

Thomas Doherty
Papers and Photographs

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

SCOTT A. CAIRY

Officer, National Guard, 32nd Infantry Division, WWI;
Officer, Wisconsin State Guard, World War II.

1979

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Cairy, Scott A., (1889-1986). Oral History Interview, 1979.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Safety Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Scott A. Cairy, an Andrew, Iowa native, discusses his career with the 32nd Infantry Division and Wisconsin National Guard, including service in France in World War I and stateside during World War II. Cairy talks about organizing a National Guard unit for Platteville (Wisconsin) after the declaration of war in 1917: calling the adjutant general, enlisting over two hundred men, being commissioned as a 1st lieutenant, mobilizing at Camp Douglas (Wisconsin), and training at Camp MacArthur (Texas), where the 32nd Division was organized. He tells of getting orders for his regiment to sail overseas on the *SS Tuscania*, having his orders changed to the *SS Orduna* instead, seeing the destruction at Halifax Harbor the day after the explosive collision of two ships, riding to Liverpool in a convoy, and hearing the *Tuscania* had been sunk. Cairy details the tough training at Camp Coëtquidan (Brittany, France) before leaving for the Front. He speaks of his first battle in Alsace Lorraine, commanding a group of machine guns, a forced march to Chateau-Thierry, and being gassed directly after their arrival. Cairy touches on winning the battle of Juvigny Plateau, being near Montfaucon during the battle of the Argonne Forest, and running into a German artillery unit while on reconnaissance for an ammunition dump. He describes reorganizing an engineer outfit during the chaos of combat, ordering the 147th Field Artillery's Battery to fire on the German artillery, and being knocked unconscious by an artillery shell. In the hospital for eight months, he reflects on the 32nd Division's occupation duties and their being forbidden to fraternize with Germans. After his discharge in 1919, Cairy tells of wanting to get out of the Army, but being convinced by the adjutant general to "temporarily" organize a company of the National Guard and accompany them to camp. Cairy stayed in the Guard until 1947. He characterizes and tells anecdotes about Ralph M. Immell, George S. Patton, Robert Bruce McCoy, and Herbert M. Smith (of the 126th Infantry Regiment). Cairy talks about failing a physical in 1940 and being put in charge of internal security with the State Guard. He speaks of writing the first National Guard training schedule for Wisconsin and organizing maneuvers. Cairy details reorganizing the security of the docks in Superior (Wisconsin), mentions there were two failed sabotage attempts on Wisconsin docks, and tells of refusing to make dam security the responsibility of the Guard.

Biographical Sketch:

Cairy (1889-1986) organized Company I, 4th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division during World War I, served stateside with the 128th Infantry Regiment until 1940, and was executive officer to the adjutant general in the Wisconsin State Guard during World War II. He served in the Iowa National Guard from 1908 to 1911, and organized Company I of the 4th Infantry Regiment in 1917 in Platteville (Wisconsin). Cairy entered the Inactive National Guard in 1940, and in 1947 he was discharged at the rank of brigadier general. He was married to Pearl Schofield in 1916 and organized the Cairy Insurance Agency in 1920 in Platteville.

Interviewed by Tom Doherty, 22 May 1979
Transcription by John P. Danish, 2008
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Interview Transcript:

Tom: [unintelligible] with the Guard.

Cairy: What do you want?

Tom: Well, what we're, what we're focusing on is the 32nd Division.

Cairy: Yeah.

Tom: From the late '30s into the '40s, during World War II.

Cairy: Yeah.

Tom: And I know you came in a lot earlier than that.

Cairy: Yeah. I organized—is that on?

Tom: Yeah; yeah.

Cairy: At the outbreak of World War I, there was no National Guard unit in Platteville. I served a short time in the National Guard in Iowa. War was declared on April 6, 1917. [unintelligible] I talked to a young fella by the name of Desmond. I said, "I'm going to call the governor and ask him to organize a company in Platteville." So I called the governor and he directed me to the adjutant general. I called the adjutant general. The adjutant general informed me to get a hundred and fifty men as rapidly as I could get 'em. We wound up with two hundred and two men; we had enlisted about three hundred but two hundred-two passed the physical examination. I was commissioned 1st lieutenant. The Captain, whose name was Weidman [most likely Capt. Harvey Weidman, of Co. I, 4th Infantry], had just returned from the boardroom [?] and he was the Captain of the company. We mobilized at Camp Douglas, August 4, 1917. We remained there until September 30th, when we moved to Waco, Texas, Camp MacArthur. There we went into training, the reorganization and organization of the 32nd Division; up 'til that time it had not been organized. The organization composed both the Michigan National Guard and the Wisconsin National Guard and the result was the 32nd Division.

