

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
DOMINGO W. BONGLE  
Truck Driver, 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, World War II.

2005

OH  
667

OH  
667

**Bongle, Domingo W.**, (1918?- ). Oral History Interview, 2005.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 25 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 25 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Domingo “Digger” Bongle, a Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin native, describes his World War II experiences in the Pacific Theater with the 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. Bongle states he was working in a cherry orchard when he was drafted in March of 1941. He talks about other folks from Sturgeon Bay who were drafted, basic training at Camp Livingston (Louisiana), and being shipped out as a response to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Bongle explains he was a truck driver in the antitank company of the 127th Infantry Regiment. He discusses being shipped to Port Adelaide (Australia), going to Camp Tamborine (later renamed Camp Cable) near Brisbane, and training in New Guinea. He speaks of being a jungle training instructor working with replacement troops. Bongle tells of attending every class he could, including malaria school. He touches on combat in the Philippines, getting wounded in the knee while on escort patrol, and being sent to Oakland Regional Hospital (California) for surgery. Bongle tells of developing malaria in the States after he stopped taking his anti-malarial medication. He talks about living conditions in the jungle and mail service. He characterizes Bill Knaapen, a baker in his unit from Sturgeon Bay. After his discharge, Bongle discusses being hired right away by the Sturgeon Bay Police Department. He mentions joining the VFW, competing all across the county with the AMVETS drill team, and marching in President Kennedy’s inaugural parade. Bongle mentions having two brothers in the service and reflects on the time he spent in the Army. He touches on seeing Gary Cooper at a USO show, having R&R at Camp Tamborine (Australia), and burying beer there for future visits.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Bongle was born in Carlsville, Wisconsin and moved to Sturgeon Bay, where he graduated from Sevastopol High School in 1936. He served in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Red Arrow Division during World War II, and he eventually settled in Sturgeon Bay.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2005

Draft transcription by Court Reporter Alis Fox, 2008

Format corrected by Katy Marty, 2008

Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

**Interview Transcript:**

Terry: This is an interview of Domingo "Digger" Bongle, who served with the United States Army, 32nd Red Arrow Division, during World War II. The interview is being conducted at approximately 2:00 p.m. at the following address of 1811 Michigan Street, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of April 7th, 2005, and the interviewer is Terry MacDonald. And Mr. Bongle likes to be called "Digger." So, Digger, can you give us a little bit of the background of your life history prior to going into the military?

Bongle: You want before I went into the service or what?

Terry: Yeah, before you went in.

Bongle: Well, I was born in Carlsville, stayed there until 1931, moved out of Carlsville, moved to Sturgeon Bay, graduated from Sevastopol High School in '36. And we moved to Sturgeon Bay, and my dad had the tavern down in Sturgeon Bay, but actually bought it from his brother. Then I went, got to Sturgeon Bay and I went to work at Martin Orchards.

Terry: That was a fairly good-sized orchard in Sturgeon Bay?

Bongle: It was the largest orchard in the United States.

Terry: Cherry orchard?

Bongle: In Wisconsin, yeah. How many were there? There was seventeen hundred and—or I don't know how many thousand trees, anyway. It was a real big place, and I worked there until I went into the service.

Terry: So how did you get in the military? Did you get drafted or did you enlist?

Bongle: Drafted. I got drafted on March 21st, 1941.

Terry: Now, when you got drafted, did a bunch of guys from Sturgeon Bay go down with you?

Bongle: Yeah. There was seventeen of us I think went down. Or was it twenty-seven? Seventeen or twenty—I think it was seventeen.

Terry: So this was before World War II started, so they were doing the draft, and it was like a one-year—

