

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
LAWRENCE S. BONGLE
Army, 88th Division, World War II

2005

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Bongle, Lawrence S., (1925-2007). Oral History Interview, 2005.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 100 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 100 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Lawrence “Red” Bongle, a Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin native, talks about his infantry and division ordinance experiences in the Army’s 88th Division in Italy during World War II. Bongle recalls being rejected by the Navy at age seventeen for bad eyesight and he discusses being drafted, memorizing the eye chart, and being placed in the Army instead of the Navy. He describes being put on a train without knowing where he was going and basic training at Camp Croft (South Carolina). After training, he mentions having a “delay on route” to get glasses put in his gas mask and sneaking off the base during a quarantine. Bongle talks about shipping out from Camp Patrick Henry (Virginia) to Oran (Algeria), going to Italy on the Empress of Scotland, and getting so tired of eating fish that he bought American-made canned ham from the British. He mentions barrage balloons and rough Mediterranean seas. He recalls landing in Naples (Italy) and being scared for the first time during a German bombing raid. Bongle talks about being assigned to the 88th Division, 349th Regiment, Company F, being sent to the Cassino front, walking up the mountain single-file in the dark, and joining British troops in “sangers” on the exposed rocky mountainside. He declares that people in the Army didn’t ever know where they were going. He mentions going on patrol and bringing back German prisoners and talks about how Germans favored mines designed to wound because they tied up as many people as possible, and he describes tricks like mining dead bodies. Bongle comments that it rained all the time and they did not even have tents, and he emphasizes the importance of socks and keeping feet dry to avoid trench foot. He describes the contents of K-rations and using the empty boxes as toilets and claims, in reference to present day conditions with women in combat situations, that putting women in that situation is undignified. He reports that passwords were changed every day and he mentions French Goums, who carried knives instead of guns and spooked the U.S. troops. Bongle describes capturing Rome and how the Romans were so happy that it was “like going in to your own birthday party.” He discusses capturing towns like Viterbo north of Rome where the Germans had the high ground and he mentions seeing a black cloud from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. He talks about being transferred to division ordinance and describes his job welding armor plating onto recon cars and Jeeps to make them mine-proof and fixing radiators. Bongle mentions cutting off the German retreat at the Po River and celebrating the German surrender in Austria and Italy on May 2nd. He speaks about drinking with uniformed Germans in Bolzano despite an uneasy Italian bartender and talks about cutting open German General Wolff’s safe and seeing all the gold, trays of diamonds, and paper money inside. Bongle speaks about finding Mussolini’s wife and daughters in a cave. He mentions camping by the Leaning Tower in Pisa and enjoying the spas at Montecatini. He recalls a German prisoner whose family

had been killed not wanting to move to the States because, “Where your cradle is rocked you’ll never forget.” He talks about being put on a ship to go to the Pacific and attack Japan, learning that Japan surrendered after the two “big bombs”, and his homecoming at Camp Kilmer (New York). Bongle describes his company’s getting twenty-four-hour passes to see New York City and smashing up the Astor Hotel bar after it refused to serve servicemen. He mentions coming home through Fort Hood (Texas) and, after the war, trying to avoid getting a job, using the GI Bill to attend Lawrence College (Wisconsin), running a hotel, being alderman and acting mayor in Sturgeon Bay, and being active in the Lions Club. He states he did not want to join anything military after discharge, although he is now active in the Legion and VFW. Bongle points out a reference that lists the 88th Division as “the fifth-most combat effective division in World War II” and describes the decorations he received. He describes the misinformation he encountered speaking to high school students about WWII. Bongle relates the unpleasantness of discussing his military experiences, especially with kids, and how, for a while, he would dive onto the floor as the sound of shifting gears and fireworks would bring back the wrong memories.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2005.

Transcribed by court reporter Bruce Stone, 2007.

Format corrected by Katy Marty, 2008.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2008.

Interview:

MacD: This is an interview being conducted with Lawrence Bongle, who served with the United States during World War II. The interview is being conducted at approximately 12:00 p.m. at the following address of 130 South Fifth Avenue Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on February 1, 2005, and the interviewer is Terry Mc Donald. Red, – I’m going to refer to Mr. Bonlge as “Red”, that’s his popular name he’s known by – can you tell us a little bit about your background prior to entering the military service, where you were born, and what year and things?

Bongle: I was born on May 19, 1925 in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. Went through the school system here and graduated from high school in 1943. However, in 1942, when I was 17, I attempted to join the Navy with a good friend of mine by the name of Bob Andre. Bob, by the way, is pretty sick right now, and out in California. He was a year older and he got taken into the Navy, and I was rejected because of my eyesight, and being 17, I didn’t know much about it. Went through and they said, “Take off your glasses and read this chart.” Well, I couldn’t even see the big “E” so they rejected me. I don’t know if my folks would have signed anyway. At that time, at 17 anyway. At that time, at 17, your folks had to sign you in. So I waited until I was drafted in May of 1943, I think that’s when I graduated, and when I went down for the physical, of course, I knew a little better, and when I stood in line behind a number of guys I memorized the eye chart. So I took my glasses off and I read the first four lines, four or five lines, with each eye, and they said “Okay.” On the way down there, fella by the name of John Slattery went down there, we decided -- I told him that I was rejected by the Navy once. He said, “That’s all right, we’d ask for the Army.” So we got down there and I got two or three guys ahead of me in line, and he went up there and they said, “Okay, Slattery, you’re in. What do you want, the Army or the Navy?” He says, “I’ll take the Army.” And he said, “Bang, bang, bang,” that thing they had, and go on, went over there, “you’re in the Navy.” So he dropped by me right away and he said “Jeez,” he said, “I asked them for the Army, they put me in the Navy.” I said, “That’s all right, I’ll ask for the Navy.” So I got up there and they said, “What do you want, the Army or Navy?” And I said, “I’ll take the Navy.” So bang, bang, they said, “All right, you’re in the Army.” I don’t know if that had anything to do with what branch you got or not, but they gave you your choice. Then they put you where they wanted you. And so, being just 18 years old, about 18 and a month maybe, I was originally sent to Camp – it’s in northern Illinois by Rockford, Illinois – forget the name of the camp now, I think it might even be a fort now. We were sent down there on a train. Our physicals were in Milwaukee. They had us take all of our clothes, bundle them up, send them back home. Got all new clothes. And cut our hair. They give us a bunch of other tests, bunch of shots, and in a couple days they put us on a train. Well, you never know where

