troops there (??) But, ah, they beat us (??). They kicked us out of there and we had to go back to River X which was 450 yards through the jungle, straight back through jungle. It took us four days and we lost one man, and he was the machine gunner on the [unintelligible]. That was the only guy we lost, and our company commander, I read in the papers just the other day that he died. He was a full blood Indian. Captain Lowry, Leonard Lowry, and he led us back to our line of defense, River X. From there on we didn't do too much. I, then we went up to Hollandia and at Hollandia I developed a jungle ulcer, well let's say they were –
- Jim: Where was that?

- Gilbert: Well, they were –
- Jim: Where was the ulcer?
- Gilbert: A little sore like that, and they spread out.
- Jim: Where was the ulcer?
- Gilbert: On my leg. I couldn't walk, you know, because I had a hole in my leg then, and then it was so bad that one guy came in, he had it right here, on his hand, he had a start of it. The next morning he was dead. It was just like a cancer, (makes snapping sound) like that. Well, then they took me over to the hospital in Biak. I stayed in Biak for three, four days, and then they flew us by hospital plane to Hickam Field in Hawaii.
- Jim: They changed that often with penicillin packs?
- Gilbert: Well, no. Well, penicillin they didn't have at the time. They tried everything. Finally the bottom of my feet and everything, it went down to the bottom of my feet and everything there was no skin on it, just bone. Later on, I couldn't do much walking so then from there we went to Hickam. From Hickam Field we went to the Letterman General Hospital.
- Jim: In San Francisco.
- Gilbert: In San Francisco. We stayed there ten days, and then we went to Winter General Hospital in Topeka, Kansas. I stayed there three months, four months.
- Jim: Still feeding that foot?
- Gilbert: Oh, yeah.
- Jim: Takin' the (??) treatment?
- Gilbert: Oh, yeah, its well, they [unintelligible] but it wasn't until I got to Letterman General Hospital I was at amputee center, I mean Percy Jones General Hospital. That was an amputee center, and it was up there that they healed it up.
- Jim: So they didn't take your foot off.
- Gilbert: Well, they wanted to cut it off. Well, [unintelligible], you know. (both laugh) It was an old nurse. She was ready to be retired. But she would hold my skin – she was the best doggone nurse you could see. Boy, she really worked on that. She used to pile stuff in there, sulphur and

everything like that. Whatever it was she used, I don't know, but she used to pack it in that and bandage it up and oh, for about a week she wouldn't leave me open it up or anything. Finally when they did open up there were maggots crawling around in there –

Jim: That's good.

Gilbert: But it helps.

Jim: Yeah. They eat dead tissue. That keeps your wound clean.

Gilbert: Yeah, and then they finally closed it up, but I still have trouble to this day with that thing.

Jim: What kind of trouble?

Gilbert: Well, I mean, there's a dull ache there all the time.

Jim: When you're on your feet or --?

Gilbert: No, all the time.

Jim: What percent disability they give you for that?

Gilbert: None.

Jim: Why not?

Gilbert: Well, I applied for it, but they turned me down. I got –

Jim: Huh. I'm surprised that they wouldn't. I would think that would be worth at least ten percent disability.

Gilbert: I tried before, I tried through the Legion, I tried through the VFW, I tried through the VAV, and they turned me down. I lost my hearing and everything over there (??).

Jim: How did you lose your hearing?

Gilbert: Well, when you have a lot of guns going around –

Jim: That's what I mean. What were –

Gilbert: And then I had malaria, dengue fever, double pneumonia, all those [unintelligible] that are all significant (??).

Jim: Tough. You Saw Dr. Kavorski (??) ? He's a good friend of mine.

Gilbert: Oh, yeah.

Jim: Nice fella. He's dead.

Gilbert: Hmm. But ah, they always turn me down. Right now, well, like you say, high blood pressure – well, with age you get diabetes maybe too. But I don't get compensation.

Jim: You wouldn't get it for that.

Gilbert: You wouldn't – no.

Jim: Have to have a heart problem (??).

Gilbert: No, but ah, but hearing I would say after I got back from service I went back to work for – but I think I spent about \$7,000.

Jim: Do you have ringing in your ears? Ringing in your ears?

Gilbert: Ringing in the ears. Tin tin –

Jim: Tinnitus it's called.

Gilbert: I just can't hear, period.

Jim: Yeah, the ringing in your ears is different from not hearing I mean they're two different things.

Gilbert: Oh, yeah.

