

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
CHESTER A. GAUGER
Infantry, Army, World War II
2005

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Gauger, Chester A. Oral History Interview, 2005.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Chester A. Gauger, a native of Door County, discusses his service in the 44th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army in World War II. He reflects on his attempt to join the Air Force at the age of 18 in 1944 and being drafted into the Army instead. Gauger describes his basic training at Camp Blanding (Florida) and subsequent Atlantic crossing on a troopship to Le Havre (France), as well the trip by boxcar across France and into Germany. In Germany, Gauger's division acted as occupational forces, guarding bridges and roads and taking over villages. He reflects on the similarities between his experience in Germany and the state of the Iraq war in 2005. Gauger mentions the surrender of the German people and the state of hunger in Europe during this time. He details his return to the United States on the *Queen Elizabeth* and expresses his relief at not having to continue on to Japan after the bombing of Hiroshima. Gauger describes his enrollment in technical school under the G.I. Bill and his later life in Door County.

Biographical Sketch:

Gauger served in the 44th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army during World War II. Upon entering the war in 1944, Gauger's division acted primarily as occupational forces in the German countryside. He returned to the United States in 1945. Upon the surrender of Japanese forces, Gauger was able to avoid the planned invasion of Japan and remain in the United States. Under the G.I. Bill, Gauger enrolled in technical school in Green Bay (Wisconsin) and later opened his own heating and sheet metal business in Sturgeon Bay (Wisconsin). Gauger spent his later years as a life-long member of several veteran's organizations and looks back fondly at his military service.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2005.

Transcribed by Telise Johnsen, 2012.

Abstract written by Mary Kate Kwasnik, 2014.

Interview Transcript:

MacDonald: This is an interview with Chester “Chet” Gauger, who served in the United States Army during World War II. The interview is being conducted at approximately 9:30 a.m. at the following address of 1451 Egg Harbor Road, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of February 26, 2005. And the interviewer is Terry MacDonald. Well, Chet, could you give us a little bit of background, as to prior to going into the service, of your family history here in Sturgeon Bay?

Gauger: Well, I grew up on the farm, up between Fish Creek and Baileys Harbor. And I went to Gibraltar High School. And after I got out of high school, I worked in the shipyard for a short time before I was drafted. But before that I had tried to get in the Air Force. And I had turned eighteen, and so they wouldn’t let me in.

MacDonald: What year was that?

Gauger: That would be 1944.

MacDonald: Did you have any brothers and sisters when you were growing up?

Gauger: I’ve got three brothers and three sisters.

MacDonald: Older or younger?

Gauger: Two brothers older and one brother younger, and I’ve got one sister older and two sisters younger. So I was the middle of the family [laughs].

MacDonald: Okay. You said you tried to get into the Air Force. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Gauger: Well, see, I always was interested in flying and stuff. And I really wanted to get in there. But, like I say, I don’t think I had the schooling, actually to get to be a pilot or anything, but I still would have liked to. But after I got in, I got drafted and that, and right before I started for—got overseas, I found there was a bunch of guys from the Air Force got transferred into our infantry division. And so I says I thought *we* would have been transferred to *them* [laughs].

MacDonald: Uh-huh. You said you were working in the shipyard after you got out of high school. And what were you doing down in the yard, then?

Gauger: I was in the sheet metal and heating department, sheet metal factory there. And I worked for what they called “contractor supply.” I had the

contracts with all the heating ducts and everything, ventilation everything in the ships.

MacDonald: What kind of ships were they building?

Gauger: They got subchasers and freighters and cargo ships. Well, they had, I don't know, only a thousand of these people working there at the time. What I worked for was a subcontractor.

MacDonald: At that time you said there was thousands of men working down there building these ships that were being built for the war effort. And the shipyard must have been really a crazy place to work—round the clock, worked all the time.

Gauger: I think there were three shifts at the time. Of course, I worked on the daytime shift.

MacDonald: So how did you get your draft notice then? Or did you enlist in the Army? How did that happen?

