

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JAMES C. HEEREY
Field Lineman, Army, World War II.

2002

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Heerey, James C., (1923-2010). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 37 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 37 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 37 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

James C. Heerey, a native of Mauston, Wisconsin, discusses his World War II service in the wire section of Battery A, 334th Field Artillery Battalion, 87th Infantry Division and his participation in the Battle of the Bulge. He talks about working for Cutler Hammer in Milwaukee (Wisconsin) waiving a draft deferment for working in a war-essential industry, and being drafted. Heerey touches upon basic training at Camp McCain (Mississippi), assignment to communications school, learning to hang telephone wires, and duty as a phone operator during training. He speaks about reassignment to the artillery and transport overseas aboard a French liner. Arriving in France in November of 1944, he comments on moving to Metz (Germany) and beginning artillery fire, stringing wire for the artillery, and night movements. During the Battle of the Bulge, Heerey comments on riding in a jeep under German fire and crossing the Siegfried Line. He discusses stopping at a brewery in Koblenz, eating chicken that a German family cooked for his group, and seeing freed Russian prisoners of war invade a German house. He portrays having dud artillery shells hit nearby and unknowingly walking through a minefield. Returned to the States, he touches on a month at home, assignment to Fort McPherson (Georgia) where he prepared to go to the South Pacific, and the war's end. Heerey mentions returning to his pre-war job in Wisconsin, attending A Battery reunions, and, after being widowed, marrying the widow of one of his veteran buddies.

Biographical Sketch:

Heerey (1923-2010) served in the Army from 1942 to 1945. A field lineman, he received four bronze stars during the Battle of the Bulge and was honorably discharged at the rank of corporal. He worked for thirty-five years at Western Electric Company, volunteered with Telephone Pioneers, and eventually settled in Madison (Wisconsin). Heerey was married to Camille Katzmark until her death in 1980. In 1987, he married Edith Fuller Havemann, who passed away in 2000.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002
Transcribed by Alex Rosinski, 2009
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010

Interview Transcript:

- James: 3rd of July, 2002, speaking to Jim Heerey. Where were you born, sir?
- Heerey: I was born in Winona County, St. Charles, Minnesota.
- James: Okay and when was that?
- Heerey: In 1923.
- James: You're four months older than I am [laughs].
- Heerey: Oh. Ah ha.
- James: I was born in—
- Heerey: '39, [laughs] September of '39.
- James: Yeah, right, right. Anyway, and you finished high school there and—
- Heerey: No, grade school. In fact we moved to Mauston, depression, my Dad was there in 1938, or '37. My dad was offered a job back on the railroad, and then it fell through so he worked carpentry, helped build the courthouse, and—
- James: In Mauston?
- Heerey: In Mauston, and I finished 8th grade there, then went to high school there, three and a half years. Middle of my senior year I quit and went to Milwaukee to work and went to night school. Went to work at Cutler Hammer electrical supplier war contractor.
- James: Did they give you your high school diploma?
- Heerey: Yeah, I found out later, I didn't—I was back and talked to the principal, Mr. Chesus, and he just grunted. I showed him what I did in Milwaukee. My mother and my sister just told me recently my mother went over there—
- James: And laid down the law?
- Heerey: And straightened him out.
- James: Well, a lot of guys graduated early out of high school in '42 because they needed guys.
- Heerey: Yeah. And then the other thing about Milwaukee, I worked at Cutler Hammer until I was drafted in February of '43.

James: What did you do at Cutler Hammer?

Heerey: I did some wiring, and then all of a sudden they found out I had aptitude for triggers and controlling stuff and parts and all that. So I was the—I had to set up the jobs because the people starting to work were on time study, and you had to make sure all the parts were there, and a guy might check in on this he expects to—

James: Sure.

Heerey: Make a buck. So we had to—I had quite a few experiences that weren't very good, but anyway, they lost a whole great big skid full of contacts one time.

James: But you, by this time you had become ready, you were subject to the draft—

Heerey: Yes. And then when I told them I was leaving, they jumped up and down—

James: And tried to make you essential?

Heerey: Yes. Now, I said, "I don't care what you do, I'm going." [laughs]

James: They said that, too, so it was too late.

Heerey: [laughs] Yeah, yeah. So anyway I—

James: But they could have gotten a deferment for you?

