

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN BARGER
Artillery, Army, World War II
2000

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Barger, John, [1918-2002]. Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette [ca. 38 min.]; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette [ca. 38 min.]; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. [1 folder].

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. [1 folder].

Abstract:

John Barger, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service with the 24th Infantry Division artillery in Hawaii and the Pacific. Prior to World War II, Barger was a member of the Naval Reserves and touches upon his service with this organization. He discusses his Army basic training in Hawaii and his work drafting maps. Stationed at Schofield Barracks [Hawaii], talks about pre-war duties and bicycling around Hawaii. Barger recounts the attack on Pearl Harbor including strafing of his barracks and troop movement to repel a Japanese invasion. He recalls total blackout, guard duty, and driving a new general around the island in a jeep over the next few days. He comments on being an instructor for basic training, Ranger school, and judo. Barger talks about training on Fergusson Island as an Alamo scout to land ahead of the troops and scout enemy positions. Barger discusses his role in the invasions of Hollandia [New Guinea] and Leyte [Philippines]. He recalls a machine gun accident that killed a friend who was about to be sent home. Eventually rotated back to the United States, he discusses his marriage and stateside duty in Florida and at Fort Ord [California]. After the war, he talks about opening a business with an Army friend in South Dakota who committed suicide three years later. He recalls how this friend cured a general's habit of grabbing his driver's steering wheel. Barger mentions moving back to Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Biographical Sketch:

Barger [April 16th 1918-2002] served with the 24th Artillery Division in the Pacific theater of World War II.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.

Transcribed by Emily Johnson, 2008.

Checked by Channing Welch, 2009.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

James McIntosh: Okay. All right. Talking with John Barger and it's the seventh of December, and the year is 2000 and where were you born John?

John Barger: Milwaukee.

James: Okay. And when was that?

John: April 16th, 1918.

James: 1918. And when did you enter the military?

John: Uh, 1935 I was in the Navy Reserves in Milwaukee for four years, and I wanted to go into the Navy in 1940, and they wouldn't take me into the regular because I have a scratched eardrum. So, [laughs] –

James: My goodness.

John: The guy that was in the Navy he says, "Go across the way," he says, "That's the Army. They'll take anybody." [laughs] So –

James: [laughs] Oh, that's [unintelligible]. I'm gonna pull this up just a bit.

John: Yeah. Well, the – I was in line there, way back in the line and waiting to go for the physical and instruction and that, and a fella came out and he says, "Is there anybody that wants to go into the artillery in Hawaii or the Infantry in Panama?" I says, "I'll take that one in Hawaii." So I moved from way in the back way up there because they had to get a train out to Fort Totten, New York that night. So I guess they gave me a real fast overlook. They put me on the train that night, and when I got out to Fort Totten an old Army doctor, he looked at me and he says, "How did you get this far?" [laughs] It wasn't really that bad. I could hear –

James: Sure.

John: And but -- He says, "I tell ya, I'm gonna pass you," and this was after three days of quarantine. But he says, "I'm going to pass you, but," he says, "if you ever come back to the Army and try to get compensation for that ear I'm gonna haunt ya." And that's how I was stuck on a boat and went over to Hawaii. I took my basic training in Hawaii in 1940.

- James: And then you were assigned to what unit?
- John: I was at headquarters of the 24th Division Artillery.
- James: 27th?
- John: 24th Division Artillery. Actually, when I first went in, it was the 11th Field Artillery at that time, and then that was a triangular division. And then they later on made it a—no that was a square division. They made it a triangular division.
- James: [unintelligible] —change all those from the World War I type—to World War II.
- John: Yeah, right. Yeah, they still had some —
- James: Now you went there in 1940?
- John: 1940.
- James: Right. Now what was your training involved? What did you do now? There was nothing going on much. You were trained for what, would you say?
- John: Well, when I got to Hawaii, I went through the basic training. I was assigned for the headquarters, and actually in headquarters I was the regimental draftsman. I made dossiers and maps —
- James: Sure.
- John: And what have you. That was basically my main function. And then when the war started, they had Colonel Deles cue [??] from the Columbia University. He started one of the first Ranger schools in Hawaii. And it's the forerunners of the Berets and what have you. And I was assigned to go there and went through that. Ended up in the hospital but I qualified as instructor for that Ranger group. But it — I had to do the instructing back in my company headquarters. And from there, we went to Sydney, Australia. Down in Sydney they had a judo class.
- James: Oh!
- John: So I went into judo and come out an instructor in Judo. Not jujitsu, but judo.
- James: Judo, yeah.