Gauger: Well, I had tried to get in the Air Force. After that, then I says, "Will you draft me?" Well, then it wasn't too long after that then they called me up, you know.

MacDonald: So, where did you go for your induction?

Gauger: I went to Milwaukee. First I went to Milwaukee, and we had our physicals. And then I was home for—I don't know how much time—two weeks or so. And then they called you back, and that's when we were sworn in down there.

MacDonald: Was there any other men from the Sturgeon Bay area that went with you at that time?

Gauger: Yeah. As far as I know, there was two or three guys. There was a O'hern. There was a Carlson, and there was a Albertson from Ellison Bay. And--I forget--quite a few more.

MacDonald: Where did you go after Milwaukee, after you passed your physical?

Gauger: I went to Fort Sheridan [IL]. And there we stayed for about maybe a week; I don't know if it was that long. And then from there we got sent to Camp Blanding, Florida, for our basic training. And we lived in some six men huts down there. Some were barracked in field barracks, but I was in a six men hut.

MacDonald: Now, what time of year was that that you were into the--

Gauger: It was in the fall of the year.

MacDonald: It was a little bit different than the weather in Wisconsin.

Gauger: A little bit, yeah. [Laughs.] But it got cold down there. During January it was cold. Sometimes there was ice on the water in the morning.

MacDonald: What year was this that you got inducted? In 1944 or—

Gauger: '44, yeah.

MacDonald: And what was the basic training like?

Gauger: Well, it wasn't easy as far as that goes. I mean, you got up early in the morning, and you ate, and you went out, and you went either on different problems, you know, that they had. Actually, we had some instructors. In fact, there was one instructor told us that our training was as close to combat as you could get it. And they always said if you didn't get somebody hurt during the problem, it wasn't any good. They'd throw it out [laughs].

MacDonald: Hmm. Were you in pretty good shape as a young man?

Gauger: Oh, yeah.

MacDonald: Because they really worked you physically, didn't they?

Gauger: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. Toward the last they went and took us on twenty-five mile hikes with full pack and everything, you know. They took us early in the morning, and by about two o'clock in the afternoon we were back.

MacDonald: You guys were in really good shape then, to do that.

Gauger: Yeah, yeah.

MacDonald: What did they train you—just a basic get you in good physical shape, or did they train you in actual combat?

Gauger: You always had calisthenics, and you always--well, actually, they took you out and had forced marches, and you'd run for maybe a mile and then walk for a mile, you know. And if you went on the rifle range, you always had to walk quite a few miles to get there and back again. And then a lot of times you had night problems, where you went out at

night. And you, well, you'd go out and run your problem and then walk back. Come late at night, and the next morning you had to get up early again.

MacDonald: How were the instructors? Were they pretty thorough with you?

Gauger: Oh, yeah, but if you behaved yourself you were all right.

MacDonald: Okay [both laughs]. Did you get any time off down in Florida when you went through basic, or pretty much you--how many weeks did you go through basic?

Gauger: I can't even tell you anymore. I know when we was going through basic, they shortened it because of the different battles that were going on. And they needed a group so they shortened our training by at least a couple of weeks that I know, in time.

MacDonald: Did you get any time off after basic training?

Gauger: They sent me home. They sent me home for what they called the delayed route, fifteen days before you went overseas, then.

MacDonald: Oh, did you get any additional training after basic?

Gauger: No.

MacDonald: Nothing?

Gauger: No, no.

MacDonald: Really.

Gauger: No, you went right over.

MacDonald: So, and how did you go across--you went in the European Theater?

Gauger: European Theater, yeah.

MacDonald: And how did you get across?

Gauger: Convoy. We was in the convoy. There was about seventy ships in that convoy. We left from Boston. And we got on, well, toward later on in the afternoon--got on the ship--and they kept loading. And, I don't know, probably got in my bunk and must have went to sleep because when I woke up I didn't see no land anymore [laughs].