Jim: The ringing in the ears is from the Atabrine that you were taking.

Gilbert: But –

Jim: Ten percent of the soldiers had permanent ringing in their ears from taking that Atabrine besides your skin yellow.

Gilbert: Mm hmm, but I don't know, I tried it a couple times (??).

Jim: I see that. Tell me about the malaria (??). Did you get that when you were in Buna or did that come up later?

Gilbert: No, I had that once night in Buna. One day I [unintelligible].

Jim: You had chills and then high fever, right?

Gilbert: Oh yeah. That was – you're shivering –

Jim: Right.

Gilbert: And you're hot.

Jim: You can't get warm, and then the next thing you couldn't get your clothes off –

Gilbert: And you got a fever of 120.

Jim: 104 usually. 120 would've flipped ya.

Gilbert: And drank [unintelligible] salts because they took toes off.

Jim: I know. It just goes from shaking violently to getting' so hot you couldn't stand it.

Gilbert: And then, well, now malaria they say after three years that you don't get it anymore, you know,--

Jim: Well, that's not always true, but –

Gilbert: But this last summer – this last winter I had malaria sure as God made green apples because I was shivering and cold and everything at the same time. I was always –

Jim: How high did your temperature go?

Gilbert: 105.

Jim: Did you take it? I can't believe it'd go that high.

Gilbert: Oh, yeah, well, like I say, I was so, so actually hot.

Jim: It's been a long time. You could have [unintelligible].

Gilbert: Well, like I say, that's just last year. It was last December I had that.

Jim: So, when did you – when you got back to [unintelligible] then, and then you were discharged from service after that? You were discharged from service after --?

Gilbert: Fort Sheridan. Then I was reverted to National Guard status.

Jim: Right.

Gilbert: So when I came home I joined the 808 Tank Battalion, and they were attached to the 84th Infantry Division. I was discharged from the 84th as a master sergeant. That was in 1959.

Jim: What did you have to do with the National Guard after the war?

Gilbert: Well, like I say we used to go train –

Jim: Just like it was before the war? You had --?

Gilbert: Well, that was the same thing we used to do.

Jim: Right. A meeting once a week and –

Gilbert: Oh, we went to summer camp and everything.

Jim: Summer camp, right.

Gilbert: Yeah. I went, though, to summer camp, oh, six, seven different times, you know.

Jim: But if you were in the 84th Division, maybe they had summer camp in Wisconsin then.

Gilbert: Yeah, no, they were – weren't – they were attached to Michigan I believe.

Jim: Yeah. So then where was your summer camp?

Gilbert: Well, the summer camp first used to go to Camp Mc Coy.

Jim: Yeah, but that was before the war.

Gilbert: Yeah, well, after the war, too.

Jim: Oh. Okay.

Gilbert: Oh yeah, we rode those tanks all over those places. And then we went down to Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Jim: That's what I'm getting at. That's the headquarters of that tank division.

Gilbert: That was a neat (??) place.

Jim: You liked that, down there?

Gilbert: Oh yeah. Good fun away from the wives.

Jim: Away from what?

Gilbert: From the wives again (??) (laughs).

Jim: Yeah, but you didn't go enough to get too far away from her.

Gilbert: Well, I couldn't get in trouble because I had my hands full with the troops that were underneath and we had some dandys. (laughs)

Jim: When you were running it did you drive the tanks?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah, I sued to drive tanks. A lot of fun.

Jim: Now you were a master sergeant?

Gilbert: Called it a master sergeant, E-7.

Jim: E-7, okay, so you had how many men underneath you at that time? How many men underneath you then?

Gilbert: Well, we had like; I was in charge of the motor pool.

Jim: I see.

Gilbert: I had all these trucks and everything. See that they had all their maintance and everything like that. Then we used to have to check those over every day.

Jim: Okay. Let's go back to when you were in New Guinea. What about the, how about the food they brought over here?

Gilbert: What food?

Jim: Well, what did you eat? C-Rations, K-Rations?

Gilbert: C-Rations,

Jim: Right. Okay.

Gilbert: And not enough of them.

Jim: Did you have any of that Australian mutton?

