

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JAMES H. BARTELT
Radio Intelligence, Army, World War II.

1997

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Bartelt, James H., (1925-). Oral History Interview, 1997.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 69 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 69 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

James Bartelt, a Wausau, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II radio intelligence service with the Headquarters Company, 82nd Signal Battalion, 10th Army in the Pacific Theater. Bartelt comments upon being drafted, volunteering to type weekend passes and typing one for himself, assignment to San Luis Obispo (California), a brief stint in a signal photography company, temporary duty with the Joint Assault Signal Company (JASC), and assignment to a radio intelligence platoon in the 82nd Signal Battalion. He talks about training at Fort Ord (California), field training in Texas, and using direction finding (DF) equipment to locate Japanese transmitting stations. He relates being combined with some 3rd Signal Battalion radio intelligence platoons into the 13th Provisional Radio Intelligence Company, his voyage to the Philippines, landing at Okinawa five days after the invasion began, getting chocolate from Red Cross tents on the beach, and Japanese kamikaze attacks on the Bolo Point airstrip. Bartelt states his daily job turned out to be typing a routine report every morning. He talks about how little information he had access to behind the lines, reactions to V-E Day and the atomic bomb, and the bedlam in camp after the Japanese surrender. After the surrender, Bartelt was stationed at Seoul (Korea) and then at Kyoto (Japan). He states he had very little to do and describes attending a Korean village's banquet in honor of being freed from Japanese occupation. Bartelt speaks of his duties as a replacement intelligence officer in Japan and being the acting First Sergeant of the company at age 20. He describes post-war Kyoto, explaining it had not been bombed much, but he could see signs of starvation, and he talks about the attitudes of Japanese civilians. He mentions some Americans had Japanese girlfriends, and says there were two types of Americans in Japan: "those who had been in the war, and those who had been assigned who came directly from the States for Army of Occupation." He states that those who hadn't been involved in the war were more "spit and polish" than the combat veterans, and he tells of being arrested by a military police company for going into the village without a trip ticket. Bartelt refers to his voyage home, discharge, and use of the GI Bill at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He describes campus life, housing, his finances, GI attitudes towards the professors, finding work as a journalist, and buying a house with a GI bill loan. He mentions listening to Tokyo Rose on the radio because she played good music.

Biographical Sketch:

Bartelt (b, December 11, 1925) served with the 82nd Signal Battalion and the 13th Provisional Radio Intelligence Company in the Pacific Theater of World War II. Bartelt was honorably discharged in 1946 as a staff sergeant and settled in Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997.
Transcribed by Todd Borgen, 2010.
Corrected by Channing Welch, 2010.
Corrections typed in by Erin Dix, 2010.
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

- Mark: Okay, today's date is June the 18th, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. James Bartelt. B-A-R-T-E-L-T—of Madison, veteran of the Second World War. Good afternoon. Thanks for coming in. And a volunteer at the museum, by the way; lest I forget to mention that. Why don't we start by having you tell me a little about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941.
- James: Well, I was born in Wausau. My father was a rural mail carrier in Marathon which is a tiny town just outside of Wausau. Pearl Harbor happened, of course, while I was still in high school. And I did pass an ASTP qualification test while I was a senior in high school, age seventeen. And the proposition was that you could go to college until you became eighteen, then take basic training and go back to college. At least that was the promise at that time. But I managed to get a job that summer as a radio announcer in Medford, Wisconsin, which was, I guess, you call them disc jockeys now. So I didn't go into that program which turned out to be a very fortunate thing because, as you know, ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] in 1944 was practically abolished, and most of those people became infantrymen.
- Mark: So you decided to take your chances with the draft?
- James: Yes.
- Mark: Now, what was your--what was the outlook of a teenager during World War II about the war? Was there thought of trying to get out of it, or do you just assume that it's gonna happen, or what's going on in a teenager's mind?
- James: Well, I think I can only speak for myself, but I think the spirit of the times--my concern was that I would be rejected for physical reasons because of being near sighted and weighing only 120 pounds.
- Mark: So you didn't feel compelled to volunteer though you knew that the draft was coming.
- James: Yes, I think it was sort of volunteering through the draft attitude that people had.
- Mark: When did you finally get your greeting from the Selective Service?

- James: Well, I was classified 1-A I think in, say, February or March of '44, but I didn't get a call until April.
- Mark: Were you still in school at the time?
- James: No.
- Mark: You had finished--
- James: No, I finished high school at age seventeen.
- Mark: I see. So you worked for about a year and then the call finally came, which you were expecting.
- James: Yes.
- Mark: So why don't you just walk me through your induction process from getting the greeting in the mail to going for the physical then going off to basic training?
- James: Well, our physical exam was in Milwaukee. And finally I left home by train. I think I went to Milwaukee and then took the North Shore to Fort Sheridan. Interesting thing happened there that the permanent party sergeant came through the barracks and asked if anybody knew how to type, and that was before I learned that you should never volunteer. And I did volunteer, and the job turned out to be typing weekend passes for the Permanent Party. And when I finished that, he said, "You may as well type one up for yourself because the old man will never know the difference when he signs them." So after being in the Army for three or four days I was home on a weekend pass [laughs]. So I probably got a misconception of what the Army was all about by that experience.
- Mark: So you stayed at Sheridan for awhile. Is that where you did your basic training?
- James: No. When I got back from that weekend we found that the following day Monday I think, we were, it turned out that we were headed for Camp San Luis Obispo, California by a Pullman. Which was another misconception that I had about the Army.
- Mark: What was that?
- James: Being in a Pullman instead of being of a troop train.
- Mark: It was a reasonably luxurious trip.