you're going. So we're on the train, and we were heading west. We could tell that because the sun was starting to go down. So pretty soon we crossed what we thought was a pretty big river. Maybe it wasn't, I don't know, but somebody said, "Oh, yeah, yeah, that's the Mississippi. Yup, we're heading west. California here we come." So sometime in the middle of the night we were sitting – Now these train cars are like the train cars you saw on old westerns, you know? They had a pot-bellied stove in them that burned wood. I don't know where they found these train cars, probably in the movies or something. Anyway, everybody is asleep, or half asleep. They wake us up in the middle of the night, "You got to change trains." Well, in changing trains we run into some guys that weren't with us, going off one train into another. We said, "Where are we?" They said, "You're in Chicago." (Laughing) So I got on that train and I threw my bag on a bunk. Now these were Pullmans we got into. Now that sounds like a nice train, but they are not. Anyway, two guys in a lower and one guy in an upper. I threw my bags on there and somebody else's bag was on there. Pretty soon he come back and it was Rollie Benzo from Sturgeon Bay, a kid I went to high school with here. And we got on the train and we traveled for two, three days. One morning we woke up, we could see on the sign for the railroad yard, it said "Atlanta". Oh, hell, we're going to Florida. Well, we ended up in Spartanburg, South Carolina, is where it was, at Camp Croft, and that's where we took basic training. There was "the City of Spartanburg", a sign said, "Spartanburg, the Cotton Capital of the South," and I could believe that because we spent a lot of time in cotton fields that were all clay, you know, digging around in there, you know, what they do in basic training. So there was a number in there from – do you know Bobby Taggi? Bobby Taggi?

MacD: No.

Bongle: Never knew Bobby? He's got the tavern that's now the Stagecoach – or whatever they call it – his dad – his mother and dad did, and he did when he come back from the Service. He and Rollie Benzo, a teacher from Sturgeon Bay High School, forget his first name. We called him Lefty Olson. He died a couple years ago. You know him?

MacD: Yeah.

Bongle: He was with us. And we all took – we weren't all in the same company down there, but we all took basic training. When it came that we were done with basic training, we were going to get a ten-day, they call it a "delay on route". It's not a furlough or anything. A delay on route so we could go home. Well, my name was called out and I went out – because my gas mask didn't have a glasses. So we had a couple weeks while they made glasses for my gas mask. Now the glasses were fit inside the gas mask, and why it took a couple weeks I don't know – oh, the reason I

know is because we were there and somebody got spinal meningitis and they quarantined us.

MacD: You couldn't leave?

Bongle: That's right. And they come around every morning, they give us a pill, or a couple pills to take, and we didn't see them all day long. And so, like most GIs, after they left we snuck out the back end of the gate of the camp and went down to Spartanburg, and – until suppertime, come back. They didn't feed us. They would set the food out. We would have to walk out and pick up the food and when we were done, take them back up there again. So when I came home those guys were already gone. And then I left, come home, and I went to Sturgeon Bay. I went to Washington DC, went to – it's a big camp out there, too, forget the name of that now. And from there we were sent to a place called Camp Patrick Henry down in Newport News. It was a swamp.

MacD: Oh, really?

Bongle: And went on boats there. Still don't know where we are going.

MacD: You weren't assigned to any specific unit or anything?

Bongle: No, we just took basic training and we were going over as replacements. And we got on the boat, wasn't on the boat very long. Found out we're going to Africa.

MacD: Now this was a Liberty ship or was it a cruise ship, or what type of ship was it?

Bongle: They called it a naval troop ship. However, it was named the USS General Buckner and the guards on it were Marines. So you know it belonged to the Navy. An there were – there were at least 3000 of us on there. It was a fairly big ship. And went over and we pulled into Oran, Africa, and we got off the ship, got on trucks, went to – that's a big bay – went to the other side of the bay. Had to go through tunnels to get over there, and we were put on a ship over there called the "Empress of Scotland", because American – we were done fighting in Africa and we were just starting to go fight in Italy. So no American ships were yet going into Italy. Just combat ships. No troop transports. And that—and this was a British transport and has been originally called the "Empress of Japan," but they didn't want that name so they renamed it the "Empress of Scotland". Now this was an old tub. We slept in hammocks above big, long tables, and then when we got up in the morning we took the hammock down and there's a place to go and stow them for the day, and then we had a seat on one of the benches at those tables. That was it.

MacD: That was it?

Bongle: And they would feed us fish. Ate more fish in that couple-day trip— And it took quite a while to get over because we were in a convoy and all the ships had barrage balloons on.

MacD: Uh-huh (affirmation).

Bongle: They were cabled up to a barrage balloon. While we were in port there the Germans came over and bombed us. But that's the first bombing we ever had.

MacD: Combat?

Bongle: Right. So when we pulled over there, we got out into the Mediterranean, there was a big storm. The Mediterranean there can get damn rough, and it would get – and you could get up and you would look out over the water and not see another boat. But you would see these barrage balloons all over and you know on the bottom of each one of them there's a boat, and that's how big those waves were. And we would go up like that (indicating) and we would come down, down, and the propeller would come right out of the water. Well, being from Sturgeon Bay I was a little more used to it, because you used to go out with the Conifers (ph) on the boats on the lake and that would get a little rough once in a while. We knew what it was like. And for toilets they had built wooden toilets out over the deck, off the deck, and when you sat up out there on the toilet the Mediterranean Sea was right below you. That's where your crap, the pee and everything – And then, on that note, I remember, got to talking to the British guys, and we were sick of this fish and said, "You got anything to eat?" "Sure, we got some canned ham." And I am looking down in the hold – oh, man, I forget – it seems to me we had paid \$5 for a canned ham, and right on the canned ham it says, "Land/lease, United States of America." So we're buying back our own hams. So we landed in Italy, and went up into Naples, and at night in Naples we were in this railroad yard, waiting to get on box cars. They put us all in box cars to pull out for wherever we were going and the Germans come over and raided us again. Well, that time, you know, the time in Africa they didn't get very close to us, you know? We could kind of sit there and watch it. But not in Naples.. They bombed us. And I guess that's the first time I got scared. Because watching it in Oran was like watching it on the movies. But watching it in Naples, that was us. When them bombs came down, you know – you see in the movies, you hear that whistling sound and then it kind of fades away. They don't fade away. They get louder. Man, we were on our bellies in that railroad yard. And I don't know how many got hit there at all, but as soon as it was over we climbed into these railroad cars and they

took us north out of Naples, not very far, to what they called “The Schoolhouse”. I guess it had been a college or something. And we got off and went there and the next morning they loaded us on some trucks and took us to what they called was “The Farm”. The farm was owned by Mussolini’s son. Of course, he wasn’t there now. They had taken it over, pitched tents and everything, and everything was there. And we got there, we still don’t know where we are going.