Ah, we trained there until about—our, my outfit left there on the 13th of January 1918. It took us seven days to get to Camp Merritt New Jersey from Waco. We remained there a couple of three days and I was appointed for intelligence work by the War Department. I received this long, sealed envelope from, ah, a Marine major at Hoboken [New Jersey] at the port of embarkation. We were to sail on the Tuscania, the whole regiment. I checked out a lot of things on the Tuscania. About 4 o'clock this major

came to me and he said, “You gotta transfer to the Orduna, which is at Pier 54 in New York.” Reason: some engineers came in from California and there was no place to put ‘em and the weather was very cold, and only one battalion from your regiment’s going on the Tuscania. So I transferred over to New York, the Orduna. He says, “You can’t go on the streetcar; I’ll transport you over the Naval shuttle,” which they done. So I was in charge of Intelligence, as far as I was concerned personally, to watch for what was my assignment; I knew what it was. We went to Halifax, Canada; and the night before, or the day before, two ships ran together in Halifax harbor. One of ‘em blew up and demolished the town; some four thousand people were killed. It was twenty-nine below zero the morning we arrived in harbor in Halifax and the Canadian soldiers were coming in then to take care of those people who were down and one thing and another. We left Halifax about 1 o’clock with eleven ships in the convoy, with the South Dakota, the battleship South Dakota convoy. About halfway across—we went way north—about halfway across, the ship, one ship became disabled. The South Dakota stood back and stayed with them; we proceeded. We came down from the north toward Ireland and three days out of, out of, ah, Liverpool, ten British destroyers met us and escorted us into Liverpool. The Tuscania was sunk; they torpedoed her. I was makin’ the rounds about 5 o’clock in the morning and there was an ensign in charge of the gun crew on the Orduna and he asked if I had any smoking tobacco. I told him, “Yes.” He said, “Could I have some?” I said, “You can have it all.” He said, “You know, one of your ships were sunk last night.” I said, “Do you know the name of the ship?” He said, “Yes, Tuscania.” I said, “How long did she stay afloat?” He says, “About two hours.” I said, “How was the loss of life?” He said, “I don’t know what it is.” And we proceeded; the same torpedo destroyer that destroyed the Tuscania followed us into Liverpool, onto the bar there at Liverpool, trying to sink us.

Tom: Yeah.

Cairy: The sea was rough when we went in. Every time he’d come up, he had to shoot quick and [unintelligible] and he’d be down again. He tried five times. I got the story in there and gave it to the *Milwaukee Journal*; he lives in Milwaukee now.

Tom: Who’s in Milwaukee?

Cairy: He lives in Milwaukee, yeah.

Tom: The commander of the—

Cairy: The commander of the submarine. [laughs] That’s right. So we get into Liverpool. That night they sent us across to Le Havre, France. We had no

supper, didn't have any dinner, no rations. We got off the boat at Halifax in the morning—not Halifax, but, ah, Le Havre—and, ah, got no dinner. Five o'clock that evening we got fed, first feed we had in two days, see. [chuckles] That's right. And, ah, we stayed there two nights, two days. Then we left for the training camp, Camp Coetquidan, down in Brittany. And the war was on to beat the band, you know. Germans were driving the French and British back, they were poundin' us on the back and training was rough; it was hard. I was commander of the company at the time, two hundred-fifty men as a first lieutenant. And I never used to take my clothes off at all at night, never took 'em off; I just took my shoes off. Because most of the time, we only got about two or three hours sleep, see, and all our gas training was at night. It would be 2 o'clock in the morning, maybe 3 o'clock, or maybe at 1 o'clock you'd be out for gas training and all that sort of thing. So along about, probably the 20th of April, the colonel announced we were goin' to the front, and I said to the colonel, I said, "I don't think it'll be any worse than the damn training's been." [laughs] That's right.

And, ah, on the 5th of May we left for the Front. Now the first battle was down in the mountains, in Alsace Lorraine, down near the Swiss border; in fact, we were right on the Swiss border. About the only—they made a raid on the 127th Infantry, Germans did, and, ah, they got some prisoners. That's about—but we made a couple of raids on them. But most of it was artillery fire because you couldn't climb those *rocks* unless you wanted to climb straight up, about five hundred feet, you know. And, ah, we stayed there 'til 'bout the 16th of July, when they ordered us to move. We didn't know where; we had an idea it was gonna be up around Chateau-Thierry, see, in that area. And so we were in training, and I had charge of the machine guns on the training, twenty-eight of 'em. They were trying to get air-raids, which we had one on the way up out of Paris we got it, but they only hit one man. One man got hit with machine gun fire after they got through dropping the bombs, and, ah, that's the only casualty I had. I had those twenty-eight machine guns just roarin' one time, see, and, ah, we de-trained. The colonel said to me, "They'll bomb us as soon as we stop." I said, "Colonel, get these damn troops off the train and I'll sit here with the machine guns and we'll keep the sons-of-bitches away," and so that's what we done. But they didn't bomb us.

We had to go up about eight miles, march everybody eight miles, supposed to get a hot meal; that's the first hot meal we'd had for several days. Just about time we was ready to sit down, eat the hot meal, orders came: a forced march to Chateau-Thierry, sixty miles; forced march; didn't even get the meal.

Tom: What did you eat?

