

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Bill Engel
U. S. Army, World War II
2005

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Engel, William, (1924-). Oral History Interview, 2005.

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

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

Abstract

World War II veteran Bill Engel, a Monona (Wisconsin) native, discusses his United States Army service in the European theater of operations. Engel comments on his prewar experiences including growing up in a poor family, reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, concern for his brother who was stationed at Hickam Field at the time of the bombing, and working at a local bakery after graduating from high school. He talks about being drafted into the Army in 1943 at the age of 18 and being sent to Camp McCain (Mississippi) where he served with the 346th Field Artillery Battalion. Engel discusses being sent to England in October of 1944 and fighting in France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and Germany. He touches upon fighting at the Siegfried Line where the vehicle he was riding in was struck by a landmine. Engel also mentions the food he received while spending one hundred fifty two continuous days on the line, feelings at the end of the war in Europe, and going to France before returning to the United States. Serving briefly at Fort Benning (Georgia) and Fort Beale (California) before being discharged, he relates the concern shared by other soldiers that they would be sent to participate in an invasion of mainland Japan. He also discusses reenlisting and serving at Fort Benning for about sixteen months, subsequent employment, attending college using the GI Bill, and joining the VFW.

Biographical Sketch

Engel (1924-) served with the United States Army in Europe during World War II. He served a second enlistment after the war and eventually resettled in his hometown of Monona (WI).

Interviewed and transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 2004.
Transcript edited by Robert Amstadt, 2005.

Interview Transcript

- John: This is John Driscoll and I am with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives. And today is July 11, 2005. And this is an oral history interview with Bill Engel at his home in Monona. And Bill is a veteran of the U. S. Army in World War II. So, Bill, thank you very much for agreeing to the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?
- Bill: I was born here in Monona in 1924, March 21.
- John: Okay.
- Bill: And that is where I lived for about half of my life before going, even after I came back from the service. I went to St. Bernard's school, on the East Side. I went to East High School from 1937 to 1941.
- John: Okay.
- Bill: I guess I can start out like the kids interview you. We get interviewed quite a bit by the kids up at the school, seventh graders.
- John: Yea.
- Bill: Have you had this experience?
- John: Yes.
- Bill: And I think we have done that three times. Each interpretation is completely different. Of course, that's okay.
- John: Sure.
- Bill: And we were a poor family. My dad was a carpenter. My mother was city clerk here, well, village clerk at that time. For something like twenty-five, twenty-six years.
- John: Okay.
- Bill: So, we lived on Winifred Road. I can remember the hard winters and we had a good time anyways. And I can also remember the most delicious treat we had when I was a little kid was a hamburger on Saturday night. But only one.
- John: Okay. Okay.
- Bill: At the time that I went to grade school, I was probably the littlest kid in the class. I don't know whether I have a picture of this but you can see me. Why, I am the

littlest guy in the class. But not for that particular reason because that is the way it was. I went to high school and graduated in 1941. When I graduated, I weighed one hundred and ten pounds. Wow. I was just barely seventeen years old. Seventeen years and something like three months.

John: Okay.

Bill: So I didn't go out for football or basketball or anything like that. We did play sports though. We played out sandlot baseball in those days, like every kid did. And I remember, after high school, we used to go down here to Olin Park, no, Olbrich Park, and we'd play football. This was when I was about eighteen years old. So I'm kind of skipping my early childhood. And we are going in to when I was just out of high school. A guy came in, a neighbor, and he said, "Hey, there's an opening down at the Saynor's Bakery." This is on Atwood Avenue, just across from St. Bernard's High School. And my dad said, "Go, go, go for it." I wasn't out of school for a week and all of a sudden I have work. But anyway, I went down and applied for the job. I got the job. I was a helper on the night shift. I worked from six-thirty to about four o'clock in the morning, six nights a week, and my pay was \$16.000 per week.

John: Oh, boy.

Bill: You tell that to a kid these days and they say, ah, you must mean every day. No, sixteen bucks a week. And as I was saying, I used to go over and play football after, not after but on Sunday's we used to go over there and I remember getting, one Sunday, that, you know, you could get beer and wine. And we were just like the rest of the seventeen year, eighteen year old kids, we were obtaining it in some manner. So, this one day, I was kind of hung over from drinking wine, which is not good for anybody. Anytime.

John: Yea, I know.