James: Yes, it was.

Mark: So what happened when you got to California?

James: Well, a lot of unusual things happened to me. I think because I had this little experience as a radio announcer probably explained why I wound up in the Signal Corps. At least one would think that was a possibility. The only problem was that when we got to San Luis Obispo, it turned out that we had been assigned to a signal photography company, and of course I knew nothing about that. There were some rather interesting people in that company from Hollywood. I can't remember any of the names, but some rather famous directors and photographers and so forth. Well, it was determined that I didn't fit in there so I was assigned temporary duty at something called JASCO Company, Joined Assault Single Company, made up of Signal Corps, Air Corps, and Navy people and artillery doing office work. And finally I got assigned to the 82nd Signal Battalion at Fort Ord, California on D-Day. And we went up there on a Greyhound bus. I was assigned to something then. Every signal battalion had in the headquarters company two platoons of what was called radio intelligence. And I was assigned to that radio intelligence platoon.

Mark: As to what precisely?

James: Well, it had two functions. One was intercepting Japanese traffic, and the other function which I was involved in was determining the location of the transmitting stations. The way it worked was they sent three mobile teams to the front, and they would radio back their direction from the finding signal that they copied. And the job that I had was called a very fancy title, Direction Finder Evaluator, which consisted of taking these readings that were radioed back and putting them on the map. The idea was that if everything worked properly you would create a triangle, and that's where the transmitting station would be. The idea was not necessarily to destroy those stations but to identify them and track their movements.

Mark: Was it very accurate? I mean I imagine you had to do some training where you had to triangulate these signals in California somewhere.

James: Yeah. We had mixed luck I would say. But we had some successes.

Mark: And this training lasted about how long? Sounds fairly complicated.

James: Well, we subsequently, for reasons that only the Army could explain because obviously we were headed for Japan or for the Pacific, and we were at Fort Ord on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, but for some reason the Army packed up the battalion and we moved to Camp Bowie, Texas, near Fort Worth. And we did field training there, and subsequently after

Christmas we went by troop train to Fort Lawton at Seattle. And we left there on the 26th of January for Hawaii where we were stationed at Schofield Barracks. And when we got there we found that our two platoons were assigned with two R.I. platoons from the 3rd Signal Battalion which was already in Hawaii. The headquarters for the 10th Army was being organized there for the invasion of Okinawa. And we were assigned, the four platoons, were assigned to something called the 13th Provisional Radio Intelligence Company. And we left for the Southwest Pacific then on February 21st. And we were aboard this troop ship for forty days including twelve days off Leyte where we practiced going up and down the cargo nets to get into the small boats. And I landed on Okinawa on the fifth day. A very unusual thing happened there, too. They had divided the ship into boatloads, and the Navy would call off the number of the boatload. I think it was like thirty-seven. The number really doesn't matter. But when we got up to the railing the boat that we were to get into had brought back several wounded people from the beach, and they unloaded them. And when the Navy got around to unloading again they called like, say "Boat 38." So at the end of the day the ship was totally empty except for this one boatload that I was in. So we went in then the next morning.

Mark: Now this is the fifth day after the initial invasion?

James: That's right.

Mark: So the beach you landed on was clear, but the island was far from secure?

James: Yes. Well, yes, as you know, it was a very unexpected thing that the—we could hear on the Navy radios, that they had captured Kadena and Yontan Airports in a matter of hours. And when we got to the beach there was even a tent there. I think it was the Red Cross. I'm not sure about that, but there was a tent on the beach dispersing coffee and chocolate, tropical chocolate bars. So it was needless to say a relief, but certainly a very unexpected one.

Mark: Yeah, I was gonna ask you what your thoughts were going ashore. I mean it's still a combat situation.

James: Yes, but we had, as I say, we had listened to some of the people that occupied the two airports, and then of course there was scuttlebutt that the beach was clear and no explanation.

Mark: Yeah. So your job was to find out where the Japanese radio signals were coming from, presumably while you're on shore. Were they doing this on the ship too, or were you just sort of eavesdropping?

