

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
THOMAS H. BRUSVEEN
Infantryman, United States Army, WWII
1999

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Brusveen, Thomas H., (1908-2000). Oral History Interview, 1999

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Recording: 1 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videocassette (ca. 80 min.); ½ inch, color.

Abstract

The Blanchardville, Wis. native discusses his World War II service with the 31st Chemical Decontamination Company focusing on his experiences landing at Omaha Beach and moving through France. Injured shortly after his induction, Brusveen touches upon chemical training, role as a mail carrier with the 31st, and giving haircuts to soldiers and officers. He relays his experiences training at Exeter (England), eating C rations, and preparing for the D-Day invasion of France. Landing at Omaha Beach on June 7th, he describes his first impressions of the beach, problems caused by animals like jellyfish and sand crabs, and burial of dead American soldiers. Brusveen comments on changes in the Army's promotion table, moving through the French countryside, and celebrating once he and his unit reached Paris. Also touched upon are a parade in Paris during which someone opened fire on civilians, guarding city officials in Luxembourg (Germany), using a code in letters to his wife, being under a bomb attack in Noës (Germany), and interacting with civilians. He provides an interesting discussion of his wartime experiences and civilian interactions, comparing them to recent visits to Europe.

Biographical Sketch

Brusveen was drafted into the Army at age thirty-four and served with the 31st Chemical Decontamination Company. After the war, he returned to Monticello (Wis.) and his civilian occupation as a barber.

Interviewed by Dr. James McIntosh, 1999.

Transcribed by Nathan King, 2003.

Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

Interview Transcript:

- James: This is July 2, 1999. We're talking to Tommy Brusveen [he pronounced it Bruce-veen]
- Brusveen: [phonetically] Bruhs-veen, we pronounce-
- James: I wondered about that.
- Brusveen: Yeah, we pronounce it "Bruhs-veen." In Norway, of course, it's [phoenetically] "Brew-sven." And a lot of people say [phonetically] "Brew-sven" here, now, yet. Lot o' the Norwegian people. So, I have some articles that I wrote up at the beginning of my Army career – army life. If you'd like to have me read a little bit of it, it would include a bunch of that, but if you just wanna ask me something –
- James: [unintelligible] prefer spontaneous conversation –
- Brusveen: [chuckling] OK.
- James: - over anything else. As a matter of fact, you should understand that – two things – one is, we need to have you OK us doing this, taping this.
- Brusveen: Y – Yeah, well, that's no problem.
- James: Right. Listen. If you can just sign that [unintelligible] the State of Wisconsin doesn't feel like it's taking advantage of you - because all we do is publish it with the others.
[long pause]
Super. Alright. The other thing I want to tell you is that, uh – well, if you put down here the main points – the facts of the case – but what we really want to hear from you is not the details of where everything was going on elsewhere, we're interested in what went on within 20 feet of you, and what your experience was at any particular time. That's the kind of thing that you don't find in History books. You understand? That's the kind of thing that *only you* can tell us. And that's why it's so important that we get it, because the books don't tell it. Because personal remembrances are the things that are really – [unintelligible] - that give more insight of what things were like than any other avenue. Simply stating the facts isn't quite the same. But, I do have to get some information. You were born in?
- Brusveen: In Blanchardville. December 25 –
- James: A Christmas baby!
- Brusveen: Yeah.
- Woman: Oh, wow.
- Brusveen: Ninteen-eight.

James: 1908. Blanchardville.

Brusveen: It was out in the country. [Interviewer started talking at the same time] It was out in the country, where I was born. But, uh, [interviewer starts to say something, then stops] Blanchardville –

James: Were you a barber before you went in the service?

Brusveen: Yes. Yeah. I started barbering at 32.

James: And you went into the army at, uh –

Brusveen: July 4th, I left here. I was inducted the 21st of June.

James: What year?

Brusveen: '44.

James: You went in in '44?

Brusveen: Mm-hmm

James: Late.

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: You were a volunteer?

Brusveen: No.

James: You conscripted?

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: And what unit were you with, then, Tommy?

Brusveen: I was with the 31st Chemical Decontamination. That's what we had our training for. So if the Germans had used gas –

James: [to woman] Are you getting this?

Woman: No, wait a minute.

James: Start over on that sentence.

Woman: I was with –

Brusveen: I was with the 31st Chemical Decontamination. 31st Chemical. And, uh, that's what we had our training for. If the Germans had used gas, we'da had to gone in with slurry suits and take slurry to neutralize the poison.

James: Tell me what a slurry suit is – I'm not familiar.

Brusveen: Well, it's a rubber suit that's air-tight. Yeah.

James: Now, the 31st Chemical is part of what division? Do you recall?

Brusveen: I don't know. We weren't really attached to – we were attached to, I think, the 12th Army Corps part of the time. I – [laughs]

James: That's – That's not important [unintelligible]. And your job in the military?

Brusveen: I was was primarily mailman. I had a rupture – I got a rupture in my stomach during the exercises. The – what do you call – the obstacle course. And so I got a rupture outta that and they, of course [unintelligible, painless??] mail carrier. Mailman.

James: They – they didn't fix it?

Brusveen: No. [pause] They just didn't.

James: So, when you went into service, where did you go in first?

Brusveen: I went from here to Fort Sheridan.

James: For basic, right?

Brusveen: Yeah, on the 4th of July. And then from there to Milwaukee, where we had our exams and our assignments, I suppose. So we were assigned to this chemical company in Texas. And we had just less than 2 weeks of training in Texas. And, uh, from there, after the two weeks – or, after the year, less two weeks – in Texas, why, we went to Patrick Henry.

James: And this is in the fall?

Brusveen: Forty – yes, yeah.

James: And not of '44. Must have been '43. You must have gone into service in '43.

Brusveen: Must have been in '43, yeah.

James: Because if you're gonna make the D-Day landing, that was in June of '44 –

Brusveen: Yeah. '44, yeah, yeah.

James: So it must have been '43 then.

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah. Must have been. I'm sorry.

James: Oh, that's OK. So, then, from there you went to go to – across the sea.

Brusveen: We were on the *Il-de-France* the night of Christmas Eve. But the boat wasn't seaworthy, so we had to come back. So, Christmas Eve we had a loaf of bread – somebody got a hold of a loaf of bread that we tore apart [chuckling] and that was what we ate for Christmas Eve. And, uh –

James: On your birthday!

Brusveen: Yes, yeah. [laughs] Yeah. Then of course, I got to go ashore again. So we left five, six days later on the *Il-de France* – er – *Queen Elizabeth*. *Il-de-France* was the one we were on first. We went on the *Queen Elizabeth* and went unescorted overseas.

James: Because it'd go fast enough that –

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah. They had speed, and so they thought they could outmaneuver any submarines.

James: And you landed where in France?

Brusveen: Landed at Greenock, Scotland.

James: Oh.

Brusveen: And went to – Greenock – we went to, uh, England – Exeter. Exeter, England. And then from Exeter, after a couple, three days there, we went to – I've got more details that would have been good in our History book. And I looked for it the other day, and I don't know what became of it. So I'm gonna have a copy made. Now that date might not be right – exact time on going from Exeter to Torquay. From Torquay – we were there until – well we got there – we were there most of the winter. And Torquay is known as “the Naples of England.” It's a beautiful city. So we enjoyed ourselves at Torquay. Then we had part of our amphibious training there on Slapton Sands. I don't know whether you've heard of Slapton Sands.

