

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DUKE E. JONES
Infantry, Army, World War I
1976

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Jones, Duke E. (1896-1978). Oral History Interview, 1976.

Approximate length: 37 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Duke Jones discusses his service in France in World War I with the 1st Expeditionary Division, 16th Infantry, 3rd Battalion, his time with the Reserve Officers Association, his advice for young officers, and his career with the Army. Jones enlisted in May 1917 and talks about his service in France, including battles in Bathlémont and Cantigny and encounters with mustard gas, until he left for Officer Candidate School in October 1918. Jones then discusses his time with the ROA, and lists the wars and actions he was in and the medals he received.

Biographical Sketch:

Jones (1896-1978) served continuously for more than 37 years. He enlisted in the Army on May 6, 1917, was commissioned as a Captain on October 25, 1940 in the 32nd Infantry Division and retired on June 30, 1954 having attained the rank of Colonel.

Interviewed by G. Lester Steinhoff, 1976.

Transcribed by Josh Celli, Audio Transcription Center, 2015.

Reviewed by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Abstract by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Interview Transcript:

[Side A]

Steinhoff: This is Captain G. Lester Steinhoff. The date is November 4, 1976. Yesterday I met with Colonel Duke E. Jones, a past executive secretary of the Wisconsin Department ROA [Reserve Officers Association] in his basement, and we're going to reminisce a little bit about the past. Duke, I noticed yesterday there was a lot of mementos all over your basement. Can you tell us about that, or about those mementos?

Jones: I'd be pleased to, Les. The relics, clippings, photos, and other items are from 1917 through 1975, and of course most of 1976, to include World War I, II, and Korea. Now, I enlisted May 6, 1917 at Fort Logan, Colorado. Home address then was Altus, Oklahoma. My first unit assignment was with Company L-16th Infantry, which was doing Mexican border duty at the smelters in El Paso, Texas. We were soon to become a part of the 1st Division, and in one month from the time, we were all for France. It was then by train to port, Hoboken to be exact, and on June the fourteenth we took passage on the Saratoga, a New Orleans cattle boat. Some of the chips, cow chips, had not been yet removed. We had been aboard since June the tenth. Due to fairly good sea, we made St. Nazaire, France, and debarked June the 26, 1917, the first combat units to serve in World War I. [long pause] Now, to give you an idea of some of the things that a recruit becomes involved in. I missed the first boat drill out of Hoboken, and the corporal of the guard found me in the bottom deck, seasick, and he said, "Recruit Jones, you ought to report to the company commander." He escorted me to the company commander, and me, dressed like a recruit in clothes that did not fit, and hadn't shaved, weighing 121 pounds. He said, "Go in and report to the company commander." I opened the door and walked in without rapping. Did not remove my hat. The company commander said, "What's your name?" and I said, "Jones." And he moved some papers around on his desk for a second or two, and he said, "What did you say your name was?" I said, "Jones" again. And he said, "What the hell are you, a private, corporal, or a sergeant?" And I thought, "Well I'm in the Army now, and the Army's full of soldiers, and I must be a soldier." So I said, "Sir, I am a soldier." He says, "Corporal, come and get him. He's the worst goddamn thing I ever saw." And out I went. [long pause] We were in St. Nazaire a short period of time, and then we left the area for Abainville near Gondrecourt, France, and we entered into trench warfare. Our instructors were the French Chasseurs d'Alpines, Blue Devils. Our first tour in the trenches was in the Bathlémont area, 10 miles, or 10 kilometers northeast of Nancy. In November '17, our first 16th Infantry killed in action, were suffered by Company E, 2nd Battalion, on November 3, 1917. The enemy pulled a

successful raid, and the company lost one sergeant and ten enlisted men as POWs, and three were left dead in the trenches. They were Corporal Gresham of Evansville, Indiana; Private Enright of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Private Merle D. Hay of Glidden, Iowa. There is a monument at Bathlémont erected in their honor by the French. Our battalion, the 3rd, relieved the 2nd at the same place, twelfth and thirteenth of November, without incident. October the twenty-third, the first Army shot was by C Battery, 6th field artillery. On January the eighteenth, the division moved to an area near Sorcey, France. S-O-R-C-E-Y. The thirty-second kilometers during that day, eighteen miles, rain, snow, sleet, and no rest periods except without standing. If you did, you were sitting in water. That night, after arriving in Sorcey, we went to every place looking for eggs, red wine, and so forth. None available. Slept in the barns and remained there for about two days. The next move was made to Ansauville, Twenty-five kilometers northwest of Toul, the [inaudible] Bouganville area, opposite Hill Mount sec [??]. Sixty people were killed in action and 137 enlisted men were wounded. Nineteen officers and thirty-eight men were missing in action. Three men were missing as prisoners. We were relieved by the Yankee Division, 26th Division, from Massachusetts. After that—Is that still on, Les? Shut it off.