Bill: And, boy, I can remember getting hit a few times. I was the running back this particular day, and these guys would hit me, but we played for about two hours and when I finally got done and started back to work, you had to get there at six o'clock or six-thirty. I was so stiff I could barely move. But we made it. And at the time, this was at the beginning of the war. The people that were my bosses, at that time, on the night shift, both of them were drafted. So I had one, and then another came along. And he was drafted, too. So at the tender age of almost eighteen I became boss of the night shift. And I only had a couple people under me but, I made all the donuts and sweet rolls, and I got pretty good.

John: Okay. Yea.

Bill: As I say, then we would go fishing sometimes. I would come home, you know, at

four o'clock in the morning and be sitting in my car. It would be coming daybreak, just like I saw this morning because I didn't get much sleep last night for some reason or the other. But the guy next door come over and he rapped on my car window. I had a car at the time. I had a car when I was fifteen.

John: Oh, man.

Bill: First car I had, I helped my dad. He was a carpenter. We were putting up a garage, or a barn. Putting an extension or something on a barn. And my pay for that two weeks that I put in there was this old Model T Ford truck. Worth about ten or twelve dollars. That's what I got paid for my two weeks work. But we kind of put that together. That eventually died somewhere along the line. But we used to take that apart and have a good time. We took it over to East High School once and we did shop courses on it. And then the guy that ran the program said, "You got to get that thing out of here. It's been here for two months already." So we did take it and put in on the stage at East High School and they used it, I think, in a play. They didn't turn it on but they used sound effects. Anyway, that's part of the game. I had a brother that was a year and a half older than I was and he graduated a year before I did. And he went up that summer, when he graduated, he went up to North Leeds, Wisconsin.

John: Oh, okay.

Bill: Just up the pike a ways. And he got a job on a farm there. And he was getting something like \$25 a month there. But he had a job. And he had meals, and everything else. He kind of enjoyed it. But this was in 1940 when this happened, and I remember us kids, we'd go up there. And one night we went up there on bikes, to North Leeds. But the farthest we got into North Leeds was in town, not on the farm, because we were all pooped out, and we had to back again. So our folks were rather worried about that and here is a bunch of fourteen-fifteen year old kids on the highway at one o'clock in the morning. So we didn't get no sympathy for that. Well, anyway, he enlisted, because a lot of the guys that he graduated with in 1940, and there was virtually no jobs, so he enlisted in the Air Force. And he was sent over to Hickam Field. And he was there when they bombed Hickam Field and the cruisers and warships in Pearl Harbor.

John: He was there?

Bill: Yea. He said he lost his religion that time because he used to go to church but then he saw all these guys praying when they were getting shot up, and he said, "Boy, they're a bunch of hypocrites."

John: What were you doing when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Bill: I was working in the grocery store, and I heard it. I had a job in a grocery store.

Well, I was fifteen at the time, but I worked there four years already. Because I was eleven years old when I started. It wasn't important work. It was like pecking potatoes and peeling cabbage leaves that were dead. That sort of thing. But I can remember that day and was quite concerned because we knew they bombed Hickam Field as well as Pearl Harbor. And everybody was really concerned. I wasn't ready to enlist. I was only fifteen. But anyway, he came out pretty well. He spent four years there. He got out in 1945, about two or three months before I did, because I was drafted in 1943, February of 1943. And as I say, I was eighteen, but I was nineteen in March. So the first place I went, well, I went down to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. And they did their preliminary examination. And then you go home, you know, for a couple days. But I can remember that I was sitting there, and my name was called over the PA system. And we were eating lunch. So I got up from my lunch tray and go and answer the call, and when I got back, why the table was cleared and the mess sergeant says, "You know, the first thing you want to know, in the Army, never desert your lunch. Eat first and answer second." So I remembered that pretty good. And from there I went to Camp McCain, Mississippi.

John: Camp McCain. Okay.

Bill: And this was a camp that was just set up for this particular purpose. And I was in the Field Artillery. Three Forty-sixth Field Artillery Battalion. And it was, I remember the gruff sergeant we had. I'll get back to him later. He was a tech sergeant and people would go to the latrine, you know, and they'd wash their socks and stuff like that in these sinks. And one morning he lined us all up and he read us off like you wouldn't believe, and using all the words that we never even heard. About washing your socks in the latrine. "Because, if you are going to do it, do it in the john, don't do it in the latrine, because I have to stick my face in there." But what I did hear recently, I bought a bugle.

John: Oh, well.

Bill: Because what I do right now. This is kind of going ahead. I've been doing this for about forty, forty-five years. Conducting cemetery ceremonies on Memorial Day.

John: Oh, tremendous. They are running out of buglers.