- Cairy: There was rations, ah, battle rations and what'er you wanted: three packs of hard tack and two pounds of corned beef, see, and march. We arrived in Chateau-Thierry in the afternoon about 4:30 o'clock.
- Tom: That's a *long* march.
- Cairy: Yes it was. And on top [of] that we went in the Line that night.
- Tom: Is this the 128th or the whole division?
- Cairy: The whole division. The, ah, see the 64th Brigade went in first and the 57th Brigade, see; the 63rd, ah, 65th, they was held up. They were for support. But we'd only been up there—ah, we got there about 1 o'clock. About 2 o'clock the Germans opened up with gas and they gassed the hell out of us for about two hours. There's nothing that affects men more than gas, I can tell you that. But the morale effects, ah, they don't know whether the gas mask is workin' or what the hell is going on, see.
- Tom: Right.
- Cairy: So, we fought that battle and won. 32nd Division crossed the Ouraq River.
- Tom: How many casualties in M Company?
- Cairy: Huh?
- Tom: Were there many casualties in M Company?
- Cairy: In M Company? Let's see, we had about, I think, ah—well, I didn't go through with M Company all the way, see.
- Tom: I see.
- Cairy: So I don't remember. Think they had around fourteen killed and, ah, quite a few wounded, I forget the number now of wounded. One thing, had they been two minutes sooner at Montfaucon, M Company would have been wiped off the map.
- Tom: Had who been two minutes sooner?
- Cairy: Huh?
- Tom: If who would have been two minutes sooner?
- Cairy: M Company. M Company from Platteville would've been wiped off the map. I'll give you the whole story when we get to it.

Tom: Okay.

Cairy: We went through the battle of Juvigny Plateau and north of Paris, up near Amiens. We won that battle, of course you know, then we moved to the Argonne Forest, see. Went into two special training, pre, prior to going to the Argonne Forest. 32nd Division was—see I was in the 52nd Artillery Brigade then, see. The 32nd Division was assigned to support the 89th Division, which was on the left of the 79th Division. The 79th Division had the job of taking Montfaucon which was a son-of-a-bitch, where we lost a *lot of men!* A lot of ‘em! And I was there right in the middle of them.

Tom: How were they lost? By artillery fire or machine gun or—

Cairy: Artillery fire and machine gun fire, both. About 1 o’clock the colonel said to me, “You go forward and you make a reconnaissance at Nanteuil for an ammunition [?] dump.” I said, “Colonel, the Germans are not out at Nanteuil.” “Headquarters says they’re out.” I said, “I’ll go, but I know damn well they’re not out.” It was about a mile-and-a-half down there from Montfaucon see, downgrade all the way. I took a kid with me, name of Nelson. We got down a ways and I said to Nelson, “Sit down along this bank of this what had been a road,” see. “I want to think this thing out a little bit; things don’t look right to me.” I said, “Everything’s too quiet; you can’t see nobody. When you can’t see nobody, everybody is down in a hole, see, to protect themselves.” And we were sittin’ there, I was figurin’, trying to figure out whether we should go or go back. All at once, German artillery opened up. I looked up over the top of the bank of the road and *they were right down there where I was supposed to go!* I could see the muzzle blast of the guns.

Tom: Yeah, yeah.

Cairy: And, ah, I say to this kid, “Let’s start back.” We keep undercover as much as we can, they’re shooting up at Montfaucon, but we gotta get up there.

We go about halfway up, they opened up with a hell of a machine gun barrage along with the artillery, and I knew they was gonna attack. As sure as [unintelligible] they was gonna attack. 119th Field Artillery, the 2nd Battalion was just facing forward. Just about the time they reached that crest at Montfaucon, the Germans opened up this whale of a barrage. [bang] [unintelligible] The 119th Field Artillery, which is a Michigan outfit, had the heaviest casualties of any company, any unit World War I. In just a few minutes they lost all their guns, in a few minutes; they blasted ‘em off the earth, and then the 79th Division started to retreat. And I helped stop some of them; they was runnin’ like reindeers. The Germans were comin’, see, makin’ the attack. There was a company of engineers I

passed down the ravine below, back of the town there. I went down and I got that engineer outfit and I said, "Get your damn rifles, you're going to the Line." And so he said, "We've got no ammunition." I said, "I know where there's some ammunition." So I got the ammunition and I put 'em in right to the left of Montfaucon. And here come Captain Sheridan of the 147th Field Artillery's Battery. He says, "What the hell's going on here?" He says, "I got orders to open fire from here." I said, "You get them goddamn guns unloaded on [unintelligible]." He said, "I only got sixty rounds of ammunition [unintelligible] gun." I said, "Fire all of them! I'll give you the target!" I says, "I know where those birds are at!" So I gave him the target, to fire collective on [unintelligible], 'cause they were making their main effort to try to come around on that side, see; that's where their main effort was being made. Colonel Carter was trying to stop some of these fellas, he said he'd shoot the first man went by him. He had a .45 in each hand, and he got hit in the leg and knocked down. He hadn't more than get up off the ground and he got hit and [it] killed him. She was a tough battle! I got blowed up, a big shell, knocked unconscious, my runner was killed, two other men were killed and one was badly wounded. And, ah, we won the battle.

Tom: How long did the war last after that; how many more months?

Cairy: Ah, that was, ah, that was on the 3rd day of October; the 11th day of November was the end of the war.

Tom: Not, not—

Cairy: I went to the hospital on the—I went to hospital, I think, along about the, ah, 3rd of November, as I remember. I was in the hospital then eight months.

Tom: The 32nd stayed over in Germany—

Cairy: They went to Koblenz, Germany, across the Rhine River.

Tom: For a couple of years was that?

Cairy: Huh?

Tom: 'Til 1919, 1920?

