

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

FRED BONZELET

Ordnance Sergeant, Army Air Corps, World War II

2004

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Bonzelet, Fred, (1907-2005), Oral History Interview, 2004

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Bonzelet, a Madison, Wisconsin resident, discusses his service as a Squadron Ordnance Sergeant with the 33rd Fighter Squadron of the Army Air Corps in Iceland and Europe during World War II. Bonzelet grew up on a farm in South Dakota near the Minnesota border. He illustrates the difficulties of growing up in the Great Depression and explains that dust storms, drought, and grasshoppers plagued South Dakota farmers. Bonzelet states he worked for Badger Ordnance before World War II broke out. He was inducted into the Army Air Corps at Fort Snelling (Minnesota). He touches upon his boot camp and training, which took him to the Mojave Desert (California), Oregon, and Massachusetts. Bonzelet humorously relates how he was promoted to corporal and attached to an Aircraft Ordnance unit, despite having no prior experience in munitions. Also, he speaks fondly of a Sergeant Taylor who took him under his wing and taught him about small arms aircraft weaponry. Bonzelet describes his deployment to Iceland with the 33rd Fighter Squadron. The seas were choppy and the convoy had to evade German submarines. Six of the 350 ships in the convoy were lost. Once in Iceland, Bonzelet's duties included transporting supplies and manning the store. He briefly describes interactions with the Stukas, a group of ethnic Norwegians living in Iceland. Bonzelet mentions the Stukas bought things from the Army store on credit and ate very small potatoes. Next, Bonzelet recalls how Sergeant Taylor was killed in a jeep accident in the mountains of Iceland while they were both on a mission to transport aircraft weaponry. When the team returned to base, Bonzelet was promoted to Sergeant and became the ranking Ordnance man. As Sergeant, he was present on the ground when the 33rd Fighter Squadron shot down a German aircraft. After Iceland, Bonzelet was transferred to England and assigned to an infantry unit where he underwent more training. He mentions ironically that he was recruited into the Medical Corps, despite a lack of medical training, because the Army needed more medics. Bonzelet describes how he was shot in the leg while transporting a stretcher on the frontlines in France. He was sent back to a hospital in England to recover. Bonzelet spends much time describing the wounds and behavior of the other patients. He reveals soldiers snuck out of the hospital and went to the bar with borrowed passes. Bonzelet addresses race relations, describing how a racist white soldier serving under him at the Ordnance store refused to serve alongside an African-American. He also addresses regional differences and recalls a Southern soldier telling him that his views on Northerners had softened since joining the Army. The Southerner told Bonzelet it was "too bad we [had] to go through something like this" to become friends. Following his discharge from the hospital and a brief stay in a replacement depot, Bonzelet was put in charge of an Ordnance shop in Germany where he supervised German prisoners. Bonzelet states he spoke German and often served as an interpreter when his commanding officers needed to read maps and get directions in Germany. He touches upon interactions between the German POWs working in the Ordnance store and the Americans. After

a total of three years in the Army without any leave or visits home, Bonzelet was discharged on points and mustered out at Fort Sheridan (Wisconsin). Following the war, he worked as a carpenter, construction worker, bartender, and employee in an atomic plant in Washington. He states he joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion but never paraded with them because: "I paraded while I was still over in France... I was sick of that parading business." Bonzelet received a ten percent disability benefit from the V.A. and earned a Purple Heart for his leg wound. Throughout the interview, he describes relations between Noncommissioned Officers and Commissioned Officers, and he tells several stories of men who were unfit for service being drafted to fill Army quotas. He also speaks somewhat dismissively about the record-keeping he was required to do of munitions storage stocks in the Ordnance store. Finally, Bonzelet reflects upon the benefits and dangers of his time in the Army, stating he is "almost disappointed when people go to join the Army so they can get an education. I think they would be better off if they would borrow the money and earn that back instead of spending three years in the Army."