MacD: No assignment or anything?

Bongle: Nothing. So we went out, we zeroed our guns. We went out and practiced with – oh, bazookas, mortars, I don’t know what else – just fooling around. I remember one day we were out there in this valley shooting bazookas and some P-38 planes came down. You know, they had – they looked like they were about that (indicating) high above the ground. Of course, they were higher. But they were right over us. We all hit the dirt. We wouldn’t have had to, but man, when they’re coming, when – man, when they come they were coming in upside down and pull out again. They were just fooling around with us. So one day they come around – within a couple days now, we were only there a day or two – about three days I guess. They come around they called out and my name was called out, and told to go and get on this truck. Well, when we got on the truck they told us where we were going. We were going to a brand new division that just got overseas. They were replacing it already. They had lost guys from something or other, they got sick in Africa or something, they had trained in Africa for a little bit. And so I went there, and I went to – what was it was the 88th Division, it was the 349th Regiment, and I went to Company F. And went there, got there about noon. We had lunch. I was assigned to my squad/company. We had supper. We got on trucks and went to the front.

MacD: You were infantryman as a private?

Bongle: Oh, yeah, a private. We were pretty near all privates. So we got on these trucks and went up. We were going on the line between Cassino and the coast and a little town up there by the name of Castelforte neither the Germans nor us had. We would both go in there once in a while and then get out of there again. But when we got up – before we got up there, the Garigliano River, the bridge was knocked out, a pontoon bridge across there. That’s where the truck stopped. And we all got off there, and then we all – took your turn, ran across that bridge, and went north up there until we got to what I found was the regimental headquarters.

MacD: What time of year was that?

Bongle: That was January – about the end of February. Down here in the valley there was no snow on the ground. And, of course there wasn't up in the mountain either, but some nights it did snow and then it would melt away. But anyway, we walked up the mountain. Now you don't know where the hell you're going, you know? And you go single-file. You follow the guy in front of you. You put your hand – you have him by the belt from behind and you follow him. If he goes over cliff you go over a cliff, you know? That's how we went up the mountain. I don't know who the hell was first guy up. He must have known where he was going because there's no lights. There's no nothing now. There's no talking. There's no nothing. You're as quiet as can be. And we got up there and these troops were relieved – I think they were British. But anyway, there was no foxholes. It was terraced ground, and on the side of a mountain, and what they were the British named them sangers, S-A-N-G-E-R-S. I don't know how they got that name. Somebody said they got it because when shells would land the shrapnel would hit the stones and go zing! You know? That's what we were in was sangers.

MacD: So you were pretty well exposed then?

Bongle: Well, you had rocks piled around you. Instead of digging down you built up rocks around you. Yeah, you're pretty well exposed. You couldn't get up. You couldn't show yourself in the daytime because the Germans could see you. And this was a pretty stagnant front at the time. All we would do is go on patrols, which is a son of a bitch. You didn't know where you were going then either. Sounds like somebody's in the Army don't ever know what they were doing, but that's about the way it was. And we would go out on patrol.

MacD: How were you going out for any specific reason, to catch prisoners or something like that?

Bongle: Most of the time they wanted you to bring a prisoner back if you could. But they don't want you to go out and scare the Germans into thinking it's an attack. I don't know how the hell you're supposed to do it, and we didn't pay much attention. If we could, we got a prisoner. Except you hit a mine, somebody steps on a mine. Now the Germans had lots of mines. They are mine nuts. And they had – some of them were little match mines, you know? Little match boxes, wooden match boxes about that big (indicating), that's all the bigger they were.

MacD: You stepped on those?

Bongle: Yeah, there was a little point sticking up. You stepped on that, set it off, probably blow your toes off, your heel, whatever. But that was it for you.

MacD: Disabled you?

Bongle: But it didn't only disable you, it disabled all the guys you had to come and take and take care of you. They had the idea that it was better to wound a soldier than to kill him, because if you kill him he's dead, they will just stick his rifle there and that's it. But if he's wounded, especially if he can't walk, you got to get stretcher bearers to take him off, you've got to get medics to take care of him, you know?

MacD: Ties up a lot of people?

Bongle: Yeah. They figured it tied up nine people. So that's how they -- lucky I never stepped on one. Had a couple of friends that did, but -- What else would happen up there? It rained all the time. If it didn't rain it snowed, but the snow would turn to rain. And even though it was all rocks, the bottom of those places would be all water all the time. And then you had -- and you would carry extra socks. I had six or eight pairs of socks, because we were told that if your feet were cold and dry you wouldn't get trench foot. If your feet were warm and wet you would get trench foot. But if your feet were cold and wet you would get trench foot. Guys did get trench foot. But for about a hundred days only thing you changed was your socks. So you would take your socks off and take a new pair of socks out of this (indicating) side of your shirt, and push this one in this side, and you had all day to get them all fixed around and then put your dry socks on. They would be dry. You put them in this side (indicating), by the time they come out this side (indicating) they were dry.

MacD: The trench foot disabled an awful lot of soldiers, right?

Bongle: They're done. They take them off of the lines. Most of them, if they are in pretty good shape, they just have to remove their toes. If they go much further than that you have to remove the whole foot. It's a lack of circulation is what trench foot is.

MacD: At this time are you living in tents or basically living on the rocks?

Bongle: Oh, no, you're living in the rocks. Nothing over you. That's it.

MacD: And you're eating, did --

Bongle: If it snowed that night on you.

MacD: And what were you eating out of, C-rations? What did they call your meals then at that time?

Bongle: K-rations. K-rations is a little box, like a Crackerjack box, about the size

of a Crackerjack box. And you had breakfast, lunch and dinner, that's three different boxes, and every night they brought the rations up and they brought water up. So you didn't brush your teeth, you didn't wash your hands. Of course, you didn't wash your face, comb your hair, because all the water you got you used for drinking. In the K-rations, in – like for the breakfast one there might be a little – they were only little tins, you know, like that (indicating), of eggs. Might be eggs with a little ham in it and you opened it up and ate that. And then it had what they called “biscuits”. We called them “dog biscuits” because they were harder than a rock. And then that at lunch you got something and then you got – maybe one day one of them would have a hard candy – really hard candy bar. And they all said, “Well, that candy bar, if you just ate a third of it every day that would be good enough for three days for you.” But I don't know if that's true or not. And if you were constipated you had one that had something in it and you would go to the toilet – which was another thing, you know.