Heerey: I don't know if they could have. They didn't—

James: Probably not.

Heerey: When I protested against anything they just let it go. So then I was drafted, and I went down to the draft board there. Then I was drafted out of Milwaukee, and then I was inducted at the—where? Camp, I forget, was it Camp Grant down in Chicago? We went on the train going down, here's my old high school buddies from Mauston. (James laughs) But I ended up going in, and the gal wanted me to go into the Navy.

James: Who wanted you to?

Heerey: The gal that interviewed me wanted me to go in the Navy, and I said, "No, no, I don't like water." So then I insisted on the Army, and apparently due to my background at Cutler Hammer, I got into communications and into the wiring of radios. And anyway—

- James: That was easy for you? It was easy work?
- Heerey: Yeah, well in the service, it's better—all my buddies from service, most of them I found out went to the infantry. A couple went to the South Pacific. And anyway, the thing about it come up, I found out when I got into Camp McCain, Mississippi, it was colder than mackerel, and—
- James: Is that where your basic training was?
- Heerey: First basic training. And the nice old barracks that were built were still blowing through the cracks and—
- James: Yeah, but Mississippi doesn't get snow(??).
- Heerey: Well, I know you only just had a few—it's damp and miserable, and hot in summer, humid in summer. And then I was assigned, I was with the wire section—
- James: A wire section?
- Heerey: Yeah, that's from the communi—
- James: That's landlines.
- Heerey: Landlines, we strung them mostly on the ground, except somebody had to, when we had pole climbing in the states—
- James: I was gonna say, you had to climb a pole now and then.
- Heerey: You had to string our—yeah, but these other guys were all hot to trot.
- James: What other guys?
- Heerey: In my group of seven or eight guys. They all wanted, but when we got overseas the story changed.
- James: [laughs] Because you'd get shot.
- Heerey: They let Jim, "Let Jim climb." [laughs] So anyway, and then also, I don't know how I got the job. I know why I got the job, because when they had the fire missions training the officers, I was the OP operator with the telephone to call the missions, and I got real good at it. In fact, an old general who was part of the mission one day, and after all work(??), "My god, you're good," he said [James laughs], "Because I've gotta hear the guy on the other end, and you correct him." The command was, so they don't screw up. You know, it's kind of a risky business. But so then I found out afterwards the reason these guys didn't want

that, they knew it was if you went up with the infantry over in war, why, it's a little different story. [laughs]

James: No kidding.

Heerey: So then—

James: Don't they give you a stripe for that?

Heerey: No, just a Pfc. So then we moved over to Fort Jackson for a while, and out of there they shipped various guys out for replacements to Europe or—and what happened there was Captain Tyler(??) come by one day just as I stepped out of the barracks, and well, I tell the story different. There was a fella who kept going over the hill from our wire section, and they just got him back, he took off again, they got him and had him in the guardhouse. Well, the captain come by and said, “Jim,” he said, “I've got a problem. You're supposed to be shipped out as a wire sergeant,” or something in that order, and he says, “I've gotta fix this.” He didn't want to lose me. So I thanked him, and so then all of a sudden two nights later, well, this Luchia(??) was working, a guy I named Luchia(??), he was working on a discharge. He had ankle problems supposedly, and the medics had already made out his discharge, but he hadn't given it to them yet, and then that night, one night they went out to, all of sudden we went out to bivouac in the field. Well, you know you didn't have any military problem, and suddenly they're going and saying, “Let's play touch tackle.” Well, old Luchia was the fastest guy on the field with his bad ankles [both laugh], and they tore up his discharge.

James: On the spot.

Heerey: Yeah, I saw a bunch of officers over there watching him, medical officers [James laughs], and then the next day over the hill. Well, they got him back, and the captain pulled him out of there and made him the wire sergeant and shipped him out. [laughs] I sure felt sorry for the bunch that were getting him. [laughs]

James: Yeah, he's a screwup from the get-go.

Heerey: Yeah, but other than that, I guess then we shipped out from Fort Dix, New Jersey on November 4th of 1944—

James: You took a ship to Europe?

Heerey: Yup, and it was a—

James: Where in Europe?