Biographical Sketch

Fred Bonzelet (1907-2005) was born on a farm in South Dakota and survived drought and the Great Depression before being inducted into the Army Air Corps in Fort Snelling (Minnesota). He served as an Ordnance Sergeant with the 33rd Fighter Squadron in Iceland, England, France, and Germany. During a brief stint as a medic, Bonzelet was shot in the leg, earning a Purple Heart. After the war, he was a carpenter and bartender and he worked for nine years at a nuclear plant in Washington before relocating to Madison, Wisconsin. He was a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2004.
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2004.
Transcript edited and abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2009.

Interview Transcript

John: All right, this is John Driscoll, and today is June 22, 2004.

Fred: 1907. 26 of December.

John: Start over. You were born?

Fred: 1907. The 26th of December. Yea. I was raised on a farm. During the war, I quit farming and went to work at Badger Ordnance.

John: Okay.

Fred: And I got my greeting from Uncle Sam. I had to report. I went back home. I still took care of my cattle, about a hundred head of cattle. Got rid of them. And then I was inducted at Fort Snelling. And we were there about a week or two. There were five hundred of us and they took sixty of us and put us in the Air Corps Ordnance.

John: Okay.

Fred: Then we were there a while and I don't know how many of us, they sent us to the desert. The Mojave Desert. And we were there a little while, and then they shipped us, we went to Oregon. Five of us. They were so crowded, they had to keep people on the train. You know. Keep moving them around.

John: Okay.

Fred: And they sent me back to the Mojave Desert and I was assigned to a Air Corps Ordnance. There was sixty of us in the group. And we got our first drill there. The drill to start with. And then, I think it was in February, we were shipped, the day before Christmas, we had a party was leaving us, assigned to, they went to Massachusetts. And there was a big sandstorm that night. And when we got to Massachusetts, we were there, oh, I don't know. About a month or so, and then they called me in and they said, they gave me a slip, they said, "You're a corporal. You live up to them." Well it didn't take long, another colonel said, "You are my man," they said. "You are going to be in the ammunition section." Well, I said, "I don't know anything about it." "Oh, that's not a problem," he says. So then it didn't take long for Sergeant Taylor to come in. He said, "You are my boy." He said, "I got small arms aircraft weapons. Oh, I'll teach you," he said. So then we were shipped to Iceland. We were twenty-one days on the water. There were three hundred and fifty ships in the convoy.

John: Wow.

Fred: We lost the first two ships.

John: Oh, yea?

Fred: Only three survived off the ships, and one of them, well, they wanted to send him to England, they had to send him back to the States because he couldn't get back on. The one that I talked to, he said, there were thirty on the raft and he was the only one that survived. And there was another chaplain that was on there.

John: Wow. Oh.

Fred: But after I went, when we first got to Iceland, why, in the wintertime. They took us to the place where we were supposed to work in the shops; it was so windy, the guy said get there any way you can, if you have to crawl on your hands and knees. You would stand there and mark your time. It never got as cold as they said it would, then.

John: Oh, yea?

Fred: So we inspected the guns, we repaired guns. About two o'clock one morning, Sergeant Taylor come in. "Corporal," he says, "you have to get up." He says, "General Randall's plane crashed a couple of miles and we have to go up and get the guns off."

John: Oh, wow.

Fred: Summertime, it never gets dark there. It was daylight all the time. I went to the mess hall, and he said, "We can go around to the back. I been on KP before." The mess sergeant, "Oh," he says, "we have breakfast ready for you." We were sitting there eating, and two lieutenants come in. "We got the jeeps out in front. When you guys get ready, we'll be ready to go." So we got through, and Sergeant Taylor got in back of the wheel. I was sitting alongside of him. One of the officers comes and says, "Corporal, you get in the other jeep with me." So we start going through the rack of mountains there where the glaciers used to be, and he got kind of nervous. And he said, "Well, let's kind of slow down, let's slow down. I don't see where that other jeep is coming." Finally, we stopped. And he said, "There is something wrong. I got a feeling there is something wrong." We went a little further and he stopped again. And we stopped. And all of a sudden the weapons carrier came up real fast and he jumped in and was gone a while, and come back, and he said, "They tipped over." He said, "We'll have to go back. Sergeant Taylor is dead."