- Gilbert: Well, once in awhile.
- Jim: Didn't care for it, did you?
- Gilbert: But, still shave, 9:00 every morning they shut down everything and had their tea.
- Jim: They had some tea.
- Gilbert: They wouldn't, wouldn't move a muscle.
- Jim: Everyday there was a war going on and –
- Gilbert: Nine o'clock, poof. Right on the old button.
[End of Tape 1, Side A. ca. 28 min.]
- Jim: (both laugh) Ah, that's good. Did you enjoy that?
- Gilbert: Well, I never liked tea over there.
- Jim: Oh.
- Gilbert: When I get – at home though I drink it once in awhile.
- Jim: How did you get along with the Australians? The Australian soldiers?
- Gilbert: Wonderful people, wonderful people. And Saturday night and when we were in Brisbane, Saturday nights really whooped it up, everybody.
- Jim: (laughs) They know how to party.
- Gilbert: Well, Sunday morning there wasn't a tavern open. There wasn't a place open that you could go, you know, and then we used to do different movies and everything, and it was always "God Save the Queen" first. You'd have all these Australians get up. Soon as they played the Star Spangled Banner about nine-tenths of them sit down. (laughs) But outside of that the Australian people were wonderful people. They didn't have much during the war, but they used to invite a lot of us over for dinner on Sunday. Maybe had a meat ration for two, three weeks, but they'd see that we got a good meal.
- Jim: What did they serve you?
- Gilbert: Oh, it was never the one, never know. There was always chicken or something like that. Where they got it I don't know, but they always set a

very good meal. Meat, where they got that I don't know. I mean, they got it maybe through the black market or something.

Jim: Okay. Did you go to any of the dance halls over there? The dance halls in Brisbane? The dance halls.

Gilbert: For what?

Jim: Go dancing? Did you go to any of the parties in there?

Gilbert: Well, parties, we didn't have too much chance to go to parties over there, you know. But I was in Brisbane for about six weeks with my sergeant, a guard of – he helped guard our warehouse, and I sicked (??) a guy and one time I asked the guys downtown where he'd been? "Well, I go this way, they go this way." I was going this way and everybody else was going –

Jim: You were on the wrong side.

Gilbert: I really had a traffic jam during the war (laughs).

Jim: Fine. Did you keep in contact with any of these people that were in your regiment?

Gilbert: Did I what?

Jim: Did you keep in contact with any of them?

Gilbert: Unh unh. No, unh unh.

Jim: You don't know where any of these guys are now?

Gilbert: From Australia?

Jim: Well, the guys that were in your company?

Gilbert: In my company?

Jim: Yeah.

Gilbert: Oh, I get to see most of the tuys, but out of our original company that left Neenah (??) I don't think there's thirty, forty guys left. One of 'em, one of our sergeants got to be a colonel, Colonel Edwin Block. Now whether he lives in Neenah or someplace else, I don't know. I saw him at a reunion not too long ago.

Jim: What reunion?

Gilbert: 1-2-7 Infantry reunion.

Jim: The regimental?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah. We have a – honey, bring that picture of the guys. They're all a good bunch of guys, and we had a wonderful time. We had good commanding officers. I can't think of the name.

Jim: Right, okay.

Gilbert: This is his picture under the last one.

Mrs. Arps: [unintelligible] the people that we [unintelligible] are [unintelligible].

Jim: When was, when was this reunion? When was this?

Gilbert: 19—

Mrs. Arps: '93.

Jim: '93? And this is just your company, the 127th?

Gilbert: This is the guy that passed away.

Jim: Mm.

Mrs. Arps: [unintelligible]

Jim: [unintelligible] the 127th [unintelligible]

Gilbert: After this [unintelligible] This guy's dead.

Mrs. Arps: [unintelligible]

Jim: Yeah, sure. Are any of these guys from around here?

Gilbert: Well, ah, not from Kaukauna, no. See, I belonged to I Company. My brother belonged to B Company. He was – he joined I Company before I joined B Company. And then from Kaukauna there were nine guys that left with I Company. And first sergeants out of nine, I think I'm the only one left.

Jim: Mm hmm. Where are you here?

Gilbert: Mm hmm.

Jim: Right there?

Gilbert: Right, yeah.

Jim: They look in pretty good shape.

Gilbert: Well, yeah. Like I say, that was quite a few years ago. (laughs)

Jim: This one looks like, he's too young. He must be the son of one of the regiments.

Gilbert: Yeah, I don't remember his name.

Jim: Yeah, but he's obviously young.

Gilbert: This guy just passed away recently, two, three weeks ago.

Jim: The 32nd Division doesn't have any reunions?

Gilbert: Well, they have reunions –

Jim: Right.