- James: No, no, eavesdropping.
- Mark: Were you supposed to be doing that?
- James: I think they had it on because the news was so good that they put it on the speakers.
- Mark: Oh, I see so you weren't using your equipment to do this. This was just broadcast over the ship.
- James: Over the Navy loudspeakers.
- Mark: So you went ashore, and then how long was it 'til you started doing that task for which you were trained?
- James: Well, we set up shop, but the way things happened in the Army we really never were deployed in the position finding mission. We set up the intercept station that later turned out to be in a Quonset hut. And we did have one long range position finder at a place called Bolo Point, B-O-L-O. And they would operate twenty-four hours a day and radio back their findings. And my job on Okinawa turned out to be typing a rather routine report every morning about what they had done the past twenty-four hours. I was thinking last night about some of the things that happened on Okinawa and one very sad memory that came back. My Master Sergeant, a man named Bob [Camen?] from Toledo, Ohio. He'd been in the Army quite a long time, and in the CCCs [Civilian Conservation Corps] before that. It turned out that he had a brother on Okinawa in the Marine Corps. They managed to get together at our company for most of one day, and it was a very happy time for them and for those people who witnessed what had happened. He left in his jeep after dinner that evening, and the next morning we received the news that he'd been killed by a sniper on the way back to his company.
- [Interruption by a public address system]
- Mark: I wish we could shut that damn thing off. So you were behind the lines, like how far?
- James: Well, the 10th Army Headquarters was never moved of course in the line. The troops, the infantry, and the Marines kept advancing. So I suppose when the battle was secured we were fifteen or twenty miles behind.
- Mark: But it was still dangerous behind the lines apparently, snipers and that sort of thing.

- James: Yeah. Well, the biggest thing of course was the kamikazes that came most every night. But they seldom were after things on the ground. They were after the ships of course. There was one exception to that, and I wrote this some years ago. I could leave a copy here. I took Stephen Ambrose's lectures last fall, and I gave him a copy of this. He used it in the course of his second to last lecture which was about the final days in the Pacific. So that was quite a moving experience for me. This exception as I say to the kamikazes going after the Navy was on the night of May 24th when—the research that I'd done indicates that a number of—five or seven bombers, Japanese bombers, were trying to get into the Yontan which was where we were. Most of the planes were shot down. One plane managed to land, and the Japanese troops either had explosives attached to their bodies or else they were carrying explosives. And they ran among the parked aircraft. Four motor transports, two fighter planes, and a small transport were destroyed. Twenty-five fighters and one bomber were damaged. And two fuel dumps containing 70,000 gallons of gasoline were set on fire. So that was probably the most scary evening that I had in Okinawa.
- Mark: That was off far from where you were?
- James: Well, we were right there. We could see the flash, and then the, as I wrote here, the scuttlebutt was that they—more than one planeload of people had landed [Interruption by PA system] and that they were fanning out and coming closer and closer to our area. That turned out not to be true. Because each plane had fourteen Japanese, and, of course, they all were either killed by American fire or as suicide soldiers. One soldier may have thought better of the suicide orders, but he was killed near Yontan the next morning.
- Mark: Yeah, I'd be happy to put this in the file actually. It sounds quite interesting. So this battle went on for several weeks. You were working behind the lines, but it was still a fairly precarious situation. How often were you on duty, and what was the shift?
- James: The intercept shack operated twenty-four hours a day, three shifts. And, as I say, it turned out that my job really wasn't very important. I had this clerical job of typing up the reports from that position finding station every morning.
- Mark: And by the—before I forget to ask the question that I often forget to ask these things—what was the information you were getting back from what you could tell?
- James: Well, it was very compartmentalized. We really, even if you were an intercept operator, you didn't know what you were copying, that is to say the meaning. You had just been trained at this school at Fort Monmouth of

Jersey to say “diddy dum dum diddy.” You would just write I-M-I. That would be a Japanese character, and then it was sent off to traffic analysis people.

Mark: So you really had no idea what the content of the messages was at all?

James: We had no—no, no, no.

Mark: Now, of course, rumors being what they are in the military, I wonder if there were rumors about the information you were giving. Or was it coming at too fast of a volume that it really didn't matter?

James: Well, I think the main thing that we were concerned in my part of it was identifying these stations which were gradually retreating to the south shore of the island where they finally broke through, as you know, at a place. The Americans captured what was called Shuri Castle, S-H-U-R-I, which was the strong point of the Japanese defense. And they gradually drove the remaining Japanese troops to the south shore where a few were talked to--the Navy went up and down the shore with loudspeakers and did convince some people to surrender. Which was the first time that had happened in the war.

Mark: So you mentioned there were three shifts of people working at the same time.

James: In the intercept station.

Mark: Yeah. When you weren't on duty, what were you doing?

James: Sleeping. After a while, they managed to get movies at night, but often you wouldn't see the end of the movie because there would be air raids most every night, air raid sirens would sound. But as I say, mainly they were going after the ships.

Mark: So what sort of quarters did you have? I think of the Army guys in tents, but you might have had something a little more--

James: We started out, of course, in pup tents, and then we wound up in—I don't know what the Army called them—pyramidal tents, I guess. Six persons in a tent, and we finally did get cots. So it was quite luxurious by comparison.

Mark: Comparatively speaking. What sort of information did you have on the progress of the battle? I mean you're behind the lines, and the lines were moving all of the time.