Cairy: They went up there right after the Armistice was signed; in fact, it was only two days' distance between the German troops who were trotting back to Germany and the 32nd Division marching up, see, to Koblenz.

Tom: What was that duty?

Cairy: Huh?

Tom: What duty were they on?

Cairy: Forward the station.

Tom: Just occupation troops?

Cairy: Yeah, occupation troops. But the damn occupation was, was tough. Of course, I wasn't there; I was in the hospital.

Tom: Huh.

Cairy: They, ah, they didn't allow any fraternizing with the Germans at all, you know.

Tom: Hmm.

Cairy: No American soldiers could go to a German's home; no American soldiers could go to any place of entertainment. The Military Police was right on the job all the time, you see; that's the reason why we didn't bring these guys home early. [both laugh] That's right! Only stayed up there until May; you know, then after that they moved them back to the States in May, then they put the regular Army in, not the Army of Occupation, see.

Tom: What's the function of an Occupation Army? What did they do?

Cairy: French? They were down, further down the line.

Tom: No. What was the purpose of our Occupation Army?

Cairy: See that they carried out the terms of the—

Tom: Ah, okay.

Cairy: Peace terms.

Tom: Versailles?

Cairy: That's right.

Tom: Okay.

Cairy: They tried to reorganize again.

Tom: What did you do when the war was over?

Cairy: What'd I do? When it came to—done what I want to, just what I'm doing today. Came back and did what I was doin' here when I went to war. [unintelligible]

Tom: When did you get back here?

Cairy: I got back here—I got discharged in July of 1919.

Tom: In this office?

Cairy: Huh?

Tom: This, this—

Cairy: Same building.

Tom: Same building.

Cairy: Same building, just south of that [unintelligible]. I've been in this office since 1916, March 1st.

Tom: A long time.

Cairy: Yeah. And I'm still here.

Tom: You sure are, no question of that; yeah! What about Company M after the war? What happened? I'm gonna move over to now. What happened to Company M after the war?

Cairy: After the war? They demobilized it entirely; all the units in Wisconsin were demobilized entirely. Then they reorganized the National Guard. And I didn't want to go back in; I wasn't feeling very good, see. So they tried to organize a company here and they couldn't get us, they couldn't make it, so the adjutant general come down to see me.

Tom: Excuse me, why couldn't they make it? Were there no recruits?

Cairy: Ain't enough enlistments. [laughs]

Tom: Okay.

Cairy: So that's the reason why. They tried about four or five months and they couldn't get enough enlistments. So he came down to see me and he said to me, "Will you organize the company for us?" I said, "General, I don't

want to do your—go back in the Guard.” He said, “You organize it; we’ll give you a commission as captain. You organize it and as soon as you get it organized we’ll relieve you.”

Tom: Hmm.

Cairy: Seven days, I called him up and I said, “I got your company organized.” I had it organized.

Tom: How did you do it?

Cairy: Ha, ha, [chuckles] I just got a hold of these fellas and called ‘em in, and enlisted them.

Tom: Were they guys who had been in before?

Cairy: [unintelligible] were empty down here and I established a headquarters, recruiting headquarters down there.

Tom: Ah.

Cairy: And, ah, I got ‘em in and enlisted ‘em. So he said to me, “They’re gonna go to camp pretty soon.” He said, “Will you take ‘em to camp?” I said, “God, I don’t want to go to camp; I don’t feel like it.” He said, “Just take ‘em to camp; you just take ‘em, we’ll let you out afterwards.” I went to camp and I stayed in.

Tom: Stayed in for another—

Cairy: Stayed in.

Tom: —twenty years, thirty years?

Cairy: Yeah, stayed in ‘til, ah—well, read it all; here’s my retirement over here, 1946. Then after the war, during World War II, I was in the Guard and they put me in the, in the, on assignment. General [Ralph M.] Immell was the Adjutant General. And he went out in the service and he had no assignment when he first went out and he went down to Washington. You didn’t know anything about General Immell, did you?

Tom: I’ve seen his name many times and I know he was in Europe.

Cairy: Bowes[?], why don’t you come in here?

[Bowes?]: I’m listening to it.

- Cairy: I know that; but then he can ask you some questions.
- [Bowes?]: I wasn't in the Guard.
- Cairy: Ah, just a minute. General Immell, he said to me, "Why did you, why did you report for a physical?" And I said, "I suppose I had to." He said, "You should never have reported." He was in New York at the time.
- Tom: Oh, this was, you reported for a physical?
- Cairy: The war, ah, was, imminent—it hadn't been declared yet. See, they mobilized one year ahead of the war.
- Tom: Okay.
- Cairy: Went down to Louisiana, and, ah, he said, "I'm gonna send you over to the doctor to get examined." I went over and the doctor examined, tried to build it up for me, had to take it to 6th Service Command in Chicago, see, and they wouldn't pass it. Except I was still in the Guard, see, in the Guard on assignment, so a memo went out, I was being assigned. I didn't know anything about it. One night about 9 o'clock they called me from New York City. He said, "I'm going to hell and I want you to go with me." I said, "How much time have I got, General?" He said, "Three days." I said, "God, I can't get my personal things lined up soon enough." He said, "Don't turn me down! You call me at the Canadian Club tomorrow morning in New York and tell me that you're going!" I said, "Well, I don't think I can be ready. Tell ya, I'd like to go the worst in the world." So I called the next morning. He was signing on Mark Clark's staff; they were making invasion into Africa and to go up into Italy, see. I'd a been with him on his staff. Then when they got to Rome, ah, they put him in command of [unintelligible] in Rome; then shortly following that, Eisenhower put him on his staff. And when they put him on his staff, he called me when he flew back to the States.
- Tom: Were you here then?
- Cairy: I was here. They called me on the telephone and he said to me, "I'll be in Milwaukee at a certain time; I got four hours to spend with you and I'll tell you what's going on over there." The invasion hadn't been made yet, see. So I met him in Milwaukee at the Plankinton Hotel. He said, "The walls have ears; we'll ride in the car." We rode for two hours. He told me all about his [unintelligible]. Eisenhower sent him into France to meet with de Gaulle, about their part in this [unintelligible] invasion. One day he told me the whole damn thing was comin' off, see; the whole damn thing, right down the line, and so—