[Break in recording] [00:08:49]

Steinhoff: Let's see. I think you said--

Jones: I said we were relieved by the Yankee Division, the 26th from Massachusetts. The next sector move was into the Guiseniers [??] area, northwest of Paris, about seventy-five kilometers, on the Montdidier-Noyon front. Here, about April seventh and eighth, we entered the lines. The division was rated fit to do its job, and when the lines around Cantigny was hot and lots of action. On the April the seventeenth we were on the road to Cantigny area. April 24, 1918, the 16th occupied the lines with headquarters at Broyes [??]. The 28th Infantry took Cantigny, and on the twenty-eighth of May we were relieved--we relieved the 28th Infantry. We had lots of lice, no water, and no clothing, except what we had what we had along in February. On January fourth, or on July the fourth, Company L had pulled a raid. Three sections of the company were involved. Time limit twelve minutes. We captured three prisoners and we lost three killed in action, nine wounded, and two missing in action. While in this area, we encountered mustard gas at Villers-Tournelle, and not too many ever made it back to the unit. In the Cantigny area we had a cemetery called Saint Agnon. In this cemetery, the troops holding the line dug trenches inside the cemetery, all the way around, to protect themselves with tombstones and whatever happened to be heavy in front. On July the seventh we were relieved from the Cantigny area, and out for a cleanup and delousing, and get ready for clothing and the next go. July

the fourteenth, Company L, 16th, represented the United States at Bastille Day in Paris. Everyone enjoyed the visit, and soon we were on our way to Soissons. On the eighteenth of July, the 1st Division jumped off for five days, eighteenth through the twenty-third of July, and this was one of our greatest actions in the war, relieved by the 2nd Division and the Maroc [??] Division on the twenty-third of July. Also, the relief was by the London Scottish and Black Watch. One of The Black Watch said to us when we were going in, he said, “Hey, Yank! Where’s the bloody shooting gallery?” They were from The Black Watch. Now, does that--Cut it off here.

[break in recording] [00:13:43]

Jones: After the Soissons action, we went to Saint-Mihiel area, and was involved there September the twelfth, for four days, which was for us a very light action. Not many casualties, but hellacious weather. It was raining every day, and the troops had to cross a small stream, which we all had to barely swim to get across. In the night, we slept on the ground with one guy in the middle and two on the outside, to keep one another warm for the first three days. We were relieved from the Saint-Mihiel sector in September the eleventh and twelfth, and moved directly by truck to the area the Argonne Forest. In the Argonne Forest, we got involved on October 4, 1918, and I was a member of the advanced battalion, advanced company, and we were involved from five o’clock in the morning, before it was daylight, and moved into the place called Exermont, Fléville area, in relief of the 35th Division, which had been actually chased out of the area, and we had to retake it. We lost heavy. All officers who were in the battalion became casualties, and finally, one officer, still wounded, took over the battalion. And he was the captain adjutant, Captain Earl Almon. We remained in the Argonne area until about the tenth of October, and then we were relieved by the 42nd Division, as I recall today, and I left for officer candidate school. That got me out of the war.

Steinhoff: Say, that’s quite interesting, Duke. Now, it seems you are a member, or have been a member, of a number of veteran’s organizations. I don’t expect you to remember all of them, but what are some of these organizations that you’ve been active in and so on, down through the years? We know you’ve been very active in the ROA—and I notice that he’s pulling out his billfold now, and he’s going through all the cards that he has there. There’s a whole packet. What are some of those, Duke?

Jones: The Military Order of World Wars; Company G 127th Infantry, 32nd Division; The Regimental Headquarters, 127th Infantry; the 50 63rd Garrison Association; the 1st Infantry Division Association; the Retired Officers Association; the Old-Time Ballplayers’ Association; the Veterans of Foreign Wars; The American Legion; the Air Force Association;

Wisconsin National Guard Association; the Southern Wisconsin Red Arrow Club; the Association of The United States Army; National Association for Uniformed Services; the Veterans of World War I; the 135th Medical Regiment Association; the Jackson County Athletic Hall of Fame of Altus, Oklahoma; life member of the Reserve Officers' Association; life member of the Retired Officers' Association; Past Commanders Club of the World War I Veterans Association, life member of the Retreads; the World War I Last Man's Club; Red Arrow Club of Milwaukee, life member; and a life member of the 32nd Division Veterans Association. I think that's enough of them.