- James: Our information was very sketchy. We knew that there was terrible, terrible fighting going on and that the progress was very slow. And of course we learned about the death of General Buckner, and Franklin Roosevelt died during that period also. I remember the people coming around to wake us up that morning telling us that the president had died.
- Mark: Now, it was also during this period that the war in Europe ended. Do you remember getting that news, or did that really matter to you guys much?
- James: Yeah, we got that news, but we had a rather ho-hum attitude about that, I think. And also almost arrogance that, well, finally they're going to come over here and help out. Which was pretty simplified thinking as it turned out.
- Mark: So, this battle eventually ended, and now what, in terms of where you were going or what you were doing? I was going to ask you, for example, if you were planning for an invasion of Japan?
- James: Yeah. We—well, of course—been thinking--
- Mark: You were anticipating it. You weren't doing the planning.
- James: Yeah, that's right, probably. The—well at that time there was a saying about the "Golden Gate in '48." Yeah, we were—of course, as it turned out, with the studying that I've done since then, we would've been involved either in the invasion of Kyushu in the fall or Honshu in the next spring. Probably in the spring. And then--
- Mark: So, to interrupt for a second, you were anticipating the invasion of Japan now. What were the attitudes of you and those around you in terms of what this invasion is gonna do? I mean did you expect it to be tough, or did you really--?
- James: We expected it to be very tough because of the defense that they'd thrown up on Okinawa would be repeated. So there was fright, I guess you would say.
- Mark: But you went ahead and planned?
- James: Yeah.
- Mark: Did you stay in Okinawa? Or did you go somewhere--
- James: No, we stayed in Okinawa, and of course then the—in August we got the news about the atomic bomb which was totally beyond comprehension.

- Mark: Well, that's one of my standard questions. Why don't you just describe your recollection of learning about it and your reaction and perhaps those around you.
- James: Well, I don't remember how we learned about it. Probably—we had, of course, because of the type of outfit we were, we had a lot of radios around. And it was beyond comprehension, but the explanation was that one bomb we were told, not officially, but one bomb could destroy an entire city. Which was beyond comprehension. The other feeling, of course, was one of immense relief that there may not be an invasion after all.
- Mark: Which turned out to be the case. The Japanese finally—V-J Day is August 15th, is it? This is still like a week or so after the initial bomb.
- James: Yeah, well, among the things I've saved—it was the night of about 9:00 on the night of August 10th that they had—well, the Army had what was called a “Jungle Network” station which played records and read news and that sort of thing. And they came on with a bulletin saying the Japanese had offered to surrender provided that the emperor could remain. Of course, every radio on Okinawa and every radio on the ships off the shore were tuned into this one radio station, and bedlam broke out. The sky was filled with tracers, and one recollection that I had, we had a baker named Hoppenfeld from Brooklyn. A three hundred pound guy who probably shouldn't have been overseas, but he was too good at his craft. Anyways, somehow he had this .45 caliber pistol and was running around firing the pistol quite dangerously. And finally some people had to wrestle him to the ground, and he started to cry.
- Mark: Now this was before the actual announcement.
- James: This was the--what had been intercepted was the fact that the Japanese had offered to surrender provided that Hirohito could remain. Of course, it took some days before that was all worked out. This front page cartoon in this *Pole Liner* was the 3rd Signal Battalion's newspaper mimeograph paper. The cartoon depicts what was going on, including the two guys in the front here. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** One man saying “But I tell you they've surrendered, and this ain't no air raid.” And the other fellow says, they're both in a foxhole, “Go on, you can't kid me.”
- Mark: Out of curiosity, did you care much whether or not the emperor stayed?
- James: No, it was a non-issue. In fact the second page of this paper, the *Pole Liner*, talks about the fact that they were awaiting the American decision on what to do about that. There was, this paper says, and I don't know what their source was, “There was deep consternation over the reports that

60 percent of the civilians at home were not in favor of the surrender terms. The question in the 3rd Signal was mostly, ‘what’s going on back there?’” That is, there was a feeling apparently of the people who wrote this that peace was being obstructed by this business about Hirohito staying or not staying.

Mark: Well, there was the policy of unconditional surrender.

James: Yes.

Mark: And should we—I suppose a condition in there was apparently subject to debate politically as to whether or not we should do that. From the GI’s perspective, you didn’t care?

James: No, what’s the point? Another thing about that night is contained in this paper. It said that during this celebration, which as I say was finally ended by sounding the air raid sirens, this paper said, “It is saddening and ironical to think that the celebration of the reported offer of surrender on Friday night cost six men their lives on Okinawa. And others were injured. Why?” In all the reading that I’ve done about Okinawa I’ve never been able to substantiate whether this is true or not, but it certainly is quite possible.

Mark: There was an awful lot of lead in the air is what you’re saying?

James: Yes. In fact, the *Yank* magazine, or *Stars and Stripes*, forget which is the Sad Sack. You know about Sad Sack? And he’s got the same—depicting the same thing, with all this firing going on, on the night of August 10th. And Sad Sack is digging a hole next to a newspaper that says “Japan surrenders”.