MacDonald: [Laughs] What kind of ship were you on? I mean, sometimes they—

Gauger: Troopship.

MacDonald: A troopship?

Gauger: Yeah, yeah.

MacDonald: Well, that's kind of interesting. What kind of living quarters did you have on board the ship then?

Gauger: Well, you had these bunks, you know, the upper and the lower bunk.

MacDonald: Four or five high?

Gauger: No, two.

MacDonald: Really?

Gauger: Oh yeah.

MacDonald: Okay.

Gauger: And then you ate twice a day. That's all. And going over you'd go and take your tray and you'd get something to eat. And you had to stand up at a table to eat. And a lot of times you'd be eating, then you'd look away, and your tray would be down on the other end [laughs].

MacDonald: [Laughs] How many men do you think were aboard that ship? You know, give me an estimate.

Gauger: Oh, I don't know. I don't know.

MacDonald: Pretty crowded.

Gauger: It was pretty crowded, yeah. But some people never slept on that ship, see. A lot of them were in groups and they'd be gambling [laughs], playing cards and stuff.

MacDonald: How long did it take you to get across the ocean?

Gauger: Fifteen days. We zigzagged back and forth. They figured seventy ships in our convoy.

MacDonald: Was there any enemy? Did the convoy run into any problems when they were crossing?

Gauger: One time they dropped depth charges. And I don't know if they got anything or not. But when they dropped them, they could feel them, next to their ears, you know. But you had--your troopships were in the middle, and then your cargo ships, and then your freighters and subchasers all the way around.

MacDonald: Mmhm. When you got over, where did you land?

Gauger: Le Havre, France. Came in there and there was ships sunk all the way around where we come in. How we [laughs] got in to dock, I don't know, but--

MacDonald: And what time of year was this?

Gauger: This was in February.

MacDonald: Of '45.

Gauger: '45, yeah.

MacDonald: And what did they do? Did you form up with a unit over there?

Gauger: No, not right away. We got off the ship, and it was overnight—that one big building I know of. And there was a bunch of names written on the wall. And [unintelligible] that came through there, and there was somebody had a name from around here. I can't remember whose it was [both laugh] anymore. Then we were put on trucks, and we went I know partway across France with that. And then we got put on boxcars. They called them "Forty and Eight" [*forty men, eight horses-WWI*]. And that's where we went across France in boxcars, and every once in a while you might hear a bullet go through it, because somebody [laughs]--a sniper would be shooting at ya', yeah. And so then there's a few places we'd stop maybe a day or two. And then we'd carry on.

MacDonald: Now, these boxcars, that's what they were, boxcars. Did you just stand up in them, or was there enough room for you to sit down?

Gauger: If you sat down you'd straddle one another. One would—side would be this, one the other way. And if you went to sleep and you stretched out, look out! [Laughs] And then once in a while they'd have—most of the time you had K-rations and C-rations while you were out. And sometimes you'd get to a place where they'd have some [mornin' ??] chow for you, but [inaudible]. That was interesting because whenever

you ate and there was anything left there was people lined up with pails and everything, looking for food.

MacDonald: The French people.

Gauger: French and German, too, you know.

MacDonald: And then where did they end up taking you?

Gauger: We went into Germany and then we had stopped at what they call a “reppo depot” for a while, and then I met up--then I got transferred to my division.

MacDonald: And what was that?

Gauger: The 44th Infantry Division. I was replacement for—most of our company that I got put in was captured, and we were replacements for these that were captured in there. And they brought in some officers and noncoms from some other that—you know, to sort of beef up the company again.

MacDonald: And this was, again, about what time of year—March or--

Gauger: This is in March, yeah.

MacDonald: Okay, so—

Gauger: February or March, in there.

MacDonald: And this would be probably during the time when--would the Battle of the Bulge taking place at this time?

Gauger: Right after that.

MacDonald: This was at the end of the Battle of the Bulge.

Gauger: Yeah, yeah.

