

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

GIFFORD J. COLEMAN

First Sergeant, 32d Infantry Division, Pacific Theater, World War II

1994

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Coleman, Gifford J. (1920-). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (51 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (51 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips mono.

Abstract

Coleman, a Brill, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service as an Infantryman with the 128th Infantry, 32nd Division in the South Pacific, and later return to civilian life. Coleman describes his Louisiana Maneuvers training with the National Guard, including marches, lack of weapons, and GI recreation in Louisiana. He relates landing and training in Australia as preparation for the fighting at Buna (New Guinea). He details the Buna campaign from the perspective of an American GI including combat fears, poor leadership, and problems with malaria; also included is the role of the Australian Army, and an evaluation of the Japanese Army. He discusses other campaigns in New Guinea, and compares those campaigns to those in the Philippines. He also briefly evaluates General Douglas MacArthur, and touches upon problems GI's faced while in combat, such as lack of supplies, isolation, low morale, and lack of communication with home. He mentions the rotation system, returning home, recurring malaria, and his membership in the American Legion and VFW.

Biographical Sketch

Coleman (b. June 26, 1920) served with Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, 32nd Division during World War II. He was wounded in battle at Buna where he received the Purple Heart, and achieved the rank of 1st Sergeant.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

Today's date is the 10th of November 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Gifford J. Coleman of Rice Lake, WI, a veteran of World War II.

Mark: Mr. Gifford Coleman, maybe you could tell me a little bit about where you were born, where you were raised and how you grew up.

Coleman: I was born in a little town called Brill, Wisconsin.

Mark: Brill? B R I L L?

Coleman: B R I L L.

Mark: Never heard of that one.

Coleman: Well, that's a real small community. It's a little--it's still there. It hasn't grown much since I was a kid.

Mark: Born in 1920, I see.

Coleman: 1920. That's correct.

Mark: So you grew up through the depression pretty much.

Coleman: Oh, yes.

Mark: Did that affect you and your family hard?

Coleman: Well, yeah, yes. Food sometimes was a little scarce. I lost my father when I was 5 years old.

Mark: Oh really.

Coleman: That left my mother with--I had an older brother and myself and a younger sister. Times were rough.

Mark: I see. What did your mother do for a living?

Coleman: Well, she'd done everything. Housework, whatever she could make some money. She worked hard.

Mark: So, you joined the National Guard?

- Coleman: Yes I did.
- Mark: When did you join the National Guard and for what reason?
- Coleman: Well, I joined the National Guard in 1940. Just 2 days before I was 21 years old.
- Mark: What prompted you to join the Guard?
- Coleman: Well, I was temporarily out of work. I met a friend of mine in the city of Rice Lake and he had been in the Guard and he said “Well, why don’t you join the Guard?” I did.
- Mark: Because in 1940 is when Hitler invaded France and some people at that time knew we were going to be in a war. Did that thought occur to you at all?
- Coleman: Yes, definitely. Yes, it sure did.
- Mark: I see.
- Coleman: Well, I might just as well get in now because I’d probably be drafted and I knew some of these people that belonged in the Guard. That’s why I joined.
- Mark: Did you go to Louisiana with the Guard? Did you join in time for that?
- Coleman: Yes I did.
- Mark: Perhaps you could describe your duties and activities in Louisiana. What sort of training did you do? What sort of preparations were you making for a war? What kind of war did you think you were going to be fighting at the time? It is my understanding that many people believed that the 32nd Division was going to be going to Europe. You went to the Pacific, so I’m wondering, what sort of training you were doing in Louisiana at the time.
- Coleman: In Louisiana, of course it was a lot of hiking. A lot of marching on the country roads with full steel packs and getting in physical shape.
- Mark: Was that a problem? Were people not in that good a shape?
- Coleman: Some of them were not. Me, it didn’t bother. I was used to hard work. I never fell out of a march; I never had blisters on my feet or anything like

that. Some of the people did. We went on a lot of hikes, like I said. We were getting--we were short of weapons.