John: Yeah.

James: This is still in 1940?

John: Uh, no that was about in 1942, about '43.

James: Oh, well, you jumped ahead here.

John: Oh, ya huh?

James: Too fast.

John: Well, actually in Hawaii, in order to get promoted you had to go out for sports so I went out for boxing.

James: I see.

John: And they had a big old punch bowl down there, and we'd fight everybody, and I was in pretty good shape at that time. But that's what I--

James: Did you fight as a middle weight?

John: A middle weight's 160 pounds.

James: That's why I guessed.

John: Yeah. 160 pounds.

James: How big was your unit? 24th Division, what regiment was that?

John: It was headquarters.

James: For the whole division?

John: Well, it was connected with the--well, it was the 24th Infantry Division.

James: I see.

John: And our in headquarters, the headquarters that I was in, at that time it was a full colonel, a "bird" colonel.

James: I see.

John: And then when we got over in New Guinea, might have been Sydney, the colonel went back to I think it was Fort Sill because he was such a good field artillery officer, and then we got a brigadier general as our commander.

James: Well, so in peace time you'd enjoy your duty over there?

John: Oh sure, we had tennis and boxing and--

James: Now this was an alternative because there weren't any jobs to be had.

John: Well, no, I was--

James: The military wasn't as popular.

John: Oh, I liked it, I always liked the military. I always wanted to, and I'm sorry I didn't stay in. It's the best and the worst time of my life, but it was always the military. And I'm sorry I didn't--

James: But you enjoyed your pre-war duties?

John: Oh yeah, we met good friends and we played tennis, and we --

James: I bet you had a lot of fun.

John: Yeah. In fact, after one of the boxing meets that we had they gave me a three day pass, and I took a bicycle and went around the island on a bicycle.

James: Oh, how nice.

John: Up through Pali and down in through--

James: Yeah, I've been there.

John: Have you?

James: Oh, yes, couple times.

John: So, the island has really changed since then. Now they got highways and --

James: Right, there's too many people.

John: Oh, highways and you wouldn't believe it.

- James: So, tell me about how when the war started and, you know, how that morning what were you doing? And stuff like that?
- John: Well, that morning I had just got off of charge of quarters and that's a twenty-four hour stint.
- James: I see.
- John: And at 7 o'clock Sunday morning I got relieved, and therefore I had the next twenty-four hours off. So we were milling around, and, like I say, I turned over the command to a buck sergeant, and I had nothing to do anymore that day. This was a free day. It was sort of a lazy day, and all of a sudden down on the –
- James: Where was your headquarters? In Hickam Field or--?
- John: No, it was in Schofield Barracks.
- James: In Schofield Barracks, that's right I misspoke.
- John: Schofield Barracks is here, and the field artillery is on one end of Schofield Barracks. You go all the way to the other end is Wheeler Field.
- James: Okay. I got it now.
- John: And Wheeler Field, all of a sudden there was a lot of flames and fire and noise, and the first thing that entered our mind – well, the first thing was that Wheeler Field was putting on some kind of a show. But then it got too big and too noisy [??]. Then we figured well, maybe a plane crashed. Then it still got, you know, bigger and noisier, and we couldn't see any flames because they came in so low. So what we seen was just a bunch of fire and smoke. And at that time we still didn't know what was going on. Until, just a little bit after that a Zero came around our quadrangle. Came in from one end, swooped down and up with machine guns were going, and I was on the far end of that, and I could look right down into the cockpit and see that man, the pilot.
- James: How did they miss you?
- John: Well, I guess, I don't know if his guns were stopped at that time or if he pulled out or what happened. Because they have a crossfire and there was a car in that quadrangle, and its engine was hit. But, to my knowledge, there wasn't any of us hurt.