Gilbert: But I never go because, first of all I can't afford it. Second of all I don't want to relive the [unintelligible] in a war that I might have died anyhow (??).

Jim: Sure. Where do they have their reunions? Are they far away?

Gilbert: Well, Milwaukee, then someplace later on, Michigan and everything like that. I actually don't know where they hold them. I get a magazine every month from them. I still belong to the 32nd Division Association.

Jim: Okay. And when you got back home did you use your GI Bill?

Gilbert: No. I didn't have to because I was – when I worked at Thilmarny they were very good that way. When you come back from service you had the job. You got the job you had when you left. When I came back I had the grind rewriter.

Jim: The what?

Gilbert: A rewriter. You know, for makin' small rolls out of big rolls, cuttin' 'em up, yeah. (Jim laughs) And I happened, there happened to be a guy that

had that job ahead of me, but when I come back I got preference because I returned from service.

Jim: I understand.

Gilbert: The mill stood behind that 100%, you bet. And then after the war I think I worked on the rewinder fifteen years, and I transferred to the lab, and I worked in paper testing. And I used to have to go to –

Jim: This is in Neenah?

Gilbert: No, Thilmany Pulp Paper Company in Kaukauna International now.

Jim: There so many paper companies right around there I never know.

Gilbert: Well, Neenah is Kimberly Clark.

Jim: Yeah.

Gilbert: I've got a son that's a security guard up there.

Jim: Oh, okay, all right. Very good.

Gilbert: That's it. (laughs)

Jim: That's all that happened – well, that's a lot to have happened to you. I'm sorry they didn't give you a disability, though. They should have.

Gilbert: Yeah, what are you going to do? I can't, I mean these –

Jim: Now there's nothing you can do.

Gilbert: These officers that checked us over know nothing about it.

Mrs. Arps: They couldn't re—

Jim: They could, but probably it's too late now. Got a picture of your medal (??) (Both laugh) Alright. Is this from the newspaper?

Gilbert: Huh? That's my –

Jim: Your brothers.

Gilbert: Yeah. My two brothers.

Jim: Right.

- Gilbert: Yeah. He was killed at Saint O Lo. He had – he went with the 3rd Armored Division under Patton. I always told him, “Keep your head low.” There was a guy from Kaukauna that was with him when he was killed, and they were out on armor reconnaissance, and he happened to see a German tank up on our road (??). They zeroed in on him, and he got hit, and he got hit about the size of a pea in his temple. He got hit and while our mother didn’t know nothing about that for almost maybe three, four months until they came over one night and told her that he was killed. I think he was killed the 22nd of August –
- Jim: And your other brother?
- Gilbert: He had a wife and a baby he never saw.
- Jim: What about your other brother?
- Gilbert: My other brother, he was, he came back and he worked down at the mill for awhile and then he had to retire because they told him he had a piece of shrapnel between his heart and lung and they could never take that out. But he was in tough shape. He had no shoulder blade or anything (??).
- Jim: He lost that?
- Gilbert: He lost that, but he was pretty good for awhile.
- Jim: What disability does he get?
- Gilbert: I don’t remember, and I don’t know.
- Jim: Where does he live?
- Gilbert: Well, he used to get a disability.
- Jim: Yeah, I’m sure. Where does he live?
- Gilbert: He died –
- Jim: Oh.
- Gilbert: In 1955.
- Mrs. Arps: He must have been young.
- Jim: That’s pretty young.

Gilbert: Yeah, he was young. He didn't live too long after that because he was always bothered with that, but he never said anything. He drank most of the time (laughs). Tried – he found that he could drown it out maybe.

Jim: Oh, I see. He never married?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah. He was married. He had a wife and two boys. Donny Arps, that's his boy. And then he had another one, Tom. So Don he's a executive vice president of the Mc Mahon Associates.

Jim: Where is that?

Gilbert: That's in Neenah.

Jim: Uh huh.

Gilbert: And I think Don lives in Neenah, doesn't he?

Mrs. Arps: Well, Gilbert, as he would have got out of the service he weighed 107.

Gilbert: What was that?

Mrs. Arps: You said you weighed 107 pounds.

Jim: When you got out.

Gilbert: Mm hmm.

Mrs. Arps: How much did you weigh when you went in?

Jim: That's (??) when he came back from New Guinea, back from Australia. Yeah, that's from being in the bush –

Mrs. Arps: Oh, I see.

Jim: From not eating much.

Gilbert: Yeah, the Indianapolis.