James: Well I know about the mix-up on Slapton Sands –

Brusveen: Oh, do you?

James: - they allowed the U-Boat to come in and sink that –

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: -one ship. We lost 700 soldiers.

Brusveen: Yeah, 749, wasn't it?

- James: Yes.
- Brusveen: And that was a terrible thing.
- James: Did you watch that happen?
- Brusveen: No, but we had training there on that same spot.
- James: But not at the same time.
- Brusveen: No, no. We were there ahead of that time. I think the 9th of April. No, that wasn't the 9th of April. The 9th of April was when we were hit and bombed. But, we had part of our training up in the Moors of England, and part of it was on the amphibious landings in preparation for –
- James: What did you do when you were training for amphibious landings?
- Brusveen: We'd just go out into the water and wade out, and that's about all we did. And we did, of course, have to get on a boat again, somewhere. You know. But that's about all we did as far as the amphibious part.
- James: Did you carry a rifle?
- Brusveen: Yeah, yeah. And the funny part of it was – at Exeter – I went in there with a bad cold and I went into the water – was in the water and wet all day – and we tried to dry up in a Quonset hut, then, and I dried up and got rid of my cold. You know, after being all wet and fighting a cold, yet.
- James: During the training time – when it was quiet – you cut any hair?
- Brusveen: Yeah, yeah.
- James: I would think that they would – once they found out that you were a barber, all the boys would wanna –
- Brusveen: Yeah, yeah, there was a couple, three of us. Tony Lazzaro was another one. He was a good friend of mine. I've got some pictures with Tony here, out by the Cologne Cathedral. We're standing by the tank that held out as the last spot in Cologne. And when I think of it, I want to tell you I got the flag – the swastika flag that was flying over the Cologne Cathedral. And it's in the museum in Stoughton.
- James: Oh, my goodness.
- Brusveen: Yeah.
- James: How did you get that?

- Brusveen: Somebody from the front – we were close behind the boys in the front, so, that’s how I got it. I had it here in the parade – in the Monticello parade here one year.
- James: Oh. Is it a big flag?
- Brusveen: Yeah. Big one. Huge. I’m not sure how long it would be, but it would be 15 foot long?
- James: How was the food before you went into battle?
- Brusveen: Uh, never complained too much about that. We had C-rations and then – C-rations, of course were the ones for the compact, existing subsistence type of food. The food wasn’t too bad. No, I didn’t –
- James: And you got mail regularly?
- Brusveen: No, no. My wife didn’t get mail here for six weeks after the Normandy invasion. So this was a bad time for the people here.
- James: Right. So, then – I’m trying to end up the training before you get into combat. Did you do any other than the couple days at Slapton Sands?
- Brusveen: Uh, well, yes, we of course had extended order drill training to stay in physical shape, yeah. And other than –
- James: Did they give you any training for this chemical unit?
- Brusveen: Oh, yes. Yeah, we had some of that, too. Yeah.
- James: Tell me about that.
- Brusveen: Well, we have to go into the areas where the gas – the particular types of gas – were. And have to get a little smell of it, so you’ve got a little familiarity, there, you know, with the type of gas, and, uh – we never fascinated that part of it too much, but, we had to have a little of that.
- James: That was very unpleasant?
- Brusveen: Yeah. Most of it pretty stinky and –
- James: Now your little unit that you were with – how big a group was that? Was that a company, or, a –
- Brusveen: The company we had was just about 200 men.
- James: Right.
- Brusveen: Yeah. About 200 men.

James: And you all did this same thing?

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: And what was your rank, then, Tommy?

Brusveen: A Corporal Technician.

James: Corporal Tech?

Brusveen: Yeah. They had to change [laughs] they had to change the table of organization, I guess they called it – the number of different officers or different ranks – and so I was one of a few that were demoted for a while -

James: Oh my goodness.

Brusveen: - because they had to change the table of organization.

James: Uh huh.

Brusveen: But I told ‘em that I wanted it on there “because of no fault of man involved.” So that’s on my –

James: Service record.

Brusveen: - service record.

James: Did they change your pay, too?

Brusveen: Yes, I think that was changed. But of course, our pay was so little - \$20 or something like that. Fifteen, twenty dollars.

James. Before you left England, then, did they give you some French money? Or some scrip? Or anything like that?

Brusveen: I don’t remember – just. We had some of it, but of course there was no place to use it whether we got that after we were in on Normandy, or where we got that. But we had some.

James: I see.

Brusveen: Of course I’ve got a lot of German money.

James: They gave you German money?

Brusveen: I’ve got stacks of that down here.

James: But you picked that up when you got there?

- Brusveen: Yeah, yeah.
- James: OK. What all – did they give you anything special before you hopped on the boat to cross the water?
- Brusveen: I thought we'da had seasick tablets, you know, or something, but I don't recall that either.
- James: You had to sit out in the English Channel for an extra day.
- Brusveen: Yeah, yeah. A little more than that.
- James: It must have been unpleasant. Most people [who] have talked to us say that was the worst part.
- Brusveen: Yeah, we knew we were –
- Another voice: We aborted the landing and did it the next day. The three of us –
- Brusveen: We boarded the plane, see – the ship at Cardiff, Wales.
- James: And everybody was sick.
- Brusveen: Yeah. A lot of people were sick. But, of course, everybody was lying around on the deck – on the hard deck, you know. And something, while I think of it – while we were waiting to go to Cardiff for debarkation, I went up to this castle which was on top of a hill – had to cross over a canal that was dug from the river upstream and the water from that was powering a woolen mill further down in at Cardiff. But this water was – I had to cross that. Then further up on the hill was a castle. And when I got home again, I read that this is the castle that Hess was held in.
- James: Yes, oh.
- Brusveen: Yeah, was confined there.
- James: Yeah. He was a little crazy.
- Brusveen: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- James: Ok, so we gotcha over to Cardiff and you're gonna take of for Normandy from there?
- Brusveen: Yeah, we got –
- James: They put you on an LST?
- Brusveen: I suppose that's what it was, yeah. It wasn't a –
- James: The front end opened up –

Brusveen: No, no, no, no, not these. We had to go down the ladders – rope ladders – to get into the LS – the, you know, landing craft. And, uh, of course -

James: [unintelligible] LCI.

Brusveen: And the ramps went down and you were automatically goin' out too.

James: You landed at Omaha.

Brusveen: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

James: How long had the landing been going on when they pushed you into the water?

Brusveen: Well, the first ones went in, I guess around 6:00 –

James: Right.

Brusveen: the morning before on the 6th.

James: And you?

Brusveen: I went in the 7th, during the day.

James: The next day.

Brusveen: Yeah, the next day.

James: I see.

Brusveen: But there wasn't any dead or anyone – no bodies picked up or anything.

James: Oh, they were still there, you mean?

Brusveen: Yeah. They were still shelling two boats that were stuck in the sand after the tide went out. The high and the low in the tide on Omaha Beach was twenty-four feet – the high and the low part of it – so that a boat that would get in on the sand would get stuck on the sand if the tide was goin' out.

James: At least for 12 hours.