- Tom: What kind of man was General Immell?
- Cairy: One of the smartest men I ever came in contact with, way out in front of the average! That's the reason why he got on Eisenhower's staff.
- Tom: He was the adjutant general for a long time before the war, wasn't he?
- Cairy: He was adjutant general from 1923 up 'til the time of the war. And, um, they made the invasion [unintelligible]. I went to school with Mark Clark, see.
- Tom: You did?
- Cairy: Yeah, I went to school with Patton, yeah. I, I had never cared about Patton, see; I thought he was too emotional.
- Tom: At West Point?
- Cairy: Very excitable. No, at school, Command Staff School.
- Tom: Oh, I see.
- Cairy: Yeah. And—but I never cared about him. I heard the general tell about what happened at their headquarters the night the Germans broke through there, coming down out of, ah, Belgium when they attacked there—the Bulge, you know, the Battle of the Bulge. And I heard the General [unintelligible] mistakes was made, you know. I said, “Any damn fool, General, would never establish a thin line like they established there.” And he said, “That was the first mistake they made!” He said, “If I had a corporal didn't know more than that, I'd fire the corporal, established a thin line there to hold that line. The Germans naturally just found it out and go take advantage of it; and the weather got foggy and rainy.” And he said, “They come down through the hills there [unintelligible]. There was nothing there to hold 'em, see, nothing to hold 'em back.” He said, “You'd been there you'd have said, we better organize this thing in depth!” I said, “That's just exactly what I'd have said; get organized in depth so that if they break through one line we got another line to fight with.”
- Tom: What about some of the Guard officers? I understand there were many Guard officers who were not allowed to go on active duty because of age or—
- Cairy: Well, I'll give you an example from my own regiment. When we was training in France, they had a brigadier general; he was thirty-two years-old, a regular Army man, see, tougher than a son-of-a-bitch, drive the hell out of you, see, and officers were a dime a dozen to him. Lowest[?] man in

the company is a 1st Lieutenant, two hundred and fifty men. We had a Howitzer company, that's seven officers in a Howitzer company, canned 'em all the same day. He'd just call you up and tell you to report to the Board, see. You went before the Board, you're done, you never—nobody ever survived the Board. Canned three company commanders, three captains in one day. And one morning I was talking to the colonel right after mess; the general rode up on his horse, said, "Who's that officer down at the guard house?" The colonel told him, his name is Johnson. He said "That officer's too slow to be a good officer; send him before the Board." [laughs]

Tom: Where did their replacements come from? Did he take regular Army men and bring them in then?

Cairy: He'd bring them in and, ah, replacements, see. Bring the replacements in.

Tom: Oh. What about General [Irving A.] Fish? What kind of a man was he?

Cairy: Fish wasn't worth a stump! He, ah, he wasn't in the Guard then.

Tom: He was—

Cairy: He was in after the war.

Tom: No, I mean back in the '30s when he was commander of the 32nd.

Cairy: Commander—that was, ah, that was after the 1st War.

Tom: Yeah.

Cairy: He wasn't in the 1st War, see.

Tom: Did you know him later?

Cairy: Fish was a good man.

Tom: Was he?

Cairy: Yeah.

Tom: He was commander of the 32nd on up until General Harding took over, wasn't he?

Cairy: Well, anyhow, I was promoted to captain at the battle of Chateau-Thierry and, ah, when I was up in the Argonne Forest I was recommended for major. And it takes about six weeks for the commission to come back after

you're recommended from Washington, see. And the Armistice, signed on the 11th, I was in the hospital, but Pershing cancelled all pending commissions.

Tom: Ah.

Cairy: Cancelled, cancelled them on the 13th day of November, two days after the Armistice.

Tom: Well, how many years was it then until you made major?

Cairy: Huh?

Tom: How many years after that did you get the promotion?

Cairy: I got it—I organized the company, commanded the company down here, the 24, and I got promoted to major then.

Tom: What was training like in the '20s?

Cairy: Huh?

Tom: What was training like for the Guard in the '20s?

Cairy: The Guard here in the States?

Tom: Yeah.

Cairy: Or do you mean over there?

Tom: No, here, after the war.

Cairy: After the war?

Tom: After the war.

Cairy: Very efficient, because all the officers were mostly war officers, see, and actually, some had left [unintelligible] and were volunteering then, see.

Tom: Ah.