Steinhoff: Guys, I lost track of the count there, but that's a lot of organizations you belong to, Duke. And then we argue with some people that just belong to one or two, especially the ROA. But I know that you mentioned you're a life member of some of these organizations, and especially of the ROA. You're a life member, and you're also a fifty-year long-timer of the ROA. Now, you take fifty years, and that's about one fourth of our 200 years as a nation. What are your thoughts about these last fifty years since World War I?

Jones: Well, my thoughts about the world is its gaining information, better living, better everything for everyone. Increasing in population, opportunities are great for everybody, and it seems to me that we've got everything in the world except some method of keeping everybody happy, and keeping us from being involved in another war. I see no reason at all for us to ever be weak and let somebody take over this country, but things don't look too good.

Steinhoff: Okay, Duke. Let's go a little further. We once had a magazine called *The Wisconsin Reservist* that was comparable to the *National Officer* magazine. Can you tell about that magazine, as we reduced it in those days, quite a few years ago?

Jones: Yes. When Colonel Roy Peters asked me, would I become the state secretary, and would I get out the magazine, I had no idea that I'd ever be involved in it. But while I was helping Colonel Didi [??] get caught up, who was in the hospital, he died and I got the job. And I, having no experience with magazines or editing, or not too much education, I took the job over. And it was interesting, and I got a lot of help from a heck of a lot of good people, and I was proud of what we did get out, and *The National* had told me, in several cases, and several other people, that we were doing a fine job. And we did it from 1955 until May 1961, when we run out of funds.

Steinhoff: Well, that's quite interesting. You mentioned some people's names there, and I know that you know all these people, and you probably won't

remember all of them, but who are some of the old-timers in the Wisconsin ROA?

Jones: Well, the ones that I know that were involved from before my time was Herbert P. Showalter[?], Roy Peters...

Steinhoff: And of course now he's a general.

Jones: Yes. General Peters, now retired; then Warrant Officer Manfred Gasko[?]; Stu Brokau[?]-

Steinhoff: And we have Al Peter, who was--

Jones: Al Peter, Leonard Sary[?]-

Steinhoff: Do you think that Al Peter is probably one of the oldest members?

Jones: Al Peter, possibly, is the oldest member. I would say its Al Peter or Harrison Garner, Chapter 17, Madison, probably is the oldest member. He was a state president, an earlier state president. And other people who were involved at that time was Joe Hague[?].

Steinhoff: And Joe, I understand that they're going to honor him here at this convention.

Jones: Yes. Joe Hague is long dead. Erhard Teschon[?], who was --

[Break in recording][End of Tape 1, Side A]

Steinhoff: I turned it over now, Duke. If you just continue, you were talking about Joe Hague and some of the old-timers.

Jones: One of those people that was involved in the earlier days was Steve Park, who became our only Wisconsin national president. And Erhard Teschon, a member of the Milwaukee Chapter at the present time, was on the committee at the 1927 National Convention, held in Milwaukee at the Elks Club.

Steinhoff: I understand that this conference, you said 1927, this is the second time that there's been a national conference in the state of Wisconsin, and here it's being held this year at the Mark Plaza, and that's quite a step up, I suppose, from the Elks Club, which couldn't accommodate too many people.

Jones: I think they had 400 people there at the Elks Club.

Steinhoff: Well, that's quite good. That's probably as many people as we may have here at this. Now, another thing. If you were to give a talk to some future department convention in Wisconsin here, what would you say, especially to the young officers in ROA?

Jones: It's my opinion that the opportunity for a young officer in this association, you never had an opportunity so great. There's no doubt in what the majority of youngsters coming up in the world don't want nothing to do with wars, and don't want to be in the military in any sense of the word. But I cannot see how a country that is fortunate and rich, and have everything that we have, that can continue in this world without fighting somebody. And my advice would be to take part in the military. Be seen. Be heard. Be neat. Because some of them are going to get caught, and they'll always gripe like hell if they get caught, and some guy they know who didn't get a college degree or something like that--he gripes because he got a college degree. The other guy is in there, and he went in the Guard, in the Reserve, and became a corporal or sergeant, and then all of a sudden he wakes up and he's a commissioned officer, and the other people are griping because they're not in the same grade. So my point is to become involved. You don't have to stay in your lifetime, but at least do something. Be part of it, because I'm a firm believer that if you live in this country, you're going to have to serve, and you're going to have to like it.

Steinhoff: Okay, Duke. Now, you retired as a bird colonel, a full colonel. What degrees do you have? What was your educational background?

Jones: My education was eighth grade. I graduated from the eighth grade in Oklahoma High School, went to the service, and remained from 1917 to 1954, a period of thirty-seven years and two months. The only schooling I had outside of that was I graduated from the Medical Field Service School non-commissioned officers course in 1935. All of the information I have in education I picked up in the military service. And I'm damn proud of every damn day of it.