John: Oh, wow.

Fred: Then he says, "He was covered up. I couldn't look. His head was all caved in." So

we got straightened out, and he said, "Well, you are the only ordnance man I got with me. I got to depend on you now," he says. "We have to get those guns off that plane." It was a steep mountain, like this, small rocks. It was a four engine plane. One laid on top and two on the side, and caught fire. The only one survived was the tail gunner. He broke off from the rest of the plane. The first gunner I found was dead. I was thinking, "How in the heck am I going to load that?" I took my hammer and tapped the release. And all of them were like that. But they all released. And I had to pick them up and take them down. It was about the next day before we got back down and they were all waiting for us when we came back down. One guy, the colonel, it was cold. Have a colonel with his coat off. "I know you are cold," he says, "but I'm not taking that coat off." Then I took in, I was in charge of the shop with Sergeant Taylor. I made sergeant then. And I was in there for some while, and all of a sudden something happened, and Moser, Sergeant Moser was on detached service, 33rd Fighter Squadron. They brought him back and sent me to the 33rd Fighter Squadron. And I was in the 33rd Fighter Squadron for about nine months, taking care of the ammunition and stuff. And we were there, they shot down their first German plane.

John: Oh, yea?

Fred: These three Germans, they picked them up in the ocean in a boat and they were going to fly them to England. And one of the German prisoners pointed to one of the fellows, and "If my gun hadn't jammed, you'd be no more." They took a picture of him and they flew him away. And then I was in, when I come back from there, I was in the hospital. And then they grabbed me and put me in the infantry.

John: Oh, wow.

Fred: They shipped me back to England. And we were in England, we had to go back to training again. And there was quite a few of them there. And the day we come in, one of the lieutenants stopped me, and said, "I want all you non-coms to stop over here." None of us had our stripes on. He said, "I was surprised so many non-coms had so little discipline. The reason I called you over here," he says, "we come from the States, and we can't handle these men. These are seasoned men. I'm not telling you, I'm begging you, you have to help us. You have to help us, or we are out of luck." So then we all put our stripes on. I got the First Squadron. When we got through with that, we shipped to England, and I was in a replacement center for quite a while. I think it was the 95th I was with. I was up in the front lines for a while. They said they wanted to see me in headquarters. Come back and they said they were going to take my rifle away from me. "You may not like this, but we are losing our medics so fast we can't replace them. I looked at your record and you would make a good medic." "Yea, but I don't know anything about that," I said. "Oh, but we'll teach you." Somebody came in with a jeep and said, "I need two medics, and I need them right now." "Okay, you and you." So I was a medic. And I was about thirty days a medic, and I was shot through. I was carrying that

stretcher and I was shot through the leg. Then I was, that night they kept us in a house. Next morning, put me on the jeep. Two up there with a stretcher up there. They took me and dressed my leg up. One of the guys looked at it and here was another medic that was wounded. Then they shipped us back to England and we were all running around. What do you call it? And when I came out of convalescence in England, I was on detached service, or they gave us vacation for about a week or two. Then we were sent back to the ordnance. I wouldn't say the Air Corps, but there was transportation ordnance. And when I got there, they wanted me to run the shop. And I had to travel around taking care of the ammunition and stuff and had a group with me. And finally they shipped me again and they called me in and said they thought they were putting me in charge of the shop. And all of a sudden, I had this shop here. And I had ten German prisoners. I could speak that language. I used to speak that language. I used to interpret up at the front lines. That went on for, oh, yea, then an officer, a couple of brass officers come in and they said, "Let's see you over at the orderly room." I was wondering what the heck they were up to. "You Sergeant Bonzelet?" I said, "Yea." "We got a favor to ask you. Your CO says you will never have to go to the front line then." Well, I never heard that before. "But we need an interpreter, and we need him bad. We'll try to get you back as soon and as safe as we possibly can." So I went with them and went through them towns. This was the only road that goes through there. What they really wanted, they had to have someone to find directions. They was going to set up a new headquarters. They had the directions but they didn't know how to ask the Germans how to find the place.