- Bongle: The war was going on in Europe then already.
- Terry: But the United States, were they involved in '41?
- Bongle: Who?
- Terry: United States was involved in the war in Europe?
- Bongle: No, I don't think. I don't know for sure if it was or not, but I know—yeah, '41 we got involved and went over to Japan, I mean over in the islands.
- Terry: Yeah. But you were drafted in March, right?
- Bongle: I was drafted in March, 1941.
- Terry: Was that a one-year commitment, or did they—
- Bongle: No. It was—
- Terry: You went until they let you out?
- Bongle: You went until they let you out. What can I say? And that lasted four years and three months, four months. No, four years and three months.
- Terry: Do you recall some of the fellows that went down with you from Sturgeon Bay?
- Bongle: Oh, sure. Bill Knaapen and—when we went down that time?
- Terry: Yeah, when you went into the Army.
- Bongle: Oh, I can't remember all of them. I know Bill Knaapen was one of them. I was one. Kenny Stevenson was one. Bill Balda. There was one of them from Baileys Harbor; I forget what his name was. And then there was another one from Maplewood or was it was Forestville.
- Terry: Did they all get drafted?
- Bongle: Sparrow Hane. I know you knew Sparrow Hane.
- Terry: Okay.
- Bongle: Yeah, he went down with us, but they sent him back for some reason, I don't know what. He never did get into service.

Terry: Did all the gentlemen that went down with you, did they all go into the Army?

Bongle: Yep. We all went from—from there we went to Camp Livingston.

Terry: And where is Camp Livingston at?

Bongle: In Gary, Indiana. Went down there, and then there's where we got—you went here, you went there, and that was all there is. It was Bill Knaapen and I, Bill Balda. Who was the other one? There were four or five of us from Sturgeon Bay. We went down to Camp Livingston, Louisiana.

Terry: Now was that your basic training then?

Bongle: That's where we had our basic training, until December 7th when they let loose over in Hawaii. So then we packed up there, and then we left there and we went—well, actually we were going to go over to Germany, and on the way up—motored up from there to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, and then the orders were changed, so they shipped us clear across the United States and overseas, over to the islands, and there we stayed. [laughs]

Terry: You were in an infantry battalion then?

Bongle: Yeah, 127 Infantry, and I was in the antitank company. I was a truck driver, a weapons carrier, drove that.

Terry: Well, when you were down in Louisiana for your training there, what kind of living quarters did you have down there?

Bongle: Tents, you know. They were tents, but they were boxed in with wood frames, wood floors. It was real nice. Sure. You could roll up the sides, you know. It was all screened in.

Terry: Everybody was pretty much in the same boat, mostly all draftees, or were there some regular Army?

Bongle: Down there they were all, yeah. They were all draftees, I mean. Some of them were from the Guard in Wisconsin. Waupaca was you'd say the base for the 32nd Division in Wisconsin, and those guys were down there with us, trained us.

Terry: Is that where you got tied up with the 32nd Division then?

- Bongle: Yeah. Left Gary, Indiana, went down there and got in the 32nd Division. The guys were all Wisconsin and Michigan.
- Terry: You went up to Fort Devlin, Massachusetts?
- Bongle: Yeah. We started motoring up there. We were gonna go ship out and go to Germany and then orders were changed and they shipped us back across the United States and we went over to the islands, South Pacific, Australia. [clock chimes]
- Terry: What year was that?
- Bongle: '41.
- Terry: '41?
- Bongle: Uh-huh.
- Terry: From the west coast, what kind of a ship did you sail on?
- Bongle: We went on a big liner. I can't think of the name of it. It was something like the Queen Mary. It was big. There was only three or four of them that were that way, and that was built in, built so they could haul whole troops.
- Terry: Now, did you go on—at that time did an escort—was there a convoy?
- Bongle: No, we didn't have no escort.
- Terry: The ships, the luxury liners, were fairly fast at that time.
- Bongle: Oh, yeah. We went to Port Adelaide, Australia.
- Terry: Was that a big Army depot?
- Bongle: That's where most of them went when they left here. They went down there and then they started up the coast. They went to Melbourne, then they went to Brisbane, and we went to Camp Timberlane [Camp Tamborine, later renamed Camp Cable]. That was just outside of Brisbane.
- Terry: Did they give you some jungle training or some sort of additional training when you got over there?
- Bongle: Oh, yeah. We got most of the jungle training when we was over in New Guinea. In fact, I taught jungle warfare for about sixteen weeks. I'd get the replacements.

They'd get replacements there, and I'd get eleven men, eleven infantrymen and I'd get one officer, and I'd take them out for three days. Every week I'd get a different group.

Terry: And it was a survival type of training?

Bongle: It was everything. I said, "Once you're out here, you do as I say. You don't listen to the officer." The officer, he always—they always bark at you, them 2nd lieutenants, you know.