Steinhoff: Okay, Duke. Now, so, when these kids come out, and they got their degree and so on, there's no reason that they can't step forward and go forward and be something in the military?

Jones: That's my opinion. All they have to do is be sincere and work, and they can get ahead. And they don't have to stay in the military service all their lives. Just be available. And certainly, some of 'em are going to get caught. They won't all get caught in a war. I don't know if we ever will have one in my time, but if I was going to bet, I'd bet that we would be involved again in a large military outfit. Whether or not we're going to have a war is a different problem, but we certainly can't run along without a military force, and it's got to be big, and it's got to be strong.

Steinhoff: Okay now, Duke. We don't want to prolong this too long. You're here for this conference, and I know that you need to get your rest, but one other thing. Can you sort of recall some of the awards you have received, and especially those that you are most proud of?

Jones: Well, one of the awards I'm most proud of is the Silver Star Medal, which I got in World War I. This medal I have received, the second award, I wear an oak leaf cluster. And then my Legion of Merit, which I got for World War II, which took place for action in Korea and New Guinea. Bronze Star Medal I also had, which I got for action in World War II. I have campaign medals for Korea, World War I, World War II, and so forth, and a number of ribbons and so forth, total nineteen.

Steinhoff: Okay, Duke, Now, you mentioned a number of other ones. At first you talked about World War I at length. What are all the wars and actions you've been in? Just run over those quickly.

Jones: I was in World War I and took part in all actions in the 1st Division except the Race to Sedan. That was the period of 1917 and '18. Then during the period between, say, 1918 and '19, I was in the military as an instructor of National Guard in Wisconsin. And then World War II, I was called to active duty as a captain and became the assistant adjutant general in the 32nd Division, later the provost marshal of the 32nd Division. And from the 32nd Division, I went to the Third Army staff under General Krueger [??], and picked up the job as an assistant headquarters commandant and provost marshal of the Third Army, plus CO of Special Troops, Third Army, and CO of Special Troops, Southern Defense Command at the same time. After that, we became part of the Sixth Army, and went to New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific area, and I had the job as CO Special Troops, Sixth Army, and later, the headquarters commandant, Sixth Army, with Krueger, in the Southwest Pacific, New Guinea, and Australia. From there, I came back to the States, went to infantry school as an instructor for 1944, '45--no, '45, '46, and part of '47. After the infantry school, I was sent to Korea and became the G-4 in the Korea Bay section, stayed there nine months, and came back to the States, and became the instructor organizer of Reserves at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. After three years in Wisconsin for the Organized Reserves, I went to Korea again, and there I'd become the commander of the prisoner of war camp at Pousson [??] from October to April. That's 1951, '52. In '52 I became the headquarters commandant and CO of Special Troops, Eighth Army, under General Van Fleet [??] in Seoul. In that connection, at that same time, one of my unit's command jobs was the Peace Side at Panmunjom, which I held till 1952, 1953.

Steinhoff: So you went through a lot of them. You never got to Vietnam, I guess.

Jones: No, no. The reason I didn't get any further along in the business--they decided that it wouldn't--I had over thirty years' service and was fifty-some years old, or older, fifty-eight years old, and that I should get the hell out. So I put in for retirement, and when I put in for retirement they sent my retirement orders back from Washington and said, "This guy can't retire because he only has fourteen, sixteen, or seventeen years service." And I said to myself, "Well, that's pretty good. I won't say nothing about it." But in the meantime, they discovered that I had twenty-four years enlisted service, which was over the period of years, and so I had to get out on June 30, 1954, after thirty-seven years and two months trained service. Only in jail a couple of times. I got in the finest jail in France in World War I, Hard-Boiled Smith's Prison, for being absent without leave from the officer candidate school. That's it.

Steinhoff: So Duke, you've had quite a life, and I'm sure that the troops, some time in the future, if we can can this thing and maybe pull it up 100 years from now, and--

Jones: Be something to talk about. And I'm proud of it, and I know so many people that I've met in the Service that I'm so damn proud that I know them, that what they did for the country, what they put up with for the country. And they're not griping and moaning about it. They take it for granted. It seemed like the biggest gripers are the guys that did the [inaudible].

Steinhoff: Well Duke, I know that I appreciate this, and I know also that, had I not been a member of the ROA for about thirty years, that I never would've known you, Duke. And it's been an honor, and it's something that I'll cherish for the rest of my life, to know a person like you as well as some of these old-timers that you've mentioned, and the National Staff that's here at this conference. And we had a meeting this morning at ten o'clock, and they're all great people. No two ways about it.

Jones: Yeah, I agree.

[End of Interview]