James: But this was not an airplane you expected to see.

John: Well, when it flew by here was a big old red circle and that still, it still--

James: Did you catch on then?

John: Not really, you know not really because you know, being in the military you don't do nothing until they tell you to.

James: Right, that's.

John: And we said "Jesus something's radically wrong." However, like I say about five minutes later our captain came in and said, "We're under attack by Japan." Well, all hell broke loose then, and--

James: So then what was your duty? Your immediate duty then?

John: My immediate duty, up in the--we got our rifles, meal pack, reported to our sections. Mine happened to be in the headquarters, and the ammunition we got, where they had these bandoliers. They just threw a bandolier at you and then everybody had to report to their sections because we had to be prepared for the invasion.

James: I was gonna say, you didn't know they might be coming by land.

John: No, what else? No, that's--

James: That was assumed? Assumed?

John: Yeah, sure.

James: Right.

John: You know, you don't have a bombing like that and then not have an invasion. It took about two days, almost three days before, with reconnaissance going out and stuff, that finally, the word came down that we were not going to be invaded.

James: You could stand down for then.

John: From there on you know, yeah, you could get some reasons of normalcy.

- James: So you were on post then for two days waiting for something to happen.
- John: That's right. We were on stand-by, and actually we were all more or less on guard duty. Ah, we had a bunch of recruits that just came in to Hawaii, and we did all of our own training, boot camp in Hawaii, and they assigned me to that new group of kids that came in, and they were down in Pearl Harbor, or in Hawaii, Oahu, and they came up to our-- they were assigned to field artillery, and when they came in about 5 o'clock that night I was assigned to take care of them to make sure that they put up the blackouts that they didn't go through a blackout--
- James: Did you sleep in quarters or in tents?
- John: No, I had 'em up until we fed 'em. We got them in there, fed them, put up these Army tent blankets on either side of the wall so that you had to go into one before you go out the other. It was total blackout. Everything was total blackout. After that I went back to my unit. Somebody else picked them up and took them to where they were supposed to go.
- James: So then the next few days, still confusing for everybody?
- John: Well, I don't know. I don't recall that it was--it was chaos, but of course like I say you just get ready like a maneuver or something. You're getting ready to go take up your positions. It was--
- James: Did you have your training on the beach anywhere?
- John: Oh, sure, sure. We, being in the headquarters, did not have, but everybody else had their locations, and--
- James: So you spent your time on the phone contacting those different--
- John: No, they were on the phone and they telling me what to do [laughs]. In fact, the new general wanted to go do some inspecting, and he always had bodyguard, or he had an aide and he had a sergeant assigned to him, but he grabbed me. He says, "Here, come on you're going with me." [laughs] And we got into a jeep and he says, "I'm driving." You know, he's gonna drive. So he throws me a rifle, and I've never seen that rifle. He says, "You're a better shot than I am." [laughs] So I took that rifle and had the windshield of the jeep laid down so I put that rifle so that the bullet or the [laughs] barrel was facing out over that way knowing that I'd never seen that rifle. Then while we're driving around he went

up in the hills and around. He was checking different things. But the rifle, the barrel of that rifle was always away pointed somewhere else. But I finally, looking at it, and I knew just about what it was. I didn't know if it was loaded, and I'm sure it was loaded. So I was – if he only knew but I didn't know what the hell I was doing with that rifle [both laugh]. But that's the way it was.

