

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
JOSEPH A. CONNORS  
Radioman/Platoon Runner, Army, World War II.  
1995

OH  
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**Connors, Joseph A.**, (1922-2000). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 120 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 120 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **Abstract**

Joseph Connors, mentions his early life in Spring Green (Wisconsin), describes his World War II Army service experiences in the Pacific theatre prior to being shot, his recovery time spent in a hospital and his subsequent career in the U.S. Postal Service. Growing up in the depression, Connors recalls not knowing the location of Pearl Harbor when he heard about its bombing. Connors tells why he joined the Army even though he was working in a defense industry. He mentions his swearing-in in December 1942, basic training at Camp Wolters (Texas), and his experiences and observations of the '03 Springfield and M1 rifles. Connors touches upon Morse Code training, reflects on his impression of "boys from the South," and the friends made at basic training. Connors describes life aboard a Dutch freighter during the 21-day trip to the Pacific and how there were separate holds for Whites and Blacks. Reflecting on life on Espiritu Santo Island, he postulates why they were assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 37<sup>th</sup> Division and tells why the Americal Division was named as such. Connors mentions different duties Blacks received, his impression of their performance and describes combat experiences on Bougainville Island during their establishment of an airstrip. Connors chats about an insect on Bougainville that sounded just like a Japanese bold action weapon contributing to nervousness, talks about his position on "starvation ridge" and having to steal C-rations, and his impressions of how and why the Japanese were forced to attack their position. After Bougainville, Connors describes combat on Luzon after the invasion at DaGupan detailing his experiences as platoon runner, pulling injured men while under fire, and running back hundreds of yards for a map case an officer had forgotten. He talks about prostitution, a brewery the soldiers found, guarding a house only colonels and above could enter and Filipino reaction to the American arrival. Connors touches upon the best swimmer in the company drowning in a river and not being able to get to him. Connors, for no reason, asked for the time just before being wounded by a ricochet. He describes his feelings toward the commander, the trip back to the field hospital, the use of penicillin, and how his leg developed gangrene. Connors chats about receiving skin grafts from a doctor at Kennedy General Hospital (Memphis, Tennessee) who escaped from Germany. Telling of the generosity of one nurse and her husband in particular, Connors mentions time spent away from the hospital and his mother's reaction when on a furlough. After being discharged in November 1945, Connors describes his application process for and subsequent employment with the Post Office, unit reunions, continued reaction to sharp noises, staying in touch with guys through the years, and his association with the DAV (Disabled American Veterans) and Purple Heart.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Connors (1922-2000) born and raised in Spring Green (Wisconsin), was drafted into the Army in December 1942 and served as a radio operator in 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 129<sup>th</sup> Infantry in the Pacific theatre. After being shot, Connors returned to the United States for recovery before his discharge on 11 November 1945. He worked for the Madison Post Office until retirement.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, 2002.

Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2002 and John McNally 2006

Mark: Today's date is March 22, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Joseph Connors of Madison, a veteran of the South Pacific theater in World War II. Good afternoon, how are you doing?

Connors: Fine.

Mark: Thanks for stopping in. I appreciate it.

Connors: I'm glad to be here.

Mark: We should start, I suppose, by if you would tell me a little bit about where you were born and your upbringing and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Connors: I was born in a small town that was made famous by Frank Lloyd Wright, Spring Green, Wisconsin. At the age of 2 my parents moved to Madison and outside of my experiences in World War II, I've lived here all my life.

Mark: What year did you finish high school?

Connors: 1939.

Mark: So it was before Pearl Harbor then. You were working at the time?

Connors: I was, in those days they had something called NYA training, that's the National Youth Administration during Roosevelt's presidency they had these and I went to vocational school to learn machine shop. After that I went to work for an outfit called Ben Anderson Manufacturing Company. We made milking machines. That's what I was doing when I was called into service.

Mark: These are the Depression years. Were they tough on you and your family? Did you have trouble finding work after high school?

Connors: I worked in a grocery store on weekends and I had a newspaper route up until the time I was a senior in high school and I kept that because it was about the second biggest route in the city of Madison so I had that coming in. But, oh, yes, things were a little tough.

Mark: Do you recall hearing the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor and do you remember what you thought and as a 20-year-old kid, did you perhaps think of the implications it might have for your life?

Connors: I had a brother, Leo, he was the one I told you was on that plane that guy got the Congressional Medal and he was in service. He enlisted in June of '41 to get his year in. There were five boys in our family and so my mother worried about the Army even before the war. What I was doing, I was down at the 20th Century Pool Hall. We always went down there after church on Sunday.

Mark: Where is that out of curiosity?

Connors: You know where The Pub tavern is at?

Mark: State Street?

Connors: Ya. Well right next door was a pool hall. You could walk from The Pub right into the pool hall and they always had free games left on the pin ball machines so we got down there just before they opened up and go in and one guy would play the pin ball machine with the free games on it and two other guys would go over and play pool. Then the one that got beat, he had to come over and play the pin ball machine and the other guy would go over and play pool. I was playing the pin ball machine. A friend of mine came over and he said that the Japanese just attacked Pearl Harbor. I asked him where Pearl Harbor was, I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. Then I said that I had better go home because I knew my mother and dad would be worried due to the fact that they already had one son in there. I went home and they were sitting there listening to the radio and that's how I got acquainted with what happened.

Mark: When did you actually enter the service? When were you drafted? It wasn't long after that was it?

Connors: No. I went in December. Went down to Milwaukee. I went for a so-called physical at the University Hospital - they just wanted to see if you were warm. Then I went to Milwaukee for the real physical and that's where I got sworn in on the 11th of December, 1942.

Mark: After the attack on Pearl Harbor, how did things change for you in your work?

Connors: In order for him to get steel and that, he went into manufacturing a thing for a field stove that the Army used. We made parts for that then. That's what they were doing when I left. They were still making the milk machine but this other one had priority.

Mark: Was there a lot more work after the war had started?

Connors: Ya. We were working nine hours a day six days a week. For instance, I could have got a deferment for a while, but I just didn't feel that that was the proper thing to do, being young and foolish. I was in a defense industry, therefore, they would let certain ones stay home. I wonder why in the world they took us in such a short time before Christmas. I never came home again. You know you're supposed to get a furlough and on the 21st of December is when I got on the train and went down to Camp Grant and the next day, certain ones of us went on the detail and then they said the ones going on detail are not going to be shipping out tonight. So I came back in and a buddy of mine from Madison was standing in the doorway of the barracks and he had the longest face you ever saw in your life. I said, "Tommy, what's the matter?" He said, "I'm shipping out." I said, "You were on detail." He said, "Ya, but they put new sheets up on who's shipping out." So I went and looked and the third name from the bottom of that sheet was me. So we left there about 7:00 or 7:30 and we went down to Texas. Camp Wolters, Texas. As a matter of fact, we spent Christmas Eve,

they fed us, they got us off the train in Oklahoma City and fed us our Christmas meal and then I arrived down in Texas on Christmas Day.

Mark: They started basic training on Christmas Day?

Connors: No. We got there Christmas Day. Then when you first went in you took exams. From the time I was three years old, my hearing was not real acute. I passed the radio quite high because I ended up in radio. Then our basic training started maybe three or four days after that. We were all headquarters people, like radio, wire, message center, intelligence and all that.

Mark: In this period between actually starting your training and being inducted, what sort of military discipline were you under? Did you get the hair cuts and the yelling sergeants and all this business?

Connors: Oh, ya. Down in Camp Grant when they issue clothes, I weighed 126 pounds, I grew almost three inches after I was 21 years old. I'm going through getting these clothes and they give you your shorts and you put them on and the sergeant was sitting in a chair atop a table and all of a sudden I hear somebody yelling, "Soldier!" I'm not looking, I just got in the Army and he said, "You!" and I turned around and said, "Me?" and he asked where I got those shorts and I told him the guy down here gave them to me. He said, "Come with me." The shorts had draw strings on the side and they were white. I did the best I could but they must have been about a 35 and I have a waist that's so small you can't believe. Didn't have any hips. He told the guy to give me the smallest shorts he had. The guy rummaged around and he finally gave me some that came fairly close to fitting, but I still kind of had to hold them up. He said to the guy issuing the clothes, he said, "If this ever happens again, you're going to go where he's going". My thought was "Where the Hell am I going?" That was my introduction to the Army.

Mark: Sort of ominous I'd say. Was it a difficult adjustment? Military discipline and that sort of thing?

Connors: No. That wasn't - the sad part was that I didn't get a chance to come back home. Even after our basic training. I was hoping to go home for Christmas because I was only 70 miles away. The fact that I didn't get a chance to come back home, well maybe it's a good thing because I was going to get married on my furlough and later on I got my Dear Joe and I married a very lovely girl as it is so maybe its all for the best. No, the discipline never bothered me.