MacDonald: Did the 44th Infantry Division, then, did you get into some combat?

Gauger: Not a lot—mostly in skirmishes and stuff at the time. And a lot of it was a lot like it is over in Iraq right now. You go in, and you took over villages, and you went through houses and stuff, and any ones that you captured they were sent either to camps or--at that time, a lot of times there was young people in there, and we’d take their weapons away and tell them to get home.

MacDonald: At the time, now did the--as far as your living stuff, did you take over houses to live in the farmhouses or in the villages?

Gauger: Yes, we did. We took whatever there was. We'd move into a house, and the people that lived there, they would have to—they could come during the day and do whatever they needed. Then at night, they had to leave.

MacDonald: Hmm.

Gauger: Find some other place, you know. They didn't sleep in—up until daytime. We slept wherever there was a place. I even slept on a garage [??] floor on the concrete [laughs]. And you slept a lot in pup tents. I can remember moving into a hay field and the farmer just mowed the hay and it was at night, and we laid on the mowed hay and slept. In the middle of the night it started to rain. [Laughs]

MacDonald: Oh.

Gauger: [Laughs] But with its—we didn't with it. Then one night we moved into a woods, and I and another guy had to put up a pup tent in the dark, you know. And after we had it up, we had pitched it over a stump. And so we just crawled [laughs] on each side of the stump and slept till the—

MacDonald: Huh. At this time, then, did they start feeding you, or were you still eating rations?

Gauger: Once in a while we'd get a hot meal, you know. There was the odd meal. But we ate a lot of K-rations, C-rations.

MacDonald: How far along was this before the end of the war, then, before Germany surrendered?

Gauger: Well, uh, Germany surrendered in May. So this was in April, you know—March and April. But, I can remember—we was over in—I think the name of the place was Worms, Germany, when we heard that Roosevelt had died then—

MacDonald: Okay.

Gauger: At that time. And then--

MacDonald: What was the mood of the troops when they heard that?

Gauger: There wasn't too much made of it. I know we all had to stand at attention during the time that he must have got buried, and I can remember they said at the time we stood at attention, and if you passed out they'd never pick you up. They just stood there [laughs], you know, for so long. Then I can remember hearing the morning that Hitler was dead. And a lot of the German people thought he was dead long before that. After that, hearing that, well then the Germans were giving up pretty well. If we moved into a [inaudible] area we'd [inaudible] ahead [??] and all these houses and stuff, they'd have to have white flags to tell us that they'd surrendered. And then we never fired on them or anything, but if they didn't, showed any resistance, well--

MacDonald: And what was the mood of the German people at that time? You were not allowed, the soldiers were not allowed, to associate with the German people, were they?

Gauger: At that time, there was—you couldn't fraternize with any of them, you know. And so it wasn't till right before we—actually never told us—that their fraternization had been lifted until we was ready to come back [laughs].

MacDonald: When you were in Germany, were you able to see any USO shows or anything like that—entertainment?

Gauger: Yeah, I can remember one or two. And I can't remember what they were about or anything. But on the way back we went through England, and Bob Hope—we seen Bob Hope's show.

MacDonald: Oh.

Gauger: Over there.

MacDonald: Still when you were in Germany and the war ended then, and you became in the occupational forces there?

Gauger: Yeah, right.

MacDonald: What was that like? The Army was more or less the government of—

Gauger: Well, basically it was like it is now. You still had to post your guards and stuff. I mean, you had to stand guard and stuff. I can remember going out and standing guard on bridges, you know, and checking people wanting to go through.

MacDonald: Then, how long was it before they started demobilizing, I guess, sending people back, sending the soldiers back?

Gauger: Our division was one of the first divisions to come back. In fact, they were debating whether we would be sent by way of the States or direct over to Japan and the invasion of Japan. Well, anyway we were lucky enough that they sent us by way of the States. And we came back on the *Queen Elizabeth*.

MacDonald: Oh. So, can I just ask you--a lot of times when they were givin' the guys—bringing 'em back to the States, they had the point system that made them eligible.