Mark: So, during the 50th anniversary of the end of the war there was a lot of discussion and debate about the bomb and the use of the bomb. And there was some attention paid to the GI’s perspective of the bomb, that, “It saved my life, I didn’t have to go into battle.” I was just wondering if you would tell me your take on the situation then and how you subsequently remember it.

James: Well, I think, as I said, there was a great feeling of relief. And yes, the discussion on the 50th anniversary has been very interesting. In fact, the rector of my church gave a sermon—or part of a sermon about that never should have been done. And I had subsequent discussion with him saying that first of all, that one’s attitude about the atomic bomb depended on where you were in August of 1945. I think that Professor Ambrose in his lectures said that there were two conclusions that he had: the GIs said, “I’m gonna live, I’m gonna live.” And he said that people who were

younger than that have lived under the mushroom cloud of fear all these years. But there wasn't any question in the minds of at least the people on Okinawa who were heading for Japan. There were no second thoughts about it.

Mark: So the Japanese surrendered, and where did you go?

James: Well, much to our surprise, we were sent to South Korea. Some people don't realize that there were Americans occupying the southern half, and of course we all know how that came out, but we left Okinawa on September 14th in an LST [Landing Ship, Tank]. And there was a terrible storm, I remember. Anyway, we got to Korea on September 24th. We landed at Inchon, climbed over the sea wall there. It later became famous in the war in Korea. And got on a train to go to Kimpo, which was what the Japanese called Seoul. And this was such strange experience sitting on a train after being in the Pacific that I remember that. The first night we stayed in what had been—we slept on the floor of a gymnasium in what had been a school for Japanese girls. And the next day we were trucked out into the country north of Seoul. We took over a Japanese radio station and set up our intercepting equipment.

Mark: For what reason?

James: That's a good question. (laughs) We were just bodies of occupation troops.

Mark: Yeah, I was gonna ask if your duties had somehow changed now that the war is over. Did they just give you a rifle and put you on guard duty, or what exactly happened?

James: We just occupied space, I think. It was just to make clear that the Americans were there. I remember the sitting—sometimes a Russian jeep with officers would come to the, I don't remember the name of the hotel in Seoul, but that was the American headquarters, and the Russians would sit very stone-faced in a jeep. The tension was already starting. So we—as I say, had very little to do. One recollection that I have is of this little village near the radio station. One weekend the villagers said they'd like to invite us for Sunday dinner because they were so grateful of being freed from the Japanese. So we went, and they had laid out a sort of a banquet on a long white tablecloth on the ground. Food was very sparse, of course, but when we were finished they started singing songs, native Korean songs. And then they gestured to us that we should sing something, and we were all befuddled by how to respond to that. And a very cool-headed friend of mine, Massy Carter from Springfield, Missouri who was an older man, I mean he was 35, seized the—realized there could be some

embarrassment if we didn't respond. He got to his feet and sang "Hail to Thee, Springfield High".

Mark: So, how long did you stay in Korea?

James: Well, I left Korea from Kimpo, what had become Kimpo Airport, on December 11th, which is my birthday. It turns out that there was another radio intelligence company at Kyoto in Japan, the 126th Signal Service Company. And they had been in the Pacific longer than we had, and they were running out of people.

Mark: Because of the point system.

James: Because of the point system, yeah. Somehow it was arranged that, oh, six or eight of us, maybe ten were to go to Kyoto to fill some vacant spots. And we flew in a C-47/DC-3 from Kimpo to Osaka on December 11. And when we got to the 126th Signal Service Company they were interviewing people to see where they'd fit in, and it turned out they needed people, at least a person in the orderly room, and I wound up there. That was described in military occupation as a personnel clerk. Actually, it turned out to be that I was the acting First Sergeant of the company at age 20. But as I say, they were running out of people. I was subsequently promoted to Staff Sergeant, although my M.S., Military Occupation Specialty was described as Radio Intelligence Control Chief. Which was a subterfuge for them just so they could promote me to Staff Sergeant.

Mark: So I imagine your duties in Japan were pretty light or routine, as well.

James: Well, yeah, as I say it turned out that I was in charge of the orderly room and keeping all the personnel records and that sort of thing. So I put in full days, but they were—certainly was not overworked.

Mark: Now there were many who had been in the service for a long time by this point. People pretty anxious to get home, as you might be yourself. I'm just sort of wondering about morale in a situation like this, sort of winding down, and people anxious to get home.

James: Well, you knew how many points you had, and you knew what the points were gradually coming down. As I said, we were at Kyoto, and that turned out to be a very educational experience because Kyoto had not been bombed because it was sort of a holy place, at least culturally important. In fact, I've read history that there was discussion about maybe Kyoto was on the list for the atomic bomb, one of five cities or whatever. And finally some people with, like Ambassador Grew or somebody in Washington said, "Hey, don't. This would be a terrible thing to bomb Kyoto." So it had

been spared, and also Nara, N-A-R-A, a little town with a lot of very important shrines. So we did a fair amount of sight-seeing.

Mark: And what did you see? What was immediate post-war Japan like?