Brusveen: Yeah, for 12 hours, at least. So that – there was two boats – two engineers – I'm not sure of the numbers of them anymore, but I think I have pictures in my collection of black and white prints that I would have that. The Germans were still shelling – were still shelling those two engineers. And I heard that while I was there that some of those bodies had to be shoveled out they were just so massacred.

James: Oh.

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: Macerated.

Brusveen: Macerated, yeah. Not massacred.

Another voice: They were already dead.

Brusveen: Yeah [chuckles]. Anyway.

James: So your job as you stepped ashore in France – what did someone tell you to do?

Brusveen: Dig a hole. Find a place to dig a hole. And they didn't say – hardly said where. But the place was – where I had to dig in – was just a short space down to the water. Because when the tide was in, if I had dug my foxhole this way, [James laughing] I woulda had one end in the water when the tide was up.

James: I see.

Brusveen: But, as it was, I dug this way. And that is, of course, in with the big crabs and sand lice. They were there in with the gravel. And, uh –

James: So as you were digging in the sand, you were also digging these animals, too, then?

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah, and all wet. And you had to crawl in and try and lay down and pretend –

James: How did you deal with those – crawling around?

Brusveen: It seemed like you sorta half forgot 'em with the other noise that was goin' on. You know?

James: Did they bite you?

Brusveen: No, no. I was more afraid of that type of fish – a jellyfish –

James: Oh, yeah?

Brusveen: - that was – there was thousands of those in the water.

James: Yeah, they'll sting you.

Brusveen: Yeah, I was more afraid of those.

James: They'll sting you even if they're on the beach. They don't have to be in the water to sting ya.

Brusveen: Oh, is that right?

James: Oh, yeah. People learn that in Florida. So you were there for a couple hours, two days?

Brusveen: No, we were there until that night. Then the next morning we started carrying –

James: So, on day three, you started inland.

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: OK.

Brusveen: We carried bodies – you know, that -

James: That were strewn along the beach.

Brusveen: Yeah. There was one washed – now, in this article, she had it – it could be into my foxhole, or could be into my foxhole and this way a little bit. It was up *to* my foxhole. I didn't have any buried or dead that floated up *into* my foxhole with me. But they were right up against the foxhole.

James: And where did you carry those dead folks?

Brusveen: In a temporary cemetery there.

James: And just about – tell me about how far inland what that –

Brusveen: It was just part of the – [talking to someone else] that's the recording I had to get for Crystal – it was part of the, uh. [laughs] Now, what did you ask? This threw me.

James: How far inland was it?

Brusveen: Not too far. This was part of the whole beach, except the road. There was a road that went past that area.

James: The cliffs are pretty high there.

Brusveen: And the cliffs – beyond the cliffs and beyond where I was – where I came ashore – they had a tank trap, and then you had the minefield, and then you had the steep cliffs. But then, this here had been cleared so that – this was a little further up where they started burying. And when Crystal and I went back there in '84, we talked to a lady that was living up in – not too far, there – but had been her parents' home – and she told us where we had the temporary cemetery, and showed us where the temporary gravestone was, or the marker.

James: She still lived there?

Brusveen: Yes, she's still there.

James: And she lived through the whole thing?

Brusveen: No, they, of course all moved off. There wasn't a single house. The Germans cleared everything out – off of Normandy, except one house way in the end. And we were at that house – I can show you pictures of where we were sitting, waiting for the fellas coming in to parachute back again. Now, 50 years ago at the commemoration, we were sitting there at that house – watching these parachutes coming in, and boys that had parachuted 50 years before. So that was interesting. But that's the only house that was left intact. Otherwise, the Germans eliminated everything, you know, for the – in this –

James: To make the bunkers.

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah.

James: OK. So, then, how long were you on the beach, and then –

Brusveen: We weren't on the beach too long. Maybe – let's see – we started inland not, - we only carried them that one afternoon – or before noon, I guess it was. So, I didn't help carry [unintelligible] they were all taken care of because – well there was one body that I – we just omitted carrying. Part of his body was on this side of the halftrack, and part of his body – the upper part, torso – was on the other side of the halftrack. But the skin from the top part was just peeled off all the way down to his heels. And he was a dark-haired guy, and I can still picture [broken down] his face now.

James: Now, he was run over?

Brusveen: No, he got a flow [?] charge –

James: Oh, I see – and the halftrack went over him after he was dead, then.

Brusveen: I don't believe so – it didn't look that way. Half of him went to one side, then half of him went to the other side. That's the only thing I can – but I never –

James: So they just had a mass grave, then, there? They didn't try to separate 'em? Or did they?

Brusveen: They had separate graves for – with the markers. They –

James: They pulled their dog tags off them, now?

Brusveen: Yeah. The dog tags were taken off.

James: What did you do with the dog tags, now? What was the routine with the dog tags? Tell me that.

Brusveen: I helped carry over, then there was a gravedigger's detail that took care of that.

James: Oh, you didn't fuss with the dog tags?

Brusveen: No, no.

James: Because I know they always put one of the dog tags on the cross, on the marker.

Brusveen: Yeah, I guess they did, didn't they.

James: Yeah, see, then they have to save the others for the letters back home.

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: So after this, did you get fed on the beach?

Brusveen: Yes, yeah, yep.

James: Or did you just use your K-rations?

Brusveen: Oh, we used the K-rations. Oh yeah, oh yeah, yep.

James: But that's all –

Brusveen: But we got to taste a little bit of the German rations there, too –

James: Oh, now, see, this is good. Tell me about that

Brusveen: That was all dark bread. Real hard, dark –

James: You found that in the bunkers?

Brusveen: We found that with some prisoners.

James: Oh, that's right. Did you round up any prisoners, or was that out of your –

Brusveen: No, when we got in there was still sniper fire, besides the shelling of that – the 286ers, or the engineers – the little bigger boats were still getting shelled down on the water that was – on the sand. They were still shelling there. And then there was sniper fire up in the bluffs. And the Germans had a tremendous network of tunnels over there in Normandy. A tremendous network of tunnels.

James: You mean, from bunker, to bunker, to bunker?

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

James: So you found, uh –

Brusveen: I really didn't go into any of those bunkers, no.

James: And so you got your German bread from –

Brusveen: Yeah, um, from a German – dead German.

James: Ah, there we go. What did you do with the dead Germans? You didn't tell me about that.

Brusveen: No, we didn't take any – we never took care of them. They come and pick those up themselves.

James: Who did? The German prisoners?

Brusveen: I suppose there'd be German prisoners, but, because there was –

James: Who else?

Brusveen: Yeah, I dunno. Because there was Germans laying along the road, you know, here and there that were sniper shot. But, who took care of them there, I, I never gave a thought to. Details of that I didn't –

James: I understand. So, now, we're moving inland. Now where did you go?

Brusveen: We moved in, I would say, about a – not quite a mile, I don't believe. Trévières was the name of the little town right close by there. Trévières was the name of the little town. And we had gotten a hold of a bunch of lumber that was for packaging – package lumber. And we were building little shacks we were going to be staying there for a while, we thought, in this farmer's yard – farmer's pasture where they would come out and milk their cows – the French people did – milk their cows, and haul their water up to them. And I got to be pretty good friends of one of these people. Crystal and I went back there, and I went up to the door to this house, and she could see that I was an American, and she said "Est vous Tommy?" "Est vous Tommy." "Are you Tommy?"