MacD: Yeah, where did you do that?

Bongle: You did that in that box.

MacD: Is that right?

Bongle: And that's not always easy, hitting the box. And then, of course, you just had to dispose of all that stuff. So when they got – most infantrymen were dubious when they came around and said, “Well, we are going to have women in the infantry.” Because whether you're in a foxhole or a sanger, or whatever, there's always two of you and they are going to put you in there with a woman and you're going to do this kind of stuff -- why? You know, for what reason? Just to say there's a woman there? And most infantrymen wouldn't go for that. It's undignified, I think, to expect somebody to do those things. **[End of tape 1, side A]**

MacD: Red Bongle, speaking of his time in Italy, the current time.

Bongle: So, like I said, I didn't speak German, so if we got a German I don't know what he said. We would take him back to the company and they would take him someplace, interrogate him or whatever the hell they did. Other times, when you're up there you would be on outpost, and when you're on outpost you want to make sure that those coming up through your lines are not Germans, they are your own men, and so you had passwords. That's another funny thing. In the movies they stand up with their rifle and “Halt! Who goes there?” There's no such thing as that. When you see that guy, you've got that guy in your rifle and you say the password and he better say the counter password. And it might be “Chicago Cubs”, you know? And every day was a different one. Every day the password changed. So

you could imagine how in the hell many passwords went through a guy's head in a matter of a couple years there.

MacD: Because the Germans were infiltrating, dressed in the American uniforms; is that right? Sometimes?

Bongle: They never did there. They were on patrol, they would come and seek us out like we seek them out, you know? Now you never heard that too much in Italy. I guess it did happen, but I never saw it. And it was – I know there were on patrol there. And so that's -- you know, that's what we would do out there. And then, oh, certain funny things happened. We'd go out, be on a outpost, and pretty soon we would hear somebody either whispering or putting out wires, you know? They had cans tied to them and they would hit the wire and the cans would rattle. So you never knew is that one of our guys out there lost or its that one of theirs? Or there might be some guys moaning, and in perfect English, and you don't go get them. Now that sounds mean, but --

MacD: It's trickery.

Bongle: It's trickery, right. And the Germans did one hell of a lot of mining dead bodies, faking dead bodies, all that kind of trickery. And during this time you know, this is, of course, the months of February and March, we had a bunch of guys we called the Goums, G-O-U-M-S, Goums, and they were attached to our division. And they didn't carry any guns, they carried knives. Some of them had their wives with them.

MacD: They were Italians?

Bongle: No, they were French. From a French province or whatever it was in Africa because the French had quite a few places in Africa. And they were attached to our division. And they would sneak up, they could be quiet as hell, you couldn't hear them, and they could tell an American from a German by just putting their hand by your boots or by your helmet. When you heard that joker say, "Okay, Joe," and they all could say "Okay, Joe," it would scare the hell out of you. So, after a while, when we got to Rome they pulled them all out. I don't know what they did with them. But they were there, they were French and the French government – I don't know, they gave us all a plaque like that (indicating), it's the decoration of the French Croix De Guerre. And some places you can read in here the outfit I was in -- let's see, the 88th Division, 349th Company –

MacD: Was this presented to you over there?

Bongle: No. No, here, after the war.

MacD: After the war?

Bongle: Right.

MacD: Very nice (indicating).

Bongle: Yeah, they got the dates on there, you know, that kind of stuff. So anyway, we got the French De Guerre. We were fighting with these French Goums in Italy. We were never in France. So after being there for a couple months of doing this stuff we are talking about, we went back off the lines a couple times. We'd go – once in a while a guy would go – you would take him back off the line, to go back down and get a hot meal or something, wherever they could do that. So on May the 11th, 1944, all hell broke loose. Our guns started firing one right after another. The mortars, the big mortars, the little mortars, the chemical mortars – it all started. And that went on for a couple of hours and then they said, "Move out." So we went out, and went wherever we could go – you know, forward, of course -- and the Germans, after a while, they retreated, the ones that could, and by the next morning we were out on a hill somewheres from wherever we were and trying to rest, wondering where the hell are we going to go from here. We just kept going forward, and on June, the 4th, we went into Rome. And this was the first time Rome in the history was ever captured from the south. And we went into Rome and then, of course, north of Rome, but after we went into Rome our division was pulled off the lines for a couple weeks, a little rest and –

MacD: We said before you were a hundred days on the line, so I am sure your division took a lot of casualties and things, and the men – after that you needed to get some time off, huh?

Bongle: Well, I guess. That's what they do it for, get some time off. They re-supply you while you're on the lines with guys that are wounded and guys that are dead, you know? When you're off the line, you know, they check all the companies, make sure they are up to full standard and this type of thing.

MacD: Well, what was Rome like when you were there? Can you describe it?

Bongle: Well, it's like going in to your own birthday party. The Italians, the Romans, were just so happy that we were there, you know? They fed us everything we wanted to eat, drink, anything. It was one big party. Of course, it can't last too long, but that's what happened. They were really, really nice. They lined the streets.

MacD: Did you parade through?

Bongle: No.

MacD: Wasn't anything like that?

Bongle: No. General Clark did. He come – you know, I don't know if this was that same day or the next day he came and moved down the streets in a Jeep and all the people were lining the streets . If there was any parades it would be his personal company rather than us. So then we were going north to Rome. There's a bunch of little towns, and all the little towns north of Rome are terrifically old towns. They are all come out on top of a hill with a big wall around them, and of course we were down in the valleys and the Germans had the place to defend, and they could get up and leave, and then we would get in and capture the town. That sounds easier then it is.

MacD: They had the high spot?

Bongle: They always had the high spot. Anyway, this was always mined. There was one town by the name of Viterbo. I don't know how the hell many mines they had around there, but it was just terrific the amount of casualties we had because of mines. And that's before Florence. You know, we captured that town. We say "captured the town", the town wanted us in there. And so we got that town, go to Viterbo, because there was a plaque from that town making us – not honorary citizens, but a welcome citizen or some damn thing for that town. There's their badge over there (indicating).

MacD: The Blue Devils?

Bongle: The Blue Devils. Anyway, the town is noted for alabaster. Did you ever hear of alabaster? The mineral like marble only it's softer.

MacD: Oh – okay. Was this a time you were over there later on? We have got a date of September 11, 1944.

Bongle: That's when we went in there, I suppose. I've been back there twice since and the people are still really good to us there.

MacD: Is it pretty much the same? You know, you said it was an old town wherever you were.