James: Well, of course, it was not typical because it had not been bombed. But of course you did see signs of starvation, and where we had landed at Osaka was just leveled. All the factories and housing units were gone.

Mark: What was the attitude of the Japanese people towards the Americans?

James: [Interruption by PA system] Well, of course, this was December, and of course the war had ended in August so I can't speak about the tensions or lack of tensions--

Mark: Well, in your experience.

James: --of the first few months, but I remember it was a strange thing to have happened because these fanatical people had just turned 180 degrees around and accepted what, I guess, what Hirohito had instructed them. I can remember one thing that--shortly after I got to Kyoto, next to a little town, it was called Fushimi, about twenty minutes by electric train from Kyoto. And I asked somebody who had been there awhile where and how I could get a haircut. He said, "Well, just go down to the village. There is a barbershop down there." So I got in the chair, and suddenly thought here was this Japanese guy, the barber, with a razor standing over me. So that was probably a pretty good indication of how attitudes had changed on both sides.

Mark: You said both sides. I was just gonna ask, what was the attitude of the other GIs? (telephone rings)

James: Well, some of them had Japanese girlfriends. And I think, I can recall that we were invited to Japanese homes.

Mark: Now were there—I imagine there were some sort of fraternization rules.

James: I don't remember that. There probably were a lot of rules, but it's a--

Mark: They didn't seem to concern you guys too much.

James: Well, I think the funny thing that happened—the people that were in Japan, the Americans, there were two types I think: those who had been in the war, and those who had been assigned who came directly from the States for Army of Occupation. They tended to be more spit and polish. I

think the people that had been in the Pacific dismissed a lot of this business about wearing neckties and things like that.

Mark: This sort of thing that GIs during the war were often described as chicken-you-know-what.

James: Yeah.

Mark: Was there more of this thing during the occupation do you think? And as someone who had actually been in the war then in occupation duty, how much of that would really apply to you?

James: Well, I don't think that the people who had been in the war, at least in something like this radio intelligence company, which was a pretty informal place in the first place, didn't pay much attention to these rules. In fact, I can remember as acting First Sergeant putting things on the bulletin board with sarcastic remarks about "You're supposed to start shining your shoes now" and things like that.

Mark: But nobody really paid too much attention to them? Nobody held you accountable either? This is what I'm curious about.

James: Not in our office, no. But I did have to illustrate the point about the two types of GIs that were there is probably one of my son Paul's favorite stories. Is that shortly before I was to leave for the States, I contracted in the village—there was a carpenter shop there, and they made boxes for us. And we sent home all sorts of crazy stuff like swords and what not. So I took the male orderly's jeep and I went down there, and about that time one of these military police companies that had come from the States came around the corner. So, it turned out that I didn't have a trip ticket, and there was a rule that there should be one man in a jeep at all times when it was parked because there had been some thefts. And it also turned out that across the street from this carpenter shop was a red-light district which was off limits. So, these people really had me violating at least three rules. So it was sort of like a scene in a movie. They said to me, "Sergeant you better follow me into town, into Kyoto." And they took me to what had been a Japanese police station. And they said just like in the movies, "You can make one call, one telephone call." So I called the orderly room and got the commanding officer. And fortunately he thought the whole thing was hilarious. But he had to come down and get me. And they put me in a cell until he got there. It was an illustration of what was happening, that the stateside Army was taking over.

Mark: Yeah. You eventually had to go stateside yourself, May of '46, is what you wrote on this thing here.

James: Yeah, that was faulty, apparently thinking—memory, I mean. We went from Kyoto to Yokohama by train. It was a beautiful trip. The cherry blossoms were just coming out, and we spent at a repple depple [replacement depot] there a couple days. And we managed one day to go into Tokyo and see the Imperial Palace, and MacArthur's headquarters and all that sort of thing. So, then we left Yokohama on a troop ship, and we wound up in the same place we left, at Fort Lawton in Seattle, and by troop train—the Army had divided people who were coming home according to your final destination which was Camp McCoy where I was discharged, or where I arrived on May 7th, then was discharged on May 13th.

Mark: So then it's back to Wausau.

James: Mm-hmm.

Mark: All of 21 I think you were by this time?

James: Yup.

Mark: So when it came back to—getting back into civilian life, what were your main priorities? What did you want to do in the short run? And then what did you want to do in the long run?

James: Well, I still had this crazy idea of being a disc jockey. So I did go back to the station in Medford, Wisconsin, but it soon became clear that this was not a very good idea.

Mark: Why is that?

James: Well, I think the main thing that the GI Bill appealed, the chance to go to college.

Mark: Now was college something you had considered before the war?

James: Well, I—that question, I often ponder that. Of course, you didn't think in terms of college. You thought not very much further than the fact that you were heading into the service. So, in high school I really hadn't thought that far beyond joining the service. So, I came to Madison and found the University very helpful in getting started.

Mark: So you were able to enroll by the fall of '46. What did you want to study?