Gauger: Yeah, there were some guys get out of—they didn't get it--they wanted to hit the States. If they had enough points, they could get out.

MacDonald: Okay, but your whole—

Gauger: But I didn't have enough points.

MacDonald: No, but your whole division came back—

Gauger: Our division came back.

MacDonald: --to the States.

Gauger: But they wouldn't have got out, even on points, if we'd have went to Japan afterwards.

MacDonald: Mm-hm. You said they come back on the *Queen Mary*—

Gauger: *Queen Elizabeth*.

MacDonald: I mean, excuse me, *Queen Elizabeth*. What was that like?

Gauger: Well, we had the whole division on there plus other ones. And we slept real crowded. You had certain sections that you had to stay in. And you ate around the clock but only twice a day, though, you got fed. But you got fed good on there. And I was lucky enough that they asked me if I wanted to work at the ship's newspaper office. And I said, "Sure." So I worked at the ship newspaper office, and I got a button. We used to have buttons where ya had to see on your shirt. I got a button that I could run all over the ship, which was pretty nice.

MacDonald: Sure.

Gauger: I had newspaper outlets. And I don't know whatever happened to 'em. But I had [unintelligible] that went on. And you'd think where the ship like that wouldn't rock or anything, but the second day out we rocked. The old waves were coming up over, you know.

MacDonald: You hit a pretty good storm, huh?

Gauger: Well, it only took us four and a half days to come back with that.

MacDonald: The *Queen* moved pretty quick compared to the convoy going across, huh?

Gauger: Yeah. It landed in New York.

MacDonald: And what was that like? Were you one of the first units, divisions, back in the States at that time, or not?

Gauger: We were one of the first divisions to come back, yes. And we landed in New York and they started unloading. We landed in the morning. In the afternoon, we started unloading, and it was way into the night before *we* got out, and they're still unloading. We got off, and there's Red Cross givin' us coffee and donuts and muffins [??]. And we got onto a ferry and went over to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. That's where we stayed, and from there they—when we hit the States they, they— from there they give us thirty days recuperation home—before we went home. And so we were—they put us on trains. There's one train went out in the morning, one train went out in the afternoon. We was in the afternoon one that went out. And when we got to Chicago we were right next to the one that went out in the morning. And here we had sleepers on it, and they didn't [both laugh]. And—I forgot what else I was gonna say on that. Oh, the guys on the next train, they says, "You're lucky. You got sleepers, and you got water and everything." And the conductor who come through, he says, "These guys don't drink water." Because every stop there was everyone would get off and get a case of beer [laughs]. Then we went to Camp McCoy [Wisconsin]. That's where we went from there and got our thirty days.

MacDonald: Okay. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** --talking about he arrived at Camp McCoy just prior to his thirty-day leave.

Gauger: And there, after thirty days, we were supposed to go over to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas and take two weeks jungle training. And then we were supposed to go in on the invasion of Japan. And while we were home on the thirty days, they dropped an A-bomb, and we didn't have to go anymore. And then the ones that had enough points they got out, and the ones—others--I was lucky enough when I got to Camp

Chaffee, Arkansas my first sergeant, he says, “How would you like to be company clerk up at Headquarters Company?” And I says, “Well, I’ll give it a try.” So I was company clerk. Well, then, just about all the guys were transferred into headquarters companies, then we’d ship them all over the place, you know. And then I think there was about three of us left, and we all shook hands and went different places. I went to Memphis, Tennessee at Second Army Headquarters. That’s where I went.

MacDonald: What was your rank at that time?

Gauger: Corporal.

MacDonald: Okay.

Gauger: And so I was there. And from there I went to Battle Creek, Michigan, for a while. And from there I got discharged through Fort Sheridan [Illinois].

MacDonald: And what year was this—or time—

Gauger: In ’46.

MacDonald: ’46, okay. And then after your discharge you came back to the Door County area?

Gauger: Door County, yeah.