Heerey: We landed in Liverpool, and it was a French luxury liner, the *Louis Pasteur* that had been converted over to a troop ship. And our battery had the opportunity being up above with the guns because we were assigned to that. And then—

James: Now tell me before you go any further, what was your regiment?

Heerey: Battery A, 334th Field Artillery Battalion—

James: Three-three-four?

Heerey: Yeah.

James: Field Artillery Battalion?

Heerey: Yeah, Field Artillery Battalion, 87th Infantry Division.

James: 87th Infantry Division—

Heerey: Mm-hmm, and—

James: Did you stay with that?

Heerey: Yeah, all the way then.

James: Got it.

Heerey: And anyway, therefore, I wasn't down below. In fact I stayed up and slept in the gun turret. Colder than heck, but a lot better than down there where all the guys are seasick. [laughs] And then at the—it was a French ship and an English crew, and dirty. These men who never took a bath, the English crew, they're crummy looking, and the guns were all rusty, so you went to fire the 6-incher off the bow on the rear of the ship I guess. Anyway, the thing blew up, and one GI got hit in the head.

James: Oh, my.

Heerey: So when we landed in England, he wasn't dead, but they carried him off the ship first.

James: Yeah.

Heerey: And then when they come up to try out the ack-ack guns by where I was, I jumped over the side and watched. [both laugh] I wasn't gonna stand there.

James: No.

- Heerey: I watched how they did it, but I said I'm ducking. [laughs]
- James: So did you stay in Liverpool very long, or—
- Heerey: No, we landed and then—
- James: When was that? Do you remember?
- Heerey: We landed in England on the 13th, November 13th of '44.
- James: On November 13—
- Heerey: Of '44. And then we stayed about a week and a half or something because the [unintelligible] took her out, we landed in Le Havre, France on the Liberty ship, or some smaller ship, on November 28th.
- James: That's when you got to France, on the 28th of November?
- Heerey: Right.
- James: France, November 28th.
- Heerey: And then we went on across over to Metz. That was a fort—the forts that weren't taken yet. So we were firing artillery on the forts, and we had attacked on the way, but at night we were stringin'—I was stringin' wires up the city streets and you couldn't leave it down because tanks were running through there—
- James: I was gonna say, they'd cut the wire.
- Heerey: Yeah, so then we were trying to hook it onto buildings, and I climbed the pole— [unintelligible] there were no Germans, but you climbed the pole, and I heard a bang, and something hit the post right above my head. The stupid Bob Haas(??) didn't know any better, he shined a flashlight on me.
- James: Did you hear fire?
- Heerey: And the Free French would shoot at lights—for the blackout.
- James: Oh, so any light, they'd just automatically—
- Heerey: Bang, and they missed me by a [unintelligible]. I come down and told him to climb, I wanna hold the light. [both laugh]
- James: Yeah, right.
- Heerey: And then we were down into—we saw action there. Then we were on down—

James: That was your first action.

Heerey: Yeah, and then we were on down to Saarbrucken, Germany on the 15th—

James: Of December?

Heerey: Yeah.

James: That's the day before the Bulge.

Heerey: Yeah, and then we were just set a little while, and a lieutenant come by and said that we put out—they must have heard something happening so we put antitank, dug in antitank guys and set 'em out in front of the battery a ways. We didn't know what was ahead of us. Except our battery, according to Lieutenant Hahn, he said, "Keep an eye out. They're at the right flank of the whole U.S. Army right now [James laughs]. So if something comes around—"

James: That's pressure.

Heerey: Yeah. So then all of a sudden the next night, it hit the middle of the night, they said, "March Orders." We all packed out of there in the middle of the night and headed back up, and I don't know just what part we were at, but I believe the map there shows we were likely past—we started in probably at—

James: Oh, late in December you were near Rheims.

Heerey: But that, yeah, but we backed through there, see. See we were over here in the Saar. Then we come back down over there. That's coming back.

James: Oh, I see.

Heerey: We crossed through there twice. Then we went on up to St. Hubert, Belgium up here, and then to St. Vith.

James: That was in the end of January?

Heerey: Yeah, but in between there when we got into the Battle of the Bulge, supposedly we were sort of near the point of a pincer movement with the British on the other side I believe. And of course they always said a lot of Germans escaped out of there, but—I was trying to think of something that happened there. I can't think right now. Oh, going up through the Bulge I was riding on the front of the jeep, and my foot was very cold. I know my feet were numb for two days. I didn't dare take my shoes off to look.