Bill: Yea. And what we did, we got a couple of kids from La Follette High School. We had one kid that really did well. And he played with us for three or four years, and he was really good. And we'd get, sometimes, an echo for him. But these guys, I had to give them a C-minus. They said, "Well, what's there to playing a bugle?" My daughter and I got on the internet and this day, this Sunday, why, she was looking up bugles and she plugged in bugles, and there were ninety-two bugles for sale that day.

John: Wow.

Bill: So, anyway, we got a bugle and I haven't learned to play it yet, but that is interesting. Talking about buglers, I remember that our barracks was right across the street from the bugler that blew his horn in the morning. And this was really bad news because he was a terrible bugler. I talked to a guy the other day and he said, you know, he played a trombone when he was in high school, in a band. But when he was in the army, this is one of the guys in the Kiwanis Club around here, he said that he was too big. I think he was in the Air Force. And was doing maintenance, and he couldn't get in some of these places. So he asked the first sergeant, "You need a bugler?" He says, "Sure." So I was a bugler. And I said, "Is there something to blowing a bugle?" And he said, "All you got to do is pucker up your lips to do it." It's not that easy. I got a couple grandchildren here a week or so ago, and they could play it better than I could. But, anyway, from Camp McCain, why, I was transferred from the Field Artillery to a cannon company. Field Artillery has 105 howitzer, M-1. And the cannon company had the M-3. The range of an M-1 is probably about twelve miles and the M-3 was probably six or seven miles. Much shorter barrel. If you've been down by Roselawn [Cemetery], there is an M-3 sitting in front of the flag there.

John: Okay.

Bill: Yea. So, every time I go down there to do a service, why, it brings back memories.

John: Sure.

Bill: So, anyway, at this thing. You know, I was a baker before I went into the army. I was telling you that. And the first thing they did in the Field Artillery was put me in the kitchen.

John: Sure. I guess that makes sense.

Bill: I didn't like that, you know, and the first chance I got, I remember one time, I hated this kitchen because, oh, various things. But I remember one time out in the grounds, setting up, you know, for an exercise, and we have to line the tents up and everything else, you know. And this order comes down, we're lining up the mess kit washers. These are barrels with water on a hot stove. And this order came down, "Move it out about a foot!" So we move it out about a foot. "No, that's too far. Bring it in about eight inches." Some guy with an aiming circle was aiming at us. And about the third time, you are getting hot. And it slopped over and burned my arm. And I let loose some mild language and I turned around, and here is the colonel. And I said, "Whose frigging idea was this?" And the colonel turned in front of me and said, "This was my idea." And he said, "I got a little duty for you." So what I had to do, Camp McCain is like our ground right now, harder than a rock. What I had to do was dig a four-by-four hole six feet deep in

the parade ground and then, when I got that done, a major came down and inspected it, of all people. And I stood kind of hunched down, because it wasn't quite six feet deep. He passed it, anyway. And I had to put all the dirt back in again. And I couldn't put any in the barracks. I had to put it in that hole. And the first sergeant said, "Here's how you do it. Put water on it, and tamp it down. Jump on it, you know." It was quite an embarrassment for me, because all the guys would walk by and say, "What are you doing?" An eighteen year old kid doing this kind of thing. But, as I said, I transferred to the cannon company. I was in the Field Artillery for about six months. I was with the cannon company essentially the same thing. We did our drills and that sort of thing. But we always, they all went on marches. On a march, the first sergeant would come up to me and say. "Engel, you were a baker." I'd say, "Yea." He'd say, would I make him some donuts? "When we get back, we can have some donuts for the troops." So I got out of a lot of hikes that way.

John: That's right. Yea.

Bill: From there we went to South Carolina. I can't remember the name of the fort. And we trained there for, oh, maybe another three or four months. I went overseas in October of '44. Because we didn't get in on the invasion but we came in La Havre, France, and I think we fought in France, we fought in Luxembourg, Belgium, and finally got into Germany. So, that was the trip there. Our first stop, though, was not in La Havre. It was in a small town in England.

John: Okay.

Bill: And I can remember one night, this guy I was real buddies with, both of us were corporals. We decided to go into town and do something. And we came out of what we were doing, and it was dark, and foggy. And I had no idea where the hell we were. And he found somebody, and he asked where we were, and he asked where do you want to go? And he said, "Well, we want to go to the camp here." And he said, "You just take this street here." And we could barely see the street. And I was there for, well, as I say, we went overseas in late summer and were over in England for a couple of months. We played football. Our commanding officer was a man by the name of Captain Michael Johnson. So, you know, we just kind of messed around, waiting to go over. And we went over on amphibious ships, and that sort of thing. And landed at La Havre. Didn't have any battles probably for about three or four days.

John: Well, you had a chance to...

Bill: Yea, they put us right up there.