Mark: As for your training, there was a gentleman I interviewed yesterday who went in really early. He described how they would train with broom sticks for rifles and those sorts of things and some of the veterans I've spoken with later in the war, they had all the equipment they needed. You were kind of in the middle. Could you characterize the equipment you trained with. Did you have modern rifles and those kinds of things?

Connors: No. We had the '03 Springfield from World War I. Most of them were pitted so when you fired it, it really kicked. I saw guys with bruises on their shoulder from

being out on the firing range. They told you don't put the thumb over the top of the stock because when that thing came back, you'd get a black eye. They were accurate. They were a nice weapon considering 1918. I never saw an M1 until I got overseas. That's when they gave us the M1s and we got used to using those. At one time the rumor was around, probably started by Japanese propaganda, that the M1 would get sand in it and jam. As a matter of fact I heard that the Marines didn't want anything to do with them for a while. Then they found out how good they were and they started trading their '03s for our M1's cause they'd shoot. Sometimes you'd end up with an '03 that didn't belong to us. That was after we got overseas.

Mark: What sort of things did you do in basic training? Was it a lot of drills? Marching around, military discipline? Did you get on the range?

Connors: Yes. We went on the range. The majority of my training was in radio. I had to learn Morse Code and then learn how to set up networks and things like this. Also, though, we had calisthenics every day. Then they did try to teach us a few infantry tactics, but very little because we were going to be radio men and so therefore you're not going to be a combat infantryman. You're going to be infantry, but you're going to be in probably battalion headquarters or regimental headquarters or something like that. Like I was telling you, the battalion that I was in Texas there was radio, wire, message center and intelligence; those four different companies. We all thought we were going to go home on furlough after our basic training and we sat down there for almost two weeks and didn't do anything but police up the area because our Basic was over. Then we found out why we were being held there they sent us to Camp Stelman in California right near Pittsburg, California. We went right overseas. None of us ever got a furlough. So from the 21st of December until I came home in 1945 from a hospital, I never had a furlough.

Mark: If you could describe some of the other men you trained with. Was it a mix of people from different regions of the country? If you could describe how they all got along, what sort of regional differences there were in terms of education and those kinds of things.

Connors: I think the boys from the south, some of them were still fighting the Civil War. Especially those from Georgia. I don't know how come but I ended up as a radio cadet but that's as top as you can go. You gotta pass all these exams and that was the main thing. They always told us that we were the cream of the crop. Well, we had high school principal, a violinist that played in those big bands in New York, and how he ever could manage to get that radio and find a symphonic music, but he kept fiddling with it and pretty soon none of these guys wanted to listen to that anyhow. But he could get it. Matter of fact I just visited him in January. The guy next to me, Art Conforti his name was, he became my best friend. When I first saw him I thought, "Oh, Boy! Look what I got next to me. This is where you really realize the first impression is not the proper impression. He and I became real close friends and he got killed later on after we got overseas. You form a little clique you might say. These two guys, Burns from Chicago got acquainted with Conforti also and on a weekend they'd take passes, but I didn't. I just went in to Mineral Wells, Texas and got myself a steak and I didn't drink at that time so I'd get back on the bus and come home to the barracks and write letters or go to a movie because I had a very guarded

life. My mother brought us up pretty strict - five boys during the Depression. Wanted to know where you were going, who you were going with and I had to be in the house at 9:00 PM until I was 17 when I had my first date and then from that time on she just said, "Be good." Maybe that's how come my mother was a - we were disciplined. Maybe that helped me when I went into the service. But these guys - we all got along. We didn't have any problems.

Mark: And so these guys still fighting the Civil War was more in the spirit of ribbing.

Connors: That's about it. Also, Georgia had a great football team and so that was always brought up. We had a few guys from Texas and I think they thought Texas was the only state in the Union.

Mark: Still is if you talk to them. So then you went to California and you shipped out overseas. Did you ship out with the men you trained with?

Connors: Ya. Conforti was a great gambler - he bookied the horses when he was only 17 years old. He didn't have any money and I had \$60. When we got off the boat, I didn't have any money and he owed me \$60. We were playing blackjack during the day up on the deck. We'd win. He'd let me deal. Then he'd do the betting. Then go down in the hold at night and he'd get in a crap game and whatever we won that day plus a little more, he'd lose. I said, "Why don't we put a little of this that we won aside?" I was a little bit more conservative. That's how you spent your time aboard ship for 21 days. We left Mother's Day, the 9th of May and we arrived Memorial Day, the 30th of May. We did a lot of traveling on holidays.

Mark: Some of the vets I speak to describe a lot of seasickness and this kind of thing on trips overseas. Was that much of a problem? Did you run into any storms?

Connors: We never left the dock and some of these guys from New Mexico and that were down in the latrine throwing up. Some were down there two and three days. They had to go down and they were feeding them orange juice or some kind of juice to get them settled down and we hadn't even left the dock. It was an old Dutch freighter, Kota Agonne that we went overseas on. How you spell that I don't know. There was an old Dutchman who had been to sea all his life, matter of fact it took me two days to find out when he said "Blackout regulations are now in effect" what he meant because you couldn't understand what he was saying.

Mark: What are blackout regulations. I'm not familiar with that.

Connors: In other words, you can't smoke on deck. No lights. The one duty that they assigned me, we had these rafts see, on a slant, and if we got hit or something and had to abandon ship, every time we had a drill I went up there and there was an ax and a big hawser rope that I was supposed to cut that thing and the raft would slide down into the ocean. I never did quite figure out how I was going to get on that raft and cut the rope at the same time because I was going to make sure I was on that raft! We didn't hit anything. We were all by ourselves.

Mark: What sort of accommodations did the typical enlisted guy have on these ships?

Connors: The bunks were canvas, one on top of the other. You had just enough room to slide in, there were about six or seven in a row. We were way down in the hold. There were three holds. There were two holds of Whites and one hold of Blacks. They took turns cooking and let me tell you we must have fed half the sharks in the Pacific. No way could you eat that. At noon I would get myself a Coke and fig bars and that's what I had at noon. If they were giving out fruit, I would go down the line and get the fruit, but I couldn't eat that stuff, it was terrible. I haven't eaten a fig bar to this day and the Coke was warm because there wasn't enough room in the refrigeration on that small a freighter to cool anything and they had to make sure that whatever meat they had was refrigerated. So, we were drinking warm Coke until we worked our way back into the refrigeration. Finally, we got cold Coca Cola.

Mark: Where did you go to in the South Pacific?

Connors: Espiritu Santo. It's a beautiful island. We picked up a destroyer about two days out. This was in the Hebrides Islands. Espiritu Santos is the main island in the Hebrides and we picked up a destroyer about two or three days out and they escorted us on in because we were getting down in some more dangerous waters. That way we could go right around it. When they first came up on us, I could never really read the signals that they send with the flasher, the light, but some of our guys got so good, you couldn't believe in that short 12-13 week training that they picked that stuff up and they were reading what they were sending from the destroyer.

Mark: What were they sending?

Connors: That there was a submarine in our vicinity.

Mark: This wasn't something that was supposed to be broadcast to the passengers necessarily.

Connors: No. They took us on in and this is a land locked harbor and we sailed into that thing and here's all these coconut trees, rows and rows of them, planted by men. They looked lovely except for way down in the Pacific someplace. I think some Frenchman controlled that island. He owned all the coconuts. The very next day we were getting all these coconuts and eating them. We thought that was just great.

Mark: When you left San Francisco did you know where you were going to?

Connors: No. One guy insisted we were going to go to Hawaii. One guy thought we were going to go up the coast to Washington. He kept saying that they couldn't send us overseas without a furlough. Well we found out they could send us overseas without a furlough. Then we're going due west but the next morning when we came up on the deck, we weren't going due west anymore, we were going the other way and then one guy said that we were going down to the canal. So we didn't know where we were going until we were almost there and then a rumor started that we were going to New Hebrides. We got there, that was one of the next places the Japs were going to hit. We were closer to New Zealand and Australia but on account of this beautiful harbor that was there too. In those days they were down as far as the Solomon Islands.



Mark: So when you got to Espiritu, it's in Mitchner's novel, what did you do?

Connors: That's when we got our really basic training as far as combat was concerned. That's where we got our M1's. That's when we went out and zeroed them in. This Frenchman who owned all those coconut trees, he started charging us for each coconut that he found opened up. I think he charged them enough to last through two world wars. He was feeding them to his pigs, so we weren't very happy with this Frenchman. We had strict orders that we would be court marshaled if we were caught eating a coconut. We went out to zero in our M1s and we got out there on the firing range and here comes a sow with about six or seven little piglets. I heard the captain yell, "Don't hit those pigs!" and those pigs were slaughtered. All of them. Then he said, "We got to get rid of these things, if that Frenchman ever finds these things..." We put them in a weapons carrier, a small vehicle and took them back to the company and the cooks took and skinned them and cooked them and we ate them. The guys in D Company right next to us said the next day, "What in the world are you guys eating over there?" We said that we ate the same things they ate. He said that it smelled pretty good and we said that our cooks are getting better, they're experimenting a little bit. We had guards out to make sure nobody came up when we were cooking those pigs.