Terry: And what was your rank at that time?

Bongle: At that time I was staff sergeant at that time. I had a platoon of my own. Started out with a squad and then I ended up with a platoon, and I got to be staff. And when I went to Australia—not Australia, the Philippines, I was promoted to a tech sergeant, but I got wounded in the meantime and—

Terry: Where was the—can you say where you were at in action, in New Guinea, or was it—

Bongle: Oh, yeah, sure. We went all the way up New Guinea, all the way around from Milne Bay all the way around to Tacloban and then Hollandia. We took off from Hollandia and we made the landing at Leyte Bay in the Philippines. And while I was in the Philippines I had hurt my knee and I went to the field hospital. A doctor there, he examined me, took x-rays and everything, and they set me up for an operation the next morning and then he come back that night and he said to me, he said, "Say," he says, "How long has it been since you been home?" I said, "A little over three years." He says, "You're going home." He says, "I'm not going to do the operation here." So he gave me a letter to give to the major in the United States, I don't know who it was. And I went into the Oakland Regional Hospital in San Francisco and had the operation there.

Terry: Before you mentioned that you were an antitank truck driver. Is that what you did most of the time when you were—or—

Bongle: Well, no, did everything. I mean I went to classes and everything. Anytime a class came up, I went to it, I mean. And malaria school, or—oh, anything that came along. I mean, me and another guy by the name of Smajic, we took every class there was that come along. [laughs]

Terry: Well, speaking of—

- Bongle: But I mean, it was all Army, strictly you did what they told you to do when they came down and that was it. Went out on foot patrols. It was all strictly military, I mean, you know. But, anyway, you'd get out in the jungle, I mean, forget the military part of it. I mean, that's your business then after that. So—
- Terry: You mentioned malaria school. Was there a lot of disease that affected the soldiers?
- Bongle: Malaria mostly, but actually, it didn't affect many of them over there, it's when they got home. They didn't keep on taking their Atabrine or their quinine, you know. And I had it; I got it when I got home, I got malaria. I landed in the hospital. I knew what it was, but—
- Terry: You mentioned that you got wounded. Did you want to just say anything about how that happened or anything, or not?
- Bongle: It just happened when we was on escort patrol. We took a major up to—oh, at that time it was Second Battalion that was way ahead of us. And after we delivered him up there, we started back, and the Japs pulled in behind us, cut us off on the way back. That's when I got hit. A buddy of mine got hit five times at the same time, but we both come out of it.
- Terry: Living in the jungle, did that—were you living in tents or—
- Bongle: Oh, sure we had tents. Sure.
- Terry: And what was the—did you live off of—and I don't know, the rations at that time, what were they called? I can't remember.
- Bongle: C-rations they called them.
- Terry: Is that basically what you lived off of?
- Bongle: Most of the time. We had our kitchen. I mean, we had our regular meals: breakfast, dinner, and supper. And Bill Knaapen was our baker at that time. We always had fresh rolls for breakfast.
- Terry: And Bill was the baker. His livelihood was a baker here in Sturgeon Bay. He ran the bakery in Sturgeon Bay.
- Bongle: Yeah, Knaapen's Bakery.
- Terry: So when you got sent home for your knee operation—is that correct—they did that here in the States then, huh?



Bongle: Hmm?

Terry: They did that here in the States?

Bongle: Yeah, Oakland Regional Hospital in Oakland, California. And during the time that I was in the hospital, the point system came up, and I had a hundred and one points I guess. You only needed ninety-one I guess or ninety-three, something like that. So they sent me back to Fort, Fort—aw, what's the one down in the southern part of the states, Fort—oh, God, I can't think of it now.

Terry: Not McCoy; is it?

Bongle: Yeah, McCoy, yeah. No, not McCoy, no. What's that hospital down in—I can't even think of it now.

Terry: Wood?

Bongle: No.

Terry: No. Okay.

Bongle: Fort Devens. No, Fort Devens, that was in Massachusetts. This was Fort—outside of Milwaukee or Chicago.

Terry: Fort Sheridan?