- James: So, after a couple of days did your outfit stay there or did you move?
- John: No, we stayed there. We stayed there for, oh gosh, almost two years.
- James: A year, two years.
- John: Two years, yeah. Really long time.
- James: Artillery division didn't move then?
- John: No, we were all stationed. That was our primary--
- James: It was your duty to protect the island.
- John: That was our mission. Then finally, they loaded us on one of those commandeered pleasure liners. I don't which, President Line or one of them, and made a troop carrier out of it. We went from Hawaii down to Australia. It took us thirty days. We were unescorted, just by ourselves.
- James: This was now in 1943?
- John: Yeah, about '43.
- James: Two years would make it '43 sometime.
- John: Somewhere around there.
- James: Maybe '44.
- John: Yeah, it could have been. It could have been. 'Cause from Sydney we went up to Rock Hampton that was Australia. Then we went into New Guineas, and we went to Goodenough Island and then when we were in Goodenough Island, General MacArthur's G2 Officer, Colonel Bradshaw started up an Alamo Scout school. And the general sent me to that school on the island, Fergusson Island.

And what that was supposed to be I doubt very much if you'll find it in history about the Alamo Scouts. It's a very, very --

James: I've not heard of them. Tell me about them.

John: Nobody's really heard about the Alamo Scouts. We took training on Fergusson Island and what the concept was that there'd be six and seven men teams and they were supposed to go pre-invasion, lay out the terrain, where the machine guns were, where the headquarters were and we'd spend three days on a mission. I never went on a mission because I wasn't good enough.

James: Where did the term Alamo come from? Do you know?

John: I have no idea. No idea, but that was right under General MacArthur's headquarters and they controlled where they went.

James: Did they have many missions that Alamo group with you trained?

John: To my knowledge I do not know. I do know that I met one in Milwaukee and he was so shook up that he wasn't allowed to drive anymore. So it took a toll on anybody that--you'd take two missions and you were probably cooked.

James: Then they did do something.

John: They had to do something, yeah.

James: In New Guinea, perhaps?

John: No, they, well--

James: Or it must have been in the Philippines, that's the only two places MacArthur went.

John: Well, I think they might have scouted Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, because we made an invasion there. That was Dutch New Guinea. They might have had that, and Biak was there. That was a real horrible place. And they probably, they might have sent some of them guys up into the Philippines.

James: How long did you stay in the--

John: Well, I was overseas fifty-six months.

James: In Australia?

John: Overseas.

James: Yes, I know, but then you were in Australia after you left.

John: Oh, Australia, yeah, we were in Australia, yeah. Went up to New Guinea and made the invasion of Hollandia, and from --

James: What was your function in the landing of Hollandia?

John: Well, our first sergeant had some legal problems back in Hawaii, and it must have been something pretty serious because they pulled him out. Some judge wanted to see him or something, I don't know what the mechanics of it is. But being the junior NCO, I had just made staff sergeant, and none of the regular, like the mess sergeant, he's a master, they're not going to step down to take over a temporary job of first sergeant so I become the first sergeant of that unit. Made two invasions as the first sergeant, acting first sergeant. And when the first sergeant, Lane, finally met up with us in the Philippines then I was put on rotation and get let out the next day.

James: Where did you go in the Philippines?

John: I was on Leyte.

James: What was your duty there?

John: [laughs] the general wanted me to go in with the infantry. So I went in on the fifth wave to set up a CP.

James: On the beach?

John: On the beach. But that was sort of ridiculous because we went in, and all we were doing is trying to save our own hide to get off the beach. [both laugh]. And we were mired down, well, you know --

James: Sure.

John: We could care less about a CP or anything else. And so I teamed up with a platoon of infantry guys. They had a tank trap, great big long tank trap, and there was one place were you could go across. Well, dummy me, you know, jeez that's the place to go. Well, there was an infantry guy and myself, we went there, and as we were just about ready to cross, we dropped down on the ground and he got shot. But he, was, it wasn't a death blow. It was down the back. He shot down the back. So we called for medics, and we

got him out of there. Then I went back towards the beach and scouted around and stayed away from where the fire was. By that time the infantry had started pushing some Japs back, and it sorta quieted it down. But the time our group came in, I--he took over, the general took over, and from then on it was--

James: Setting up a command post would involve a radio, radio operator--

John: We didn't have a --no. Actually, what it was is more or less to recon to group the island or where we were to let him know what was out there. Not really setting up a functional command post. It was more or less like a forward scout beacon.

James: How did you communicate?

John: Well, when I got back down to the beach and I had a, I seen the group coming in and--

James: Oh, ok so, direct contact then.