James: They were probably blue.

Heerey: Yeah, but they turned out all right.

James: Good.

Heerey: And some other guys went back—

James: Sure.

Heerey: And one jeep driver, he was gone. Anyway, on the way we're going along the road and there's Germans off in the woods apparently because all of a sudden I look in the snow [laughs]—something's hitting the snow across from us, right ahead of us.

James: Like bullets.

Heerey: Yeah, and you couldn't hear it because of the noise of the vehicles, and the vehicle ahead of us was quite a ways ahead, and I told Miller, who was driving, I said, "Gun it!" I said, "Get out of here, get out of here." "Why?" "They're shooting at us!" [laughs], and I guess a fortunate thing that he—to be back a little further they would have had us. Then I see on there, it said the Siegfried Line we took on a certain date.

James: February 26th.

Heerey: February 26th, and we had a guy, a corporal in our outfit who was a forward observer for the artillery, for our battery, and he spoke German. He captured a hundred Germans by saying, "Get the hell out of here. We're gonna blow your butt off." [laughs]

James: In German.

Heerey: In German. And they all come. [laughs]

James: Were they pretty young?

Heerey: Yeah, they were a mixture. Yeah, they were a mixture, but most—the real old toughies, you know, the old SS, they were the bad guys, but if you run into young ones, they were—

James: Readily to give up.

Heerey: Ready to give up, yeah, they knew better. And then, we went on over to Koblenz, and I was up with—

James: Now you're talking about your unit, did you operate in groups like a squad or larger?

Heerey: They only went with—we ever—

James: [unintelligible] string out a line.

Heerey: Yeah, what happened was the ones that string—our wire section, they were(??) eight to ten people. Different times we'd borrow one or get an extra guy—

James: You had a jeep and a—

Heerey: We had a jeep and a three-quarter ton smaller truck.

James: The three-quarter ton had have a huge spool of wire?

Heerey: Well, no, no, we had our own rack for reels, and the reels were probably this wide, this high, and it was a paired wire, paired black covered wire—

James: Paired?

Heerey: Yeah, pairs.

James: Double strings. Okay.

Heerey: Yeah, yeah, and we strung that and just left it. In training we always picked it back up during the States, but over there of course we would run back to the rear echelon and pick up some reels, and we didn't always—well, later on in the war as we moved faster sometimes we didn't even get involved stringing out because they used radio to move faster.

James: But you, were you as skilled in using the radio, too?

Heerey: I only used, I wasn't trained on it. The guy that was the T4 sergeant that was trained on it, Ralston(??), went up one time, the first time at the first action at Metz. He cracked up.

James: Couldn't stand the pressure—

Heerey: He went crazy, I guess. They hauled him back, we never saw him again.

James: Oh, my word(??).

Heerey: He's in Peoria, Illinois, and well, he had the best job with the radio, you know, all the time, and then there's other radios they carried as a backpack, but I wasn't in that, but I did use it up front when I was up at Koblenz.

- James: Now you were attached to a company headquarters—
- Heerey: It was like a battalion—
- James: A battalion headquarters.
- Heerey: Yeah, battalion headquarters, and that was the coordinating—
- James: But you were connecting that battalion—
- Heerey: Yeah, and each battalion was, the 334th was attached to a, some other, three something infantry battalion. They paired them off.
- James: Did that landline have to be repowered along the way so that you could—
- Heerey: No, no.
- James: You'd go forever and you could—didn't lose power.
- Heerey: No. But the whole thing, as we're up at, funny one in a way, up at Koblenz, we're up on a hill with the infantry guys, and we're waiting there. They were waiting to cross the Rhine. Down below there they captured a bridge, and everything broke through so they all crossed. But anyway we're up there, and I was up with forward observer with Sergeant Greening(??). He did a lot of the fire missions, and all of a sudden the first day up there he says, "Come on Jim, we're going down." I said, "Down where?" "Well, down to the brewery." [James laughs] So down the hill we go, and I just couldn't believe this, they pulled about three trucks with infantry guys, and not everyone come down, you know. And they come down along, they went along the riverfront, and there's a long board fence. And if the Germans—we saw the Germans had a machine gun set up. After doing this a couple of times they could have just—
- James: Wiped you out.
- Heerey: Wiped you all out, and I thought these guys were awfully thirsty. So we got over there, and the man there was a cook for Max Schmeling when he was in the States, and the lady was a dermatologist.
- James: Oh, my goodness.
- Heerey: She's telling this infantry guy, the guy back home has his wife, has a little baby and it has a rash [laughs], and she's [laughs] prescribing what she should do. Then we had a chicken dinner.
- James: Oh, my.