Mark: Nice change of pace I'm sure. I was in the Air Force and I'm sometimes unfamiliar with the way the Army works. When did you get hooked up with the 37th? Was it on Espiritu Santos?

Connors: Yes. The reason we went over when the war started they had what they called a square division from World War I. They decided that it would be better coordinated and so forth if they just made a triangle so they yanked one regiment out of each division. Matter of fact there was a division down there in the Pacific called the Americal Division that was composed of three regiments from all different divisions. When we were sent over there we got involved with the 129th Infantry which was a former regiment of the 33rd Illinois. Now the 37th was the second division over there. The 32nd was the first one and the 37th was the second one. They sent a regiment up to fight on Guadalcanal and wherever they sent them for rest after that, they came down with elephantiasis and malaria and dengue fever and all these things. They didn't miss out on anything. Well, here's us guys up there just finishing our basic training and 129th Infantry is down there and they are short a first battalion because when they were taken away from their regular division, and became what they called it a bastard regiment, no mother division. They sent a forward party over to Europe. They sent the 1st Battalion over there. Then you still got the 2nd and 3rd Battalions in 129th Infantry in the United States and somebody figured out MacArthur's not getting enough help so they send them down there to the Pacific. So they're down there looking to join some mother division or something, but they're short a battalion. So there we go, we now are going to be the 1st Battalion of the 129th Infantry. That's why we went overseas without a furlough or anything. They just sent a thousand men over there to form the 1st Battalion. So, therefore, they had a chance to get into the 37th Division but they had to have that 1st Battalion and then they came around and checked us out, the officers from the 37th to see if we were capable of joining their division. The ones that passed the highest was the 1st

Battalion because they had all these guys who were a little more intelligent. That's why they put us in headquarters company down in Texas. Like I told you, high school principals and all, three or four school teachers down there in Texas. That's how I ended up in an Illinois regiment in an Ohio division. We were from everywhere. The general was from Ohio, of the Division, and our colonel was from Illinois so if they hit something pretty bad, the guy from Ohio is not going to send his other regiments in there, he's going to send an Illinois regiment in. Well, they're not going to send the two battalions in because their all from Illinois. They're going to send us because we're from everywhere. And they did.

Mark: I thought I read somewhere where the 37th there was a Black contingent. Is that true?

Connors: They were truck drivers and things like this. They weren't combat troops. But I heard they put some out there and they had to put some guys behind them to make sure they didn't go off the line. You can take that for a fact or not, I don't know. No. There was no combat troops that I

**[End of Side A, Tape 1]**

ever was around in the Pacific. Now I ran across them when I was in the hospital in Biak, Dutch East Indies after I got shot. They brought this one Black guy in and I don't recall just what happened to him but they would send them out on patrol, now these are all the stories you hear. They send them out on patrol and they just got outside, they were protection for the hospital. There were three field hospitals on Biak or something like that and you had to have somebody to protect you. They would go out so far and you'd swear the biggest battle was going on you ever heard. They'd fire all their ammunition and come back. They came to visit this guy, they're funny. They got a great sense of humor. Just the way they talk sometimes. These three guys come in and they sit down and he says, "What seems to be the trouble with you fellows?" They says, "You aren't going to believe what they did now!" He says, "Tell me what did they do?" He says, "You aren't going to believe what they did now." Finally he says "So tell me!" He said, "they took our rifles away and locked them up." I thought "no, who the Hell is going to protect us now?" But no, we didn't have any contact outside that they drove the trucks.

Mark: So when did you first get into combat? How long after you got there and trained?

Connors: We got over there the 30th of May and we went up to Guadalcanal and there were about three or four thousand Japs still in the interior. I never saw any of them. As a matter of fact, it was very sad, my sergeant, he was from the 37th Division. They sent him over as cadre to train us guys when we got over there and he's down below at a place called Bloody Nose Ridge and he's walking along and there's a cross with dog tags on it. He looked at it and here's a kid he grew up with from the 37th Division that they sent up to fight on the Canal. He felt kind of bad about that. Then we left there, the Marines went in Bougainville Island. They made the initial assault and then we went up and we landed there the 11th of November on Bougainville and also my company was on a Navy ship because we were in the loading detail also. We were the only one left, the rest had all gone out on ships so they put us on this last Navy ship. We ate right with them. Boy, the food that the Navy has is far superior to what you can carry on your back. I'm behind this Navy guy and he gets up there in line and he's taking his tray and he looked down and says, "Ah, Lemon pie again today?"

I tapped him on the shoulder and I says, "Take it, I'll eat yours and mine too." Then we went up and hit Bougainville. The Japs were going to hit up where the village is on that island, up at the other end where we went in. The jungle came right down to the water just about. Not much of a beach and the Marines had to work their way in so we'd have enough room for us to go in. They were there about two or three days before he hit. Then we went in and we started spreading out because all they wanted on Bougainville was enough room to build a fighter and bomber strip to knock out islands such as Rabaul and that and then they wouldn't have to invade that because it would knock them out. So we went eight miles in and eight miles along the beach and made a semicircle and then we dug pill boxes. But the first night it was quite a battle going on. Everybody was shooting at everything.

Mark: Now the Japanese were shooting at you.

Connors: No. Just they imagine things. But they had some damn insect, I don't know if it clicked it's wings or what it was but it sounded like somebody working a bolt like the Japs got these bolt action weapons and so it sounded like that. So, with every little noise I heard, somebody would shoot at it. Well, all I did, I dug a hole, got down in the bottom of the hole and stayed there. Then it calmed down and we kept moving in until we had dug our pill boxes and there was a volcano right in the middle of the island so this is quite mountainous and it seemed like you were either going up a hill or going down a hill. They didn't get the food up to us. As a matter of fact, after we did this then we went on patrol and we patrolled and patrolled you'd run across a little action once in a while against a patrol of Japanese. We even sent three guys who weren't feeling very good back to the beach to see if they could steal some C-rations. If you think that isn't something to be at the point where you gotta steal C-rations! We even watched the other guys come down to my platoon. I was in the 1st platoon at that time. We had to watch so that they wouldn't come down and see us with these C-rations because then we would have had to give them some. That's getting pretty sad. We called it Starvation Ridge. It was just unbelievable. We were hungry!

Mark: Were you in contact with the Japanese?

Connors: Until they come over. Finally, they were starving. They had these gardens they were growing but the Air Corps was watching and when it looked like they were getting fairly good they'd go over and set them on fire. They got nothing coming in. Maybe a submarine might sneak in, but for how many thousand that they had on that island. So, finally they come over and attacked us. This is a benefit because the offense is worse than the defense so we got all these pill boxes and we had mines out in front of our pill boxes. It was terrible. We killed them at the rate of 30 to 1. You couldn't believe all these dead bodies out there.

Mark: Just a desperation attack it sounds like.

Connors: Sure. We could hear them out there jabbering. They didn't want to go across our mine field. The officers were insistent and they go along in single file and get blowed up and that's the way they make a path. That's the only way they could come in there, you had a machine gun sitting on the other side of there and they're coming up that path. It was very bad. They finally retreated. They came over in 1944, we got

there and invaded in November of '43. We were on there a few months before they ever decided, they had to come clear across those mountains and carry everything over them. They expected us to hit up there where that village was and we went in the exact opposite. Empress Augusta Bay we went in. After they retreated went back over the other side of the island again. I don't know how many thousand of them were left, they sent the band out to bury the dead. The band was madder than hell, but they figured the band didn't do any fighting and they didn't do too good a job of burying them either because you'd be on patrol and step in - where they'd thrown some dirt on and that gas would come up in your face and all the flies are out there and so forth. Then we go to invade Luzon. We were supposed to go to Saipan, but we were in such bad shape,

Mark: After Bougainville.

Connors: Yeah, we'd been in the jungles all this time and MacArthur wouldn't, they actually announced that they were going to go to a temperate climate, but MacArthur turned us down. So instead of hitting Saipan, they give us the interval between the invasion of Saipan and the invasion of Luzon. They probably figured that Luzon was better off, maybe even just a little more temperate climate than the other places and this Australian division, one division. The Marines pulled out before the big battle. They left to go someplace else. They brought in the Americal Division and so the 37th and Americal were the ones on Bougainville when the big attack by the Japanese came. Then later on we left on a ship, what was it about 30 days going up to Luzon? We got to Luzon the 9th of January of '45 and we left around sometime in December. Took us 30 days. That was the biggest invasion fleet in the Pacific at that time.

Mark: Where on Luzon did you land? It was kind of a big island.