John: Yeah.

James: By that time everyone was pretty secure.

John: Yeah, I was in a headquarters, the field artillery headquarters where we had, I think it was about fifteen field grade officers, major on up. So,-- and they took care of the functions of the division.

James: So your responsibility was then to keep the paperwork intact.

John: Paperwork and have enough people around, put them on KP and guard duty. Well everybody was on guard duty, more or less -- But KP was the hardest, and it was a good thing we had a couple of screw-up's who we volunteered more or less for that job. You can't do that in the new Army. You gotta rotate it. And we did, we rotated some, but it was pretty hard getting guys on --

James: Did you have trouble getting food on the beach when you first got there?

John: No, no --

James: Or did it follow you pretty good?

John: Yeah, everything was pretty well organized, and, yeah, and we moved off the beach and went inland quite always before I went out.

James: By this time you had enough points to rotate home?

John: Oh yeah, I had more than enough points. I coulda went home a year or two years before then.

James: Oh, my.

John: Yeah, but I had to wait until that sergeant come back. In fact, the general said that, "If you come back I'll make you the first sergeant, 'cause then you'd have authority to fill out that—"

James: That spot?

John: Table of organization.

James: Yes.

John: I says, "Well, you give me those stripes and give me that first sergeant now I'll come back. "[laughs] And he says, "No I can't do that, we've got a first sergeant." So, that was--

James: So what did you do?

John: Then I come back home and--

James: By plane?

John: Yeah, we got back to the States.

James: You went alone, by yourself?

John: No, there was a whole group going back from our organization, and that's a story in itself, the reason that I went back so soon. Juan Perez from Texas, we played tennis together and we had, we were pretty close, he'd been overseas almost as long as long as I was and he was getting his bags packed and that to go home because his new replacements were there. And some yahoo, got, picked up an automatic, I think it was a BAR or a machine gun. I think it was a machine gun. And he let a burst go. It went across the tent hit Perez, two shots in this arm, in the left arm and one in the chest and he died in my arms.

James: From just somebody being careless.

John: Didn't know other--one of these kids had seen a machine gun, ooh, yah. Well, you know some of those guns fire on the forward motion. And that rounds come right across into his tent.

James: That kid was court-martialed I'm sure.

John: No, they just. No, they transfer him. I don't know what happened to him because I left right, I got on rotation right away. But I took Perez's place. That's why I went about a month ahead of time. I even took him down to grave registration to make sure that was-- when I got back they said, "Pack your bags, you're on the, you're going out." That's--

James: You got on a plane then and left the Philippines by plane.

John: Yeah, we got a plane and we went over Palu and we had an old -- well, he was an old, old military corporal, one of those guys with mules and horses. He got in an airplane, and he was looking out that, and the wing was flipping and flopping. We got him -- we landed at Palu, it was just a coral island. He wouldn't get back on the plane. He says, "You're not gonna get me--[laughs] Actually, we had to tie him, put him on the plane.

James: They tied him up and put him on the plane?

John: Yeah, he wouldn't get on that plane.

James: [laughs] He was a long-term--

John: He was one of the old--yeah, see, when I went overseas they were all professional Army.

James: All old regulars.

John: Yeah, that's why there was no promotion.

James: He'd never been on a plane before?

John: No, no, uh-huh.

James: And he didn't enjoy his only--

John: He watched that plane, that wing was gonna bounce right off of that thing. He was scared and he wouldn't get--once he was on land he wasn't about to get back.

James: [laughs] So they really tied him up?

John: Well, they hog-tied, more or less and got him on that plane. Yeah, so --

James: Then that flew from where?

John: That was Palu. Where did we go then?

James: Probably went to Guam and then --

John: No, we didn't go to Guam I think we went--we either went to Australia or we went to Hawaii.

James: Well, anyway—

John: Anyway, we ended up –

James: Ended up going to your home.