Mark: I was going to ask about equipment and that sort of thing. You were short of weapons? Could you describe--

Coleman: Company D was a heavy weapons company they called them. We had machine guns, light--what we called light, or did, later on in the war, 30 caliber. We had the old World War I rifles at the time.

Mark: I see.

Coleman: The maneuvers and the training we done, a lot of it was just, sometimes right in camp. Just getting used to the weapons and close order drill. So on and so forth.

Mark: I see.

Coleman: Until later on in Louisiana, we had what they called Louisiana maneuvers. We were on those. During that time we done a lot of moving around, marching from here and there it was more for the officers. The higher-ranking officers at the time I think, moving troops then it was for training for us.

Mark: I see.

Coleman: If you remember--I don't know your age or anything.

Mark: I don't remember that.

Coleman: It was Eisenhower and Krueger, the Generals. They were conducting the maneuvers and like I say I think it was more for army than it was--divisions and armies more than it was individual training.

Mark: That's interesting, actually. Did you get off the post much while you were in Louisiana? I would imagine that this was your first trip to the South.

Coleman: Oh, yeah.

Mark: I'm wondering if you got off post and what sort of activities the soldiers did on what free time they had.

Coleman: Well, passes yeah. I mean we would get a pass and Alexandria was the nearest city to our camp. Alexandria, Louisiana. We'd get a weekend pass, a 72 or 24 hour pass whatever was available, and we would go in

there and well, hit the bars and look for the girls and go to a movie, so on and so forth.

Mark: Pretty typical stuff.

Coleman: Typical GI stuff.

Mark: I see.

Coleman: Yeah.

Mark: Did you have any impressions of the south? Did you find it much different than Wisconsin where you grew up? Or, did you think people were pretty much the same? Did you have any--

Coleman: I think the people were quite the same. Of course the drawl, the southern drawl and so on was a lot different. But the agriculture was--what impressed me a lot was the cotton fields and the Negro families from old people to parents to little kids. Little kids, they had the whole family out there. And believe it or not, these little tikes were picking cotton. They had their cotton bag--it was done by hand. The little tikes would have the smaller bags and the grown ups would have the bags that were--oh my goodness, they must have been 10 or 12 feet long. They would go down the rows and pick by hand. When their bag was full they--I have no idea--I suppose they had a dumping place. But they were row upon row of colored people picking this cotton. That impressed me. Especially the younger people--the family.

Mark: It's certainly not a sight you would have seen in northern Wisconsin.

Coleman: Oh my goodness, no.

Mark: OK. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, where were you? Do you remember where you were when it happened? Do you remember what you thought?

Coleman: Yes, I can tell you that. We had been shipped...we were scheduled for Europe. The 32nd was shipped by rail to Fort Devins, Massachusetts. Then the Pacific became so critical after Pearl Harbor that we got on a Troop train and went to Bristol--to be shipped out.

Mark: The Bristol? Bristol where?

Coleman: San Francisco.

- Mark: Oh, San Francisco, I'm sorry. Frisco, I thought you said Bristol.
- Coleman: Oh no, San Francisco.
- Mark: Perhaps you could describe your voyage between San Francisco and Australia. That's a long time on a ship.
- Coleman: We sailed on the--I remember that--the U.S.S. Monterey. On the way over we picked up some more ships and troops and we had two destroyer escorts going over--to Australia is where we ended up and landed. It took us 21 days going over.
- Mark: Did you make stops along the way?
- Coleman: Oh no, no, no, no. Not in the middle of the ocean. We had no stops. 21 days it took us to get from San Francisco--to Adelaide, Australia is where we landed. The Port of Adelaide.
- Mark: That's a long trip especially for some guys from Wisconsin and Michigan. Were there problems with seasickness or that sort of thing?
- Coleman: Not much of it. I never did myself, I had the queasiness but I never had the problem of vomiting overboard or aboard ship or in your bunk or whatever like some people did.
- Mark: I see.
- Coleman: It was a mess.
- Mark: What sort of accommodations did you have?
- Coleman: Well, we were--they had bunks. I remember distinctly after leaving San Francisco, the bunks were in the old staterooms aboard the luxury liners and they were four high. They were fastened to the walls of the staterooms. That was 4--16 troops in a stateroom in bunks, sleeping quarters. We ran into a storm just out of San Francisco and it was rough. Some of the bunks tore away from the walls and actually collapsed on--there were a few injuries. Troops were sleeping at the time or trying to. In fact, most of the time you spent in your bunk when you weren't up on deck doing calisthenics and we at the time were lookouts for submarines or whatever. It was kind of a hectic trip.
- Mark: I see. What did you do when you got to Australia? What were the first things they had you do?