Connors: Empress Augusta Bay. I'm a little mixed up between Bougainville - we landed at a town called Dagupan. This Dagupan was a favorite of the Americans before World War II when they went on furlough. You could actually see the difference in the Filipino kids. They weren't all Filipino. We went in there and I'm riding on the front of this Alligator. That's the vehicle that could go on both land and water. This bridge was only half in and these people were standing up there, some of the girls had umbrellas over their heads to keep from the sun and they're waving to us. I'm looking at them, all that time in the jungle hadn't seen a girl in quite a while. So, I'm looking up like that and this alligator comes to the bank of the river and I start to slide into the water and this guy grabbed me by the collar and hung on. I got my legs wet but at least I didn't go in. The front of this thing would have run right over me. I got a 30 pound radio on my back. I had been moved up to become company radio man. I don't know that I would have made it. So, he hung on until we leveled off. It might have been Empress Augusta Bay.

Mark: I'm sure that's in official Army history somewhere.

Connors: Oh ya. Because they had already hit Leyte and the 32nd hit Leyte and they also came over to Luzon later on. There were the 45th, the 6th, the 37th, I don't know, I think there were four divisions and one in reserve or something like that when we went into Luzon. We went right up Highway 1. As a matter of fact that was the first time I

went to church in quite a long time because they had locked all the churches up and I went in the side door. This was at a place called Malasiki. That was the second town we took. I remember there was a big celebration because they unlocked the front doors. Filipino bands were playing and they were all dressed in their finest. Then we went right up Highway 1 and we went up and took Clark Field and there was quite a battle at a place called Ft. Stottsenberg. That was just adjacent to Clark Field. Anyhow, this Vice-President of the Philippines under the Japanese, they built themselves this home. Oh, you should have seen that! It was just gorgeous! The order come down that nobody under the rank of Colonel could go in this building. This was the word we got because they sent a friend of mine from Chicago, Peterseck and I over there to guard the two gates going in. They said that nobody under Colonel goes in there and that if they try, we were to stop them. So later on, here comes this guy through and Peterseck says, "What rank are you?" Cause they're not wearing anything to demonstrate what rank they are. They don't want to show off that they're a big shot because they might get knocked off. He said, "Why?" We said that nobody under the rank of Colonel can go in there. He said, "Well I'm a Lieutenant Colonel." So, we said that he couldn't go in there. He says, "What are you talking about, we got our orders." He starts to walk right on by Peterseck says, "Lieutenant Colonel, I don't think you better go any further or I'm going to let you have it." He turned around and here's Peterseck with that rifle pointed at him and he was swearing and walking out of there and mad as Hell. A beautiful home. That was just before Manila. We took a little suburb, Lowinitowoc. It had a brewery and somehow or other we stalled right there and the guys all knew I didn't drink so they said, "Go on and drink some beer". This is the first time we had a vehicle. We walked all the way. We never rode anywhere. So I went in there and I couldn't find anything to put any beer in so I put it in my helmet and brought it back to them. They're drinking that beer and we went on up and somebody says, "Save some for Connors." I said that I don't want any and that they could go ahead and drink it. That little helmet full for all those guys, they're lucky if they got a sip. Well, we got up into that suburb and they had to go get water. So we asked the Captain if we could go and get some beer. He said that we could but that we shouldn't get into any trouble. So there was myself and Peterseck and a guy we called the Polack and we're in this vehicle and the driver. We got I don't know how many 5 gallon water cans that we were going to put beer in. We got up to the brewery and went in and filled them all up and put them back in the weapons carrier, and we're going over to try and find this water point and we picked up this guy hitchhiking and here he is a Major in the MP's and he asked where we were going so we told him and he says he knows where those water point is so these guys have been sipping on this beer with the canteen cup and the Polack and Peterseck got a small pony, an empty pony keg and they filled it up with beer and put it back in the back and Peterseck's got his foot against it holding it and every so often Polack asked Peterseck if he still had that keg. "I got the keg." Peterseck would answer that he did. So we got this here major about half snarkled. We got to the water point. Well, it's getting late. I think he took us to the point where he was stationed by, because there might have been another one along the way but this is the one he took us to. So we left there and we're going back and we decided that they drank so much beer that we better go back to the brewery and refill the ones. We didn't want the captain to see how much beer was gone. We're going down this highway and I said, "I don't think this is the way we came." The driver said he wasn't sure either and it's getting dark. So we pulled up to a Filipino house and yelled until a

Filipino came out and we told him we were Americans and we asked if there were more Americans down that road and he says, "No, no, Japanese." We were going toward the damn Jap lines. The driver's got a 45, I got my rifle, the other two guys don't have anything. So, we turned around and went back and we got back and the captain is really perturbed at us because we were gone so long. We stopped at the brewery, some guy got drunk and fired off his BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) and so the MP's came in and took over the brewery so we couldn't fill up our cans. So the captain said to throw that beer out, it's green. Now where he ever got the notion it was green I don't know. Here, I'll never forget this Lieutenant Constable, God rest his soul. He got killed nine days after I got hit and he was a very dear friend of mine. Big guy. He reached in and here went a 5 gallon can and Peterseck went to lift that keg out and he almost threw it over his head. The thing had a leak and all the beer leaked out. So Pollock took off and went with Lieutenant. Constable. But the guys that drank the beer - it didn't affect them. Somebody said the beer was green.

Mark: You must be close to Manila.

Connors: Ya. We're in the suburbs.

Mark: Some guy went to the latrine and forgot to take his rifle with him and just went off in the bushes and he looks over and he spots this Jap laying over there. He got back and told us there was a Jap over there. We knew there were some in the vicinity because they were getting these here rifle grenades, I believe it was, they were firing them with a (child shiline form?). They'd get fired on. So they knew something was going on. So about four of us went up to this little hummock there and he was on the other side of that. So we were going to go around either side and a guy named Zowadski threw a grenade over this hill but just before he threw it, he had been firing to pin him down so he could get up there and throw it. He heard this noise. The Jap had taken a grenade and held it against his stomach and killed himself, cause he knew he was done so he killed himself. The next day is when we moved over to the Manila Jockey Club racetrack and that's where we got all set and this Lieutenant Constable heard about these two Filipino girls that were benefiting the GI's and he wanted me to go along for company. I said that I wasn't going to go there. He said that it only cost a peso. I said I didn't have a peso so he said he'd loan me one. He just about got me convinced and the captain comes over and told me to get a couple of 6x6's and a jeep and go back and pick up Sgt. Ziederwicz's platoon. They're still back at the suburb. So, I said, "Gotta go. Sorry." So I get in the jeep and go back and I don't think that they had an officer at that time in that platoon 'cause Ziederwicz and I were riding in the jeep and all the other guys in his platoon are in the trucks and we're going along and here's this line of guys, about seven, eight or nine of them in line and here's Constable. Ziederwicz says to me, "Isn't that Constable?" I asked where and he said "right there with the raincoat about the fourth guy back in the line." I says, "Ya, that's him." Ziederwicz asked, "What do you think that line is?" I said, "I'll explain it to you later." But for the grace of God, I'd have been standing in right in that line with Constable. Then they came and got these two girls later on because they were sore. They thought they were spreading some disease. Turned out it wasn't that it was just too much activity. So then Manila was burning. That night we were up there on the racetrack in the bleachers and its all on fire. We moved out the next day. I remember these Swiss people were more or less in charge of some oil tanks there because they

weren't at war with anybody. They come out and passed out about three or four or five bottles that they'd been saving (liquor) and they give it up front of the company and then go back and wait for another one in there, the guys are passing these bottles around to each other. I didn't drink so it didn't phase me. We moved on up to a place they called the Rope Factory where they made ropes and there was a river here and we got through there and this machine gun pinned us down and we slid off the road and I got behind this metal door. In front of me is my communication sergeant and in front of him is the captain. I couldn't see him so I told the communication sergeant if you move out, let me know. Well, they moved out and they didn't let me know. There was a plank across this river and that's the way they went over. Then here comes another captain and he asked me where Litchfield was. I've got the radio and I'm supposed to be with him at all times. I said he was right around this door, but they left me and I didn't see them go and I assume they went over the other side. He said to get over there and find him. He starts walking with us and a machine gun opened up again and he took off, so we took off. When we got back there he said to me, "What are you doing here?" I said that I had seen him run so I thought I better run. He says, "You go find Litchfield." So the bridge had been blown up on the far side and so it sloped. I was sliding down and there was Peterseck and George Cass, all these are company headquarters people. We were sliding down and to the right and as we were sliding down the machine gun is hitting the bridge. I don't know why one of us didn't get hit. We stood down and here where the road come up to meet the bridge, there was a bank. So we got up there on the bank and then Peterseck spotted a small pill box and he stood over by that. The rest of us were lined up along this bank and there were three other guys that were there already. One guy froze. We told him to move or we're all going to get it. That machine gun was coming right down that road. He couldn't quite hit us on account of that bank. There was a big tank car up on the right so he couldn't fire down that way. So I heard somebody yelling "Help" and I looked back of me and nobody was moving so I took the radio off and I went back to where we had slid down and I see Olson and he's bobbing, he's going under. He was the best swimmer in the company. Anytime that we'd stop, he'd start digging a hole. I don't care if it was only five minutes and the guys made fun of him for digging those holes. He said that he had a baby boy he had never seen and he was going home to see his son. He drown. I couldn't get to him. I crawled back up and George Cass, from Madison, told me that the machine gun bullets were going just above my head, less than six inches. I got up there again where my radio was and why I ever asked, this is probably one of the most stupid questions anybody could ever ask in their life, but I said, "What time is it, Peterseck?" What the Hell difference did it make what time it was. I wasn't going anywhere. He looked at his watch and he said, "10:00." I had my watch up in my lapel because of perspiration. I looked at it and said, "Ya, that's right." I no sooner said that than I got it.