MacDonald: And what was it like when you came home, then?

Gauger: Well, things were changed. I mean, the shipyard was down to just about--I mean, they didn’t have too many. And there wasn’t too many ships being built then anymore.

MacDonald: A lot of young men had come back from the service, too. So there was a lot of competition for jobs, huh?

Gauger: Well, I guess if you wanted a job, you could get it. But pay wasn’t that good [laughs] anymore. You couldn’t be that fussy, you know. But under the G.I. Bill, I went to school, technical school, and it worked under G.I. Bill. And that’s how I picked up my trade again and I went to technical school down in Green Bay.

MacDonald: What did you take?

Gauger: Sheet metal and heating, and then when I—I think we went to that-- there was three of us. Two was in the sheet metal and one was in carpenter, that's from up here. We started in the fall, and we went through the winter, and then towards spring the instructor told I and another guy, he says, "We can't teach you guys anything more. Get out on a job!" So we got home, and I was lucky enough to get a job, and I worked in the sheet metal shop for about five years for somebody else, and then I went on my own.

MacDonald: You formed your own--

Gauger: Business.

MacDonald: Yeah, what was it called again, Chet?

Gauger: Gauger Heating and Sheet Metal. And I did plumbing and air conditioning.

MacDonald: And how many years did you operate your business?

Gauger: My business? Well, I still got a part of it yet, the shop. It was about fifty-six years that I was really active yet.

MacDonald: Mm-hm. So, other than you took your G.I. Bill and used it for your schooling and stuff, did you join any veterans organizations or anything when you got back?

Gauger: Yeah, I belonged to the Legion right away, the Legion from up north. There was a fella that belonged to the Legion here in Sturgeon Bay, and he got a bunch of us to join that. Well, then they formed the VFW up there at Fish Creek, and Bill [inaudible] up there. So then I'm a charter member of that. And then I dropped the Legion. So then I worked up here in Sturgeon Bay, and then in '51 the AMVETS started theirs, and I joined the same year. I wasn't a charter member of it, but joined the same year which I'm still a member yet. And then the VFW, I still belong to the VFW up north, but then they bought their club room, and they had an old wood and coal furnace. And I had started my own business, and they got me to put an oil furnace in there. And the guy by the name of Bob Graef says, "Now, you transfer up here, or we're going to take it out of your pay." [Laughs] So I transferred and I've been a life member of that. And then there was a guy by the name of Bill Martinson, and he got me in the Legion again. So, I belong to all three organizations.

MacDonald: You were a pretty active member, huh? You're still pretty active in the VFW today, correct?

Gauger: Right, and so I am a life member of the AMVETS, a life member of the VFW, and a life member of DAV.

MacDonald: Yeah. Did you participate in any other service organizations after you got out?

Gauger: Yeah, Kiwanis—I have twenty-five years in Kiwanis.

MacDonald: Good. When you were in the Army yet, did your division ever have any reunions, or anything?

Gauger: Yes. I've been to two of them.

MacDonald: Really? Where were they?

Gauger: One was in Clearwater, Florida, and one was in Las Vegas, and I was in them. They've had some since, but I never went. They had one in Chicago, and there's another one in Philadelphia this year. I don't know if they had it already or not. But they'll communicate about two/three times yet. Yeah, I don't know, it is fun, but, I mean, expensive to go to them.

MacDonald: Yeah. Also now, we're in Chet's den here. And on the walls of Chet's den here he's got pictures of himself when he was in the military, and he also has a framed thing of some medals. Chet, why don't you describe some of the medals there that you have on the wall?

Gauger: Well, most of them are European campaign medals, and like the--*[gets up]* African American and European medals with the Bronze Battle Star. And you got the Combat Infantry Badge, and American Campaign Medal, Army Occupational Medal, World War II Medal, and Good Conduct Medal. And then after I was out—I don't know how many years ago—the ones that received a Combat Infantry Badge were awarded the Bronze Star. I got that.