Mrs. Arps: How much going in?

Gilbert: Huh?

Mrs. Arps: How much did you weigh –

Jim: When you went into service how much did you weigh?

- Gilbert: Oh, about 135, 140. I think I grew three or four inches in service because there's a picture of me in '39 boy, I [unintelligible] But I think I grew in service. Anyhow, I think I carried myself a little straighter in some ways.
- Jim: Probably.
- Gilbert: They may have made a –
- Jim: I've interviewed a couple of guys who were on the Indianapolis, the Indianapolis that ferried you your transport across the Pacific.
- Gilbert: Oh, yeah.
- Jim: The Indianapolis.
- Gilbert: Yeah. Mm hmm.
- Jim: I've talked with several people who were aboard the Indianapolis.
- Gilbert: Well, you know, we used to go I think it was seven seconds this way, seven seconds that way, nine seconds this way, fifteen seconds that way. It took us twenty-eight days to get across it.
- Jim: That's what happened to the Indianapolis then. Then after they delivered the atomic bomb they [unintelligible].
- Gilbert: And then they got hit with a torpedo then.
- Jim: Right. More than one, yeah.
- Gilbert: But that was a pretty good ship, because, boy, they kept a pretty good eye on us. I happened to have an airplane guard. I was in the airplane guard. They had fifty caliber machine guns set all along the deck and ah, trucks and tanks and everything down there. Well, 15,000 troops on board.
- Jim: Did the whole division go on one ship, or was it three ships? The division was in three ships you said?
- Gilbert: The Luline, the Mariposa, and the Monterey, those were the ships that the nurses were on.
- Jim: (laughs) Well –
- Gilbert: Oh, yeah, we always had field glasses that could see –

Jim: Pick 'em out, right. Yeah.

Gilbert: Those were Matson Liners.

Jim: Yeah. This was the first group that went overseas, the 32nd Division.

Gilbert: Yeah. Mm hmm.

Jim: It was right at the very beginning [unintelligible] 1942.

Gilbert: We were the first American troops in contact with the Japs.

Jim: Right.

Gilbert: 32nd Division.

Jim: The 32nd had the longest combat time of any division.

Gilbert: In the division?

Jim: In the war, the 32nd.

Gilbert: Well, I think they had nine out of sixty (??) days, something like that. That's what they said anyhow. I don't know.

Jim: Right. Well, now, I can't think of anything else to ask you.

Gilbert: Well (laughs)

Jim: Got any stories to tell? How about the bugs? Did you run into any bugs in the jungle? How did you deal with them?

Gilbert: Well –

Jim: Snakes and bugs that bite you and –

Gilbert: I guess (??) all right.

Jim: They didn't -- you don't remember them.

Gilbert: Unh unh.

Jim: That wasn't a problem? A lot of guys had a lot of problems with them they got into that jungle because of all the animals.

Gilbert: Oh, well, the only thing there you see a lot of kangaroos, wallabies –

Jim: Well, that's in Australia. That's not in New Guinea.

Gilbert: Yeah, in Australia, and over in New Guinea all what you say – well, you couldn't see nothing because the sun, it used to rain like a son of a gun, fifteen minuets later it would stop. Sun would come out. Where it was dry out it was all right. If it was dry out you otherwise you dig a foxhole and bail 'er out.

Jim: Right, that's jungle.

Gilbert: Oh, it was – I saw these land crabs. They used to walk at night.

Jim: Right.

Gilbert: You could feel, hear them walking at night, (Jim laughs) and they sounded just like a person walking. Scare the hell out of ya. (laughs)

Jim: Right, that's what I was trying to get you to tell me about. (Gilbert laughs) Did they bite you?

Gilbert: Huh?

Jim: Did they bite you?

Gilbert: Well, no, I was never bitten by one. I killed one once. I had move my foxhole fifteen, twenty feet away because he stunk like mad.

Jim: Oh.

Gilbert: Oh, they were awful.

Jim: Right. So, how many Japs did you kill?

Gilbert: I never say I killed any of 'em. Because I don't know.

Jim: I assume –

Gilbert: I don't know.

Jim: Okay.

Gilbert: And maybe I bumped off one or two, but it weren't no –

Jim: Right. Okay.

Gilbert: But they were good.

Jim: Right, okay. I can't think of anything else to ask of you. Did you forget to tell me anything?

Gilbert: No, I don't think so.

Jim: Okay.

[End of interview]