John: Yea. You were still in the artillery?

- Bill: Pardon?
- John: You were still in the artillery?
- Bill: Yea. Well, the cannon company. Infantry. So from there we just fought the war. And I tell people, you know, that one thing about war is that there is a lot of mud. And you got to get used to mud. And we got used to it. But in February, of '45, we were just entering the Siegfried Line. We had set up in Luxembourg, in a small town there. And we did a lot of firing. My gun was Number One, or Number Two. And we did the zeroing in. And then the battery would join us when we got through with that. They'd follow the skipper, follow the commands of the field observer.
- John: Yea, I used to be a forward observer. With a smoke bomb.
- Bill: And we fought in Luxembourg, as I say, probably two or three weeks. And one time, why, we had got to have a drink, somehow or another. I remember one time, this was the winter time, you know. It was cold out. And the lights go out in this little town. And I follow the, go over to the, they had a house where they had a Fort Mode A engine running a generator. So I'm tracing the line and I find the two ends and put them together. Well, I got knocked on my butt.
- John: Yea. Okay. Sure.
- Bill: The generator was running. So then I got the generator, turned it off, and I repaired the lines and got lights back again. But we spent there like I say three or four weeks or whatever, and we used, I never did it, but the guys would get champagne. The way they would do it, there was a place between the lines where they had a winery. And our guys would go down there at night and fill a gunny sack full of wine, or champagne, it was. And the Germans did the same thing. So they both did this. Not simultaneously.
- John: Yea. Yea.
- Bill: Then we'd come back and we'd get a little high, but not much. We could still fight the war.
- John: Yea.
- Bill: From there we entered the Siegfried Line. And at this time we had fired so much that my barrel on my gun had worn out. So we were Number One gun, and we came into this emplacement just on entering the Siegfried Line and they had mine sweepers out cleaning up the debris. They were blowing up mines for probably an hour or an hour and a half before we got there. So we entered this area, and all I remembered we started the turn. I am sitting in the passenger seat. We hit a land

mine.

John: Oh, wow.

Bill: There was a driver on this side of me. There was a buck sergeant on the right side of me, sitting on the box, you know, of the ammo carrier.

John: Okay.

Bill: And there was a tech sergeant standing the wire down, telephone wire down, just outside of the truck. Well, it took that truck up. There was eight guys in the back end of it. Picked that truck up and the truck landed on the driver and the tech sergeant. And killed those two guys. The buck sergeant broke his leg and got back to England. Nobody in the back got hurt. They just came out like peas out of a pod. And I came out with just a scratch on my knee.

John: Oh, wow.

Bill: So I'm sitting here, and these three guys are casualties. So I said, well, God must be saving me for something. There was something.

John: That might scare you.

Bill: So we just continued fighting the war. And we, I am pretty sure that we relieved the 81st Airborne, I think it was.

John: The 82nd Airborne?

Bill: 82nd Airborne, in the Battle of the Bulge. We relieved them. We didn't get into the Battle of the Bulge. And from there it was just a matter of mud and more mud. We continued to fight the war. And we finally, the war was over and everybody was pretty happy about that. I remember after the war was over, why, the Germans were going this way and we were going this way, and to me, it was like a football game. After the football game, the teams shake hands.

John: Vikings shake hands, Packers shake hands?

Bill: Yea. Everybody goes their own way. But we were in this spot probably for a couple weeks, before we were ready to go to a camp that we could be sent back home in. I went over on the *Queen Elizabeth*.

John: Oh, wow.

Bill: The whole division went. And it took us about three days to get over there. Because it really moved. Yea, I was a hundred and fifty two days on the line.

- John: Oh, good Lord!
- Bill: Continuously. As a cannon company. And Christmas of '44, we pulled back. I think the whole division pulled back. This was around the time of the Battle of the Bulge.
- John: Yea, right around Christmas.
- Bill: We were getting ready to leave to relieve these people, but our truck was malfunctioning. And we had a lieutenant with us, and he was really concerned about this. Because here, we're the last ones, and the enemy is over here, and some of the guys are over there cutting a Christmas tree. This is Christmas Eve.
- John: Okay.
- Bill: We got back and we decorated the Christmas tree and we had Mass said that day. They had the chaplain there. He said Mass for us. And everybody got a chance to go to confession. I don't know if you are Catholic.
- John: Yea, I am, as a matter of fact.
- Bill: Okay. So we all got the chaplain out there and you get down on your knee and confess what sins you got.
- John: Yea, if you can remember.
- Bill: But we just continued the war. I remember, we got to, I always like to - oh, the main course of the day, the breakfast, I guess you would call it, was pineapple fritters. You know what that is?
- John: Oh, yea.
- Bill: Yea, that is pancakes with pineapple in it. And this was everyday. We'd have this for one hundred and fifty-two days. They would come in a can, and by the time you fill this can up, by the time you got filled, these things were pretty soggy in the bottom. But that is what he ate. And I guess, as I say, I couldn't look at a pineapple for probably ten years.
- John: I'll bet. What about the food in general? A hundred and fifty-three days, now often did you get to a kitchen? Hot food?
- Bill: It was, usually, they had a second meal, but it wasn't very big. One time in this particular place, my driver, who was kind of a wild guy, says, can we go over to this farm when we came in here? There was a pig over there. And I said, "Oh?"