Mark: Where did you get hit? From rifle fire?

Connors: No. Machine gun. It had to have ricocheted because I'm facing up the stream and he hit me down here in the back of my calf and it went through and just knicked one of the bones and came out about an inch or so above my ankle. The guy in front of me got hit too and he's facing me, so we figure we got a couple of ricochets.

Mark: So at 10:00 in the morning

Connors: I got hit.

Mark: So whatever day it was you knew exactly what time it was.

Connors: I know it was the 9th of February. What difference did it make what time it was for Christ's sake. Anyhow, we laid in that stream until 3:00 in the afternoon. I had to keep loosening this guy's tourniquet. He got hit up in the thigh.

Mark: So he was more seriously wounded than you were.

Connors: Ya, he was. He was bleeding quite bad.

Mark: And you weren't?

Connors: Well, I was all bandaged up. The aidman come over and he's nailed in there and we told him to get down or he'd get hit.

**NOTE FROM TRANSCRIPTIONIST: WE LOST SOMETHING HERE AT THE END OF THE FIRST SIDE OF THE TAPE**

He said "No. I can't give you any more morphine." Then he had to leave. Oh, and the captain shows up. He came along and asked what the Hell we were doing over there. I don't know who told him. Nelson and Connors got hit. I said "Oh." Now I chased this guy over an island and a half. He didn't even look at me and he tried to court marshal Nelson two or three times because he was a little "anti".

Mark: What does that mean? Anti-establishment? Didn't fit in? The Army?

Connors: Everything. Anyhow, he says to George Cass, "Take the radio." Then he says to Nelson, "How do you feel?" Nelson says, "Not too good." He never even asked how I felt. I'll never forget that. After all the time I spent chasing him with that damn radio. So we laid there and they finally came and got us and hauled us back to battalion headquarters. Then a couple of my buddies were back at battalion and they came over to see how I was. Then they put us in an ambulance and took us 30 miles, bumpity, bumpity, bump in that ambulance back to a field hospital and that's where, that night, the bullet was sticking out about maybe an inch and he pulled it out and he held it and he asked if I wanted it. I was so sick at that time, I wish I had kept it, but I said that I didn't want it. He threw it in a bucket.

Mark: You were still conscious. Did they give you a local anesthetic?

Connors: Later. They gave me a spinal and it froze my right leg and it froze my left leg down as far as the knee but it didn't go down far enough. Then they put me to sleep and that's when they gave me Sodium Pentothal

**[End of Side B, Tape 1]**

and I counted to 23. Good thing I could count that high. I didn't come to for two days. All he did was just clean the wound and all that. This is on Leyte. They flew me to Leyte in a little Piper Cub, and that's where they did the preliminary and put a



cast on me. He was going around talking to us two or three days after we got on Leyte, and he said to me, "Do you always hold your foot like that?" I looked at him and I said that it was a comfortable position. They had a big traveling cast on my leg all the way to my hip. He said to raise my foot up and down and I looked at my foot and it didn't do anything. I wiggled my right foot and looked at my left foot again and I said that I couldn't raise it. He said that I was going back in a cast. You got a dropped foot. He said that the nerve was cut or bruised and it turned out it was bruised, but I didn't find that out until Tennessee. He put this cast on just up to my knee and that was there about a week and they flew me to Biak in the Dutch East Indies and, oh God my leg hurt - terrible!

Mark: Throbbing kind of pain?

Connors: Ya. Just a continuous ache. This one nurse, Miss Bahovski, I'll never forget that lady. Oh, how she had to work. She had I don't know how many bed patients, plus some ambulatories and when she got through, her uniform was absolutely drenched. How hard she worked! Anyhow, she would come around, and they'd give me a couple of aspirins, wouldn't give me a pain pill. Then they gave me a couple of aspirins later on and a shot of Penicillin every three hours. The Penicillin was just for protection purposes, not for relieving the pain. Finally this one nurse said to the doctor, "I think there is something wrong with Connors' leg besides being shot. He's awake all the time." I wasn't sleeping at all. I'd ask for another pain pill and they'd say no, that I couldn't have any more pain pills. So said, "OK, let's take the cast off. But take it off so we can reuse it." In other words cut down the sides and then they could put an ace bandage around. When he got down so far (cutting the cast) you could smell it. My leg was black.

Mark: Gangrene?

Connors: Ya. See, they were giving me just Penicillin that's all to save my leg. I was laying on my back when he took it off and I saw the look on his face when he took it off. I thought, "Oh, oh." Just the way he looked at my leg. So we sent the ward boy to get a kit. All it is a towel folded up and inside are scissors, knives, etc. He takes that scissors, I'll never forget, it was like a kindergarten scissors, round nosed, and he bent over my leg and I asked him "Aren't you going to give me anything?" He "no, I got to know when I got enough." So he cut on my leg. Where the bullet came out first it wasn't that big a hole. But it was a bigger hole than where it went in. But they had to give me a skin graft in Memphis. He had to cut so much. If he had of got to me sooner, probably wouldn't be that big a scar. When I got to Memphis they had to give me a skin graft because where the bullet went in healed, but the other one took forever. So they took the skin off my thigh and I got one of the very first, if not the first, skin graft of that type. Before it was always you had to be stitched and that's painful even while you're healing with the stitches in there. This German doctor, he escaped from Germany before Hitler had a chance to kill him. He invented this process where they took your blood the day before and they made a paste out of it. Then they took the skin and punched it until it puffs up and then they take a scalpel or something and slice it off. While they goofed and that broke and so they had to do it twice, so I got a big scar on my thigh too. They pasted that on and then they put a cage around it. They don't bandage it. Before they gave me that skin graft, I had a

bandage on my leg and they'd come around every day and pour Penicillin in it. That stuff, in those days, was expensive. They said that was probably the richest leg in the hospital. This was in Kennedy General Hospital in Memphis. I was there through April. They sent me there because I needed a skin graft. One guy had lost an eye and they sent him there and it was the wrong hospital. They had to send him back to Texas. When I was there we had a gray lady in my ward. One of the most attractive women I've ever seen in my life - not just physically, every way. She could set those GI's off like you couldn't believe. She was a gray lady who volunteered on Mondays. So I was there about three weeks and I said to her, "Mrs. Wensler, what kind of a city is Memphis?" She said that it was a nice city and asked why. I said, "For the first time in almost three years, I'm going to a city. I'm going to get a bite to eat and go to a movie." She said that I would have a good time. On Wednesday she came back to the hospital and she said, "Now you have a pass this weekend?" I said that I did and she asked "How would you like to come to our house?" I don't know what to say. Here I'm a young kid from the north even. I asked if she had a nice easy chair and she said she did and I told her I'd love to come. I never spent a weekend in that hospital from that time on. They'd even come sometimes on Tuesday or Wednesday if there was a good movie, take me out to eat. So, I go to see them at least once a year. No way could I ever repay these people for what they did for me. Two days before I got shot, I got my Dear Joe from my girlfriend. I got the Dear Joe on the 7th and got shot on the 9th. He's 93 and she's 82 and I saw them twice this year. I'll probably see them again when my reunion of my company is the last part of August. He teaches golf six days a week year around. Six months in Memphis, six months in Florida. His son usually helps him go to Florida but he couldn't make it so he called us up and wanted to know if we could get away to take him from Memphis to Winterhaven. It gives me a chance to repay them just somewhat for what they did for me. Wonderful people.

Mark: I've got a couple of questions about the Pacific before we move on to some of the post war things. Specifically what was your role in combat as a radio man?