Bongle: Sheridan, that's it. And I got back there, and that's when the point system came out. No, then I came back there and I was discharged from there, but before I got discharged I got malaria the same day I got my discharge papers. [laughs]

Terry: So you were basically in the hospital when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima?

Bongle: Ahhhh—

Terry: Or the war ended in the Pacific?

Bongle: Yeah, yeah. No, that was—I don't think I was—yeah, I was out of the service then already, I think.

Terry: Oh, okay.

- Bongle: Yeah, I was out of the service already then. Where the heck was I at? I was working for the city, anyway, I know that.
- Terry: So then when you got discharged, you said you got sick. Did that have any long-term impact on you, that malaria?
- Bongle: No, not really. It lasted for a day—day, two days maybe at the most. You get a big, high fever, and that breaks and you get a big chill, you couldn't warm yourself up, and then it was over. You take quinine and Atabrine.
- Terry: When you got back, you know, were there any job openings for you around, because—
- Bongle: I went to work right away the minute I got back.
- Terry: What did you do when you got out?
- Bongle: I went to work for the city, Police Department.
- Terry: Okay.
- Bongle: Her dad, my wife's dad, was working down there, and he got me in. He says, "Come on down and talk to Charlie." So I went down, talked to Charlie, and he hired me just like that.
- Terry: Wow. Now did you get married right away when you got out of the service?
- Bongle: No. I was married when I came home on furlough in January; got married in February.
- Terry: Did you join any veterans' organizations when you got out?
- Bongle: VFW, and then the AMVETS started and I joined that and I have been with them ever since.
- Terry: Did you use any of the GI bill that was available to the servicemen? Were you able to use any of that when you got out?
- Bongle: No, I never used any of it. I just went to work and that was it, you know.
- Terry: You know, I know you mentioned you joined the AMVETS. Now, when that started up in the '50s, early '50s I believe—

Bongle: Yeah, '51.

Terry: Were you on the drill team?

Bongle: I was on it for ten years.

Terry: Can you kind of just describe briefly what the drill team was, because that was a pretty exclusive group of men?

Bongle: Yeah. It was twenty guys. It was four in the color guard, twelve on the team, and we had a few spares, I mean you know. And how it started, I don't know how it started, but I went to one of the state conventions in Sheboygan, and I seen the team down there. And I was in the Guard when I was in the service, so, you know. And I watched them guys, and they won first place. So when I got back to Sturgeon Bay, I—I don't know, Tim Willy [?] I thought, I talked to him, and I joined the AMVETS and I joined the drill team. It was a lot of work, but we made 'er.

Terry: What was the highlight of the drill team?

Bongle: Well, the highlight, oh, I don't know. I think President Kennedy's parade, I think that was about the highlight of that as far as I'm concerned.

Terry: That was the inaugural—

Bongle: For President Kennedy.

Terry: —in Washington, D.C. that the drill team went down to?

Bongle: Yeah. We were state champions. Nobody ever did take it away from us from the state, but we still had six nationals in a row. We beat out Army, Navy. [laughs]

Terry: Where did you go to compete in that type of thing? Where did they go for that? All over the United States?

Bongle: Sure. We would go, God, Florida, Missouri, Michigan, Philadelphia.

Terry: That was a pretty exclusive group then. Did you guys pay for your own trips or you raised—

Bongle: No. We'd have it all raised. After we won the first national, we had no problem raising money. The whole state was behind us and even the Milwaukee brewery. They paid our way out to Washington, D.C., for the parade, but most of the stuff

was raised by—right in town here. We made a lot. It was fun. A lot of work, practice there three-four nights a week.

Terry: When you were in the military, Digger, did you meet any guys that you kept in touch with over the years? Real good friendships at all that you stayed in touch with?

Bongle: Not really, no. I see a few of them now and then, but I mean, that was it. There was nobody actually outside of the guys from town here, I mean, that I was with, that made it back.

Terry: Did you ever attend any of the reunions for the 32nd?

Bongle: No, I didn't. I was always going to, but I never did get to one.

Terry: Can you give us an idea how highly decorated the 32nd Division was? Did they get quite a bit of awards as far as combat?

Bongle: Oh, yeah, quite a few. I can't describe how many there are or what they were or what it is, but—

Terry: They were pretty active for a long period of time, right? Did you have any other brothers or sisters that were in the service at the same time you were in?