So I was the section chief at this time. He says, yea, let's go over and see what we can do about that pig. We used to kill the chickens, you know, we used to be camped in barns. I remember one time this kid, one of the kids says "Give me a stick." Guy hands his rifle over, but he says, "No, I want a stick. I want to kill this chicken." So we cooked chicken once in a while but this one time we had this pig. And we went over to this driver of mine and I says, "Well, there is the pig." So he gets his rifle out and shoots it right between the eyes. The pig just stood there for a while. So my dad used to butcher pigs, and so I knew how to butcher a pig. So brought it back, and we had camp fires. Heated water to shave in a helmet and that. You remember that.

John: Oh, sure.

Bill: And we got this big frying pan that we confiscated someplace and were cooking it, and the lieutenant came along and said, "What have you got there?" I said, "These are pork chops." He says, "Where did you get them?" "Well, these farms." An order came down the next day, "Nobody will kill the farmers' livestock. They got to live, too." Which is true.

John: Yea. Sure.

Bill: That was a good thing to do. I didn't go to confession for that.

John: Well, it might have been a German pig. A lot of K-rations and C-rations?

Bill: Yea. We used to cultivate these. By that, I mean we used to go to a farm and they'd have a lot of potatoes, and they were willing to share them with us, and we'd get a big pot and throw everything in the pot, and mix it up with the potatoes, and sometimes you'd get some onions. And this is what we'd eat. I remember some of the kids from the town would come around, you know, and we had a big pile of what you'd call stew, and we'd share it with them. They were German kids. They had to eat, too.

John: Yea. Sure.

Bill: They sure weren't fed very well. I remember one time we went into the town and we wanted some beer. So we went to this brewery and they had beer. So I pulled out Invasion Marks. I pulled these out and she said, "Nien, nien, don't want those things." I said, "Well, I guess we're in a jam here." I wasn't going to take it because I wasn't that kind of a guy, to just take something. So I turned around and said to my driver again, "You got any German money?" He says, "Yea, how much you want?" Pulled out a handful. He got it someplace. I don't know where he got it. But she was willing to take that.

John: Okay.

Bill: And I remember his name was McDonald, and he was not too good a guy.

[Side B of Tape 1.]

John: Okay, we missed a little bit of the conversation. I didn't have the thing turned on. Let's see. We were talking, this was about McDonald. And giving the woman German money. And let me think, what did we talk about? Well, where did you, where was this with McDonald and giving the woman money? That was in Germany?

Bill: Yea.

John: Okay. Okay, we'll probably think of this as we go. One of the things we talked about was what was it like when you heard Germany had surrendered and the war in Europe was over. You mentioned that.

Bill: Yea. Immediate relief.

John: Yea. That must have been.

Bill: And, as I say, we, it was just like teams greeting each other.

John: Yes, right. That's good.

Bill: And, but one time we wrote out an order from Captain Messkit, and we confiscated a motor cycle. They didn't need it any more. You know. So all of us were learning how to ride a motor cycle. Here we were all cruising down this road. It was probably as good as this road out here, nice and smooth. And the captain and the lieutenant watches us, and pretty soon the order came down, get rid of that motor cycle. Been through all this, you know, and never got hurt, you know, why get killed on a motor cycle?

John: Right. Well, then we also touched base on when you did come back, and let's get, well, why don't we do that now? Then about the war ended in Europe and you went back to camps somewhere in France?

Bill: Yea, if France. It was just camps that were gathering people to send them back. That's all they was.

John: Yea. Then you came back on a Liberty ship.

Bill: Yea. And we landed in New Jersey, and were immediately shipped down to Fort Benning, Georgia. And we stayed there for, oh, it must have been about a month. By this time I think the war was over in August.

John: Right around, right after my birthday. The middle of August.