Bongle: Oh, yeah, up there these were all old towns. During the war I was never in Cassino, you know, with everyone, you know, when we – first went on the line it was the Cassino Front. The town was bombed twice, but it was made more rubble for Germans to stay behind. Because Cassino was way up on the mountain and they could see for miles, could see us coming, and

just not much we could do about it. And today – I got up there now, last time I was over there, I was up there and it's all rebuilt. It's just gorgeous up there. And being up there, looking down, you figure—Holy Christ, what the hell were we doing down there with them up here?

MacD: Yeah.

Bongle: And another thing that happened when we were on that front is Mount Vesuvius erupted. That was the first eruption of Mount Vesuvius since it Erupted in 079. And that was a big black cloud back there. We didn't know what the hell it was at first, you know?

MacD: Yeah.

Bongle: Until we found out it was Vesuvius erupting again. So anyway, we got up there and I got transferred out. I got transferred out of the infantry to the division ordinance, and division ordinance was between the artillery and the infantry.

MacD: Was that a supply-type thing?

Bongle: Ordinance was a repair outfit and supply. Supplied ammunition and retrieved damaged vehicles, and repaired – anything; firearms, anything there was. It was really a, I would say, godsend to be sent out of the infantry back to the ordinance. But what had happened, in 1942, in Sturgeon Bay, I went over to Pies [pronounced Pease]. Pies had a machine shop behind -- they had Pearose (??) Motors, do you know where that was? Pearose Motors Office was on the corner of Maple and – what was it, Madison down there now? I don't know what's in there now.

MacD: Used to be Felhofer Garage. Is that the one?

Bongle: Okay, before it was Felhofer it was Pearose. Behind that there was an old building back there that old Pies had for a machine shop. This is – Do you know Judge Dean Pies? His dad. Now his dad must have been given a contract or something to teach welders, because a kid by the name of George Bubnik, and myself, and there were some others, but I remember us two, we went over there and learned welding, and we went down to the shipyards and welded second shift while we were in –

MacD: In high school?

Bongle: While we were in high school. So when I went into the service they say, "What did you do?" I said, "I didn't do anything. I just graduated from high school." "Didn't you ever work?" "Yeah, I worked." "What kind of work?" "I welded in the shipyard." "What kind of shipyard?" I said, "A

shipyard that makes ships.” “Did you make ships for to go overseas?” I said, “Yeah.” “Did you ever weld with armor plate?” “Sure.” They put all of us in there, never thought another thing about it, until we had what they called “armored cars.” We had a armored car (inaudible). These armored cars had armor all the way around them, and up on top, and a .37 mm pea-shooter carbine, and a couple of machine guns, and – I don’t know, maybe three or our guys rode it. Maybe only three, I don’t know. Well, anyway, the floorboards were not armored. They were just like the floorboards in your car. But the tires would run over a mine and bang! That’s not only the armored cars, but the guys inside. So they got a kid, named Frenchie Callal (??), from the mule skinnners. Remember, all our supplies were brought up in the mountains on mules. There were no cars coming up by us. So then, he was a mule skinner because he – at one time he had been in rodeo. He won a bareback riding championship one time. Anyway, he was also a – he could shoe horses. And he could bend horse shoes into – that do they call them? I forget. Anyway, in E Company there was a kid by the name of Lonny Seagraves that had welded in the shipyards up in Superior. So Lonny Seagraves and myself, and they went out to the muleskinnners and they got this Frenchie Callal – I don’t know how they got all these names. They brought us there and they just come and say, “Hey, you’re transferred.” Again you don’t know where the hell you’re going, you know? So I went back to battalion, Headquarters Company – Headquarters first and then battalion headquarters. At battalion headquarters I ran into Seagraves and I said, “You transferred too?” He said “Yeah.” I said “Where are we going?” “Damned if I know,” he said. So then we got down to regimental headquarters. They put us in a Jeep, went back, and then we still don’t know where we are going. They had took us to a building. “Find your bags.” Well, one good thing about it, the bags were separated by companies, you know? The 349th Infantry, Company F, was here and E was here, you know? So we only had to go through the bags of our own company. Finally found our bags, and then they took us to ordinance. And when we got to ordinance we met Frenchie Callal (??) And we said, “What the hell are we doing in ordinance?” They said, “You guys are going to weld armor plating on the floor of the recon cars.” So that’s what we did. And we got done with all the recon cars, we started – the general’s name was General Sloan, remember him? We started with his Jeep and then we had another two generals. Another general, went and did his. Then we did the colonels, and then we stayed in the ordinance and did whatever repairing we could. I ended up I was fixing radiators. That was the biggest casualty in the war was the radiators.

MacD: I suppose they had no protection at all, just getting –

Bongle: Piece of shrapnel, just (indicating). So they would bring them in, most of the time – most of the time a radiator operated on a third of its size. So if it wasn’t that bad we would just solder the thing shut and make sure they

didn't leak and put her back on the Jeep. So – there you go. Little did I know when I learned welding at Pease's machine shop over there that it would someday get me out of the infantry. So after that I went up to see the guys a few times, but there always less guys. And the infantry, of course, it was not like being in the rear echelon. It was, you know, if you figure the 105s and the 155s and that, if you figure they are on the front lines we are on the front lines, too.

MacD: Well, you were treating damaged vehicles, you've got to be pretty close, fix them up, put them back in service.

Bongle: Yeah. And, of course, the munitions part of the ordinance, they had to take – they had to take the munitions up all the time; and of course they had to take care of the cannons, you know? They were out there all the time working on the sights, you know? Somebody would say the sights are bad because they missed their target and they'd have to go out and see if they were or weren't. It was quite a thing. And the thing is we were in Rome on June, the 4th. Do you know when they went into Normandy?

MacD: The 6th or 7th?

Bongle: Right. So we had captured Rome before the invasion at Normandy. So I went up to the high school once and talked. Before I talked I said "How many of you here studied World War II?" Well, yeah, that's what they are doing now. "Okay," I said, "when did the war start?" "Well, when we went into Normandy", and I said, "No, that was a big battle but that's not when the war started." And I said, "How many people were killed in World War II?" They didn't know. I said, "There were 80 million human beings were killed in World War II." It's hard for these people to realize that. See, they are talking about 1,000, 1,400 killed in Iran. What the hell would they say about 80 million?

MacD: Oh, it was a world war. It was – everybody was involved in it.