MacDonald: Okay, good. And Chet also has a picture of his--looks like his whole company.

Gauger: That was in basic training.

MacDonald: Okay. And he also has on the wall a framing of the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., where he was an honoree, honored by his daughter and son-in-law also. So, it's a pretty impressive display there, Chet. How do you feel about your military and war experience? What was that like for a young man to go through?

Gauger: I said, if the experience--if you come out of it you wouldn't want to give it up, you know. It's something that you're going to treasure all your life, as far as that goes. And I don't think it hurt me a bit. But, like I say, if you come through in one piece, you know, I think it's a good experience. It's something you treasure, you know, you're proud of—

MacDonald: Mm-hm.

Gauger: You can be proud of.

MacDonald: Chet, I want to give you the opportunity—do you have anything else you'd like to mention about your war experiences or your service time that you went through?

Gauger: Well, I've mentioned just about everything, but, I know there's a lot of things I forgot [laughs]. But, like I say, if you think back, think of the things you did, you wonder how you did it. But you did. Sometimes you'd get in on your long marches and carry big backpacks and stuff, you'd wonder if you're ever going to make it [laughs]. I can remember going across some of France and walking with a big barrage bag with your stuff in. And you'd walk and walk and think your back was going to break, but—

MacDonald: Were you ever put where you felt your life was really in danger?

Gauger: Well, you never tried to think about it, you know. You went and did it and, sure, you didn't know from day to day what could happen. Like a lot of times when we were over in Europe there, you had these German Youth, and they had no regard. They were trained: "Well, we've got a gripe," you know? And we never walked anyplace by ourselves. You always had two/three guys or more. Like I say, if you lived through it, it was quite an experience.

MacDonald: You mentioned earlier about the weather one time, the rain and stuff. There was a lot of soldiers that were disabled because of the weather. Probably before you got--and I don't know how cold it was when you first arrived.

Gauger: It was pretty cold, yeah—

MacDonald: Because there was an awful lot of—

Gauger: Frozen feet and—

MacDonald: Right.

Gauger: Yeah, yeah.

MacDonald: How did you cope with that?

Gauger: Well, you did the best you could. Once we got over there, they give you a sleeping bag or a blanket, either one. You didn't have both. And I always chose the blanket because I figure if I was shelled I didn't want to be caught in the sleeping bag. And, like I say, we slept up on the ground a lot, and if it was raining then we had a tent up. There'd be a little tension around the tent for the water kept runnin' out. If you sleep in there, you take your raincoats and lay down first, and then lay on top of them and cover up with what you had.

MacDonald: Needless to say, it wasn't very good living conditions during the time.

Gauger: No, you lived whatever, wherever you lived, and you know, you made the best of it. But like I say, when you could—toward the last you could get in some of these homes, and of course it was like chasing the people out.

MacDonald: I'm just curious. Did they eat with you, or you ate at someplace else?

Gauger: [Coughs.] No, we always ate mostly in a prisoner [??] company. It was hot meals, you went through chow lines, and they'd--and the people there, they ate, lot of times, what we did, when we were over in Germany and Austria, there was barns connected with the houses. And they would have the cattle in there, and sometimes we'd go and help ourselves to some milk and eggs or stuff, even potatoes and that. A lot of times we'd make our own meal on the run. So somebody'd gather—I gather potatoes, another one would get eggs, and another something else, and we'd have a meal on our own.

MacDonald: Mm-hm. When you got out then, Chet, and came back to Door County, you got married?

Gauger: I got married in 1950.

MacDonald: 1950--and raised a family—

Gauger: We got one girl, 1952 she was born.

MacDonald: I just want to appreciate you sitting down for this interview today. And I especially want to thank you for your service time. I think it's really important that you guys really deserve a big thank-you.

Gauger: Well, a lot of them had it worse than I did. But, like I say, if the war wouldn't have ended when it did with the A-bombs, I probably wouldn't be talking to you today.

MacDonald: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

[End of Interview]