John: Okay.

Fred: So one place comes out a tower. "Oh, *Obertour, ya, ya.*" [words in German.] I finally got them where they wanted and they brought me back. And then I run prisoner joint, and then I got out on points.

John: Where did you go in?

Fred: What?

John: Where did you go in? You said you went in at Fort Snelling?

Fred: Fort Snelling.

John: Where were you living then?

Fred: We lived in South Dakota but our address was in Minnesota.

John: Okay.

Fred: One time when we got ready to go overseas, we had to march about five miles to

fill out our will. So an officer sat down beside me and said, "What is your address back home?" I said, "Browns Valley, Minnesota." "Your township?" "Beckerd, South Dakota." "What?" He thought I didn't know what I was talking about. Another guy, an officer, comes over. "What's the matter?" "Well, he claims he's from Minnesota and his township is South Dakota." "Oh, that happens all the time," he says.

John: Okay. When you got out, Fred, you had the GI Bill. Did you use the GI Bill?

Fred: The what?

John: The GI Bill. For college, housing, anything?

Fred: No, no, I never used that.

John: Okay.

Fred: When I got the disability. I had the leg, ten percent.

John: Okay. You got shot in the leg?

Fred: Yea. Got shot through the leg. There is two bones, and the bullet went through them and it was in my leg. And the doctor said. if it hit one of the bones, I would be crippled for life.

John: Ah, what did you do after you got out?

Fred: I was on construction. A carpenter. When I first come home, I was home and I don't know whether I should tell this or not. There was a young fellow in town there. He raped some girl and everybody was afraid of him. And we were standing in the liquor store and one farmer said to another GI, "Say, there is a place that serves steak for dinner. I'll buy you each a steak." So we went down there and we were sitting there having a beer, and here this guy come in. And he grabbed the guy's beer. And I said, "Leave that beer alone. That's not yours." He grabbed mine. I said, "Look, you heard me." I said, "If you're smart, you'll leave." Oh, he was such a smart, tough son of a bitch, he jumps up. I hauled off and knocked him unconscious. He got up. Nobody said a word. We had dinner and everything, and in a couple of days the mayor came and said, "We had a meeting the other night, and we need another cop. We was wondering if you wouldn't take the job as the cop." "No," I said, "I'm not interested." "Well," he said, "we need another bartender. Down at the liquor store." I said, "I might take that." So I took that and just tended bar there until spring. And I still belonged to the union. I picked up my card and I was going to go to St. Paul, and they said, "You might as well stay here. We got a lot of work here." So I stayed here until, oh, there was an atomic plant in Washington. I decided to go there to get a job. And I worked there for

about nine years and finally somebody must have run out of money. And my wife, we got married and I had a house trailer. I went to Washington in the house trailer. And we come back here, and I been working here ever since. Construction.

John: I see.

Fred: So, you know about as much as I do.

John: Well, this is a tremendous story. Every story is different, but you guys saved the world. You did.

Fred: That time when I had the German prisoners. One of them would do something wrong and I'd reach up and straighten it for him. And he says, in a little different German, but like mine, "That silly guy doesn't know anything." And the other guy says, "Yea, he's smarter than you think." And another one, he was enclosing a jeep, and he had a younger fellow with him, and all of a sudden he come and shouted, "You shouldn't be acting like that when there is an officer around." I didn't know he was one. And when we got back home, I used to hang around the garage. I had a '27 Chevy, and it didn't have shatter proof glass in it. And one day, he said, "Fred, let me put some shatter proof glass in that." We got to arguing about it. He wanted \$17. He dropped to \$8. But he said, "You got to stay here and help." He took that glass and he said, "Now, look here. I'll cut it and break off a piece. If you turn it over and cut it, it will break." So when I had the German prisoners over there, an officer comes and says, "As long as we are going to have glass in that jeep, we might as well have shatter proof." So I brought that piece of glass over to the guy who was fixing it, and he says, "It won't work." I said, "Why not?" [Words in German.] "It will break all to pieces." "Turn it over," I said. "I'll cut it." Who ever thought a thing like that.