Bongle: Well, right. It's unfathomable that these people don't realize these things. So I talked to them. And then, you know, told them where I was in World War II, Africa, and we went up through Italy, of course. We got up to a place by the name of Bolzano. When we get up to the Po Valley we stayed there for a while in the winter, too, because it got so damn muddy you couldn't move. And then, next April, we took off and we went across the valley fast and we got to the Po River before the Germans did and we cut off their retreat. And then we went up to a town by the name of Verona. Did you ever hear of Verona?

MacD: Huh-uh (disagreement).

Bongle: It's the home of Romeo and Juliet. We went to Verona. We cut off the right, again to cut off the Germans that had gotten across the Po River, to a place by the name of Vicenza. And then we went up in the mountains, and then we went in the mountains there, about May 2nd – I think it was May 2nd – the Germans surrendered. The Germans surrendered in Austria and Italy, and – it was funnier than hell because you didn't hear them guns anymore, you know?

MacD: Yeah.

Bongle: You keep waiting for a shot to go off or something and it didn't happen. And an ambulance driver came by – first somebody came by and brought us mail, and I got a letter from a lady in town here by the name of Belle Sloan. Did you ever know Belle?

MacD: No.

Bongle: Probably dead before you. Anyway, she was from Sawyer, a good friend of my mother's, and good friend of Mr. & Mrs. Smolzer (Smeltzer??), and she wrote me a letter. I got the letter that day. She said, "You know, Don Smolzer must be close to you because his APO [Army Post Office] is 85 and your APO is 88." Well, the only reason 85 and 88, he was in the 85th Division, I was in the 88th, they were alongside of it all through Italy.

MacD: Oh, really?

Bongle: Yes. I didn't know he was there. There's fifteen, sixteen thousand in each division. So anyway, this is the day the war ended, and when that ambulance driver stopped there I asked him if he knew where the 85th was. He said, "Yeah, they were right down the road here." So he said, "I'm going down there." I got a ride with him down there, hooked up, and spent the evening with Don. So every May the 2nd I give him a call. In fact I just saw him the other day.

MacD: Well, he used to go to all the basketball games.

[End of tape 1, side B]

MacD: This would be the rest of the oral history tape, tape 2, Lawrence Bongle, World War II, United States Army. We are talking about he had a reunion, Don Smeltzer, on May 2, 1945 in Italy at the end of the war.

Bongle: The war ended on May 8th but they surrendered in Austria and Italy on May 2nd, and that's when I met Don. And when I went back to my company, I got back there just in time, they said, "Hey, we're moving out. We're going up to Bozen," or Bolzano or whatever – it had two names

because before the First World War it had belonged to Austria and after the First World War they gave it to Italy. Because Italy did the same thing in the First World War that they did in the Second World War; they started out with the Austrians and the Germans, they switched sides and came to the Americans and the French and the British. So we went up there, and this was German headquarters for Austria and Italy. We got there – this was my ordinance company. We got there, there was 75,000 German SS troops there. How many other troops I don't know. And we went in. The Germans – it's a fairly good-sized town. The Germans directed traffic. If you came, were driving one of our vehicles, came to a corner, they would stop us either to let the Germans go by, or the Italians or let us go by – you know, they were regular directing traffic. Our officers and our company commander said whatever they ask you to do, do it. So we did. So the first night or two that we were there, we were staying in an old barracks-type place and nobody went out at night. So finally somebody said, "Oh, driving up today, just a couple blocks down the street here, there was a bar." And their bars said "bar", you know? Easy to understand. So we went down to that bar after dark. Italians running it. We walked in the door. Lots of Germans in their uniform, and the Italian running it, he flipped his head, he would kick us out. He didn't want the Germans and the Americans in the same bar, and a couple of the Germans grabbed him, took him, threw him behind the bar and said, "You tend bar. We and they are done fighting." He told him that. I don't know if he told him in German or Italian, but one of our guys understood it. So we stayed there – and this is about the May 4th or 5th – and drank with the Germans. They figured – they was SS and they figured the war is over, it's over – you know? They were sick of the damn thing too.

MacD: And the SS were the elite troops there, they were Nazis, right?

Bongle: Yeah. Well, they were all Nazis you know? We didn't differentiate. The SS were their elite troops, though, right. And so, a couple of interesting things happened in this town. I found out why they sent the ordinance up there. Because we went into the headquarters and the German, General Wolff, wouldn't open the safe. So we had to cut the safe open. Big walk-in safe. Went in there and in there was about – I think it was forty million dollars worth of gold, trays and trays of diamonds – not in rings, unset diamonds taken out of rings undoubtedly – paper money; paper money for Switzerland, paper money for Austria, paper money for Germany, paper money for Italy. How much of that I don't know. So anyway, we took all that and then – I don't know how it came, but just north of this town, between there and what is called Brenner Pass, we went up there and there were some caves. We went into this cave – you know, tell you, the Germans could have held out there for a while. There was Mussolini's wife and a couple of his children. Now this is Mussolini's wife and his daughters. Took them and took them aback. Now remember, at about the

same time Mussolini's over some Swiss border, was in a truck with his girlfriend, and they were stopped heading towards Switzerland, taken out. These partisans, communist partisans, found out who they were, they set them in a chair right alongside the road, and shot them. Then they took them to Milano and they hung them in a square, in the big square, the scaffolding, but they hung them upside down and people would come around an spit on them. So, about the same time, we capture Mussolini's wife and children up there, and she was – nothing wrong with Mussolini's wife. She was a nice lady. Anyway, they took a Dodge – I forget what they call them, three-quarter-ton, ton, ton-and-a-half – I don't know. Put them in there, and this daughter, Himmler's daughter, she said, "We want a command car." I don't know, but the GIs give her a kick in the ass for that. Tell you, she flew in the back end of that truck. And anyway, the Germans did all the work, but we loaded all this money and gold up, AMG officers, Allied Military Government Officers came. They were British, American – I don't know if there were any French – a couple others there. And supposedly the stuff was sent back to the bank in Rome, but we're not sure where the hell it went, you know?

MacD: Yeah.