Heerey: Yeah, they acquired chickens for us.

James: These were Germans?

Heerey: The Germans, yeah. They just loved us, “Come here and save us.” [laughs] And anyway that was a experience, but the second night they went down, I said, “You know, I think I’ll stay. I’ll wait. I’ll eat my C-ration.” [laughs] “I’m chicken.” Then we went on across quite rapidly, had a sad thing along the way. We were going through some little town, and we were stalled for about, probably an hour, and all of a sudden two or three German war prisoners roaming around, small dark, swarthy looking guys come over. They point at the house, and they say “Germans forgotten(??), Germans forgotten(??) in there.” So all of a sudden about three or four guys of us, and I went with them, went charging over and searched the house out, the side part. Just at the time as we just finished we tromped through the basement, these guys were in there. There was a lady and her daughter, about seventeen year old girl and a lady, and we couldn’t get those Russians out.

James: Couldn’t get who?(?)

Heerey: We couldn’t get them to get out. We were gonna run them out of there. Just then Sergeant Turner from one of the batteries hollered down, hollered at ’em—

James: There were Germans.

Heerey: They were Russian prisoners. They wanted, their secret, the trick was they wanted to get into the house.

James: What the hell were the Russian prisoners doing on the Rhine River?

Heerey: Well, they were back to work, they had labor camps, for the Germans. They were probably working.

James: And how did this girl and her daughter get separated from the labor camp?

Heerey: No, they weren’t. This was their home.

James: I see.

Heerey: This was their home. And what happened, these Russkies wanted to get into the house, that the women are [unintelligible]. Well, here comes Turner hollering, “The line’s moving! The line’s moving! We gotta get these guys out,” he says, “Let everything go, you’ve gotta get out of here.” The line was moving, otherwise they’d be gone. So out we went, and it always bothered me, how these guys pulled that, and leaving the women there like that was a sad thing.

James: I don't know what these prisoners of war were doing wandering around loose.

Heerey: Well, because the infantry came through ahead of us—

James: I see.

Heerey: --and let them loose. They were—

James: They didn't try to send them back to the prison camp?

Heerey: Well no, they weren't our enemy, they were just German prisoners. The Germans had them. They were working in factories as prisoners.

James: They were Russians.

Heerey: Russians they had captured.

James: Oh, I see. Okay.

Heerey: And then we went over near the Czech border by—near Plauen, Germany, and then we were over near, when the war ended we were right near the Czech border. And then they shipped us back to the temporary, the Camp Lucky Strike in France. They set up various camps, but you could tell the power of the cigarette companies. They named the camps after cigarettes.

James: The Lucky Strike, the one at Le Havre is the only one I know about.

Heerey: That's the one I was, but I guess there's a couple other places—

James: Yeah, I don't know about those.

Heerey: Okay, but that was the one we were at, and we shipped back to the States, I think we were back here by—I don't even know the date now.

James: Well, that's okay.

Heerey: But anyway we were back home, and then I was at Fort McPherson. We were planning to go to the South Pacific, and later on in my division news it came out through my 87th Division retire—they discharged people [unintelligible].

James: When you got home from overseas, when was that?

Heerey: I got home I think on 7/16/45.

James: July '45.

Heerey: Yeah.

James: And then, did they send you home for a month?

Heerey: Yeah, then we were home for a month.

James: And then you went down to finish your time down at Fort McPherson—

Heerey: Yeah, then we went down to Fort Knox first, I think it was, and then they broke us up, and I was assigned to Fort McPherson, Atlanta, Georgia.

James: But you really didn't have much to do, did you, except to [unintelligible] guys to go to Japan.

Heerey: Yeah, well, yeah, but the war was all over then, and I still stayed in to December 3rd.