John: Yeah, we got off and that was in San Francisco I think we came in. Then they gave us. Our records were catching up with us, so they shipped me to Great Lakes or Fort Sheridan because that was close to my home. When I got to Fort Sheridan, they gave me a twenty-one day delayed en route to get down to Florida because our records were going to be shipped there. Then we had to go through three days of debriefing. And in that twenty-one days, the girl that used to live next door to me -- it was on a Sunday night I come home. Monday night we got engaged [laughs] and about a week later –

James: You got married.

John: We had a military wedding.

James: Oh, how nice.

John: Yeah. My brother-in-law was in the Air-Force and he happened to be home. He was in it. We were short, we had a bunch of girls, sisters and that. We were short, so we went down to the USO and got some GIs [laughs] out of the USO to stand up for my wedding. Then went down and had my orders changed to being married

instead of going to the National Hotel where all the single guys went, we went to the Grossing Hotel in Miami, which is one of the most exclusive at that time in Miami. We had a ballroom, and we had steaks and butter and the whole bit. And I went out and bought a brand-new tailor-made uniform [laughs]. Well, went through the medicals, and A-1 they gave me an A-1. A lot of guys were psychiatric and wounds and stuff like that. But they stamped me A-1 sent me out to Fort Ord, California. They were going to shoot me back overseas. Well, I went to Fort Ord, my wife come back to Milwaukee, and they made me a first supply sergeant out there where I was taking all the uniforms of these GIs as they come through there and issued them all new uniforms. And that was the job. Well, it looked like I was going to be there for a little while so my wife, she came out there. Funny thing, she almost didn't make it. I had something like \$3,000 in the Bank of America out there. So when I got out at Fort Ord, there was, I think it was eleven of us from my outfit over there. So, everybody was broke. I got some of that money out, we spent it until it was gone [laughs]. So she borrowed her money from her father and we came up there, she came out to Fort Ord. And right after that the war ended in Germany and then they sent me to Bakersfield, and they discharged me from there. And Smitty was going to discharge about a week later, and he was, well, he was my driver, he was a general's driver. He was my right-hand man. And he and I were going to set up a construction business out in Rapid City, South Dakota. So I had a week to layover. So I went down to Monterey and got a job in the fish market. They get me to wear all the entrails. Oh, was it a sneaky job, and I was glad that he got discharged in a week because I would have quit after that. Anyway, he went and got discharged, and then we got on a train, and we went out to South Dakota; my wife, her girlfriend and Smitty. Smitty ended up marrying her. [laughs] So we started up a construction outfit because his --

James: How did you pick that area or that town?

John: Smitty is from Rapid City, South Dakota. His father has a construction business and also a motel in Rapid City.

James: It was all set up.

John: And it was all set up. And we rented the equipment the first year from his father, and he and I, we had a little bulldozer. And at that time the government was paying the,-- well, it was sort of little dams, little water breaks when it rained the water backed up in there, and we had that sewed up pretty good. And it was from the

United States government that paid us. We were doing pretty good the first year, then the winter set in. It was enough work for him to clean off the railroad runs and stuff like that and being as his parents were there, I come back to Milwaukee, and oh, I worked on different odd jobs. As soon as spring came I went back. We tried for three years, and I was back in Milwaukee and he committed suicide.

James: Oh, my.

[Tape 1, Side A. ca. 30 min.]

John: Yeah, his dad died in about April. And he was a gambler, for whatever. I know that if I'd have been there he wouldn't have committed suicide. But they found him lookin' over Rapid City, brand new car, and he--

James: He was depressed. Yeah.

John: Just completely depressed.

James: Yeah. That's a shame.

John: So that was the end of --

James: Rapid City.

John: Rapid City. Cause you can't do that alone. So, I went back and worked in Milwaukee.

James: Did your outfit get any medals? Your 24th Division?

John: Oh yeah, they all got the ribbons and--

James: The field ribbons and service--

John: Oh, sure. Oh yeah, the commendations --

James: Commendations. Did you get any special awards?

John: Well, just one here that I got. This is a Congressional Medal and it's--

James: From the President?

John: No, it's from Congress. Congress authorized this medal that I have on. This one here.

James: For what purpose, for what --

John: You had to be in Pearl Harbor on the 7th of December.