Bongle: I had two brothers. Earl, he got killed in Germany, and Bud, he died, well, young, of cerebral hemorrhage. He was in Lenny's Tavern downtown when he died. But he was in the Navy, and Earl was in the Army and he was with the Engineers.

Terry: What kind of impact did—looking back on your military experiences, what do you feel about going into the Army at that time and taking part in that?

Bongle: Well, none of us actually do like the idea of getting inducted, but after we were in it, after a certain length of time, so what, you gotta be in it, you made the best of it. And I've got nothing against it. I mean, I had a good time and a lot of bad times, but good times, too. So it's not—infantry is not bad at all. I liked it. Of course, I was a truck driver [laughs], didn't do much hiking.

Terry: Is there anything that really stood out, any memories that you can think of that stood out that might have made an impact at all? Any favorite stories you might recall?

Bongle: Not really. It's strictly routine most of the time. I mean, you do this, you do that, and that's it. I enjoyed everything I did. I mean, all the fellows were good to work with and everything else. I mean, that's—

- Terry: Was there any USO shows of any type that made it into the Pacific?
- Bongle: There was one, one we went to, Gary Cooper, and who was with him? I forget. That was the only one I seen. All the rest of them were either back further in the echelons or what. But we were up to the front most of the time, come back twice for R and R.
- Terry: Where did they send you, just back—
- Bongle: Australia, back to Australia, Camp Timberlane.
- Terry: Was there much to do in Australia then when you were recuperating there?
- Bongle: Oh, sure. You could go out, travel, travel to other cities and do what you wanted. Couldn't do what you wanted, but when you had the time to do it or they let you do it, I mean then—first time we went up to New Guinea, the night before we were celebrating and I bought those picnic bottles of beer, you know, fifty cents a bottle. It was cheap. Everybody had plenty of those. We had bunks laying full of them. So the next morning we each got a shovel and went out and found a good tree. Didn't know if we'd come back there, so we buried them all. Next time we came back, we dug 'em up again. [both laugh] So we had beer all the time.
- Terry: How about the mail service when you were over there? How often did you get mail? You know, was it on a regular basis or—
- Bongle: It was almost on a regular basis.
- Terry: —because you were on a combat—
- Bongle: Yeah, I know.
- Terry: —battalion.
- Bongle: Yeah. We never had too much of a problem with mail. Of course, the ones that were way up in front, I mean then that was a different story. But I was with an antitank company. Of course, we didn't take our guns along though, the big antitank guns, you know. We played as infantry men then. So—but mail was no problem. I always got plenty of mail. How they got it to us, I don't know.
- Terry: Yeah.
- Bongle: But we got it.

- Terry: Was the Red Cross or the Red Crescent or anything providing donuts and stuff and things like that for you guys at all? Did you see any of that?
- Bongle: It was there. It was there, sure. I used it once for something, to send a telegram or some darn thing. That's the only time I ever used it, but they were there. If you wanted to use them, you could use them.
- Terry: Do you have anything else you'd like to say about your military life or experiences?
- Bongle: Well, comes right down to it, I enjoyed it. I mean, that's it, you know. And there were no problems, never got into any trouble.
- Terry: Were you awarded any medals when you were in?
- Bongle: I had the Purple Heart and Bronze Star.
- Terry: The Bronze Star for valor?
- Bongle: Bronze Star. We just got that here about—oh, there was about twenty or thirty of us I guess. It was at the high school.
- Terry: That was for the fellows that served in the Philippines; right?
- Bongle: Yeah, yup. Uh-huh. The Purple Heart, I got that over there, second day after I was hit.
- Terry: Did you meet any important officers at all? Meaning, you know, like Eisenhower was a big guy in the European theater.
- Bongle: Well, McArthur was—
- Terry: In the Philippines.
- Bongle: —by our outfit. We were in—where were we? I think we were in Australia. I'm not sure. But he must have come back for R and R, too, and then he visited the camps that was around there, you know. That's the only one that I seen.
- Terry: Okay.
- Bongle: I don't know of anything.
- Terry: Okay. Then we're going to bring the interview to an end at this time right now.  
**[End of Interview]**