John: That is something. Fred, did you join any veterans organizations? VFW? Or the American Legion, or that?

Fred: Did I what?

John: Did you join any vets organizations?

Fred: I belong to the American Legion and the Vets, too. I am a paid up Vet. You pay so much and you don't have to pay any more.

John: What about reunions?

Fred: Huh?

John: Did you ever do any reunions?

Fred: No. I wasn't very active. I used to go to their card parties and their meals and stuff like that when they have them. I never even paraded. The only time I paraded was while I was still over in France. Fourth of July we had a parade. I was sick of that parading business.

John: Oh, yea, I know. How long, overall, were you in? How many years?

Fred: I was in three years and two months.

John: Okay.

Fred: I was never home from the time I went in until I got out.

John: What, looking back at it, what do you think about it now?

Fred: What?

John: It took three years out of your life. What do you think about that?

Fred: Well, I'll tell you. When we was getting ready to go overseas, the colonel come in so drunk he could hardly stand. "I envy you guys. I wish I could go along with you. I envy you guys." Then the chaplain got up, and he said, "You boys, every minute you spend in your life, your private life is wasted. I know none of you want to go home until this is over." So he just about said the whole thing.

John: Yea. Okay.

Fred: I am almost disappointed when people go to join the Army so they can get an education. I think they would be better off if they would borrow the money and earn that back instead of spending three years in the Army.

John: Yea. That time is gone. It is just gone.

Fred: And those heroes they make. All wars have to have some heroes in them. Wait till that one sergeant, wait to the boys come back and see what big heroes they are. That is the sad part of it.

John: That is a remarkable story. Anything else you want to put on here?

Fred: No. A lot of funny things happened over there. There was a dead-end kid in the hospital. He was getting pretty well. "Boy," he said, "I'd like to go to [someplace] but I don't have a uniform." Well, one guy there, he was a cop in civilian life. Chicago, or New York. He was a big guy. This was a little dead-end kid. He handed him a pair of his ODs. He put them on and the belt come up to here. He reached over and got the jacket out, and he put it on with the pants. So about a

couple weeks later, I was running around with a paratrooper who wanted to go someplace when we were in the hospital. I got a pass to go. The paratrooper said, "Gee, I wish I had known that. I'd have got a pass." The dead-end kid says, "Here, take my pass from last night. If you work it right, you can get through the gate." So he took it. We went out, handed him the pass going through. We were standing at the bar and he looked, and he had given him the pass from the night before. He was standing down the bar at the other end. I said, "Come here. How come you gave him your pass?" "Oh, I knew you guys could get through. I climbed over the fence." One of the girls looked at him and said, "You sure look a whole lot different than you did the other night."

John: Where did you get discharged from?

Fred: Huh?

John: Where did you get discharged from?

Fred: Fort Snelling. No, not Fort Snelling. Down here, in Wisconsin.

John: Fort Sheridan?

Fred: Yea.

John: Okay. Well, that is quite a story.

Fred: We had one colored guy, he drove a truck. I don't know why he was in the hospital, but he was telling, "I was driving that truck with a load of ammunition on it. I was supposed to cross that bridge, there. And I was scared to cross that bridge. I knows then Jerries is going to blow that bridge up. I ain't going to drive." And an officer come up and said, "You got to take that over. The boys need that ammo." "I is not going to cross that bridge. I don't want to die." He points a gun at him and says, "You is going to die right here or you is going to cross that bridge." "I shook. The whole truck just shook. like that. I revved it up, I revved it up. I didn't drive across that bridge. I flew across that bridge." And another one was Navy. He got hit by shrapnel and was laying on his stomach, and the nurse said, "Put your leg out." "I just can't do that. I just can't." She said, "What do you know about that?" Somebody said, "What were you? What happened?" "Well, I got hit by shrapnel." "Were you advancing?" "Hell, no, man. I was retreating."

John: Okay. Anything else you want to touch on?