Cairy: They had a pretty good Guards, you know.

Tom: What would a drill be like?

Cairy: Huh?

- Tom: What was a typical drill like?
- Cairy: Typical what?
- Tom: Drill.
- Cairy: Drill?
- Tom: Yeah.
- Cairy: Well, we had a training program; that's one thing I had on these fellas. I was the first National Guard to ever write a training schedule in Wisconsin.
- Tom: Oh. Okay. They'd come in and what would they do? Would they—the enlisted men?
- Cairy: We had maneuvers. We had battalion maneuvers, regimental maneuvers, brigade maneuvers, and your new recruits were in school by themselves, gettin' the school soldiering, all that sort of thing--[**End of Tape 1, Side A**]-[unintelligible] military training and the men who were more advanced, those men were putting out for field training, see.
- Tom: I see.
- Cairy: We had a lot of—I tramped over, I knew every damn tree up there in Camp McCoy, see.
- Tom: I'll betcha did! Yeah.
- Cairy: See, captain, Bob [Robert Bruce] McCoy was my commanding officer for part of the time in World War I.
- Tom: He was.
- Cairy: Ah, there was a leader if there ever was one. Boy, he always called me by my first name. I met him up at Chateau-Thierry. I was lookin' for a German gun. The gun was firing every once in a while in back of us, see, and they sent me out to look for it. And I met the colonel; he was going these long strides, he was throwin' his chin right straight out. I saluted him, he didn't salute; he didn't return the salute. So next day I was at his command post and he said, "Scott!"—he had a very sharp voice—"I saw you yesterday; but, god dammit I was mad!" I said, "I thought something was wrong, Colonel." He said, "I was on my way to Division Headquarters. He said they had ordered my regiment to cross the Vesle

River,” and he said, “I told them, when I got the [unintelligible] orders, not a goddamn man from the 128th Infantry would go across the river but myself!” I said, “I’ll go over.” They rescinded the orders. They’d have got annihilated. They had a second line of defense to cross that river. And that’s where they fell back to is on the Vesle River, see. Any damn fool would have known better! He refused to go and they rescinded the order, saved his men. All he’d a got was a hell of a lot of casualties, that’s all he’d a got, drove back across the river.

Tom: Was his son the Colonel McCoy—

Cairy: Colonel McCoy today is son of Bob McCoy.

Tom: Okay. And he was in the South Pacific with the 32nd?

Cairy: Yeah.

Tom: Okay.

Cairy: He was in the South Pacific. Did you ever heard of Herby Smith, Neillsville?

Tom: Ah, no, no.

Cairy: Herby was in our regiment down through the years in the National Guard after World War I, see. I made prediction on the officers when they went out; I said he’d be number one. And when they got down to Australia, he was promoted to full colonel and put in command of the 126th Infantry, see.

Tom: Okay, okay. Yeah.

Cairy: And they went into, over to Buna, tried to make an amphibious landing there against the Japanese, you know, and they couldn’t make her. Herby said to the general, “Let me go over the top of the mountain, come in the back.” They had a lot of Australian officers there, see. They said, “You can’t get over there with a regiment of men.” Herby said, “We can try and I think we’ll get there. If I start out, I’ll get ‘em there.” And finally they, he convinced them he’d go over the Stanley[?] Mountain Range ‘tween them and the river, which they done. And, ah, they got down there in the flat, Japs didn’t even know we were there, see, and all at once they attacked the Japs from the river and an amphibious landing from the front, see, and they made their—they got in there. [laughs]

Tom: Yeah, yeah.

Cairy: And Herby got shot through the kidney, and I got the finest letter from him. I graduated Command Staff, see, and I used to teach tactics all the time. I got a letter from Herby; I got one around here, just a couple of weeks ago. He said to me when we went over that mountain range I had to use every tactical thing you told us about, and he said, I'd say to myself, if Colonel Cairy was here, what would he do? See, and then—

Tom: Colonel Cairy here was the first commander that—

Cairy: Yeah, he commanded down there the 26th Infantry.

Tom: Okay.

Cairy: And, ah, that's right. Then I figured, in as much as I didn't go out, then I organized the State Guard of Wisconsin during World War I, then when it broke out I was assigned to that job, see. I organized forty-two units in the state, four regiments for internal security, and the 6th Service Command called me to Chicago about the docks at Superior. Ninety-five percent of the ore went through those iron ore docks up there, it was a huge industry, and he said "That thing's got to be organized up there." He said, "I sent people up there, don't seem to know what the hell to do!" He said, "I'm gonna send you up." So I said, "All right, I'll go up." He said, "I'll meet you there." It was on a Thursday; he said, "I'll meet you there Monday morning at 7 o'clock." He was having a meeting over in Duluth that day, that afternoon. I said to the general, "I went over this whole thing and it's gotta be totally organized." I said, "It's very badly organized; there's no system at all, none whatever." I said, "I checked up all the important things." I said, "They got *guards* at the docks, don't mean a damn thing." I said, "There's a lot of things that gotta be done." So he went over it with me. I told him what should be done. Coast Guard was in there with seven hundred—or eight hundred men. This young commander, name was Forbes, commanding them [unintelligible]. So we let that be. There was about—all the officers of the Great Northern Railroad and the docks and all those people were there, see, FBI and then security out of Minnesota and all that sort of thing. And he talked to me about that plan that morning; that whole morning he talked to me about it. Finally, towards the end of the meeting, he said, "I believe Colonel Cairy has come up with the best answer. I would recommend that you meet with him in Superior and send responsible people to me." About a week later they organized a meeting. Commander of the security forces in Minnesota was there. About seventy-five people were there representing the various institutions, manufacturing and so forth. The chairman of the committee was the Great Northern president, the Great Northern Railroad; his name was Jacobson, and he called on his force[?] first about what part they'd play in security. He told them what they was doing, you know, patrolling along the lakes and all that sort of thing. I said to myself, "What the hell do you—you