Coleman: Well, after we landed we went to a camp, I can't remember the name of it, and we had our equipment and we set up primal tents. It was out in the woods in Australia. We did some more training. The regular army training. We had some newer weapons at the time or we're getting them.

Mark: Like what?

Coleman: Well, like the 50 calibers. We were a heavy weapons company but we never had the 50 caliber machine guns when we left the states. It was something new for us. The whole country was unprepared really for war.

Mark: After you got to Australia, about how long was it until you started to see action up in New Guinea? Were you in Australia for like a couple of months or--?

Coleman: It was longer than that. It was longer than that--let's see now. When we got to Australia we--like I said--we set up a camp out in the woods, tents and so on and so forth. It was training as usual, hiking. The war was for real and in 1942, we went to New Guinea, Australia and into combat.

Mark: You first went from Australia to Port Moresby, is that right?

Coleman: Yes.

Mark: What's interesting about the Battle of Buna was that you know New Guinea was pretty wild at the time.

Coleman: Oh, yes.

Mark: There wasn't much settlement or civilization or anything. I'm wondering if you could describe to me going from Port Moresby to the battlefield and your impressions of New Guinea and how did you get there? How did you get over those mountains?

Coleman: In 1942, like I said, we went to New Guinea and at the time, the Japanese were coming over the mountains from Buna. They were trying to get at Port Moresby. That was their objective. When we first went there, we were up along the Goldy River just out of Moresby and the Australians of course had been there before us. They were fighting the Japanese. Then the Japanese never--some of their troops got over the mountains, a few, so we left the Australians there and we went to invade Buna on the Buna side of New Guinea. We got up there in Buna and started to try and take it, take Buna.

Mark: So this was the first combat.

- Coleman: That was our first combat. It was new and the weather was bad. It rained constantly every night--every night. We had rain and mosquitoes. Monopolies of malaria carrying mosquitoes were in swarms. The food--our supplies were practically zero. There were a lot of dysentery, malaria among our troops. It was a rough, absolutely disastrous deal for us.
- Mark: I'm sure. As for the actual combat, this might sound like a dumb question, but were you scared?
- Coleman: Oh my God. Well, sure. You never get over that. At least I never did. But, you do what you're told by your leaders, try to. Buna was our baptismal fire. We didn't do well. We had poor leadership. Very poor leadership. I can remember, I was a sergeant at the time, and I can remember being asked to take a patrol out and I could see and I could see us standing in the rain, the headquarters, supposedly battalion headquarters and there wasn't--All the officers were standing there. You know. I thought then--Where are the lieutenants, the captains, the--you know, where are they? There was a big shake up after this Buna campaign. People were relieved. I'm talking about company commanders, the division commanders, the battalion commanders, they went down the line because there was poor leadership.
- Mark: Did it get better after that battle? I mean, did the shakeup affect the leadership in a way that was positive? Or did things not get better?
- Coleman: After the shake up, I'm going to call it a shake up, things got better. We had a new battalion commander come in and do some new company commanders. Some of the non-commissioned officers were busted from whatever their rank was, down to private. Other people were put in their place. It was a real baptism of fire and a lot of different commanders and different non-commissioned officers.
- Mark: I see. Could you give me some more examples maybe of poor leadership? Did they lead--did they sometimes lead troops into areas they shouldn't of gone in? Or were they too late to attack?
- Coleman: They weren't leading. They were trying to lead from behind and the battalion commanders, as an example, the company commanders were passing the buck down the line and letting the enlisted men do it.
- Mark: I see.
- Coleman: That's what it was. Exactly what it was.