Bill: Yea. And we got down to Fort Benning, probably in September. I was shipped out to Camp Beale, California. And our detail at Camp Beale was, we were packing mail to be shipped overseas. That was our job. We'd go there. We'd work an eight hour shift, you know, packing mail. This was getting around Christmas time, or pushing it. We just did that. I went from there to Camp Knight, California, or maybe it was reversed, whatever it was. And there what we did was the troops that came back, we used to parade, all that sort of thing. The generals would say that is the slickest looking line I've ever seen, because you have a bunch of recruits there. But here, we were guys that returned from overseas with our combat infantry badge and all our medals and all this sort of thing. And we were picking up garbage. That was our job. It didn't make any difference if you were a sergeant or you were a private, you were picking up garbage. These guys would look at you, you know. Of course, you didn't travel around in uniform with these medals on, but they knew we were the old timers, because they could look at us that way. So, one night, I remember, we used to go, well, I didn't go to the PX. I didn't have any money. I was red-lined for two months. Didn't have a nickle. And we'd get on the back of the garbage truck and it was just a six-by-six, two-and-a-half-ton weapons carrier, you know. We'd pick up the garbage that way. But they'd give you one cigarette, and you'd pass it around. You've probably seen that?

John: Oh, yea.

Bill: Really hard up for a cigarette.

John: Right.

Bill: One night, oh, some of the guys that had a couple of bucks, they would go over to the PX and one night there was an altercation with a bunch of Filipinos that were waiting to be shipped back. And so there was a big fight, and these Filipinos, they worked as a team. They'd take care of one guy, and then move on to the next. They knew what to do. So these guys came back, and they were really pissed off. That's the word. So, they are exciting a riot. Here we are gathered out in this courtyard. We're going to go over and clean up that barracks over there. And pretty soon, here come the MP's. They said, "The general knows all about it. He's going to meet you tomorrow. Go back to your barracks and go back to bed." So we did that, and the next day when the general came, he said, "Yea, it's not very nice the way we are treating you guys." And I think it was about a week later I was discharged.

John: Oh, great. To back up, just a bit, you were, though, you thought you were headed to the Pacific?

Bill: Yea.

John: And then what was the feeling among your guys when they heard about VJ Day?

Bill: Well, we didn't have a chance to really get a feeling. Because we came back, we were sent down to Fort Benning, Georgia, and then we were sent home for leave. For a couple, three weeks. And so we didn't really get a chance to discuss. While I was home, the war ended with Japan.

John: Oh, I see.

Bill: But I remember they weren't too happy because they knew they spent a considerable amount of time in battle already, and they weren't really interested in going over to the other side.

John: Yea. And if they had had to invade the home islands, that would have been terrible. Yea.

Bill: It would have.

John: Bill, do you stay in touch with any of the guys? Ever get together with any of them? Communicate with them?

Bill: Not very much. I knew a couple guys here in Madison that were in the outfit. And one was my driver for a while. This wasn't McDonald. This was a guy by the name of Lucas. And he was quite a lady's man. He was married, but he was indulging. He was probably a year older than I was. And the other guy, I never saw him after we got discharged. He went his way from Fort Benning and I went out there to California. I don't know where he went. His name was Lyle Olsen. But when we were on leave, during that time when the war was winding up, why, we bummed around and saw people, and this sort of thing.

John: What did you do when you got back? Right after you got back?

Bill: I bummed for probably a week and then I went to the bakery I worked at and they looked up when I came in, and I said, don't worry, guys, I don't want to be a baker any more. So your jobs are not in jeopardy. Because I had this opportunity to bump anybody.

John: Sure.

Bill: Because this is the way they treated servicemen. So I didn't do anything for maybe a week or two, and my brother was working at Oscar Meyer. He got out before I did, so I started working at Oscar Meyer. And I worked there for seven months in Hog Kill. Ever hear of that?

John: On, no, but I can imagine.

Bill: I didn't kill the hogs, but my job eight hours a day at \$.91 an hour was to cut brisket fats off the hogs. So by the time I got the hogs, they were just going into the cooler. The hogs were open, their brisket fat is what holds the lungs. The lungs were gone. Guys would rip out the lungs and I would, I worked there seven months and I said, "God, there's got to be something better than this." And I re-enlisted.

John: Oh, did you?

Bill: Yes.

John: Oh, wow. Okay.

Bill: And, where do you want to go. Fort Benning was a nice place. So they sent me down to Fort Benning and I was there a year and a half. The guy said, the first sergeant said, I was a sergeant at that time, he says, "You don't like the army." And I said, "How do you know that?" And says, he could just tell by my body language. But I seldom went to town, or anything like that. A lot of guys we got back at that time were people who were let out of prison in England for having done various deeds like rape, and stealing, and stuff like this. And we were getting these people in our, I was in the Field Artillery down there. And they were not desirable characters.