James: Oh, my goodness.

Brusveen: Yeah, because we had – I don't think we had communicated any other way, because I never met them during the time – during the war in Trévières, but I think we communicated with letters afterwards, after I was home here.

James: Oh, how nice.

Brusveen: Yep.

James: Now, those people weren't too far from the beach. They stayed –

Brusveen: No, they weren't – no.

James: Did they leave during the –

Brusveen: I don't know whether they did or not [James started saying something inaudible]. The people that took us down from Vieux-Waleffe, Belgium was a pretty good haul to Paris, and from Paris down to the beach. They had to go out to Trévières and stay because they couldn't get in on the commemoration services there. They were really haughty at me.

James: Who?

Brusveen: Oh, these people. Because I couldn't get 'em in.

James: Now these people were from where?

Brusveen: Belgium.

James: And they were angry with you because they couldn't participate in some of the celebration –

Brusveen: Festival, yeah.

James: The fifty-year –

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah.

James: But that's [frustrated laugh] certainly not your fault.

Brusveen: No, it absolutely wasn't my fault. But they were just really nasty.

James: To *you*.

Brusveen: Of course I didn't – they were speaking French all of the time, but I understood part of it, and I – maybe I shouldn't put it on here – shouldn't repeat –

James: It makes no difference. Who cares?!

Brusveen: OK. Well, anyway, I told 'em, it's too bad the way you'd feel that we didn't let the Germans stay.

James: [laughter] They didn't have an answer for that?

Brusveen: No, he didn't. But – they were quiet for a little bit, but – they had a big party planned for us that night – a big party. The mayor of Vierville planned that we should be staying with this couple that we knew there out at Trévières. I had a chance to stay with – I told him in a letter later on, but they didn't get a chance to answer – that I was gonna be staying down there on the beach because I wouldn't have a vehicle. We were riding with them in their car, and I couldn't speak

the language as well as they could. So it would be much easier for them to stay down there, and he wouldn't have the qualifications to get in there anyway. They wouldn'ta got in there. I had a hard time getting in there – in Normandy.

James: But where were you trying to get that you couldn't get to?

Brusveen: To attend the services and the ceremony.

James: There was limited –

Brusveen: Yeah, oh yeah.

James: - space –

Brusveen: I've got my credentials [unintelligible] – and in here, I should have kept – or maybe let's not interfere now.

James: [in background] Not now.

Brusveen: Anyway, they said "We're goin' home." They were gonna leave us.

James: No transportation.

Brusveen: So we wouldn't have any transportation. But staying with these people down on the beach, there – Noella Sue was her name. Just a very fine lady. She spoke a fair English, even. And she took us in to her house and up to the place where they were having the party – and they had a wonderful party there. Even met two ladies that are goin to school in Madison to study Frank Lloyd Wright architecture, and I was thinking maybe I sent their letter, but I guess I haven't sent it yet. Yes, I did too send it. It was paper clippings and stuff about Frank Lloyd Wright's – you know – procuring money for maintenance of a place and something else about – can't remember what that was, but something else about the Frank Lloyd Wright estate there that I thought they'd be interested in.

James: So, now we're getting still further inland. Now, where'd you go then?

Brusveen: We stayed there for the, uh – oh, that's during the war. Yeah.

James: Yes.

Brusveen: We stayed there for a while – a few days – but we thought we were going to be staying there longer. We were building these shacks - I and another buddy. All of a sudden we got word we were movin' up, and we were heading for Paris. And we were there at the time that the bombs – or the bombers – were flying over to bomb St. Lo, which we enjoyed seeing immensely – because we knew where they were going. And, I think we counted fourteen-hundred bombers that were going over to bomb St. Lo. St. Lo was a fierce-fought place, there.

James: Yes. I know that from a crossword puzzle.

Brusveen: Did you go –

James: I've been there, yes. It's a crosswords – you see that was – the Germans held everybody up at St. Lo.

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah, and that's where part of the smoke cover – what do you call it now – anyway, they laid down a smoke cover, and they laid it down too close, and so they got some American boys.

James: Yes, I know about that. That happened several times during the war.

Brusveen: I don't doubt it.

James: A false pocket, you know –

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah.

James: They lost a lot of Americans because the bombing was a little too far –

Brusveen: Did you know anything about the bombing of Normandy the day before we went in there?

James: Well, I don't know which part you're talking about.

Brusveen: The Normandy beach.

James: Yes?

Brusveen: Omaha beach. There was a – some Frenchmen killed there, which they held against us quite a bit.

James: Who held it? The French people?

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: Because?

Brusveen: We had bombed them there. It was unintentional. Completely unintentional.

James: And this was before the landing –

Brusveen: Yeah, mm-hmm, yeah. Right before the landing.

James: There wasn't an extensive bombing.

Brusveen: It couldn't have been because it would have alarmed the German Army.

James: The Germans that that's where they're coming, so –

Brusveen: Yeah. I don't know how much truth there was to it – but I heard this, see.

James: Yeah, I would not put too much credence in it. If it was – it couldn't be very much, otherwise it would have alerted everyone.

Brusveen: It could – no – but they probably thought it was big at the time, you know. First one.

James: Yes.

Brusveen: But, anyway, that came to my mind here, so –

James: Tell me about going into Paris on the 25th of August.

Brusveen: I can't – [laughing] – I can't tell you everything that.

James: Why not?

Brusveen: [still laughing] I can tell you everything *I* did!

James: Oh, well that's what I want to know.

Brusveen: OK.

James: The other stuff I can read about.

Brusveen: Yeah, you can read about that. It was tremendous. Going in there, we stopped at – what was the name of the place – Rambouliet (??) – you know, where Marshall Pattan (??) – his estate wasn't too far out from Paris – and we stayed there overnight, getting ready for going into Paris. But, anyway, when I was hearing this about [difficulty pronouncing] Milosevic –

James: [correcting] Milosevic.

Brusveen: [repeating] Milosevic. I couldn't help but feel some of the memories coming back to me of – you know – when we stopped there.

James: Sure.

Brusveen: And then, of course, we got on trucks, then, from there, and rode on in to Paris. And of course the French people were just tremendously grateful to the Americans comin' in because they knew this was their liberation.

James: Yes. Did they ask you to put on your Class A uniform to this?

Brusveen: No, no, no.

James: OK.

Brusveen: No, but the first night then, of course, I slept under Marshal Clemensot's (??) statue, and it was a hard place to sleep – and I didn't get too much sleep because the fellas were running, and fellas had girls all over there, you know. And so –

James: Did you have a “companion” with you?

Brusveen: No, I didn't have one, no. Anyway, I slept there and [stops to think] I was just a little bit isolated – sort of alone. I was kind of alone. There wasn't anybody else sleepin' close to me or anything, even. But, uh –

James: Were the boys drinking all night?

Brusveen: Uh –

James: Or did the Army keep them pretty much under control?

Brusveen: I don't think there was too much drinkin' there. Now, the name of the man come and met me there in Paris is coming back to me – Andre was his first name, I think. He had a bottle of wine that he had saved for the liberation of Paris – that he wanted me to come home to him, to his home and share with him.