Bongle: And then we were there for a little while and we were sent back to Pisa. Camped pretty well right alongside the Leaning Tower, and we stayed over in a town called Montecatini. It was a resort town. That's where – Mussolini was there. It's all spas there, and we had a ball there for a couple weeks, and ran into a Schrader boy. I don't remember his first name, but his older brother, couple years older, named "Buber", they come from the south of town here. He just got over there, wasn't in Italy when the war was on even. He just got there and they were sending them back to the United States, and we were a little tee-ed off about that because we were supposed to go to the Pacific and invade Japan. So that was, you know, that didn't go over too good with the guys. We had a place there to – called it "cosmoline" – everything so it didn't rust. And when -- and we had German prisoners doing that. And one of the German prisoners that was with me there, he was talking about his home, I forget where it was in Germany, but he had lost his one brother in the war, lost his sister and mother and father in bombings so he had nobody left. I said, "Well, you know, when you're done here why don't you go to the United States?" He said, "No, I've got to go back there." He says, you know, "Because where your cradle is rocked you'll never forget," and I never forgot him telling me that, and it's true. So when we got done there we are going to ship out of a place called Leg Horn – Livorno, the Italian name. We got on that ship. Now this wasn't a big ship, this was a smaller ship. Had our equipment on it with us. I don't know if there's one or two companies on there. Anyway, we pulled out, we pulled into Oran, Africa,

because we were going to go out through Gibraltar, across the Atlantic to the Panama Canal, over to the Philippines. Quite a trip.

MacD: Yeah.

Bongle: Anyway, we pulled in there, they put a boat over the side. We went ashore. We come back, lifted anchor, and pulled out again. Pretty soon a rumor came around the boat, they went in to shore because they had heard they dropped a big bomb on Japan. And a big bomb, what kind of bomb? We didn't know what the hell they were talking about. They didn't know. So when we got to Gibraltar it was the middle of the night, and pretty soon the sirens went off on the boat and the lights came on and the speakers came on and said, "Hey, hey." We thought "Gosh dammit," you know, "abandon ship, German submarine didn't know the war was over." They said, "We just got a notice to proceed to New York City instead of the Panama Canal. We dropped another big bomb on Japan and Japan surrendered." Oh, Christ, that was good for us. So we were one of the first ships into New York after the -- after both sides had quit. So from there, when we got in, when we got to New York we were on Pier 42. We went over to -- like a ferry. Loaded that thing up, went across to Jersey to a camp there, Camp -- Kilmer? I don't know what it was. Anyway, they said anybody with relatives in New York can have a 24-hour pass. Our company commander said, "I have -- all my men have relatives in New York. Passes for everybody." So we went into New York. We stopped right at Times Square, right in front of the Astor Hotel. Ever hear of the Astor?

MacD: Uh-huh (affirmation).

Bongle: There was a bar. We went into that bar, you know, whole busload of us. Wanted a drink. The bartender says, "I'm sorry, we don't serve servicemen." Wow! Pretty soon stools, bottles, everything that was at the back bar -- that guy got out of the way -- we smashed as much as we could until somebody got wise and said, "Hey, let's get the hell out of here before the MP's come, we'll spend the rest of this thing in jail." So out the door we went. We ran for a while. We came to the Roosevelt Hotel. Somebody said, "Here's the Roosevelt. They better serve us or else." We went in there and they served us. But can you imagine that?

MacD: Coming back after fighting in the war and they won't even serve you?

Bongle: No. That was kind of bad. Well, now I got to tell you about some other things here. This -- I don't know, you want to read it or you want me to read it to you or what?

- MacD: Let me look at it (reading). You're showing us some pamphlets you got on the 88th Division, some information that he brought –
- Bongle: No, it was sent to me after I was at home. We get one of them four times a year.
- MacD: Just tell us all about the different companies and things like that, and memorial – it looks like a pretty interesting book.
- Bongle: Well, it tells you a little more than that. It says here – the average combat effectiveness, World War II, the 88th Division had the best in the Americans. These here, first ones here are German, and down to there, there's German, and the 88th is the fifth-most combat effective division in World War II. And it says here – when we first got these results we had difficulty understanding them. Who had ever heard of the 88th Infantry Division? We carefully rechecked all the figures and calculations. No change. The 88th Infantry Division was still number five, the lone allied division in the top ten, and then it goes to show how they did that. And the guys in the division are pretty proud of this, because we were picked as the best American division. This was just Europe. This did not count the South Pacific. And there's a place here to tell – to tell how many total casualties, and our division had 15,101 and that rose. Do you want me to tell them what this is?
- MacD: Sure. You've got a plaque here, kind of a closed thing, of all the medals – it appears to be all the medals you were awarded.
- Bongle: Yeah, I think so.
- MacD: And it's a very colorful display. Can you tell us what some of these are, Red?
- Bongle: Well, up here (indicating), that's the Fifth Army. Fifth Army was in Italy, Second Corps. We were part of the Second Corps. And of course the blue one in the middle, you can hardly see it – that's the 88th Division. Okay, this is the Combat Infantryman's Badge, I don't care if it's a private or a general, it's the top badge he has. It's the top one. There's nothing higher than a Combat Infantryman's Badge. Okay, then these other badges here are the same as these. I'll show you by the medals. This medal here, that's a Bronze Star. You know what a Bronze Star is?
- MacD: Well, is that a battle star? Or is that a meritorious star?
- Bongle: Meritorious star, Bronze Star. This here (indicating) is a Good Conduct Medal; everybody got them. This here is Defense of the United States Medal. This here is European Theater of Operations Medal, and with that

you have your battle stars. Now we got four battle stars, which is quite a few.

MacD: Okay.

Bongle: This (indicating) is the War Over Medal. I don't know what the hell – got that at the end of the war. This here (indicating) is the French Croix De Guerre. I showed you the plaque there.

MacD: Uh-huh (affirmation).

Bongle: This here (indicating) is an Italian medal for fighting with the Italians against the Germans in Italy. This is a French medal for fighting with the French against the Germans in Italy, and that's just what you get in training. And this is the 349th Regimental patch. That's the 88th Division there –

MacD: Uh-huh (affirmation).

Bongle: And these are like –

MacD: They were ribbons? You don't actually wear the medals; is that correct?

Bongle: Well, you never wear the medals immediately. I don't know why you ever would. I never seen anybody wear them. They got miniature ones that some guys wear, but these ribbons are the ones that are worn.

MacD: The Bronze Star – that's a pretty high medal?

Bongle: Well – they got to give you something, I guess.

MacD: I think you deserved it. So then, when you got back to New York, how long did you stay in? They muster you out? What did they do?

Bongle: Okay, they give us this 24-hour pass in New York, which we were gone for three days. We got back to that camp and they had tickets for us to come home. Tickets for us to come home and return to Fort Hood, Texas. And for home I had a 51-day rest and recoup, whatever they hell they call it—

MacD: Parole or something, huh? Furlough or something?