James: I see.

Heerey: The war ended with Japan, I forget the date.

James: September 2nd.

Heerey: September 2nd, and then according to the map we had from the division, it showed where our division would have landed in Japan. In the history of Japan no one had ever invaded it. When the early days, way back in the early days, a whole fleet came and a typhoon took them out.

James: That's The Divine Wind, right. We all know that.

Heerey: Then they had set the date for invasion into Japan, and according to the history of that, what happened if we would have kept the dates, six days before the invasion date, there was a typhoon that would have rocked the boats. Also they found out later that the Japanese had hundreds of kamikaze planes, one man subs. They probably would have never given up because they fight to the death, and we can say that the atomic bomb was bad, but it saved a million lives.

James: Tell me now, when you got out of service, did you use the G.I. Bill?

Heerey: No, I had no—I just went to work.

James: Where?

Heerey: Back at Cutler Hammer.

James: In Milwaukee.

Heerey: I was off a couple, three weeks. The other guys were all running down to get unemployment. I didn't bother.

James: You had a good job there at Cutler Hammer then?

Heerey: Well, yeah, but then I was back with them for about a year, and then they frustrated me. They assigned me—well, I was in a special room they had there, and what it was it was gonna be samples of all the products logged in different shelves to show the buyers. The salesmen would call me for what they wanted to show the buyers, and I was busy arranging that, and a friend of mine at Cutler Hammer said he just left there and got quite a big raise by going to Western Electric Company installing telephone offices. And I told them I thought I would go over there and I applied, and of course the guy didn't offer me too much so I went back a couple weeks later, a different guy, and he said, "Oh boy, we could use you." Different guy, you know, and I got quite a raise, so I gave Cutler Hammer two weeks notice, and to get the supply room set up they put me on overtime. [laughs] And I thought, "You guys are nuts. Why don't you bring another person in here and train them?" You know, it's like I'm gonna set it up and walk out the door. I thought this isn't very good management. [laughs] So anyway, then I went with Western Electric Company and was with them thirty-five years.

James: Thirty-five years. Where, in Milwaukee?

Heerey: No, I started in Milwaukee, then Madison, and then you flit around the country quite a bit. I was up in New York City for about five months one time to help them out. They get backlogged, and I had quite a few experiences there.

James: What was your expertise then, at the time there?

Heerey: Well, nothing really except my little background of telephones and prior work at Cutler Hammer, so therefore in four years—

James: You knew a lot about the equipment, then?

Heerey: Well, no, I didn't, because I hadn't gotten to that part like some other guys. Except I was fast learner, and I got lucky right away. Madison, I signed into the mechanical or electrical adjustments of relays, and then pretty soon I got into troubleshooting and learned how to read schematics and all that, which I had a little bit of, but I got a lot more, and then in four years, they goosed me on up and made me supervisor. [laughs]

James: Here in Madison?

Heerey: Yeah, here in Madison first, and then—

James: For Western Electric?

Heerey: Western Electric, yeah. We worked installing the telephone offices for Wisconsin Bell.

James: Where was that out of?

Heerey: We were out of Milwaukee. It was out of Milwaukee, the headquarters. Yeah, and that's national, it's part of AT&T.

James: Right, I understand. Okay, and so you were there thirty-three years?

Heerey: Thirty-five.

James: Thirty-five, my, my. Did they give you a gold watch?

Heerey: Yeah, I got a watch, this watch earlier, thirty years, and then I got a beautiful clock for the thirty-fifth and a dinner. Of course it took me awhile to get the dinner out of them [James laughs]. They were always wondering if I was gonna leave. The area manager of Milwaukee couldn't get up and make connections, and finally he did.

James: You keeping track of any of your buddies?

Heerey: For the Army?

James: Yeah, which were in your battalion.

Heerey: Oh yeah, the two guys, people from Illinois, Ken Hamlin and Willie Coonrads started contacting people way back, and I don't even know what year, early '50's, and they kept contacting more, and they caught up with me in about '61, and every year since we always have a reunion.

James: And this is the whole division, or—

Heerey: No, just the battery.

James: The 334th?

Heerey: Battery, A Battery, just A Battery.

James: Oh, just A Battery.

Heerey: Oh, yeah.