James: Wine? Champagne.

Brusveen: It was champagne. And I did. Andre Limbash. Andre Limbash! And, uh – [laughing] I tried to think of that name, and I couldn't. It's funny how when something else will come in. But he took me to his home, and he had a three-and-a-half year old girl – daughter – she sat on my lap during that time that I was there. The Mrs. didn't speak any English, but he could speak a little bit of English, and between the French that I knew and his English, we had a nice evening. We had a real nice evening.

James: How did you unit allow you to be away from them that long?

Brusveen: They – I don't think we asked anybody.

James: That's what I was –

Brusveen: [moment of realization] No, I *didn't* ask anybody. I know I had to ask to go on a pass in Paris, I was assigned as a company barber during the time we were there – for the officers. So I had to ask for a pass and a permit to leave *then*. But other than that I don't think that I did!

James: You were older than the average G.I.

- Brusveen: I think so. Yeah.
- James: By about ten years, I think.
- Brusveen: Maybe so. Average – yeah, yeah. Would be, now when I think of some of the ages of some of the boys that – you know – were with us in our company.
- James: In their young twenties, and you were in mid-30's.
- Brusveen: 32 or so, maybe, yeah.
- James: 35 according to the – your article in the paper.
- Brusveen: Oh, was it?
- James: Yeah.
- Brusveen: Maybe I was that old, eh? [Note: Brusveen was born in 1908]
- James: Yeah.
- Brusveen: Anyway, some of these things that I saw there was just a little bit difficult to believe it was reality.
- James: In Paris?
- Brusveen: Well, even in Paris, but in Normandy and the whole thing – you know.
- James: Like what?
- Brusveen: Well – Going up from the [pause for thought] the seashore – going up from Omaha up in to Paris, on our way. We were heading into the Falais Gap – this doesn't reflect – tell you really what you want to know – but going up there, having to think of this – that we were on the wrong road. And the Falais Gap was the largest contingent of German people – prisoners captured any place in the war. And that's where a Norman conqueror built a castle. There's a castle built there by a Norman conqueror, the –
- James: William.
- Brusveen: William the Great. Yeah, I think that's who it was. Have you read that? Are you reading that, or no?
- James: I've seen that.
- Brusveen: Oh, did ya? I wanted to see it, too. Because I'd read it, but I – we always took off on a different road.

James: And during the wartime you went past it.

Brusveen: It could have been, huh?

James: Probably!

Brusveen: Anyway, we were heading into that not knowing that we were heading into that German – a bunch of German empla[cements]-

James: Encampments.

Brusveen: Yeah, but we finally got wise, and so we turned around. But, that's one thing that took place there.

James: You get in among the hedgerows?

Brusveen: Well, we didn't have to do any fighting in the hedgerows.

James: Lucky.

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah.

James: That was difficult.

Brusveen: I'm reading a book right now with World War 1 by – I can't tell you what his name is – but it's a good book, and it's 'bout –on hedgerows.

James: So now, we're moving along, here. Then where?

Brusveen: Then, from – we were in Paris for a while. We were there 13 days, in Paris. And, we had the Gran Palais – and during the time we were there when that shooting started – I didn't tell you that, did I?

James: Not yet.

Brusveen: Shooting started during the parade –

James: In Paris.

Brusveen: Coming down Champs Elysées. And that was – the shooting started and came from the Gran Palais – the big palace. And General Clemensot's (??) statue was by the little palace, the Petit Palais. I've got so used to calling it that, that it comes to me easier to saying it in – you know – in French. But, anyway, that's where we stayed then. I and Charles Swanson. We had the boxing arena. But during that shooting, one bullet went through the door where we would have been working otherwise. Where we did work later – went through the window of the door.

James: You were doing what there?

Brusveen: Cutting hair. I cut hair there.

James: For the officers.

Brusveen: Yeah. But, during that time, during this parade, that shooting started. And I've got two pictures somewhere – I haven't gone to try to find them in my negatives – I've got thirteen, fourteen hundred negatives. Yeah, I had two cameras with me. And I have all of those negatives there. But, I never had a chance to go through them again. But I did get prints made of two of those. They weren't too good of pictures, but it showed the people running during that shooting. The funny part of this is where we were trying to take a picture there, forty years later – Crystal and I – this couple came up to us – this man had been a prisoner of the Germans for five years, and he was a very stooped old man - between the French and the English and everything we communicated fairly well – but this lady had been at this same spot – intersection – and remembered these people running that same day of the parade.

James: The shooters were Germans who are left over and did not evacuate when they –

Brusveen: I don't know howcome they were left there. I suppose they were caught there. There's always somebody left over to hold the rear – hold up the rear – or hang in there for the rear – and that's maybe where they were and what they were there for. But, the Gran Palais is what the Germans used as their headquarters – the German police – as occupation - [James said something inaudible in background] – [to James] the German what?

James: The police, perhaps.

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: The other – the German general, though –

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: - of course, was in the Hotel Maurice.

Brusveen: Were they?

James: The headquarters.

Brusveen: Oh, the headquarters?

James: Yeah.

Brusveen: Oh, was it?

James: Yeah.

Brusveen: I didn't know that. I understood that –

James: You read that book, *Is Paris Burning?* ?

Brusveen: No, no.

James: You should read that. That's the story of the evacuation of Paris.

Brusveen: Is that right?

James: Yeah, outstanding book.

Brusveen: The Mauritz. I heard that name, you know, over there.

James: Yeah. Right around from the continental [inaudible behind coughing]

Brusveen: Anyway, I thought it was quite a coincidence that this woman should tell me forty years later that she was at that same place where I took these pictures of these people running, you know, during the shooting.

James: How long were you in Paris?

Brusveen: Thirteen days.

James: And then?

Brusveen: Then we went on up toward – we were heading for – we went through Verdun. And we stayed in Verdun a couple, three days. In fact I sent home a sheepskin coat from Verdun.

James: And what were your duties at that time?

Brusveen: Just, uh – if there was any to be done, it was a little guard duty. We were supposed to be – well we were doing guard duty for the CIC, the same as the FBI would be here now.

James: Yes, it's counterintelligence.

Brusveen: Yeah, counterintelligence. And we had to do some guarding of those prisoners. We guarded some German ladies that had their hair all clipped off in Paris.

James: Were they German ladies, or French ladies who befriended the Germans?

Brusveen: I'm sorry, [pounding the table] they were French.

James: Right.

Brusveen: Yeah, good thing you –

James: French ladies who were consorting –

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah.

James: Yeah, they treated them badly. They hung a couple of them.

Brusveen: Oh, did they?

James: Oh, yes. Well, they were traitors.

Brusveen: Yeah. Good thing you caught that, because I didn't want the German ladies in there, but.

James: So, you're getting closer to Germany, here.

Brusveen: Yeah, we went through – up to – oh, they're long names. We stayed at each one of these two places, I think, one night, and then we headed for Luxembourg.

James: Ah.

Brusveen: Yeah. So, we were in Luxembourg. We had a beautiful place in Luxembourg. And there, I guarded the mayor of Luxembourg and the police chief of Luxembourg.

James: Why did they have to be guarded?

Brusveen: They were prisoners, and they were shot in a short time by Americans.

James: Whoa!

Brusveen: They were executed.