don't know nothing." So it come my turn, called on me, and I said, "I want to talk to Commander Forbes first, for your information, my information." I said, "Commander Forbes, have you got a training objective?" He said, "Yes." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Communications." I said, "Where is the theater of operations?" He said, "In the South Pacific [unintelligible]." "Colonel Forbes," or, that is, "Commander Forbes, I'd like to have you tell these people that you can remain here for any period of time in as much as you have the training objective and the War is not here. It's out in the South Pacific, [unintelligible]."

The meeting went no further. Jacobson said, "I recommend we follow General, or, ah, Colonel Cairy's method of organizing this thing," and I was done. And they tried twice to sabotage the docks, you know; they tried once over at Ashland, see.

Tom: I didn't know that.

Cairy: You didn't know that? Yeah, that's right. And I made 'em put a [unintelligible] fence all around that plant, put a lot of projecting lights out onto the lake at the end of the docks, damned near broke my leg going out there on one of those docks one day. It was colder than hell, we were—I fell down, got my leg caught between the ties, see. Pert near broke my leg, and, ah, which they done. And properly instruct guards, to hire, they hired a retired colonel up there; he was a pretty good man. I recommended that, see. And now I went to see the engineer. I said, "I want to know the contour of the ground. There's a lot of oil tanks over here, not very far from the dock." I said, "One of them oil tanks got busted would it soak down onto the docks along the lake? He said, "Yes." Well, we went over the map. Pure Oil Company had a lot of tanks, Standard Oil Company. I called Standard Oil Company right in Indiana, I called Pure Oil Company in Chicago. I said, "I'd like to have your chief representative meet me here in Superior" on a certain time. They sent 'em up. I said, "Gentlemen, something's gotta be done, relative to protecting the docks against that oil. There's only one way it can be done: build dikes around the tanks." If you go to Superior today, you'll find the dikes there around those tanks; they built 'em. Then the Governor leaned on me totally; Governor Heil was the Governor. Every damn problem came up relative to them outside deals in connection to the Army and so forth he'd call me in, see. He called me in one day—

Tom: Well, what was your title then? Were you the Adjutant General at this time?

Cairy: I was head of it, see; I—

Tom: Head of the State Guard?

- Cairy: I was responsible to the organization of the State Guard, see, the entire Guard. I held maneuvers every weekend. Every weekend I held maneuvers.
- Tom: Who went into the State Guard? Who were the men in the State Guard?
- Cairy: Huh?
- Tom: Who were the men in the State Guard?
- Cairy: Who commanded?
- Tom: No, who were the men?
- Cairy: Taken from the men that are a little older, some young, some of them hadn't gotten into the service yet and went into the State Guard.
- Tom: I see.
- Cairy: And some was around seventeen years old and so forth. I had a damned good State Guard, don't ever kid yourself, when that war was over. Better than even the National Guard was when it went out. And one day he called me up to the office. He said, "I want to talk to you, got a man here wants a lot of things done." I went up there and he said, "The general manager of the Northwestern Railroad Company," he said, "he wants guards for all the bridges in Wisconsin." I said, "Governor, to you I recommend no guards; put that responsibility on themselves." I says, "You can't furnish guards to everybody wants guards in Wisconsin." I said, "You must remember, they don't pay guards very much, and for the manpower and the service and the demand for them in industry," I said, "it gets weaker and weaker all the time." So he said, "I'll stand on his recommendation," on my recommendation. He got—an attorney from Chippewa Falls called me up one day. He said, "The State of Wisconsin is responsible for the dams in Wisconsin!" I said, "How come?" He said, "Because they furnish power." I said, "No; they're not responsible." He said, "Do you want me to report that to the Armed Forces at Washington [DC], what you said?" I said, "I don't give a damn where you report it! The State of Wisconsin cannot furnish you guards. Now if you wish to go any further, talk to the governor." [unintelligible] where they belong because I know what can be done and what can't be done. And that general down in Chicago was backing me one hundred percent in my decisions, very much so; so I never heard any more from him. Big problems like that come up, one after the other.

Tom: Could I back up to the time when the division was activated in October, 1940. Where you anticipating going on active duty at that time?

Cairy: Well, did I—ah, what?

Tom: In 1940.

???: When the Guard was activated in October 1940, did you anticipate going in?

Cairy: Did I expect to go?

???: Yes.

Tom: Yeah.

Cairy: Yes. [unintelligible]

Tom: Okay. Do you have to see someone else now?

Cairy: It's alright.

Tom: Why weren't you able to go? Was it your age?

Cairy: I was ready to go any time, you know. It was on account of my, ah, hearing.