Connors: At first, I was what they call a platoon runner. What I did there, we had a little walkie talkie about the size of a carton of cigarettes and that kept us in communications with company headquarters and possibly with the other platoons, because there is four platoons and then also I was a runner that took messages if you didn't send a radio. If they wanted to send some word to company headquarters for some reason and also in the squads and in the platoon I would go tell them what the sergeant told me to, what the latest was and so forth. This Sgt. Hutchins, we didn't have an officer, one night in the pill box I heard him rubbing his face. He was in his poncho and he was rubbing his face when he was sound asleep. The next day I looked at his face and it was all red. I asked him if he knew that he was scratching his face something terrible at night. He said that his face itches and itches. I said that I thought he should have it looked at. He said that he would. He didn't come back. They sent him over to medics, and they looked at him and sent him to the hospital. He had three skin diseases all at the same time. They might put Penicillin on and that would activate another one. Then whatever else, salve, they put on, that would rile another one up. I don't know how long he was in the hospital. I went down to see him when he'd only been gone about two weeks and they come over to the 1st platoon and said to pack up that we were going to company headquarters. I said that I didn't want to go to

company headquarters. I was with these guys all that time. They said to pack up, that was an order. So Hutchins is down at the hospital and I don't have a lieutenant, that's how I ended up in company headquarters with that blasted radio. Then I went down and saw Hutchins and you couldn't see anything but the tip of his nose and his mouth. He was all bandaged up. He was in horrible shape. This was all over his body, these skin diseases. Anyhow, he talked them into letting him come back and he came back to the company. Then he's overstripped. They'd already put another sergeant in there so they're going to send him to another company and he said, "The Hell you are!" They said he had to go. So he went over there and the first thing he did, he walked up to the first sergeant and said, "I'm Sgt. Hutchins, where's sick book?" The guy said that he had just got here and Sgt. Hutchins said to never mind, just give me the sick book. They sent him down to the hospital again. He got down there and the doctor says, "Oh, no. You're going home." I don't know how many months he was in the hospital, and in that climate, perspiring all the time, he's not going to get well. Some new doctor had just taken over the hospital and he's going through the papers and he sees this guy only been there a day and he's going home. He wants to know what's going on. They said that they had had him for so many months and we just can't do anything for him. The new doctor said, "I can cure him." So, he told Hutchins, "I can cure you if you cooperate with me. That's probably the reason, you have not been cooperating." So, Hutchins told him to send him home or he was going to see his general. So they sent him home. He still had spots on him when I went to see him after the war.

Mark: I was going to ask about some of the health problems after the war. Out of these exotic diseases like Malaria seems to be the most prevalent one. Did they affect the troops a lot? How many guys really got sick from these exotic diseases?

Connors: We had a number of people that had malaria, but they didn't send anybody home with that, they just got them as well as they could. Then there's guys like Hutchins with all these skin diseases. We called one of them jungle rot. I had that on my face. As a matter of fact, we had a little activity at a place called Peniki. First we had this place called Camaline. We went out there because the Filipino gorillas had spotted about 45 or 50 Japs coming down this road between these rice paddies. So they sent my company up there to ambush them. We got there and got all set up and we got a couple of machine guns set up on either side of the road and the other guys were behind the river bank. There was no place for them to go. So they said instead of waiting for an order, when the first Japs, there was a sign post there that said so many kilometers to the next town, they said just as soon as the first one hits the sign post, open up. Here comes this colonel and he has just been sent over from Africa fighting the Germans and Italians over there. The time came they surrendered. They weren't going to die for their country. So they had a lot of prisoners of war there. He comes up there and I'm with the captain because I have the radio and he says, "Captain, what's going on?" The captain told him that "When they hit that sign post we're going to get them. We'll probably get almost every one of them on the road." The colonel asked why we didn't ask them to surrender. The colonel said to send a squad out there and ask them to surrender. The captain said that they wouldn't surrender. The colonel asked how the captain knew until he asked them. The captain says, "We been fighting these guys a couple of years now and we don't have many prisoners" The colonel said to the captain, "That's an order." The captain says to me, "Go down

and tell Lt. Tokovey to send a squad out and ask them to surrender.” I heard this whole episode so I didn’t say anything. I just put my radio down and I went down. I told Tokovey that he was supposed to send a squad out and ask them to surrender. You could see them out there but they were still out there quite a ways. He looked at me and he thought I was kidding. I said, “Lt. I was standing right next to the captain when this colonel told him, ‘And that’s an order’ and the captain told me so I guess I’m carrying an order. He said, “Oh for God’s sake! So he says to this Castlebury, a great big guy from California, he says, “Castlebury, it’s your turn.” So Castlebury was right there listening to our conversation and he says to his squad, “Well, let’s go.” They moved out and as they are moving out, Castlebury says, “So long.” He got out there and got up on the road and they’re walking toward this Jap patrol and the Japs are coming down the road in a column of threes with the officer walking in front. The officer spots Castlebury in the squad and he put his hand up like this and he stopped them and he looked again and he walked on between this row back down through this row and here comes a guy carrying a Nambu machine gun and he starts to set that thing up in the road and Castlebury made a U turn and came back and said, “I don’t think they want to surrender.” I can just imagine what that colonel is going to say. Just then some guy fired a shot and so that took care of everything. Some of them went into the rice paddies so we couldn’t get them all. Why they ever went into the rice paddies, they sent A company in there to get them out. Let them stay there. They aren’t going to do us any damage. So A company went out there and I still was down with Tokovey and Tokovey says, “Oh, one of them is hit out there and here’s this guy from A company staggering in the muck. Nobody knew and I said, “Well, I’ll get him”. So I went out there and I had a little trouble with this guy cause he fought me a little bit. When I finally got him back, and we’re a mess, I got him back and was standing there and Tokovey says, “Oops, there’s another one!” Why somebody didn’t move cause if I was out there, I’d want somebody to come and get me. That’s why I went. So, I said, “What the Hell, I’m all dirty, I’ll get him too.” So I went out and got him. I’ll be honest with you, I think Tokovey put me in for something. ‘Cause I could have got killed out there. Somebody shot those two guys and he might still be out there. Daniel O’Leary was our first sergeant and he heard about it and he said to me, “I’m going to put you in for the DSC. He said “That was one Hell of a thing you did.” I didn’t do it for a medal I did it cause they were there. Needless to say, I got hit in Manila and Danny O’Leary got killed two months later and needless to say, there went my medal. But the guys know I did it. Another time we were in Bougainville and we’re out in, they had the outposts numbered one, two, three, four and we’re on number seven and we’re out on the Ruma River. It was a pretty good sized river. The Japs were just starting to come over and I don’t know how many were coming over . One guy was out there with a machine gun on the river and he come zipping back in there and he said, “You can’t even see the hill there’s so many Japs coming over that hill.” So, Ziederwicz says to him, “Where’s your weapon?” He had a machine gun. He says, “It’s up there”. He took him up there and brought that machine gun back. Well, I’d gotten word on the radio and I told them what the situation was and they said “OK. Withdraw from the front lines.” So, we start out and get back about 500 or 600 yards up this trail and this Lt., the most hated guy in the company comes over to me and he stopped and he asked if I remembered where the command post was out there. I said “Ya.” I spent three, four or five days there. “I forgot my map cases leaning against that tree right there in the middle of the clearing. Go back and get it.” The last word I heard was that all these Japs were

coming down that river and I'm going to go back there about 500-600 yards and get this guy's map case. This is where your discipline comes in. I went back to get the map case all by myself. it didn't bother me so much at the time but right now sometimes I'll be laying in bed and I'll think about it and think, "I could have got myself killed and who'd have known whatever happened to me". So I went through the jungle, got back to the clearing and I spotted that map case and I think I might have set a new record cause I took off and I grabbed that thing and I dead run and I'm running up that trail and I twisted my ankle. So I can't run and I come walking up there and here's Zince, that was the Lt.'s name and I looked at him and I got this map case in my hand and I threw it at him. You could just see he wanted to start on me and I'm looking right at him thinking, "If you just say one word, I'm going to let everybody know about you forgetting your map case". So, he didn't say anything more. Major Fite showed up and every time Major Fite showed you the fight started because it was unbelievable - all the action would take place when Major Fite was around. He was about 6'2". Anyhow, I'm limping and he asked what was the matter. I told him that I had twisted my ankle and he says, "Oh, that's good. You lead off. We're going back and we're going back with about 100 yards of front line and feel them out. Tonight. You go ahead because that way we won't have an accordion. You know when you're marching sometimes you get an accordion effect because the rear is catching up and falling back and catching up and falling back. So we went back and we dug in and Fite wanted me with him because he wanted to have the radio. It was getting kind of dark and he said "Well, we're going to have them throw some artillery out in front of us. I said, "OK" so he headed out there about three or four hundred yards and he said "That doesn't sound very close does it?" I said, "No". He said we'd bring it in a little further so we brought it in another hundred yards. Then it makes a little different sound. He asked how that sounded and I said that it was closer. He said we'd bring them in a little further. You could start to hear that stuff going over your head. I'm thinking its going to hit those trees up there and we're going to get a shower. They shelled out there all night and some guy from OP6 got cut off and came in behind us but then the shelling started so he couldn't get all the way back in and he lay out there all night. He said those Japs were crying and screaming and running around out there and getting slaughtered. He came in at daybreak. He was all shook up. I don't think he went back to action for quite a while. So we moved back there and got to the front lines. Now I went back and got that Lt.'s map case. Could have maybe got the Bronze Star - but you don't think he's going to recommend me!