- Mark: Did this cause a lot of resentment among the enlisted men? Such as yourself.
- Coleman: Yes, it sure did.
- Mark: Let's talk about the Battle of Buna maybe a little bit more. What were your objectives in that battle?
- Coleman: Well, it was to take Buna, and destroy the Japanese army. Our general was relieved and we got a new general. Eventually, it was taken. We had some Australians fighting with us.
- Mark: I was just going to ask about the Australians and their role in that battle. Were they--was their role important or was it crucial?
- Coleman: It was, I would say crucial. I think it was crucial. We also had some United States marines that were there. It was a bitter battle and it was a bloody battle. We destroyed, you had to destroy the Japanese. There was no question about it. To surrender to them was a disgrace and they didn't surrender. They would rather die. That was strictly opposite to what we were taught. You tried to preserve your life. Do your duty but not to-- Banzai charges is what they called them. They would come at you in waves and they were prepared to die. At times, they could overwhelm you. No question about it. Unless you retreated. When you were facing one of those, that is what you did you fought but you were retreating, you were backing off.
- Mark: Was this something you expected when you--before you actually engaged the Japanese; was this something you expected of them? Did you know this was their style of fighting? Or, was this a surprise to you and the other soldiers?
- Coleman: It was a complete surprise. We had no idea what kind of troops we were going to be fighting. But it didn't take us long to learn.
- Mark: In your own personal opinion, not just speaking about Buna, but perhaps you could characterize this throughout the whole war, how would--would you characterize the Japanese as good fighters? Bad fighters? Were they effective or ineffective? Your own personal opinion based on your experiences.
- Coleman: My personal opinion was that they were good. They were very good. As the war progressed, we had better weapons. We eventually ended up with better weapons, more of them, possibly than they had. Our supplies were probably--well I know they were better later on. As troops, they were tops

I thought. They were dedicated, life meant very little to them. They were brought up, trained that way I suppose.

Mark: After Buna, it is my understanding that the 32nd Division went back to Australia for a while.

Coleman: That is correct.

Mark: Why did you go back to Australia? What happened during that time?

Coleman: Why did we go back? Because the troops were physically and mentally a wreck. We were physical wrecks. In my case, I was--a tree, a coconut tree was shot off and it fell on me. I was evacuated earlier and back to Australia eventually and to a hospital in Australia.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Coleman: I didn't see the battle to the end and so on. They were tenacious and good fighters. We were green, first combat and not too good.

Mark: Did you get replacements after Buna?

Coleman: Back in Australia, that is what we did. We healed up, got our malaria taken care of and we got replacements and rebuilt the outfit. New leadership, like I said, in a lot of cases, higher rankings. Prepared to go back.

Mark: About the replacements. The 32nd Division was National Guard.

Coleman: Yes.

Mark: And it was mostly Wisconsin and Michigan. I would imagine these replacements came from other parts of the country.

Coleman: From all over.

Mark: So, as you got more replacements, the 32nd Division changed.

Coleman: Oh, yes.

Mark: Did you notice much of that? How did these replacements fit in with the "old" National Guard guys such as yourself?