James: Well, I studied—I think I had the intention, and my degree was in journalism, but I specialized in radio journalism. And that was my intention, I think, from the very start. It was a very—well, as you

indicated, the professors have said that it was a very—they had good students, and dedicated. And there was a great—I think it was a prevailing attitude of, “You have to catch up.” [telephone rings] That you’ve lost two or three years, you know. In fact, I went through the University in three years. And subsequently, wonder why. What was the rush? But you were a 21 or 22 years old freshman. So that was the attitude.

Mark: You felt like you had lost time to catch up on?

James: Yeah.

Mark: Three and a half years you said you finished?

James: Yes, at that time they had what was called a summer semester for GIs who wanted to catch up. So, there were really three semesters a year then so you could finish. I went to school for five straight semesters, and then three of us took the summer off, and we went to San Francisco and worked that summer. And I graduated the next—in the spring of ’49.

Mark: So you weren’t the only veteran on campus at this time?

James: Oh, no.

Mark: Why don’t you just describe campus, student life for me as you experienced it?

James: Well, of course there hadn’t been able to be any construction because of the war. And one of the things that, for example, I found out that I had signed up for the men’s halls. And the first semester that turned out to be Truax Field, the barracks.

Mark: Having just gotten out of the service, I don’t imagine that getting back in the barracks was something you had anticipated.

James: No, but actually it turned out to be a good thing probably for a starting student, at least in my case, because they had school buses that ran back and forth. And they had set up a place where you could study in the Great Hall in the Memorial Union. And at the end of the day the buses would go back to Truax. And other buses went with the married veterans went all the way out to Badger Village in Baraboo. Well, it turned out, as I say, that the first semester with living in that sort of isolation, that I got straight As. Huh! Which I never repeated. And the second semester I, still in the men’s hall system, lived under the seats at Camp Randall. They had two houses there under the east seats. One was named Baumann House and the other Schreiner House, both football players who were killed during the war, Schreiner on Okinawa.

- Mark: What was the classroom like? Now you hadn't been to college before the war so perhaps—
- James: Well, I had visited colleges when I was in California on weekends. But, yeah, all of the lower campus where the library is now was, oh, I don't know, at least twenty Quonset huts there for classrooms. And one thing that I remember rather fondly was taking Introduction to Political Science and the lectures were in the church, at the First Congregational Church which I assume had donated the space. And we took our final exam in there, and Professor Stokes said, under the circumstances, he realized there would be quite a temptation to cheat, but he said, "Please remember where you are."
- Mark: Had a little extra advantage there, I suppose. In terms of the relationship between the students and the professors now, by this time the professors had expected a little more difference from their 19, 20 year old students. Now you've got these battle hardened GIs coming in, and they were a much different student than many of these professors had experienced. Did the professors expect a lot of deference and that sort of thing, and did you guys give it to them?
- James: Oh, I think so. As I say, I think that for the most part it was a very serious and hardworking group of individuals. I think you respected the faculty. I can't remember any professor that I thought, you know—I think I was very respectful. I think most of the GIs were.
- Mark: Now you mention you used the GI bill to finance this. Did it cover all of your expenses or most of you expenses or how well did it do?
- James: It covered most of the expenses. I got seventy-five dollars a month as a single person, I guess ninety if you were married.
- Mark: And that was just to cover your room and board?
- James: Room and board. And you got all of you books and your fees and tuition.
- Mark: So if you lived in the barracks, or in the dorms, or with your parents, or whatever, and the seventy-five bucks, that covered what you needed?
- James: Pretty much. As I said, that one summer we worked in San Francisco and saved a little money. And in Japan, of course it was possible—we hadn't been paid since we left Hawaii. So that you had a small grubstake there, not very much, but--
- Mark: So you weren't hurting financially to finish school?

- James: No.
- Mark: That was pretty much taken care of. You finished in '49 you said?
- James: Yeah.
- Mark: And you did, in fact, get your degree in journalism.
- James: Yes.
- Mark: Now it comes time to go find a job, now a lot of other vets on the job market as well. Did you have trouble finding work in your field? **[End of Tape 1, Side B]**
- James: It seemed so at the time. I think that that probably was a failing of – at least the School of Journalism at that time. They didn't have a very good listing or system of available jobs. I interviewed for a job on the Stevens Point paper, and that didn't sound very promising. And I sent out a lot of letters of application to radio stations in Wisconsin. Got some responses. And finally, what had seemed like a terribly long and worrisome time, but really amounted only to a month or so, I got a job in Green Bay.
- Mark: With the paper up there?
- James: With the paper's radio station.
- Mark: You kept that job for awhile. As your profession went on, [interruption by PA system] you didn't have trouble staying in it or anything?
- James: No. I eventually wound up, because of an interest in politics I took—a vacancy occurred on the paper, the so-called city hall beat.
- Mark: Was this the *Press-Gazette* by chance?
- James: Yes.
- Mark: Because I'm from up that part of the state so I know the *Press-Gazette* (telephone rings). So you went to school, got educated, didn't trouble finding a job. Other types of GI benefits that there were, housing loans, for example. Did you ever use one of those? Not to pry into your finances, just to get a handle on the usage of these benefits. Did you use--
- James: Yeah, well, we— I often say to my wife, somewhat facetiously, that— yeah, we did. We were married in 1952, and we were going to have a child

in 1957. So we shopped around for a house and found a house, I think, for twelve thousand dollars, and the GI loan was 4.5%.