Mark: Because he screwed up.

Connors: He got killed later on.

Mark: About some of the post war things. When did you get back to Madison?

Connors: I was discharged the 11th of November, '45. Armistice Day. Out of Percy Jones Hospital in Michigan.

Mark: You came back to Madison on a train?

Connors: I was back on furlough. It ends up that four of the five boys in the family went in the service. Three in the Pacific and one in Europe. My mother was all shaken up. Her other son was on the police force in Milwaukee. So, he didn't have a bed of roses either. So, I come home in May on furlough. They were giving out 90 days and I'd never had a furlough. So, I asked them for 90 days. No, no, we want you back so we can look at your leg. I said there was a hospital at Truax Field in Madison. I can have them look at my leg there. You aren't going to look at my leg cause the skin graft was just healing and you don't put any medicine on, it just heals itself. Well, they told me to wire back for an extension. So I asked them for 60 days and they turned me down there too. So I wired back and they wired back "Extension Denied". I'll be honest with you, what I should have done was have them come and get me. I don't think there was an awful lot they could have done with me. They're aren't going to put me in the brig. Then I got discharged and I went to the University for a semester but I didn't have any books, I had to stand up in class and I had written a post office exam. They called me to go to work at the post office. Being a disabled vet you go to the head of the list.

Mark: I noticed you worked at the post office, not to interrupt but I was wondering if you got the job with the Federal government with a veterans preference thing?

Connors: No. I passed an exam pretty high. Plus the fact that I was the number one guy hired after the war in the Madison Post Office. Seven disabled guys. You get ten points, say you got a 65 and ten points is a 75. That's somewhat how it works. I think I wrote about a 90 or 89 plus the fact that I was disabled so. When I was growing up during the Depression, the mail man always had a good job and they had their own homes. So I decided that - my benefits started as though I had three years in at the Post Office because they took my Army time and put it into the Post Office time. I had 37 years counting my Army time when I retired.

Mark: In the postal service, having your leg wound, what sort of job did you do? You weren't pounding a beat were you?

Connors: They wanted me for inside. I said I wasn't going inside. They asked about my leg and I said, I'll stay out there just as long as I can. I was going to be a cop but I didn't pass the physical on account of my leg. I might not have been able to stay outside as a policeman but I carried two years. I'm carrying the 2500 blocks on Gregory St., all these steps go up like this and in those days you made two trips. You had two deliveries a day. We had boodles of magazines. Liberty, Colliers, Saturday Evening Post, and on Friday they always had all these magazines. Oh, God, after the first trip I came back in and told the supervisor, "I can't do it anymore." He said, "Look he said, just take out the first class. I don't have anybody else and see me when you came back in." Well, I was back out there he called up the superintendent of mails and explained the situation. Well, he knew that I had a bad leg and so he said to Leo Coyles, the superintendent, "Tell him that we're going to open a parcel post route out in Nakoma and tell him to bid on that." I had just made regular. I'd only been in the post office at that time from November of '46 and this was in '48. So, I said to him, "what do we put in for it?" He says, "Joe Worker says for you to put in for that." In those days, Joe Worker ran the post office. The union can come complain about seniority and it didn't make any difference to Joe. So I put in for it after the first two

years on a foot route, and for 15 years I delivered parcel post in Nakoma on a truck. All I had to do was take the parcel and walk up to the house and I went all the way through Nakoma, down as far as Commonwealth, in the morning. In the afternoon, they might send me anywhere in the city. Well, I wrote the supervisor's exam and I did pretty well, but just before that, I was an officer in the union and we negotiated the very first contract that was throughout the whole United States where you had a contract with the Post Office Department. We never had anything like that.

Mark: This was how long after the war?

Connors: Well, when we negotiated that thing - well it was '63 when I became a supervisor so it had to be before that. Right about the early part of '60. It was a short time after we had negotiated that I had written the exam, that the Assistant Postmaster called me in and asked me how I would like to become a 204B. That's a foreman trainee. I said, I didn't know. He said they'd like to have me and to try it. I was only a 204B a very short time and I became a regular foreman. I was 17 outside and 17 inside. Then I worked all shifts, nights, then I was Assistant Superintendent at

**[End of Side A, Tape 2]**

Brookwood. I ended up in Middleton. I was the manager of the Middleton Post Office when I retired. I liked my job. If I hadn't had heart attacks I probably would have worked until I was 70.

Mark: About going to the University and having to stand up in classes, that's interesting to me.

Connors: Well, there was such a mob. Everybody was going. By the time I got there, I wasn't walking real fast, so all the seats would be taken. I think that was my math class and I didn't have a math book anyhow.

Mark: There were no facilities for disabled?

Connors: No. I could have flunked and went right back the next year. I was getting \$113 a month, Public Law 16. That wasn't bad money in those days. According to the law, if you flunked, you didn't have to stay out. Still, I was close enough I thought - aw Hell.

Mark: So you used Public Law 16. That's one of the questions I was going to ask is how you financed your education.

Connors: I didn't go to the GI Bill. This is different.

Mark: Yes. For the disabled vets. On this sheet I had you fill out you mentioned that you had leg trouble for a year. I'm interested in how veterans readjust back to civilian society. You had a medical problem that was more severe than most guys do. What sort of leg problems did you have?

Connors: For instance, I was in the hospital for 9 months and 2 days. My leg was very small. Laying in that cast for so long and not doing anything. When I got discharged I think I had only been off the crutches about a month and a half. So that's one of the reasons

when I went to the policeman's exam, that leg was ... It took a while to build it up to where, I think one of the smartest things I ever did was when I went to the post office because I think that built my leg up. Otherwise, I probably would have been favoring - suppose I went to sit behind a desk. There was a number of places I probably could have went to work, I would never have exercised that leg the way I did.

Mark: Did you go to therapy at the VA Hospital here in Madison?

Connors: I didn't until a few years back. The reason I retired is I had two heart attacks, in 1980, so I retired. I had plenty of time in and I was almost 59 years old and so I retired and with my heart attack I was supposed to walk. Then I had open heart surgery in 1985 and so, it started to bother me and I went over to VA Hospital because I thought, "This is their baby." I couldn't walk two blocks and my leg hurt me so bad.

Mark: This is much, much later. This is in the 70's or 80's.

Connors: Oh, ya. It was in the 80's. It was after I had my heart attack. One of the smarter things I've done is to get a job where I exercise my leg.

Mark: Very therapeutic.

Connors: Ya. Anyhow, when it once started to go though - service over there - they're something! That's how come I volunteered. I was over there and I had this little therapist. She left now and went to work for the Oregon School Board. They had a volunteer on Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday, but they didn't have one on Monday and Friday. So, when I'm going in there I'm going about three times a week and I notice there is nobody there and a friend of mine is over there on Wednesday and so I said to her, "You don't have anybody here." She said that they didn't have anyone for Mondays and Fridays. I said that I could come and help. She said to do it one day at a time and see how you like it. I more or less volunteer on Monday and Friday, but there are certain days I can't make it so I just don't go. Then a buddy of mine, Russell Connor got me involved with his Veterans Benefits office over there so that's where I was today. They send these communiqués all the time and then you got to take the old communiqué out and put the new communiqué in.

Mark: It about available benefits and that sort of thing.

Connors: Ya.

Mark: I just got a couple of more areas I want to cover. One involves social readjustment back to civilian life. After Vietnam, a lot of the veterans complained about not being accepted by society and some complained about psychological problems they had, or just that they didn't feel like they belonged in society. After World War II did you have any such problems?

Connors: Just the fact that my girl got married. I might have had a little trouble adjusting to that because here I get the letter on the 7th and get hit on the 9th and I'm going home on the 10th and everything just - I hadn't had a letter in two months. Well, we were aboard ship for a month and driving toward Manila for a month so you don't get



much mail. I had some very good friends and I gradually married them all off. I didn't get married until I was 31 years old.

Mark: That was late for that time? Because I got married in my late 20's and that didn't seem late at all. Back in the 40's and 50's that was considered late I guess.

Connors: Ya. 'Cause most of the girls got married at 18 or 19. I'll be honest with you. I couldn't blame her. Here she's all my herself. She doesn't live with her family. She lived with her sister when I left and then her sister got married. So she's all by herself. When we were together every night. I was 17 and she was 15 when we started going together. So you see, I didn't have anybody in that respect when I came home because that was the only girl I ever dated. But outside of that,

Mark: There was a term "Nervous out of service". Did you ever hear that term?

Connors: I heard it but

Mark: It didn't seem to apply to you.

Connors: No. But you know I spent nine months in a hospital, so I'm getting a lot of relaxing time. I never got it when I was in service but I sure got it after that.

Mark: So things like nightmares didn't plague you?