John: Sure, sure.

Bill: One guy I can remember that, he ran the card game, the poker game. And he was from New York, and he looked like a gangster, but he ran the game, and he took the cut out of every pot. And very seldom did I involve myself with those particular games. By the end of the night, well, he had the whole pot. This is down at Fort Benning. So I finally, as I say, I got discharged there and I came back and I started, let's see, what did I do after that? Well, I worked at various jobs. I was an appliance guy, and stuff like that. Then I went to college. University. Took up engineering.

John: You had the GI Bill?

Bill: Yea.

John: Used it for college?

Bill: Yea.

John: Did you use it for anything else?

Bill: No. But I didn't graduate from college. I went into light building afterwards. And I got something like a hundred and twenty-two credits but I didn't have enough for an engineering degree. So after that, I worked, oh, at various things. Really didn't know what I wanted to do. The job I had as an occupation was, I worked for Gisholt Machine Company for five years. And that was kind of a testy place. And this is where I met my wife.

John: Oh, okay.

Bill: Not at Gisholt. But it was during that period. And at that time, I was working forty hours at Gisholt, I was taking fourteen credits at university, I was bartending at weekends.

John: Okay. When did you sleep?

Bill: And this was kind of like hit and miss romance. You know. So, anyway, I worked at Gisholt. I finally quit the university because I was getting tired of the whole thing. And at Gisholt, they laid people off all the time. You'd work for maybe a year, and they'd be on strike. This would last for five or six weeks. Go back to work, never, you'd get about a two cent raise. Know how that went?

John: Oh, yea.

Bill: A big strike, and this is what we went out for. So the second time I was laid off, I remember that I was holding up about twenty-five people, because I had kind of a specialized job there. And the union wouldn't let them, these other people go. Which meant be laid off. Till I was laid off, because I had seniority on these guys. Or they had seniority on me. And I was holding them up. So I remember the guy, I remember his name. I won't mention it, because he's dead now. God bless his soul. But I remember him coming in there with about twenty of us, he said, "Well, how many guys want to be laid off today?" You know? This wasn't very humorous. So, anyway, I was laid off there. This time, it lasted about a year. Meantime, I am doing various kinds of odd jobs. Then I heard the university, this guy came along. I was building the house at this time. This house, here. And he came along, and he said, "Engel," he says, "you ever think of putting your name in at the university? For a job?" And I says, "No, it never occurred to me." So, he says, "Go ahead and do it." So I put my name in at the university. They gave a test. It was like old home week. All these guys from Gisholt here are taking this test. So this test, I came in second on the test. And I didn't get an interview because they had picked the guy already that they wanted. This was in agricultural engineering, that they wanted a person. So the second time the test was taken, I boned up on what I'd missed and it was the same test, and I came in first.

- John: Okay.
- Bill: So I got interviewed, and the guy liked me. He was a doctor from Baltimore, and he was coming out and establishing a re-hab center at the University of Wisconsin. And this used to be, remember the old hospital, on University Avenue?
- John: Oh, sure.
- Bill: They had a penthouse on top, and that is where the re-hab center was. Where I was was down in the basement. What I did was the mechanical work.
- John: Re-hab of what?
- Bill: Patients with broken necks, and that.
- John: Okay.
- Bill: First patient I ever had, had polio. And what I had to do was set him up in his iron lung, the cooling system. We just walked around. I didn't worry about catching polio, which I should have been, you know. But from then, why, I went down, I went out to UCLA for a specialized study for this particular job. I was, spent time at the University of Michigan. I was up at the University of Minnesota. And I had to get a certificate and so I had to spend time at Northwestern to take certain courses, you know, that would make me eligible to be certified. That certification is a national thing. It's not a regional, or state. So, it took me a good time to get certified, and meantime I'm building the house, and one child. That's my life.
- John: You were coming along, a young man, and your whole future was ahead of you. And then, boom, this thing happened. And they dragged you out and sent you off in harm's way. What is your, what was your feeling about that? The whole thing.
- Bill: I was a baker, and I worked eight hours, six days a week, and I was glad to get out of it. And this was one way to get out of it. Because a bunch of us guys, my classmates, down at Fort Sheridan for the initial examination and testing, and that sort of thing, and I remember one guy didn't make it, because he had flat feet. They wouldn't take him. He was really disappointed that he couldn't go. So the rest of us, this is, World War II was a heroic war. If you didn't go, you were missing something. Even if you got killed. They killed four hundred or five thousand troops, men and women. These are all young guys, most of them are, ninety percent of them are. And, but, it was a heroic war. And you felt this was your duty. That is the way I felt, and I think that is the way the guys felt.
- John: What about the vet's organizations? VFW?