James: Oh, I see. They were –

Brusveen: Collaborators.

James: Collaborators.

Brusveen: Yeah, they were collaborators of the Germans. If they had collaborated with – and gone with the Germans – that's how they were saved by the Germans. But as soon as the Americans came in, and we heard from people around, you know, that they were collaborators of the Germans when they came, then Americans took 'em.

James: Did the Americans hang 'em, or did the [inaudible behind Brusveen]

Brusveen: They were executed. As what – I don't know.

James: - I would imagine.

Brusveen: No, I had their names – I have their names with me here, somewhere but –

James: It's all right.

Brusveen: - where I'd find that now, I don't know.

James: So, did you get to the Rhine River?

Brusveen: Then – let's see. We were in Luxembourg for fifteen or twenty days – we were there. But we did guard duty and that was mostly what we did there. And then we headed out for Aachen, and Eschweiler, and Stolberg was one place we stayed. Stolberg was a town where – I saw this in the paper after I was home here – because it showed the dragon's teeth right above there. And that was right above where we stayed, also, on the German Siegfried Line.

James (??): [barely audible] Dragon's teeth were pointed obstacles.

Brusveen: They were cement – made of cement, like this, see.

James: To prevent tanks – because that was –

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: [unintelligible] dragon's teeth.

Brusveen: Yeah. Anyway, there at Stolberg is where that thalydimide [?] was made – was manufactured.

James: Oh.

Brusveen: Because it showed that building in the paper.

James: Now, you're into Germany.

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: What was the reaction of the German people towards you?

Brusveen: We never had anything much bad.

James: Did you fraternize with them?

- Brusveen: Um, not too much. Only – I accidentally run into this Mr. Kempel, that would have been a brother to Mrs. Trickler in New Glarus. Accidentally run into him because he had a three-and-a-half-year-old girl that was in – they were makin’ garden out of a crater – a big shell had fallen –
- James: Bomb crater.
- Brusveen: Bomb crater, yeah – had fallen there, and it cracked their house all the way from the bottom up to the third story. And the wall was cracked all the way up.
- James: Houses were brick houses, or were they stone?
- Brusveen: They were pretty much stone, yeah.
- James: Stone.
- Brusveen: Stone and brick, yeah. Anyway –
- James: And this was a farm?
- Brusveen: No, this is in Moers, Germany. This is Moers, Germany. And [sounding it out] “oe” is an umlot in German.
- James: Sure.
- Brusveen: e-r-s. He found a camera and he wanted me to go with him out to take some pictures. And, uh, where we were settin’ up - we were gonna take a little pains and settin’ on tripods and everything, you know. This church – going over a little footbridge – over the little stream that was running through, past, near there – and this bomb crater was just not too far from where we were. So I spoke to the man, and I said “Eine schönes mächen.” And right away, he said, “Are either one of you from Wisconsin?”
- James: [laughter]
- Brusveen: [laughs along] And I said “Well, I am.”
- James: What a surprise!
- Brusveen: Yeah, I said “I am,” and he says, “Well, I’ve got three sisters in Wisconsin. One at Wyota, one at Platteville, and one at New Glarus.” And, of course, when he said New Glarus, the chills went up and down my spine, and I’m sure it did for him, too, because I didn’t say anything for a while. And the first thing he said was, “Would we come to his house?” And we met his wife, and she prepared a real nice supper for us. And he had some cheris wine – it really was good cheris wine. And that evening – we had a nice evening then up to that point yet. That evening I went over there with a whole bunch of stuff from the mess sergeant.
- James: Like what? Tell me.

- Brusveen: Chocolate and sugar, and, oh – see, there was some fruit or something. But the chocolate and the sugar, of course, and I think some butter and soap. Those are things that I remember that I brought for ‘em, and they were just so happy that –
- James: What about cigarettes?
- Brusveen: I didn’t – I never smoked there, so –
- James: You must have been the only G.I. in Europe that didn’t smoke.
- Brusveen: [laughing] Yeah, just about.
- James: [laughter] Of course, you could still bring him cigarettes, even if you didn’t smoke.
- Brusveen: Yeah, yeah. Anyway, he, in turn, gave me a clock that I want to show you in here. A spread eagle clock that his father had made out of the Black Forest, which I know he treasured. And I’ve been thinking about sending it back to Sigrid, you know, the daughter.
- James: Take it back.
- Brusveen: Yeah [chuckles] I wish I could. I wish I could.
- James: Do you correspond with her?
- Brusveen: Yes, once a year is about all. But she came here – this three and a half year old girl – she came here in ’66. In fact she was here at the time that the – President Kennedy was assassinated.
- James: That was ’63.
- Brusveen: Was it ’63? Huh? Yeah. I’m glad you brought that in, because I kind of searched my mind a little on that. And she was here, and that’s the time that she went home. Well, that’s the year she was here. And she got on the boat on the 13th of December, and why I know it’s the 13th of December? Because that’s my wife’s birthday – the 13th of December. And she had 21 roses wired to her from her father, on the boat there, yeah.
- James: Oh, how nice.
- Brusveen: And in ’66, that’s when we went over. ’63 was when she was here. But I was gonna also tell you that I wanted to look that up and see the year that Mrs. Strickler and Hammie - I can’t think of the one that was really our best friend - in Platteville. She was a very good friend of ours. But they came here with Henry Durst. Henry Durst lived in Monticello, here, and was a native of this area. But he went to Germany, and coming back again, he brought these three girls with him. And I thought I shoulda had the date of that, but I can’t quite think – sometime before, anyway, that he brought those three girls with him. And when the mother of Willy and the three girls came here, she had – she and two other ladies were standing on the sidewalk – they were

standing on the sidewalk and they were seeing a man coming there with a wheelbarrow – an officer was coming with a gun – and he had a shovel with him in the wheelbarrow. This man was gonna shovel his own grave – make his own grave – and this German was, you know, gonna put him in the grave. And these three ladies kinda protested this a little. In a day or so, we know that Mrs. Kempel (??) was arrested and they were held for three days as prisoners. And she thought that her life was in jeopardy, so she made preparations right away to come to the U.S.

James: When was this?

Brusveen: [pause] During the wartime. You know, during the wartime. But it would be the year that Mrs. Kimpel come, and she had been here just a very short time when I got home from the service. Because when they got news, I sent them the mail from Germany telling of this meeting of these people. I sent that in classified mail, you know, so that –

James: I don't understand how she could get out of Germany during wartime.

Brusveen: She got out through Italy, or down through there somewhere, but they took her – the gold out of her teeth. They took the gold out of her teeth, they took her luggage. All she had on when she got here was just her clothes.

James: Took the gold off her teeth?

Brusveen: They took the gold out of her teeth.

James: Out of one of their own people.

Brusveen: Yeah, but she was goin' out. I suppose that's why they probably let her go. I don't know.

James: I can't believe that. I've never heard of that.

Brusveen: I haven't either, but this is what I've been told.

James: You suppose that was the S.S. or just regular Germans. I can't believe regular German soldiers would do that.

Brusveen: I can't believe a German soldier would do it, either, but this is what I was told. Then I haven't heard anything to the different, you know.

James: So she just barely got here, then. Is she still alive?

Brusveen: No, no. Mrs. Kimpel, no.