- James: Which involves what, how many guys?
- Heerey: Well, it would be a hundred and some, a hundred and ten people, and actually they got up to about forty some coming to it with their wives and kids at first.
- James: How many are left now?
- Heerey: Ooo, now we're down, coming to it'd be about fifteen, half of them have a brother or son drive them, and now the way, the thing about it was, I was going to—**[End of Tape 1, Side A. Approx. 60 sec. of end of Side A is blank]** and then later on, what happened to me in life was Camille passed away in '80, then I knew this other lady. It was Ken Hamlin's wife, and Ken and Willie and I were always good friends, even in service. Well, what happened was then Peggy lost Ken in '84, and then Willie called up. He was down in Fairfield(?), Arkansas, and he called up and said, "Peggy's coming to the reunion. You better get down here."
- James: Without your wife?
- Heerey: My first wife was passed away, and I hadn't married Peggy yet.
- James: Ah.
- Heerey: So he says, "Peggy's coming down from Muscatine, Iowa."
- James: Another romance.
- Heerey: Yeah, and so then I called her up, we always sent Christmas cards, and I said, "We're going down to Coonrads, let's pull one." We were gonna fly down and go to Little Rock and rent a car, and then we'd drive up to Fairfield(?) Bay. For a joke we'd drive in together. "Great!" she said. About a year later we got married.
- James: Hey, terrific!
- Heerey: But it was real funny when we drove in. All these people, mouths hangin' open, and [laughs]—
- James: Was the American Legion the only veterans group you joined?
- Heerey: Yeah.
- James: Are you active in it?
- Heerey: Not very, no. I was with one in Minnesota one time when I worked out there, then one at Mauston, then in Minnesota, then I got out of them a few years, and then a friend of mine, very active in it was [unintelligible] the Mazomanie post,

and I joined that. I get out there once in a while, not very active, I keep myself busy enough. These guys that love this, some guys love this type of thing –

James: Not me.

Heerey: Not me, I'm kind of a –

James: What do you do now?

Heerey: Right now, my wife passed away a year ago last September, and I was also in antiques. I retired from Western Electric in '81, and I had been in antiques with my first wife, and I kept on with antiques until about four years ago—

James: What do you mean?

Heerey: Antique shows, selling, buying, finding and buying and selling, and now I do volunteer work with the Telephone Pioneers.

James: What's that?

Heerey: That's the retired telephone and –

James: Linemen?

Heerey: Eighty of them, yeah, inside and out.

James: Pole men?

Heerey: And the ladies. [laughs]

James: You gonna get married again?

Heerey: No. I've got a couple looking at me, but [both laugh], no, I've got kind of a problem there. I can't—after you lose two, I think—

James: Two is enough.

Heerey: You gotta say you're all done, and it's just depressing to go through it and go through it and like up in Mauston one of the gals in our class, I saw her a few years ago, and she said, "How could she have lost the second?"

James: That's enough.

Heerey: That's all, she said, no more romance in the world. And that's the way I feel, too.

James: Too much effort.

- Heerey: And not only that, but other people don't understand this. You know, I go down to visit my friend in Arkansas, a very good friend of Peggy's—in fact he said they were like brother and sister for thirty-five years. I'm down there a couple months ago, and he's telling me how I should find myself a nice lady and all this, and I looked at him and said, "You don't know what it is inside here." You know they don't understand.
- James: Yeah.
- Heerey: No.
- James: It's easy to say and tough to do.
- Heerey: Yup, that's right.
- James: So what right now then you don't do much?
- Heerey: Not much, no. I belong to some other organizations, the Knights of Columbus, and [unintelligible] Club, and some other things. I do volunteer work sometimes for the Knights of Columbus, fundraising for the charities, and I've always felt lucky after, well, you look back, twice 88 shells landed by us, and one each time was right near where I was. They were duds.
- James: They could have taken you out.
- Heerey: Yup, they would have taken me out. But they were due to somebody working, some of the slave labor they had would screw up—
- James: Sabotage.
- Heerey: Sabotage, luckily. Mm-hmm. And then the other time, we were halfway or part way over there and another one happened to me that made me feel lucky was we come in, and I remember Miller put our switchboard and all that at the time on the hill, and I said that's an awful bad place to put it if you knew artillery. They look at some point for a base mark to shoot at to measure. Of course they had plenty to shoot at down the valley, but anyway if they started shooting at us with artillery, I thought it was an awful spot. But I was down below, and to keep the trucks from running over the wire I had to climb a pole and string the wire across up above so the trucks wouldn't hit it, and Lieutenant Hahn was telling me, "You're gonna kill yourself climbing that, you know." "No, no, I'll make it." So I made it all right. Then I started back up the hill and I shortcut up across. There's a dead GI laying there, infantry guy, and as I went up the hill, here comes an old German war plane over the hill real low. It goes right down, and I'm looking at him right in the eyes. He's looking at me—

James: Jesus.