- Coleman: They were, of course, draftees. Replacements were people who had been drafted and they fit in real well. Some of them were educated much better than probably the original people that were in Company D. They blended in real well and picked up quick with their weaponry and so on and so forth.
- Mark: I see.
- Coleman: No problems with any of them.
- Mark: OK. So then you went back to New Guinea and you fought two more battles. (Sigh-door) and (I-tape). Saidor and Aitape.
- Coleman: Saidor (Say-door) and Aitape (I-top-eee).
- Mark: Saidor and Aitape, well, so much for my pronunciation. Were these different than Buna?
- Coleman: Oh, yes, in many ways.
- Mark: Perhaps you could describe that a little bit to me.
- Coleman: OK. At Saidor, we were better prepared, had been blooded, we knew what it was about. Our replacements were better led by commission as well as non-commissioned officers. We knew then that we were in a war, for real. Things were much easier and more organized. Better equipment, better food, more of it. That's the way it was, it was easier.
- Mark: I see. When did you finally get to the Philippines? It was about '44, I take it.
- Coleman: Yes. It was 1944. We went to Saidor and Aitape and then we went to the Philippines.
- Mark: I see. Was fighting in the Philippines any different than New Guinea had been? If so, in what ways?
- Coleman: Well, OK. We went to the Philippines and as far as the troops, the Japanese troops, it was--they were the same. They never changed. We were getting more experience, we had better weapons, we were better lead and it was a different atmosphere. I mean the climate in the Philippines was different. The terrain was different than in New Guinea. New Guinea was quite flat. In the Philippines, they greeted us and were glad to see us. It was easier. It wasn't easier as far as the fighting, but it was easier for us.

- Mark: I see, because you better equipped and better lead and everything?
- Coleman: Better lead. That's correct.
- Mark: I want to come back to fighting in the Philippines in a little bit. But first, I'd like to ask you some questions about the life of the GI in the South Pacific during World War II. Before you started the fighting, of course, you were in Australia, which was a westernized country. When you were in New Guinea and then into the Philippines, I'm wondering what you did for spare activities and how did the soldiers occupy themselves when you're out in the jungle and that sort of thing? You can't go "bar-hopping" exactly when you're in the middle of the jungle, I'm wondering-- card playing, what sort of things did you do to occupy your time?
- Coleman: Well, we didn't really have that much time. When we were in the rear areas, there was a lot of card playing, not so much gambling, but just penny ante. You might have a few shillings or whatever the currency was but most of us took out and deposited our money, you know, that we earned. We'd never see it. It was going into our accounts. We had no use for money, really after we got up to the island.
- Mark: There is a term, I've heard among some veterans of the South Pacific. They use the term, "rock-happy." Do you know what that is?
- Coleman: "Rock-happy?"
- Mark: Yeah. When you're in an isolated area sometimes, people kind of "go nuts," I guess you'd say.
- Coleman: Yes, that's a new expression for me. But I understand it.
- Mark: The isolation. Was that a problem for morale and that sort of thing?
- Coleman: Oh, definitely, yes. After you're in combat so long, the morale of the unit drops, because you have nothing to look forward to except the next battle maybe. Like I said before, the fear is always there. The duty is always there and you know you're going to have to go out on a patrol or you're going to be sent from the rear area up to the front at any time. That's where the worry comes in and the stress. Some people did "crack up". Definitely. I've seen them. They were not only the enlisted men, some of the officers.
- Mark: If someone "cracked," what sort of symptoms were there?
- Coleman: Shaking, crying, nerves, not being able to function.

Mark: Did you get much alcohol?

Coleman: Oh my god, No.

Mark: No?

Coleman: Oh, no. Except the native in the Philippines. When we first landed, they greeted us with--they called it "bolic." It was a wine that they made. We had been warned, you know, don't drink that stuff. I took a sip and it tasted like the wine--homemade wine that you would make in this country. But we were warned ahead of time. Some of that stuff was pretty bad.

Mark: You mean poisonous? Or strong? Or-- **[End of Side A, Tape 1]**

Coleman: Well, it was strong, but not only that, it would make you deathly sick. They could probably drink it, but-- No, there wasn't much of that.