Fred: No, I don't think. I think you are disappointed in what you heard so far.

John: No, no.

Fred: There is a lot of things I can't think of. You know, those people who write them funnies and stuff. Everything you read in the funnies there is a person like that.

John: Yea. Yea.

Fred: Then when we was going up, some officer from the South sat down. "You know, before I come in the Army, I thought everyone from the North was a son of a bitch. I find that there are a lot of nice people up there." He says, "Too bad we have to go through something like this to find out a thing like that."

John: That's a good point.

Fred: And then, we had a little Dago there. One day we were supposed to give blood. I said to the officer, "What if we have a cold?" "Well, I'll find out about it. Well, if we were sick or had a cold." We were out in the field one day and they come and they want the sick guys that hadn't give blood yet. He said he'd take them in. Well, the little Dago, he couldn't keep up with the rest of them. I told the others, "You go ahead and I'll take him in." Went to the barracks and we called the officer. "You wait there until somebody calls us." Nobody called us. The next morning, the lieutenant comes by. "How did you feel since you give blood?" I said, "We didn't give no blood." "What? Well, you had a good day off." But a couple weeks later, all of a sudden, I had to take them in. And here was that little Dago. I told the guys to go ahead. We got in, and I went and told him now was the time we had to go give blood. And we got ready to go, and the officer said, "You got one guy here that passed out." I look, and here was the little Dago passed out. Well, we had to stay and take him in. What I was getting at, when we crossed the Channel in the ship, we had a drill to jump into the landing boat, or barge. An officer looked at me, he says, "You think you could make that?" I said, "I will try." One was higher than the other. They were bound together but they had a net between them. I stepped over and got in. And they said, "Now take your field pack off and get me in. Take mine. Give me your hand and now we'll help the rest of the guys." Here come that little Dago. He was ready to fall in between the boats. I grabbed him and jerked him in. I said to the officer, "Why on earth do they let a guy like that in the Army?" "Well," he said, "anybody can pull a trigger." I said, "Well, if he is pulling a trigger, he's pointing the gun the wrong way. I know what you mean." But they had to fill a quote. They didn't care who they put in. Then another time, when we was in the replacement center, I had the first squad. And I just took them alphabetically. And you want particularly an older guy. You know, he says, "I don't want to cause you any trouble." But, he said, "I can't stand alongside a Nigger. I was brought up that way with colored guys." I said, "Okay, stand in the back of the line." And a couple days later, he come and sat down and he said, "You know, I had a hernia when I come in the Army. And they said you might as well, you won't have to go overseas, anyway. But you might as well have it fixed." So I had it fixed. And I was sick. I went to our family doctor and he looked at me, and he said, "Who in the hell butchered on

you?" I come back to the company, and I reported, and two days later I was on a ship list to go overseas. Now, he said, "I can't keep up. I can't climb over a fence or a hedgerow." I don't know what happened to him.

John: Wow. I am going to turn this over.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

Fred: The cold I ever had. When we went to England, I says, "This is the coldest I ever. And in England, it starts raining, and it keeps on raining all day long. They never have thunder and lightning there. And then it tapers off, like that. When you are in Iceland, in the winter time the sun just comes up and goes under. And in the summer time it is daylight all over.

John: That is a remarkable story. When I get this back to the museum, they'll have someone type it up and they'll send a copy to you. So you'll have a copy of it. Anything else you want to add?

Fred: Tring to think of some of the stuff that happened. When we were in Iceland, the Stukas, you know, they speak the Norwegian language. They have a dead language. So when something new comes, a car, they call it a truck on wheels. And they sit there with a rake, hay, the wind is all over, they rake hay, cut hay. And they haul it in. They have ponies. But they put the hay on the ponies back, they tie the one pony to the other's tail to haul them in. And then in the summer time they raise potatoes. Just little marbles. One day in the mess hall, the sergeant says, "Watch this." They were just coming back from dinner. They were having potatoes. We have potatoes. He jumped over and put a big potato before they start collecting. All of a sudden, they found that one.

John: What was it like going over on the ships?

Fred: What?