James: That's a Pearl Harbor award.

John: Yeah it's a Pearl Harbor, and it was -- the Arizona is --

James: Hold it up a little higher. OK, alright, got it.

John: How about the other side? It's also engraved in there. Get it?

James: That's for Pearl Harbor?

John: That's for being at Pearl Harbor December 7th.

James: In whatever branch.

John: As long as you were on the island.

James: In whatever capacity.

John: Whatever capacity. I got that about three years ago.

James: Yeah, I've seen them before. Mel Stapleton, I just interviewed him a month ago. He brought his too.

John: If he wasn't in such bad shape I'd have signed him up in the Pearl Harbor Survivors. He's not a member. He's in pretty bad shape.

James: He had a tough goin'.

John: Yeah.

James: Got that smoker's problem.

John: Yeah.

James: Emphysema

John: Emphysema.

- James: Right. So, and have you kept in contact with any of your fellas in the 24th?
- John: Ah, not really. Not really. There's a fellow by the name of Carmel and he was writing to me quite often and I never answered him. But I still got his letter in my drawer and some day I'm going down to Kentucky and look him up. He's an insurance man now. We were real close.
- James: You better call. Make sure he's alive.
- John: Oh, I don't know. I'm just that kinda guy. I hate to write letters.
- James: And the general? Your friend the general? Is he still alive?
- John: I have no idea. I have no idea. And--
- James: But he took good care of you out there.
- John: No, I took good care of him.
- James: Oh, I see, it was the other way around.
- John: Oh, yeah. He was-- first thing he did when we got to the Philippines, he went down to the battalion and he got two of the biggest men that you ever seen in your life, and he made them bodyguards. [James laughs]. He just took 'em out and he'd had this jeep and these two great, I mean huge, huge guys who sit on the back of that thing. And the general, I could never keep a driver, never keep him a driver in there. He'd always grab and he'd grab the wheel, and Smitty he was a race car driver, motorcycle racer. We were like that. And I says "Smitty, What the heck we gonna do?" He says, "Leave me take that Jeep." Well, he did. The general grabbed the wheel and the kid dropped his hands, Smitty dropped his hands, he stepped on the gas and let it go [laughs].
- James: He cured the general of that?
- John: Never touched it again. [James laughs] But he also always wanted that guy to be his driver, too. But yeah, that Smitty he was a wild one, real wild one. And people don't understand that I got his picture in an album. Especially in life [??] he was a gambler and he was a womanizer, but he was still the closest thing that I ever had-- in fact, when we made that invasion I was, the general got me on to going with the infantry. Smitty had his orders changed so he'd go in with me.

James: In the Philippines?

John: That was the Philippines, invasion of the Philippines. So we were closer than close. Yeah.

James: Well, that's why you went into business –

John: Ch—

James: Right?

John: Right.

James: Yeah.

John: We knew each other. In fact, he got mad at me. He had about two or three thousand dollars, give it to me and says, "Now don't give me that money until we get, you know, get on land." Well he lost his money. He wanted that money and I says, "To hell with you." [laughs] And I wouldn't give it to him. I just wouldn't. Because I just would not give it to him. He's mad. He cussed me out and everything else and says, "That's my money," and all that. But no, when we got to the States I says, "Here." The first thing he did he went and bought his dad a wristwatch and his mother a diamond ring. And yeah, but oh yeah, Smitty.

James: How about his wife?

John: His wife was my wife's girlfriend –

James: I understand.

John: From Milwaukee.

James: Is she still alive?

John: Yes, in fact she, they have a ranch.

James: She live in Rapid City?

John: Rapid City, outside of Rapid City. She worked for a lumber company and then they had these mobile homes. She become one of the main officers of that company. And she remarried one of the guys that was delivering these vehicles after Smitty's died. Smitty had two children. And they have a ranch and we visited, but not lately and she stayed right out in Rapid City.

James: [unintelligible]

John: Yeah.

James: Wonderful. Okay. Thank you.

John: [laughs] you're welcome.

James: Excellent interview, you do a good job.

[End of Interview]