Bongle: Yeah. They didn't call it "furlough", though, they called it "rest and recuperation" or something. Well, I was home. I get so – I don't know if I got a letter or Gus Andre's address, folks got a letter from Gussie and he was going to come home just about the time I was leaving. So I called and

asked for an extension. I called in and said, “Yeah, I got a buddy coming home that’s in the Air Force. Can I have a couple week extension?” But they said, “Hey, while you’re on the line we got to tell you, you report back to Camp Mc Coy, and whenever you want to you will get discharged. You’re out.” So I said, “Okay,” and I never had to go down there. I had stuff sent down there that I had in barracks bags that I probably would have liked to have had, but nothing personal, it’s just some army stuff I had. So I went down there and got discharged.

MacD: Good. Then when you come home, you know, what was it like in Sturgeon Bay when you come home? You know, this was a war town and anything that they were having, the shipbuilding and things like that, had to be winding down considerably then.

Bongle: Right.

MacD: So was there any jobs for you when you got back or what happened?

Bongle: Well, nobody wanted a job, you know? You tried like hell to keep out of getting a job. They had what they call “52-20”. You were allowed to get a \$20 a week for 52 weeks. So tried that, but you had to go and register all the time, and every time you went to the windows to register they would say, “Oh, we got a job for you.” “What’s that?” “Picking brush out of Reynolds’ orchard,” or some shitting thing like that, you know? I decided to go to school. So I got discharged I think it was November. I go home, I went deer hunting with my dad. And then Christmas here, New Year’s, and sometime towards the end of January went to Lawrence College in Appleton. I spent four years there.

MacD: You used the GI Bill at that time?

Bongle: GI Bill. They said “What it cost you to go to school?” I have no idea, you know? It was a good experience. Come out of there and I ran a hotel in Ocala for five or six years and then moved back to Sturgeon Bay.

MacD: When you came back to Sturgeon Bay did you work in the yard then?

Bongle: Yeah, I worked in the yard when – before I left. I didn’t work in the yard when I came back.

MacD: Didn’t go back, huh?

Bongle: The yards were going down. Things were way different when we come back.

MacD: I’m sure they were.

- Bongle: You know, when I left here there were British soldiers here, there were Coast Guards – man, the guys from all over. But the thing was really humming.
- MacD: So, I know – When you got out and came back to Sturgeon Bay did you participate in any veterans organizations when you got out or join any?
- Bongle: No.
- MacD: Not immediately?
- Bongle: No. I don't know why I didn't. It's like when I got discharged down there, they said, "Do you want to join the Reserve?" I said, "No." Everything they asked me like that I said no. So when I got back here I didn't join any of them whether it was the Legion or VFM or – I go to all of them now.
- MacD: Yeah. Now you have been pretty active in the VFW today?
- Bongle: Right, right – but, you know, I don't know, I guess – you see, when we got back there was some guys down here, and especially the Marines – remember Frank Tahaskey? Used to live with Frank?
- MacD: Yeah.
- Bongle: Frank Tahaskey was a captain or major or something in the Marines. We had a lot of the ex-Marines, you know? We had Bernie Powell and –
- MacD: Cookie Tess?
- Bongle: Cookie Tess, Lenny Klabush. And he wanted to start a Marine Reserves there, and if you got so many of these guys to join he would become a colonel when he got them to join. Well, after they joined, this Korean war broke out and these guys got taken into the Korean war. Well, people said, "We ain't going for that crap," and that's what happened to a lot of the stuff around here. So most of the guys that were in these things just didn't want to get back in.
- MacD: Well, another thing that you were really active here in the Sturgeon Bay area was in the politics end of it. You served the community for a number of years as an alderman?
- Bongle: Eighteen years.
- MacD: And during that time you were also acting mayor, weren't you?

- Bongle: Right, right – which was a good experience. I think everybody – I think everybody should get into politics a little bit, just to see what the hell it is.
- MacD: Uh-huh (affirmation).
- Bongle: Most of it is fun and some of it was hard and not fun. Sometimes you were forced to do things that you would rather you didn't have to do. But I have no regrets about being in politics.
- MacD: Another thing, you were pretty active in the Lions Club, weren't you?
- Bongle: Yeah, I was active in the Lions for quite a few years – thirty years anyway. But after a while – let the younger guys do it, let them run the show.
- MacD: Was there any – Looking back on your military experiences and your war experiences what's it meant to you in your lifetime here to go through all that?
- Bongle: Ha! What's it meant my lifetime? I don't see that it really meant too much. I'm not sorry I went through it. It's something that – it's something I'm glad I had the experience of doing. **[End of tape 2, side B]**
- MacD: And just talking a little bit about what his military experience meant to him –
- Bongle: I said it really didn't mean too much, but I'm sure glad I went through it, because most people – and I would say most veterans – don't really care to talk about it much. It's – well, if you held a gun on a guy and shot him, would you want to talk about it? Who the hell would want to talk about that?
- MacD: Yeah.
- Bongle: It's not a pleasant thing to talk about. But if you're there you have to do it, and if people would just realize – you know, kids are worse in that than anything. Kids like to ask veterans how many did you shoot. You know, that's the –
- MacD: They don't have any –
- Bongle: -- that's not a proper question. It's something you don't really want to talk about, you know? It's – I hope people didn't ask the Germans how many people they shot, because I'm sure they feel the same way. And this thing went on for so long that – you know, we got in it late. Hitler went into Poland, Czechoslovakia '38, '39. The Japanese went into China in 1935

or '36. And this whole damn thing wasn't done until 1945, you know? That's nine, ten years of battle.

MacD: Yeah.

Bongle: And -- and I don't think -- I don't think it taught me anything. It taught me not to talk about it. I guess that's all it taught me. I never talked to my wife. Never even talked to my folks about it.

MacD: Uh-huh (affirmation).

Bongle: Just -- it affects you. When I first got home, live in Sawyer, and -- it was before I got discharged, when I first got there. The hill that goes up out of town on the west side, you know that, and in the middle of the night trucks would go up there and they would shift gears, and when I was sleeping, to me, that sounded just like an airplane diving and I would dive on the floor. Now when you do that you feel like a damned fool because you're on the floor before your mind tells you "Hey, this is" -- you know?

MacD: "You're home."

Bongle: Yeah -- you know? So it took a while for some of those things. And, of course, fireworks scared the hell out of me for a while. Even though I knew I was going to fireworks it just brings back the wrong memories.

MacD: Uh -- huh (affirmation).

Bongle: Not any memory I want brought back. Watching fireworks display or hearing a truck go up a hill. It's foolishness.

MacD: Well, Red, I appreciate you taking your time here today to go through this with me. If you've anything else you want to bring up at this time?

Bongle: No, nothing that I know of here. I wanted you to see these (indicating) things. Nothing that I know of.

MacD: All right, thank you very much.

[End of interview]