Mark: Which is low by today's standards, obviously. Was it low by the standards of the day as well?

James: Yes.

Mark: Would you have been able to afford a house, do you think, had it not been for the GI bill? Or was it just something nice you were able to utilize?

James: I think we would have been able to afford a house, but not at those terms. In fact, it was towards the tag end of banks accepting that 4.5%. I knew a man, not very well, but he (telephone rings)—Jake Rose at the Kellogg Bank in Green Bay. After I'd been turned down by the bank we did our business with I went to see him, and he said, "Oh yeah, I think we could swing that." But he said, "Of course, you realize that we'd like to have your business." Rather embarrassing to go back to the other bank and— [approximately 4-second pause in recording]

Mark: Okay. I think we're back. I think you finished the story. You ended up switching banks?

James: Yeah.

Mark: Because they'd give you the loan. One last thing, and it may not even apply to you in terms of benefits and that type of thing are the medical readjustments after the war. You weren't wounded in combat or anything? Did you contract any diseases or anything in the service that continued to affect you afterwards?

James: No.

Mark: In terms of emotional and psychological readjustments to civilian life, did you find that hard to get back into the civilian groove?

James: Well, that's a good question. I think that because of the GI bill, you tended—everybody was in the same mind set. All the students you associated with were ex-GIs. So you had that in common so it really wasn't total civilian life, I suppose.

Mark: Do you sometimes read—if you read through the magazines of the day, there was a lot of concern that vets were gonna come back bitter, angry at civilians, that type of thing. Do you remember any sorts of feelings like that? Or were you just glad to be home and that was it?

- James: Glad to be home. Well, there was—during the war, of course, there were all these— I suppose a certain amount of bitterness about people who were back home. I found this piece of Japanese propaganda in my scrapbook before I came over here. It's a copy of V-mail, and it's addressed to "Dear American soldier." And the message is "Isn't it too unequal? The young men who still stay in America, your beautiful country, will be walking the street under the blue trees with their darling, talking with her pleasantly." I think it's what they mean, pleasantly. Another side, "comma, a large number of your friends are falling day by day calling their darling." So that was—Tokyo Rose did that same sort of—that was the pitch, her pitch.
- Mark: Did it have much of an effect of you guys, or did you not believe it?
- James: Well, we listened to Tokyo Rose I think because she had good music. But I think she was sort of a subject of ridicule really.
- Mark: Okay, so I guess I just have one last area that doesn't apply to you too much, I don't think. That involves veterans organizations and that type of thing. You never did join like the Legion of the VFW?
- James: No.
- Mark: Is it because you didn't have time, because you didn't want to, you didn't like them, or for what reason?
- James: Well, I don't think too many people who were GI Bill students joined veterans organizations. They may not been considered pertinent I think, and I think--
- Mark: In the years right after the war?
- James: Yeah. And I think that, probably I'm just speaking for myself, that you had the conclusion that, "Hey, I got a free college education, so do I really deserve anything more than that?"
- Mark: So, the veterans organizations in the perception of many vets were fishing around for government money--
- James: Yeah.
- Mark: Things like that. As you got later in life, did you ever think about such a thing?
- James: Well, I think, particularly during and after Vietnam, that their agendas became too conservative for me. I was an editorial writer during that

Vietnam time, and so our positions—very much anti-the war, as not being relevant in our view.

Mark: Up in Green Bay that might not have gone over terribly well, I don't think. It's not the most progressive part of the state. (laughs)

James: No, but I think a lot of people agreed with us, although I can remember my publisher saying, "It's really terribly complicated and involved." He said, "Sometimes I think it should be my country, right or wrong."

Mark: Now, as a veteran, someone who had served in the war, during World War II, what was your view of the Vietnam War?

James: I guess my view was that it really was not of a strategic concern. This whole domino theory and so on as it turned out was not true. And then I think the American people were being lied to.

Mark: Now, in the post-Vietnam period, there are many complaints by some veterans that the anti-war movement, or those who spoke out against the war, were sort of affecting morale of the troops and that sort of thing. Your position was against the war, but you had been a veteran yourself. I was just wondering if your veteran experience had any impact on your writings and on your attitudes?

James: I think there are probably in this regard that you felt, that I felt, that World War II was a necessary thing. And that there's no strategic purpose for this. So they're really no comparison. Of course, there were veterans that said, "This is war, and it's just like the last one," and so on.

Mark: Well, there were many veterans who were dead set against it.

James: Yes.

Mark: It was very divisive all the way around, I guess.

James: I think probably the majority.

Mark: You've pretty much gone through all my standard questions, is there anything you would like to add, or anything you think we've glossed over?

James: I think we've covered everything.

Mark: Well, thank you for coming in.

James: You're welcome.

Mark: I appreciate it.

[End of Interview]