- Bill: I belong to the VFW and American Legion.
- John: Okay. Active?
- Bill: Yea. It took me, after I got out the second time, it took me about, probably, oh a couple years and they came and recruited me. And I was recruited in the fall of whatever, and the next fall I was commander.
- John: How long were you in the second time?
- Bill: I was in sixteen months. I had two months terminal leave coming, and they let me go because the first sergeant said, "You don't like the army."
- John: That is the first time I've ever heard of anybody getting out because they didn't like the army. That's great. Well, this is a fantastic story. This is remarkable. I had a friend, Stephen Ambrose, the writer. And I was with him once, and he was talking to a bunch of World War II vets. And he was praising them. And most of them were saying, more or less, "I didn't do anything." And he said, "You guys are wrong!" He said, "Stand up." And they did. And he said, "You were giants! You went out and saved the world!" And that's true. You did. Each one, of how many million guys and gals, did his or her thing, and saved the world.
- Bill: They were scared.
- John: Oh, yea.
- Bill: I mean, anybody that wasn't scared. I remember this first driver I had. When we got bombarded by the 88's, he is standing up there, and he is telling us where the shells are landing. "This one is landing over there." "Oh, man, you are really weird!" But he is still living, so.
- John: I guess that was quite a weapon.
- Bill: Yea.
- John: It was originally an anti-aircraft gun. Extreme height and range. And then they used it as an anti-tank gun.
- Bill: Actually, it was a rifle. It wasn't a howitzer. Rifle has the longer barrel, and has greater range, but a smaller shell.
- John: Okay. This is remarkable.
- Bill: Want to see my picture?

- John: Oh, yea.
- Bill: I have a picture. I said to my daughter. She said, "What do you want for Christmas?" I said, "Well, I got this picture, and got a couple medals." So, she said, "Okay, I'll make it in a frame"
- John: Okay, you went to Washington, DC, for th dedication?
- Bill: You don't see too many guys with the Combat Infantryman's Badge. When the guys see you, boy, he comes up and shakes your hand, like a long-lost buddy.
- John: Sure. Yea.
- Bill: So, it's pretty impressive. And, you know, you don't realize, most of the people who were in the service, sell, the Air Force took a beating in World War II. They really took a beating, because they were sitting ducks up there all the time.
- John: The loss of air crews was just...
- Bill: But the people, the support troops, were in greater number than the people actually fighting the war. So, when you see somebody who has something like that, why, you are impressed because a lot of them didn't come back, you know.
- John: Yes, yes. [Reacting to picture] Oh, wow. Oh, isn't that nice. That is quite a thing.
- Bill: That's a nice display.
- John: Frame. Yea. That is tremendous. Okay.
- Bill: So I got something to hang on my coffin.
- John: And you got the most important of them all, right? The Ruptured Duck - it got you out. That is nicely done, too. She did a real nice job on that.
- Bill: Her training is in commercial art. So she put this together. Pretty nice. This letter was in the group. She put that in there. But I think about fifty million guys got this. The people that look at this, they don't know that.
- John: That is very nicely done.
- Bill: Yea. Good balance to it.
- John: As we do wrap up, anything you want to add? Or any stories we missed? You threw in the pineapple one. You talk about donuts. I was on a ship going to Norway, an LST. This was in the '50s. And there was not much to do. So I was

taking a nap in the afternoon, you know. And I dreamed of home-made donuts. I don't know why. My mom used to make them. And I woke up, and I would have killed for a home-made donut. And I thought I'd go down to the galley and get a cup of coffee. Well, why I was dreaming, here the crew went crazy and they had tabled piled with home-made donuts they had made. And I think I ate about six, which is about five too many. Okay. Well, what a remarkable story. This is great.

Bill: The day the war was over, the captain came up to me and said, "Engle, you were a baker in civilian life. Make us a cake." They had cooks. I wasn't in the kitchen at this time. I was running, you know, a field artillery gun. And I said, "Well, you got a recipe?" He says, "No. But you know how to do that stuff." So what I did, I got a Karo box, remember Karo baking powder? And I took the recipe off there, and I multiplied by about seventy-five times, or something like that, and they cooked it in, remember these big cookers they had? And they had these big pans. I think they were stainless steel. I used that as an oven. And they thought it was great.

John: Okay. On the way back home, I'll drop this off at the Vets' Museum. They want the original tape. And they'll...

[End of Interview.]