Mark: I see.

Coleman: Not on the Islands, no.

Mark: Did you get much mail? How were communications back to the United States and to Wisconsin specifically? Was mail sporadic or did you get it regularly?

Coleman: No, we didn't get mail regularly. When it would come, a lot of it was lost of course shipping. There were times when we would go for months, at least I did, and I know being a sergeant that I--when the mail would come in, it would usually come to a certain company or a platoon. Mail was very--I went over 6 months, at one time and never got any mail. Later on, it was longer than that. As far as us writing letters out when we were in the combat area, I don't think anybody wrote any letters then. I know we didn't. How do you write a letter when food and ammunition are more important than stationary? How do you keep stationary dry and so on and so forth in combat?

Mark: I see. The 32nd Division was under MacArthur, if I'm not mistaken.

Coleman: Yes. He was the big leader.

Mark: I'm wondering if you could comment on what, from your level, what the troops thought of MacArthur. Did they like him, or not like him? Did they care one way or the other?

- Coleman: Definitely, we called him “Dugout Doug.” I mean, that was, the troops overall, as far as MacArthur is concerned, didn’t--he wasn’t a good leader.
- Mark: No?
- Coleman: That was the opinion. Because he was--he was pushy, he didn’t realize, he wouldn’t even take his commander’s, division commander’s, army commander’s word for how tough it was to just go, go, go, again. He never--he never came to visit any troops, you didn’t see him. That was--they called him--everybody did, “Dugout Doug”.
- Mark: I have heard that term before actually. Now--I wish I had done some more studying before I talked to you. The 32nd Division in the Philippines, you landed at Leyte?
- Coleman: Yes, that was the first place. Leyte, the island of Leyte.
- Mark: What did you do there?
- Coleman: Well, that was the toughest campaign that was for sure. We went into combat, as usual and fought the Japanese, we were good, they were good. I don’t remember just how long it took us to secure that island. Can’t remember that. I have some notes here. We experienced the kamikaze.
- Mark: Oh really.
- Coleman: Oh, yes. That was in November 1944. The kamikazes were already working then. We stood on deck waiting to go over the side, you know, to get into our landing craft. Our Air Force and airmen were up there and these kamikazes were trying to get at us. Some of them didn’t miss our transports by very far. They were falling out of the sky, being shot down. God bless our Air Force.
- Mark: Was your division involved in the liberation of Manila?
- Coleman: No. We were--we were in the mountains. We had the rough, it was rough going in the mountains. Building roads and getting supplies up there, you know, to keep up with the troops.
- Mark: That’s where the 32nd Division was when the war ended?
- Coleman: That is correct.
- Mark: You were in Luzon.

- Coleman: Yes.
- Mark: If I could get back to the Japanese for a minute. As the war went on, did they stay consistently tough or do you think they started to suffer from supply problems? From your vantage point, could you notice that sort of thing, or did they always seem tough?
- Coleman: They were always tough. They--I'm going to have to back up a little bit here. I didn't see the Japanese surrender. I got rotated. They had the rotation system. I was rotated home, way home I should say, before the Philippines were conquered. So I--but I can tell you the--the Leyte and the Luzon, I was on both of them. It was tough going for us, like I said before, we had the mountains. We had it tough going, the 32nd Division did.
- Mark: I'm starting to lose you a little bit here, just thought I'd let you know that. So you were rotated out then?
- Coleman: Yes, I got out in April.
- Mark: I see. Where did you go from there? How does a GI get from fighting in the Philippines back to the States? How long of a process is that and what sort of steps did you have to take to get back?
- Coleman: When you were up for rotation, you were notified out in the field, in the battle area. There was a replacement for you. When I was rotated, I had become first sergeant of my company and a man by the name of Ball, his last name was Ball, he was a first sergeant, and he told me, he came up there and he told me he was my replacement and I was relieved, you know, to go back for rotation.
- Mark: What did you think?
- Coleman: I thought--oh my God, it finally came. It's finally my turn to go home.
- Mark: Did you have any desire to stay there and see it through or did you want to get back?
- Coleman: I wanted to get back, because it was desperate. The fighting was hard. I lost--I'd like to give you one example. This goes back to Leyte. My--I was First Sergeant then on Leyte, and my supply sergeant and I happened to be toward evening and we were preparing for the--looking for a hole to crawl into or digging one to spend the night because of the artillery, they were great, the Japanese were--pestering you all night with artillery and that mortar fire. We found a hole that had been dug by the troops that were in the area before us and occupied it. When my company