James: Where did she live?

- Brusveen: She stayed with her daughters. Mrs. Gundersen, Reverend Gundersen at Wyota was the one. I heard that this Gundersen had been shipping goods and lard and materials to her German people during the war, which was a no-no.
- James: Yeah, it's hard to get that through, also.
- Brusveen: Yeah, yeah, but I heard –
- James: Did you see any of the – tell me about the Red Cross. Did you see, going through Germany at this time, did you see any of the Red Cross?
- Brusveen: Not too much, no, not too much.
- James: Salvation Army?
- Brusveen: We were pretty close to the front all the time, see, so that – well the time we were in Luxembourg and in Paris, I did see them, but that's about all.
- James: What? Salvation Army?
- Brusveen: Yeah, either one of 'em.
- James: You saw 'em both?
- Brusveen: Yeah.
- James: Some coffee and donuts?
- Brusveen: I probably had a cup of coffee one time. But I know they were there.
- James: Was the mail service any better at this time? Or not.
- Brusveen: Oh, no, the mail service –
- James: Never did get better?
- Brusveen: It was six weeks before Crystal heard of me going into Normandy.
- James: As far as she knew you were still in England, and then –
- Brusveen: No, we had a code.
- James: Oh, [laughter]
- Brusveen: We had a code, so she had got word through this code, and understood my code. So she knew I was going into –

- James: Tell me about the code. How did that work?
- Brusveen: Well, I used the capital letters of a paragraph. I used a capital letter of a paragraph.
- James: The first word in a paragraph?
- Brusveen: Yeah, yeah, yeah. In that letter.
- James: Did other G.I.s do the same?
- Brusveen: Oh, I don't know.
- James: Oh, you didn't discuss it?
- Brusveen: No.
- James: Or were you afraid to?
- Brusveen: Yeah, I guess that's why I never said anything. I've got a suitcase full of letters up in the garage here that I sent to Crystal.
- James: Your commanding officer a nice chap?
- Brusveen: Rather, yeah. Rather nice job. First sergeant –
- James: And your other – have you kept contact with your other buddies who were with you?
- Brusveen: I have been in contact with one of the other officers, but he was the type that if he heard a shot somewhere, he'd just take off and run. So, this is the reputation he had with the rest of the boys.
- James: Not very good.
- Brusveen: No. It was Harris – oh, not Harris – Harris was the guy that was our Captain. I'll tell you about that, too.
- James: Good.
- Brusveen: Where we were stationed, then, after the winter set in, was at Vieux-Waleffe, Belgium. That's where most of the pictures that I have, here, have emanated from Belgium. Anyway –
- [tape cuts out for several moments]
- James: Kosava? What?
- [there is an exchange that does not make sense out of context]

- Brusveen: Harris – we were stationed in Vieux-Waleffe after we left Luxembourg, and we got settled down after we had been in Stolberg. I think we must have headed for that area pretty close to that time. So we were there the rest of the winter until – oh, see, when did we leave Vieux-Waleffe? Oh, that’s when we started moving up into Germany. But from Vieux-Waleffe – we were there, and we went walking one evening and we went by some people that were well-acquainted with the people we were staying with. This is now 40 years later – this wouldn’t coincide with what we were talking about.
- James: No.
- Brusveen: No.
- James: We’re getting off, here.
- Brusveen: [laughter] Well.
- James: Tell me about these people you dealt with in the war.
- Brusveen: Yeah, uh. When we were there in Vieux-Waleffe, he had them out for rides in his vehicle because he was captain of the company.
- James: Had who out for rides?
- Brusveen: This girl that I was talking about, that I’ll tell you about that, uh – she was eleven years old then. And she was also a good friend of the girl that – after she grew up, married a friend of people we knew there, or had got to know, and were here to see us in ’90. They were here for three, two weeks with us. So we had a real nice time, and we spent quite a bit of time with them. We’ve been there, I think, three or four times. And, uh, we were going for this walk, and this other girl – who is a grown woman now – anyway, she had a daughter I’m going to tell you about – anyway, this lady, I don’t know what her name was – what the heck. Yeah, I come home again and she wanted me to – well, when we met her that time, she wanted me to find out about Captain Harris [he pronounced it with an accent, kahp-TEEN ha-REES], that’s the way she pronounced Captain Harris, and I couldn’t quite make out what she was saying there at first. And she repeated and then it finally came to me that she was talking about Captain Harris. And when I got home, I called him and told him, having met this girl and her family, he didn’t even remember the name of the town that we’d been in! Now, this is how much interest some of the boys took in what they could have learned about the people, you know. But he didn’t even know the name of the town that we’d spend two, three months during the winter in – [incredulous] or the girl, or the family. So that was – in the wintertime we slept in tents, and we had a lot of snow during the time of the Battle of the Bulge.
- James: It was the worst winter in Europe in 40 or 50 years.
- Brusveen: Yeah. I didn’t think it was so severely cold as they were telling. But, anyway, we were in Château Fançon in Belgium before we went there. And when Château Fançon was occupied by

the British during one war, I'm not sure what war that was, but during that time they had just slit and just massacred a bunch of murals that were painted in this Château, Château Fançon. And they never, ever, you know, had any apologies or anything for that. I'm getting just a little bit ahead of myself, here. I'm not too sure of my – maybe we ought to just take a little break, huh?

James: Do it!

[tape was stopped]

[exchange between James and the woman regarding their recording equipment]

Brusveen: Your first –

Woman: Pardon me?

Brusveen: Your first name is what?

Woman: Gail.

Brusveen: Gail?

Gail: Gail. My grandmother was a Gundehagen. Seen a Gundehagen.

Brusveen: Gundehagen!

Gail: Yes!

Brusveen: That's gotta be Norwegian!

Gail: Of course it is!

[James and Gail still fussing with equipment for several moments]

James: I think we were talking about – I was asking about some of your personnel and whether you kept in contact with some of your soldier friends.

Brusveen: Um, yes.

James: You mentioned that you kept [unintelligible] with one of them.

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: That's about it.

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah. Could we shut it off just a little bit?

Gail: Sure.

James: Sure.

[tape was stopped]

Brusveen: Is this the place you want it? Would it be at the last?

James: No, now tell me about being bombed.

Brusveen: OK. We were in Noës, Germany, right across from Dusseldorf. We had moved there from Moers, and in getting bombed there, we went back to Moers again. This is Noës. We went back to Moers and at Moers is when I met these German people. It's just like I was supposed to be meeting these people from, you know, the relatives of the people in New Glarus. And where we got bombed there, I thought it was a miracle that I was just – eleven o'clock at night - I distinctly remember, and I haven't forgotten that – I was saying my prayers. And with the brick and stone that are lying around me there and around the bedroll I'm sure that there had to be divine guidance there. Otherwise, I'm sure that this was just a miracle that I wasn't hit, you know.

James: Were you asleep when the bombs –

Brusveen: No, I wasn't, I was saying my prayer.

James: And then, all of a sudden, an explosion, and the stuff come down.

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah. Well, I hardly knew, it came so quickly. It all happened so quickly that –

James: Did it kill any of your friends?

Brusveen: Yes, my best buddy that I had been sleeping with. I guess it's not on here yet. Thomas Apesos was a good friend of mine. We had been sleeping together before we moved up there from Château Fançon in this castle – British – had been a British castle that I told you about.