Heerey: Through the sight, and you're supposed to flop on the ground. I just knelt down and ducked. He was over me and down the valley. Well, before he got out of the valley he got shot down, but I got back up and walked on up the hill, and I heard somebody way back along the ditch hollered, "Mines here somewhere. There's mine boxes." German mines, and a personnel mine. That's why they killed this GI. I walked through this minefield—

James: You lucked out.

Heerey: And if I would have flopped—

James: You would have hit one.

Heerey: I would have hit one. That's just how close, you have a guardian angel.

James: That's right.

Heerey: You have a guardian angel, yup.

James: You have children?

Heerey: No, Camille and I never had children, and we were gonna adopt one time. You know way back it was an awful fuss. You had to—and then I traveled. "Oh, no, you can't adopt. Get home every night at eight." [laughs]

James: So you have to cook your own meals now.

Heerey: Yeah, I manage pretty well.

James: Do you? You get a lot of ready to eat meals?

Heerey: Not many, most of them are too salty.

James: Too salty?

Heerey: Yeah, I like to do most of my own.

James: Sure.

Heerey: Then I have a niece in town who on every other night or so we go out and have a—by the time I eat my big meal at noon go out and have a sandwich or something—

James: In the evening.

- Heerey: The evening, a lighter, especially in hot weather now.
- James: Well, there's a lot of stuff built up around where you are.
- Heerey: Oh, yeah.
- James: You're in an apartment there?
- Heerey: Condo.
- James: Condo.
- Heerey: Yeah, we just bought it a year ago last May, and then my wife was very ill when we got in, but she wanted to get everything just so for me. I got definite instructions to stay there, because she knew she had colon cancer.
- James: Yeah, well, she took good care of you.
- Heerey: Yeah, she was—I didn't take good care of her, I have to say as she was in in '96 for a colonoscopy, and instead of going to her regular doctor at Meriter, she had a doctor at University, so we went to the, well, she said, "Should I go to University or go back to the doctor?" I said, "Well, if you're going University, they just have everything over there, right? All your records." Well, then she went to University and she had a colonoscopy, and they found something down on the lower left side. That doctor prescribed—they took it off, it wasn't good, but it didn't need surgery, but he said she had to get a colonoscopy the next year. Come the next year they hashed it all over and sold her on the idea of having that short sigmoidoscopy thing. And I thought at the time I shouldn't allow this. We did, and then the doctor dang near killed her with pushing it in. She said she practically fainted three times.
- James: It was a stricture from the previous procedure.
- Heerey: Well, maybe, but anyway, too bad he didn't back off and give her a colonoscopy. So then after she got home she was so upset she said, "I should really get a full colonoscopy." And I thought, well, you should, but you know then we didn't pursue how things go. Everything, call me and stuff, come here, do this, do that, go there, and then a year later in '98 went for a colonoscopy, and it was already up here in the right side. It was full blown and outside. But it probably would have gotten caught.
- James: Could have.
- Heerey: Very likely, one year you know, doesn't grow that fast, but the only thing about that, you were a doctor, I don't know what in, but if someone were to tell me that

this thing could grow that fast and be outside in a year—I don't believe. There's got to be a time—

James: There's no rules about that.

Heerey: Because some may be different types.

James: Yeah, but there are not that many different types in the bowel, and it just depends. Some tumors are more aggressive than others.

Heerey: Yeah. Mm-hmm. But I assume she would have been—

James: Once it gets outside the bowel wall the chances of cure are minimal because it spreads everywhere.

Heerey: It was everywhere, yeah, she had an awful time. But anyway, that's life.

James: That's life, that's right.

[End of Interview]