Tom: Oh, I see, I see; okay.

Cairy: I didn't have it bad then, but I had a doctor examine me; they had a team of doctors, see. They organized these—the 6th quarters, headquarters organized them out at the University Hospital. About nine [unintelligible] rejected me, see. That's what Immell said, "Why did you report if you've never been rejected?"

Tom: Okay; that's what you were talking about; I see; I see.

Cairy: He said that if I'da been here, I'da raised hell with 'em right there and got it stopped. He said, "I broke out a six service commander and got on my patrol," and he said, "I can get you activated at Washington" when he called me up that time, see; "they'll activate you."

Tom: Okay. Did you know General Harding?

Cairy: Who?

Tom: Harding?

Cairy: Harding?

Tom: Yeah; did you know him?

Cairy: General Harding? No, I didn't know him personally. No.

Tom: Okay. How did the other officers think of him?

Cairy: Huh?

Tom: Did—

Cairy: I don't think they thought very high of him; they thought very high of Eichelburger.

Tom: They did?

Cairy: Yeah.

Tom: Okay; okay.

Cairy: We had a good commander in General Hahn in World War I; he was a good commander, really commanded. The 32nd Division made a damn good record in World War I.

Tom: I know they did. I know, I know; yeah.

Cairy: There's no question about that.

Tom: They never thought they were going to fight the kind of war they had to fight the next war, though, did they? [pause in tape] When did you retire? Was it after the 2nd World War?

Cairy: Yeah; after the 2nd World War; yeah.

Tom: Yeah; yeah.

Cairy: Here's my retirement [unintelligible].

Tom: '49, okay, I see; yeah, 1949. This is Immell, isn't it? Is that Immell?

Cairy: No, no, no; this here is Joe Sterdoff. [?]

Tom: Oh. Okay.

Cairy: I got a picture of them. Here I was and that's Admiral, Admiral, Admiral, ah, Nimitz [unintelligible] who commanded the 7th Fleet in the Pacific during World War II—

Tom: Right here.

Cairy: Right in Wisconsin. In fact, the Governor asked me to present that to him.

Tom: That's very nice. Okay. What did you—General Cairy—

Cairy: Huh?

Tom: What were your impressions of the mounted cavalry in between wars? General Immell, I know, was a mounted cavalry man.

Cairy: He wasn't a cavalry, no.

Tom: Wasn't he?

Cairy: No.

Tom: Wasn't he with the 105th?

Cairy: He was an Infantry man.

Tom: Oh. Okay. Okay. [pause]

Cairy: [unintelligible] I had something I wanted to show you.

Tom: Oh.

Cairy: Can't find it. Can't find it. Can't show it to you; you've got to find it.

Tom: Okay.

Cairy: This one goes in here and comes around there.

Tom: Oh, this one.

Cairy: It's me.

Tom: Okay.

Cairy: [unintelligible]

Tom: Okay. That's from '32, '33?

Cairy: Yeah.

Tom: Fort Benning.

Cairy: Fort Benning.

Tom: Oh, how about that.

Cairy: Yup.

Tom: Okay. I saw Major Enloe [Newman E. Enloe] this morning.

Cairy: Who?

Tom: Major Enloe.

Cairy: Yeah; did yah?

Tom: Yeah, I talked to him this morning. He told me to be sure to be in touch with you.

Cairy: Yeah. Enloe. He enlisted when I was in the Guard, he enlisted, see.

Tom: He said that you'd started the company, I think, that he was in.

Cairy: Yeah; I had the company for a while.

Tom: Well, General, I appreciate your time and your telling me about your career in the Guard. Sounds like a lot went on—you were in at an exciting time.

Cairy: I knew good officers and poor ones. I called the shots; I said Herby Smith, Neillsville, he'll be number one. Herby Smith from Oshkosh should be number two. And Herby, they wanted to fire him one time; he was battalion commander and we had a maneuver over at Camp McCoy. He got lost for twenty-four hours with the battalion [both laugh] and the—

Tom: The lost battalion, is it?

Cairy: That's right. [both laugh] General Fish told—ah, no, I think he told the colonel that that man should be discharged, he wasn't qualified if he'd lose a battalion of men in that little brush up there, see.

So the colonel said to me the next morning [unintelligible]. I said, “Herb, ah, colonel, if I was goin’ into combat tomorrow, I wouldn’t want a better man than Herby Smith. Sure proved it, huh, down in New Guinea!”

Tom: Sure did! Yeah, yeah.

Cairy: He so proved it. [both laughing]

Tom: I noticed in New Guinea a lot of the Guard officers were replaced.

Cairy: Replaced?

Tom: Yeah, Colonel McCoy.

Cairy: Yeah. Brought in all three days, having development all the time; they brought them in.

Tom: Okay; okay. Was there any hard feelings about that, about the Guard officers being kicked out and the others brought in? There wasn’t?

Cairy: Of course they promoted quite a few officers. In World War I the promotions were not very fast.

Tom: Yeah.

Cairy: Ah, they didn’t, ah, seem to promote men.

Tom: Huh.

Cairy: I got about high as promotion was; get up there be recommended for Major, see.

Tom: Okay. Well, that’s all my questions. Thanks very much!

Cairy: Got anything more I can give you?

[End of Interview]