James: Yes.

Brusveen: He was boar hunting that particular day, so I took care of his equipment, and packed it up besides mine, and my camera – I had an enlarger that I had put together here – and a person shipped it to me – an enlarger with a camera I had [laughs] put together. And that's the way I improvised. But I couldn't help but feel that I had more divine guidance after I saw this license plate sent to me without any request for numbers – they're 12, 13, 14 and then – that was with the numbers – and then having the letter C at the end, for Crystal. I couldn't help but feel there was some divine guidance.

James: Well, let's get back to the war.

Brusveen: OK. [laughs] Yeah, I can deviate quite a bit.

James: Did you have a raise in your rank?

Brusveen: No, no.

James: Never changed?

Brusveen: No, no. I didn't do anything to warrant it, I guess.

James: Well, just being there, and surviving –

Brusveen: [laughs] Surviving should have been *something*.

James: And what were you doing once you got to Germany? What was your duty?

Brusveen: I was a mailman as far as England – I guess just guard duty, and –

James: Yeah. And haircuts on the side?

Brusveen: Haircuts on the side. And with the guard duty, of course, you never knew where you were would be doing guard duty. I know we did that in Luxembourg and into – we had to do guard duty there in Vieux-Waleffe, Belgium also, and Germany, then. I can't just say – I can't say exactly what, anything but guard duty, I think is all –

James: Were you in Germany on VE-Day?

Brusveen: Yes, yeah.

James: Did that come as a surprise to you?

Brusveen: We were sort of expecting it. Yeah, we were expecting it.

James: And the German people? Were they expecting it too?

Brusveen: Where we were – I think we were in Bonn, Germany. I don't think there was too much exultation, as you might say, from the German people.

James: They must have been pretty well beaten down by then.

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: And Bonn was pretty well destroyed?

Brusveen: Uh, there was a lot of destruction in Bonn, but there was a lot of intact parts of it.

James: Now, you mentioned your friend was doing boar shooting?

Brusveen: Boar – he was hunting boars in Belgium.

James: During the war?

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: How did he – who gave him time off to do this?

Brusveen: [laughs] I guess we didn't have to get a license or anything there.

James: No, I'm sure you didn't.

Brusveen: So, I guess they took off and that's what he was doing at the time. They were hunting boar. So when we moved up from there, we had a boar feed.

James: Oh, I bet that was wonderful.

Brusveen: Oh yeah. Then we left Château Fançon – the night we left Château Fançon was the 16th of December. We had word that the Germans had broke through for – during the Belgian Bulge – and I spent that night in a haystack out in a field – not too far from another fellow, but there was another guy close by.

James: Why weren't you in tents?

Brusveen: No, we didn't – we were out there looking for Germans probably coming through.

James: I see. There must have been a high alert, then.

Brusveen: Yeah. We had to leave – we had to pull out. I had to pack up everything and, you know, and Thomas Apesos he had been sleeping with me there [unintelligible] on the floor. And we had to pack up in a hurry, so that's – I got my Christmas gifts also, there.

James: So the buddy system was the way you paired off in your unit?

Brusveen: Not so much in particular, but each one bunked where you found it feasible I guess.

James: You weren't responsible for another man, then?

Brusveen: No, no, no. No, but they took us back to Château Fançon now, and we were back there again. A couple of times we were back there. I heard that they were having a memorial service - in conjunction with Crystal and I being there - of another Polish boy that was shot going over the wall from the Château Fançon. He was trying to escape the Germans coming in.

James: So you were in Bonn in VE-Day. When did you go home, then?

Brusveen: I think about the 13th or 14th of October, I believe.

James: Oh, you were there that long?

Brusveen: Yeah. We were in Bonn and Wiesbaden. We were at Wiesbaden for a while.

James: You came back to the United States then?

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah. Then we had orders for the 20th of September. No, it was before then because the 20th of September [tapping on the table] we had shipping orders for Japan.

James: Ah, that's what I was getting around to.

Brusveen: Yeah. So.

James: So you thought you were gonna fight the war somewhere else?

Brusveen: Yeah, but we were scheduled for Japan for the 20th of September.

James: Everybody was pretty worried about that, I expect.

Brusveen: Yeah, it wasn't a very good outlook.

James: Didn't you have enough points to get discharged by this time?

Brusveen: No, no. But then, a short time then after we spent some time in Louisiana.

James: After you came home?

Brusveen: Yeah.

James: Then the war was over in Japan, by then.

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah, I think so.

James: So you got out of the service when?

Brusveen: Well, I thought it was about the 13th or 14th of October. I'll have to look that up again.

James: Where were you discharged from?

Brusveen: From Camp Polk, Louisiana, I think, yeah.

James: Now, you were married at the time –

Brusveen: All this time, yeah.

James: Right. Did your wife meet you down there, or did she stay here?

Brusveen: She met me at Norfolk when I came into the U.S.A. I left on the 4th of July here on a Sunday, and I put foot on American soil again from the European theater on the 4th of July, three years later to the day.

Gail: Oh, wow.

James: You and your wife have a remarkable coincidence with dates.

Brusveen: Yes.

James: You were born on Christmas day, you left the United States on the 4th of July, you returned on the 4th of July, and your wife was born on New Years Eve. Right?

Gail: No.

Brusveen: No, no.

James: 31st?

Gail: 12-13-14

James: Oh, 13th. Oh, excuse me.

Brusveen: This part of it I thought was coincidental – there should be with a letter C there at the end, and sent to me.

James: Yeah.

Brusveen: That, I think is really –

James: Unusual.

Brusveen: Very unusual.

James: So she had to go back – you went from Norfolk to Polk – Camp Polk in Louisiana. She didn't do that.

Brusveen: No, no.

James: She came back home.

Brusveen: Yeah, yeah.

Gail: What was she doing when you were in the war?

Brusveen: She was teaching school down here at the high school, Simmons School, yeah.

James: Did you join any veterans organizations?

Brusveen: Oh yes, yeah. I belong to the 40 and 8 , and of course, VFW, and of course the Legion little over 50 years. And I guess that's the – Belgian of the Bulge – er, the –

James: Battle?

Brusveen: Battle of the Bulge, yeah.

James: What – what was that? I mean, what was that organization you're speaking of?

Brusveen: I have the magazine – I get it every –

James: Oh, I see.

Brusveen: It's a life membership.

James: You were on the fringe of that battle, right?

Brusveen: Yeah, in the Battle of the Bulge, yeah. We were in that area all the time, yeah.

James: Right. Well, that's when you had to move back to get out of the way.

Brusveen: Yes, yeah. Mm-hmm.

James: OK. Well, I think we're coming to the end, pretty much. Anything else? Any other remembrances we should have on record of your experience in Europe?

Brusveen: [laughing] Well, I'll probably think of something after you're gone.

James: Oh. Any little personal notes –

Gail: That's what my father always says – “Can I do anything for you, dad?” “The minute you leave, I'll think of it.”

Brusveen: Yeah [laughs]. Well, I don't think so. But I feel that if you can make use of some of these pictures. My niece says she want some of them.

James: Sure.

Brusveen: But I will be –

James: Well, she has first choice, of course.

Brusveen: If -

[end of recording]