commander, Captain Clark, he was from South Carolina, and another officer came and asked if they could make that the company headquarters, because the hole was quite large and it was quite deep. You don't argue with the company commander, when he has bars and you're enlisted. So, we went and started to dig another hole and about that time, the Japanese started shelling us with their big, heavy stuff. My supply sergeant and I scratched out a hole deep enough where we could get into it--room for 2 people and during the night, the shelling went on and we both heard somebody say "Oh, my God, my leg, oh, my God, my leg." It was my company commander, our company commander. He had no leg. The shell--where my supply sergeant and I had been in that hole previously and was asked to move, that shell went right smack dab into it. I have thought about this for years and I can't help but think about it periodically, had I not been asked to move, it would have been me and my supply sergeant, instead of my company commander. That hurt, he was a leader, he was a wonderful southern gentleman. That's all I can say about him.

Mark: Did he survive?

Coleman: Oh, no, no no. He died right there, right close to us. The second time he said "Oh, my God, my leg," there was silence and that's what happened. These things get to you and you see enough of that maiming and people, death, to people you know. If you don't know them, it's different. If you know them personally and respect them, eventually, it gets to you. I can tell you this, in all honesty, when I heard Sergeant Ball say "I'm your replacement," I was probably the happiest man in the world at that time. You can only take so much of that and you start worrying and cracking. I was at that point.

Mark: I see. So when did you finally arrive back in the US and how long did it take you to get back to Wisconsin?

Coleman: It took--on the way back, 21 days going over, and I'll never forget 31 days aboard ship coming back to San Francisco. I have to think back on That--OK, from San Francisco, we were re-equipped; let me put it that way. We got new, not new uniforms, but we got different clothing. We got the regular GI uniforms, but they had been used, worn. They'd give you a pair of pants and if they fit and if they were too short, they'd give you another one, you know. Blouses were the same way. Your clothing, they gave us, I should say, when I was discharged, I had a little barracks bag and probably a couple pairs of socks in it, some shorts, handkerchiefs and the uniform I wore. That's what I got discharged with. After, Frisco, we were shipped to Ft. Sheridan, IL. From San Francisco, we took a train, the people that were being shipped home and then at Ft. Sheridan, they asked anybody that wants to re-enlist or stay in the service, to fall-out and

go across the field that you were assembled in. I thought, well, do I want to re-enlist or do I want to become a civilian? I took a few steps forward, I could re-enlist with my rank, First Sergeant, and I took a few steps and said, "No, Gifford, I don't want this." Turned around and went back and took the discharge.

Mark: Did anyone take them up on the offer?

Coleman: Yes, yes, there were a few people that did, they went over to the other side and evidently re-enlisted.

Mark: So then, you were discharged and you went back to Barron County.

Coleman: That's right.

Mark: What was it like to be back?

Coleman: It was wonderful. I remember, I got--from Ft. Sheridan, I took the train they called "the 400." I had a buddy, that--we had made arrangements--he was discharged and got home before I did; I was supposed to meet him at a bar. I looked up his name in the book from the bar that we were supposed to meet at and I couldn't get ahold of him for some reason at that telephone number. So, the next day, I got on the 400 and went to...I went to Eau Claire, that's where the 400 ran--went through. I got off there and took a bus to Rice Lake.

Mark: And then you were home.