Connors: If something startling happened, I was home on furlough from the hospital and I'm coming down State Street and this furniture company had an entrance in the back and these guys were unloading things and I had just gone by them and they took one of these planks and they flipped it and when the plank came down, it made this sound and I damn near dove in the street. That was just reaction. If something sharp happens, to this day, I'll maybe jump a little bit. But after all that activity there, it just doesn't go away, but it never bothered me. A lot of people think I'm crazy when I say this but I was never scared. To me being in that Army was almost like something that was meant to be. If I hadn't got hit, I'd have stayed in. Outside of the fact that I didn't get a furlough and things like that, I didn't mind it that much. I'm very close to the people I was with, like I told you those guys knew what I did, I didn't know that until we had our reunions. Big John Kinofsky said to me, "I don't know how in Hell you ever lived." When I asked him what he meant he said, "God, you're up you're going here, you're going there and everybody else is hiding in a hole." Then Carroll P. Watley from Texas, he brought his sister-in-law with him to the second convention that we had and I'm sitting in this room we're all at and this lady came and asked if I minded if she talked to me. She said she was Carroll Watley's sister. We always called him Carroll P. I asked her why and she said "After Carroll came home, he talked all the time, and I mean ALL the time about that brave little Irish guy, that he had to be the bravest guy he ever saw in his life." That was me. If you don't think that didn't mean a lot to me!! That these guys noticed some of the things that I did. We are quite close. You don't spend that kind of a life and not get close.

Mark: Did you stay in contact with these guys all through the post-war period?

Connors: I sent out 20 some Christmas cards. Matter of fact, two years ago, one of them brought the Christmas card that he kept for all those years that I wrote in 1946 when I found out they were home. They came home three years to the time that we left. Right around Christmas. So I kept in contact and I went and visited about half a dozen of them. You got to realize we were scattered all over the United States. I was best man for George Cass, he lives in Madison. He's the guy who took the radio when I got hit. I went down to Chicago and saw four guys down there, one guy got hit the same time I did. He got hit in the head. He lost one eye right away and he's now lost the other one. Now we got this reunion going.

Mark: When did that start?

Connors: That started in 1985 when I had open heart surgery. I was all signed up for it and I had to send word that I couldn't make it. It's been going on ever since. Down in the great state of Missouri.

Mark: Good central place.

Connors: Some gal started it for her husband's company and some of the guys in my company heard about it and so she helped them and one of the guys ended up in the Secret Service and they utilized him to trace people down.

Mark: Put your talents to work. Did you ever join any groups like the Legion or the VFW or those kinds of things?

Connors: One year I belonged to the VFW.

Mark: When was that?

Connors: Right after the war. '46 probably or '47. But I didn't keep that up. I belong to the DAV and the Purple Heart.

Mark: When did you get involved with those groups?

Connors: Quite a while ago.

Mark: In the post-war period or later on?

Connors: Later on. I was never a joiner. I consider it a little bit more of an elite group.

Mark: Which one the DAV?

Connors: DAV and Purple Heart. Purple Heart first because you gotta get wounded in the war to belong to the Purple Heart. The other is anybody gets disabled from the war no matter what it is can belong to the DAV. Those are the only two I belong to.

Mark: So you said you're not a joiner so you joined these groups, why?

- Connors: Well, they keep sending you messages all the time. Then a guy named Erin Karp. He belonged to the Purple Heart and he said, "Why don't you join the Purple Heart?"
- Mark: I just spoke to him yesterday. Erin Karp.
- Connors: I've known him all my life. So I thought I might just as well. Then I thought as long as I belong to the Purple Heart, I might as well join the DAV. So, I'm a life member of those two things. I really enjoy going over to the hospital. You see people who are pretty bad, but still, I might just as well do that as ... That glass there with that emblem - I think that's the 129th.
- Mark: I picked that up in Germany.
- Connors: You see this here?
- Mark: That could very well be.
- Connors: That's what they got because they fought in France. That's almost what's on my Regimental Crest. What did Erin have to say?
- Mark: Oh, just the general things. He had a lot to say about his post-war experiences working with the parades and that kind of thing.
- Connors: He was very much involved.
- Mark: He was interesting to speak to.
- Connors: He was a good basketball player.
- Mark: He mentioned that he played basketball.
- Connors: They called him Ace Karp. The next time you see him, call him Ace.
- Mark: Those are all the questions that I pretty much have prepared. Is there anything you'd like to add?
- Connors: Well like you were talking about - the post-war. It happened to one of my good buddies, the one we called the Polack. He's in Chicago. We had moved up to Peniki after that ambush at Cameline. We didn't think we'd be the ones to go hit something we assumed it would be somebody else's turn. So we had to go to a place called Peniki which is about 16 kilometers because we were supposed to meet these Philippine guerillas. They had two GI's that never surrendered. But, before they showed up, we were all there and dug in and I think about the second night we were there, here comes this truck down the road and we had a machine gun set up out on the road. This Sgt. Wills, oh he was a sharp guy! From Texas. He had a Filipino with him. We yelled "Halt!" and they stopped the truck. They started yelling "Filipino, Filipino" from the truck. So he starts walking out there and this Filipino says, "No, Japanese". Wills says, "I got to check this out." Walks right up to the cab and they shot him in the head and started dragging him into the truck and tried to turn

the truck around and a guy named Ogui, I said the Sgt. Conforti got killed, the guy that lived next to me in the barracks in Basic. Well, he was a very good friend of this Ogui, who was a Spanish boy from New Mexico and he's a BAR man and he crawled up that road and got that truck. He had them laying all over the place. The guy we called Commando, he was one of the toughest looking guys you ever saw in your life, he couldn't stand the sight or feel of blood. If he got inoculated, he didn't dare look at his arm because there might be a little drop of blood there and he'd turn dead white. Boy, he was a tough guy in combat, but he just could not stand that. He's in this hole and he's going to throw this grenade and he pulled the pin and he's going to throw the grenade and he stood up and got creased right across his thigh, just above his knee from the Japs in the truck. He put his hand on it and felt that blood and he just slumped down into the hole and he's moaning something terrible. This guy Zowadski, the Polack from Chicago, was in a hole nearby him and he crawls out to go over to Pollock to see if he can help him and they got him underneath his arms and lifted him up and Commando lets the grenade go. It goes "Pop" and another guy yelled, "Look out for that grenade". Well, he thought the safest place was with Commando back in the hole, so the grenade blew his guts out and killed him. I went down to see him when I saw those four guys in Chicago. I'm out in the kitchen with his wife, she's getting us a beer and I'm talking to her and I said, he had filthy mouth, her husband. I said to her, did he use those words before he went in the service? She said, "Oh, yes. I'll never forget when I took him to introduce him to my folks, I thought he would swear, but that time he didn't swear he just kept his mouth shut". Whatever happened, he blames himself for killing this guy over there with a grenade. He wakes up in the night. Now this is about '47 or even later, and he's going through this. So this did affect some people. So I went in and sat down and I talked to him and I told him, "There is no way was it your fault. You were doing what you thought was right to get him out of there because he was moaning so, and then when somebody yelled grenade you thought the best place for him was back in the hole because it was safe there." He took a couple of steps and then dove and hit the ground and when the grenade went off he got it in his stomach. So I talked to him and he died when he was only 32 years old of a severe heart attack. His wife and I we sent Christmas cards to each other. The first Christmas card I got after I talked to him and she thanked me for what I did for Walter. She said that he was so much better. See he was living with this. I fought in the jungle. They fought in the jungle. They had a little different deal going there. The people that they were fighting looked just like the people they were fighting with on their side so they had a different. Well, we had guys that couldn't stand the jungle. Hell, the Marines had dogs that couldn't stand the jungle. The Dobermans. They had to send them home. We didn't have dogs. We went out and set up an ambush on Bougainville this one time. I went out there on this trail and I had a, I was what's called rear guard and getaway man. I had a little compass. They could forget that I might get away but I wouldn't know where I was going. So they told me to go back and set up. The trail come down and made a curve so I set up right at the curve thinking if the Japs came along, I could get a couple of shots in and they'll retreat and give me a chance and they won't see that I'm gone. So I'm out there and here comes these Marines. The first three or four had a Tommy gun and they're coming down this trail and I'm trying to attract his attention and not startle him because I don't want him opening up too quick. So I'm saying real soft "Marine, Marine and pretty soon I said it a little louder and I heard a growl and I turned and looked to my left and here comes this dog. Now this is just a regular

dog but he couldn't surround me because we sound just like the Marines I suppose. He's jumping to find me and he got about one or two more jumps and he's got me and I'm turning around trying to watch that Marine, I don't want him to shoot me. I gotta watch that dog, I don't want him to get me 'cause one more jump and that dog is dead, I'm going to shoot him. I'll never forget that dog's name Mitch and I swear he must have froze in midair. He just stopped but he was still growling.

Mark: Well, thanks for stopping in.

**[End of Interview]**