John: What was it like on the ships?

Fred: We were twenty-one days on the water.

John: Wow.

Fred: We had 350 ships in the convoy, and like I told you, we lost the first two ships. We had a corvette going around us all the time. They called it Submarine Junction. The Germans had a lot of submarines down there. And one day we had a storm, and the captain said, we're going full ahead, standing still. And we'd go on that one deck and it would roll us up. The water was going over the top of the other deck. And where that ship went down, they said that water was so cold, in a

few seconds you were unconscious.

John: Yea. Hypothermia. Yea.

Fred: The Stukas, when they go into a store, they don't buy something. They charge it. We had to pay, though. They pay by the month, whatever they, and fishing is the only thing. There is no lumber on the island whatsoever. And they had that hot water spring at Reykjavik, in fact, they heated the whole city from the hot water spring.

John: From underground, yea. I've heard that. I was in Reykjavik for a couple days. Not much there. A lot of rocks.

Fred: When I was transferred to the 33rd Fighter, one day Captain comes, when we had to pay, we didn't have to. Forget about it. The big shots come there. I was just coming back from eating dinner and the major comes running up with a jeep. "Sergeant," he says, "the brass wants to see you down at the ammunition dump.?" So I got in the jeep and drove down there, and they said, "How come you have that five hundred pound bombs separate from the rest of them?" I said, "They are exuding." They said, "Is there any danger?" I said, "In case of fire." "Oh." He jumped in my jeep and drove off. Couple of days later, Captain Durkin comes down. He was a nice guy. I liked him. "Say," he said, "we got some notice that there are some bombs we have to destroy." And I said, "I do." And he said, "Do you know how to do it?" And he said, "No, I got a sergeant knows how to do it." He said, "You know how to do it?" I said, "Hell, no." So we got some from the engineers and we put a cracking box over it. We put one of the five hundred bombs and packed it and we blew that up. It tore a hole in the ground you could probably put a jeep in it. The last one we had water down there. So it was all over with, the evening, sitting in the barracks and the telephone rang. It was Captain Durkin, he said, "I am ready to leave, at the air port, and I would like to talk to you before I leave. You know, we were in trouble." I said, "What happened?" "That stuff blew over in the other cord and there were people putting up paint there, and pieces flew over."

John: Oh, wow.

Fred: But he said, "I got it all straightened out, but I thought you better hear it from me if there is some trouble." And then one time, all of a sudden I got notice he wanted a strict record of all the ammunition and bombs you have here. Didn't have a piece of paper there long. I happened to think of the first sergeant of the squadron, the service squadron there. "Oh, yea." he said. He got some portfolio out. I knew a little about lost and found and he filled that all out. About a month later, they figured I never said nothing. The new captain comes out. "Say," he says, "I'd like to see your records." I showed him some. "Hey, wait a minute. Wait a minute. This is really something. You done a wonderful job here." He told me something

else that I was supposed to do. I would never do it. I would have made staff sergeant if I had.

John: Okay, well, this is a remarkable story. When they write the story of the war, they won't write about, they are not going to write the stuff you are telling me here. This will be in the archives. They've got about eight hundred interviews in there now.

Fred: What?

John: They have about eight hundred interviews in the archives, now.

Fred: I was just thinking, I'm not very good when I tell stories.

John: It is a real story, though. It is true. Okay.

Fred: When you are my age, when you think of all the people you've run across, you wonder how you covered all that distance you did in the time you were in. I was born on the South Dakota, during the dry years when we didn't have rain, in the Depression, when we didn't have rain for three years. We had sand storms, broad daylight and it was pitch dark. I was out dragging one day, I couldn't see. I unhitched the horse and turned him loose, and I had to find myself along the fence to get back to the barn. An old Indian explained that the air and the dust is all up in the air, and the wind rolls it back and brings it right straight down. And grasshoppers, people got stuck in the road with the grasshoppers when they drove over them. If they hit a cornfield, they'd clean it out slick and clean.

John: Okay. I am going to wrap this up. And I need to get...

[End of Interview.]