Coleman: Then I was home. It was in the evening and my folks had been in bed. I got a friend of mine to take me out to their farm. I knocked on the door and my mother came to the door.

Mark: Your mother was surprised? She didn't know you were coming.

Coleman: She didn't know I was coming. I had sent her a telegram from California that I was on my way home but I didn't know when I would arrive.

Mark: I see. So you got back, what were your first priorities to get your life back in order?

Coleman: Well, really, just to rest, meet friends, relatives, answer a lot of questions, of course. Of course, getting work, I didn't take any of the GI Bills, which I was sorry for later, made a mistake there. I got married, got a job in Chicago and started having a family.

- Mark: I see. I've got a couple questions about the post-war period. One concerns employment, in some areas, veterans had trouble finding work right after they got out of the service. Did you have any trouble finding a way to make a living?
- Coleman: No, no. At that time, I didn't find it difficult. The first place I went to, I had seen an ad in the paper, in Chicago. That was at Ingersoll Steel Company, Ingersoll Steel; I got a job right there. Later on, I don't--I think they were more inclined to hire ex-GIs than they probably were other people.
- Mark: Why do you think that was?
- Coleman: I don't know. Maybe just to help get them back into civilian life. Maybe appreciation.
- Mark: On this data sheet I had you fill you out, it says you had problems with Malaria after the war.
- Coleman: Oh, yes.
- Mark: Could you perhaps, describe that to me a little bit?
- Coleman: Well, periodically, I would be working, that was one of the handicaps, you never knew when it was coming. You would get the chills and start shaking. You'd take your temperature and you'd probably be 102, 3, 4 degrees. That's another handicap. It took me a long time, it took years really, to shake this and get it out of your system. Of course, the quinine at that time and the adenine, that was the medication you took for it.
- Mark: I've got a note here that says you had to leave some of your jobs because the fevers got so bad. Is that right?
- Coleman: Well, yes. If you're working on an assembly line or something, you can't--at that time, help was--the war was still going on, war production, so on and so forth. The people who were making civilian hardware or whatever, they were--they needed the people they could depend on, on their shift.
- Mark: Did you get any sort of medical help from the VA for this problem? Did you get any sort of benefits or is it something you had to fight on your own?
- Coleman: I got a 10% disability, which at the time was--\$11.50 a month for malaria.
- Mark: This lasted how long?

- Coleman: That lasted a very short time. I don't think it was a year and I was notified that I was cut off.
- Mark: I've just got one last area I want to cover and that involves veterans' organizations and that sort of thing. Did you join any groups like the Legion, the VFW or anything like that?
- Coleman: Not immediately. Later on, I can't remember when, how many years ago, I belonged to both. I'm a lifetime member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and I pay my dues annually to the American Legion.
- Mark: I'm interested in why you joined these groups.
- Coleman: The first reason that I joined was to exchange and be in company with people who had been in the military, like myself.
- Mark: That was important to you?
- Coleman: It was important to me, yes. It was important to me for several reasons, different places these people had served, their experiences, mine, sure, comrades.
- Mark: I see. Were you very active? Did you go to the meetings and that sort of thing or did you just--
- Coleman: I still do. I have served as commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars post I belong to, 2 different terms and I have served 3 different terms as commander of the local post of the American Legion. I was also on staff at the American Legion at the district level. I'm very concerned about the way veterans sometimes are used, and still am.
- Mark: Like what? Could you elaborate on that? What do you mean used?
- Coleman: Well, the way they are accepted back into the civilian community, some are actually discriminated against.
- Mark: Was that a problem for you? Or do you think that's veterans of later wars?
- Coleman: Later wars. I'm talking about the later wars.
- Mark: But that wasn't a problem for you?
- Coleman: Oh, no, definitely not. You were considered quite a hero at that time.

Mark: I see. Well, those are all the questions I had. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Coleman: That pretty much covers it.

[End of Interview]