

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

KARL K. KLEEMANN

Anti-Aircraft Artilleryman, Army, World War II.

1999

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Kleemann, Karl K., (1923-). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 40 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Karl K. Kleemann, an Oconomowoc, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as an anti-aircraft gunner with Section 8, Battery B, 485th Anti-Aircraft Battalion in the South Pacific. Kleemann talks about anti-aircraft training in the desert near Camp Stoneman (California), a shortage of fatigues in the States, and getting food poisoning. He comments on his fifteen-man section, weapon technology, and combat training in Hawaii. Stationed in the Philippines, he touches upon having a lack of current news and providing anti-aircraft protection for the infantry. He talks about life in the Philippines, including getting jungle rot and living off K-rations and pancakes. Kleemann also mentions landing on Okinawa, where his unit was credited with shooting down six Japanese planes. He discusses military life on Okinawa including living in tents, interaction with the Seabees, and being bombed by Japanese planes. One night, Kleemann recalls being alarmed by noises, which turned out to be from a wounded animal. He describes getting playing cards from the Red Cross, celebrations on V-J Day, and remaining on Okinawa with nothing to do until January of 1946. Kleemann touches upon joining the Veterans of Foreign Wars and volunteering with his wife at the Veterans Administration hospital. He reflects that his time in the service was good for his health.

Biographical Sketch:

Kleemann (b.1923) served in the Army from 1943 to 1946. He worked as a printer at Madison Newspapers for thirty-five years until 1977 and at CUNA and Affiliates for ten years until his retirement. Kleemann settled in Madison (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999

Transcribed by Clint Cargile, 2009

Checked and corrected by John Pike, 2011

Corrections typed in by WVM staff, 2012

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

Jim: This is Karl Kleemann, on the 23rd of June, 1999, who was in the US Army, 485th anti-aircraft battalion, Battery B. And, take it from here. [scraping sound] [unintelligible] [scraping sound]. Once I get the thing attached. [unintelligible]. The mic will pick up whatever you have to say. You don't have to worry about this. Then--so we'll get started then. You went into the service exactly when? [background noise, footsteps]. I think my glasses are missing.

Karl: [laughs]

Jim: I don't need them for the camera, so—

Karl: [laughs] Yeah.

Jim: All right. Oh, I was going to ask you first off, were there any Wisconsin boys who were there with you?

Karl: Yes. There was—

Jim: Did you know them?

Karl: Norton Kaiser [?], no, but Matt McKaiser [?] from Milwaukee. But I only knew him after I went into the service, and, he is gone now, yeah.

Jim: You knew him—

Karl: He was my corporal over me when I was—we were—I was an anti-aircraft azimuth tracker for a 40-millimeter gun. He was the range finder corporal. In other words, he sets the gun ahead of the target. We put our eyes on the target with the gear box.

Jim: With the what?

Karl: Well, it's a gear box. It's all full of gears. We get the target right on it, on the Japanese planes we were shooting at. And the range finder puts the gun ahead of the target so when it gets there, the shell will supposedly hit the target.

Jim: Like shooting a shotgun.

Karl: Yeah.

Jim: Yeah. You have to lead it.

- Karl: Yeah. Have to, yeah, lead it.
- Jim: Most of your training was spent learning to do that. I think that would take some skill.
- Karl: Yes, we had training in California near Camp Stoneman. We left Camp Stoneman, but near there we had training. And we were shooting at simulated airplanes that were pulling a cloth target. That was what we were supposed to hit. [laughs]
- Jim: This was in the Mojave Desert?
- Karl: No, this was over in California. Well, it was the edge of the Mojave Desert, yes.
- Jim: You went to that camp where you learned how to do this and then to the Mojave Desert, or the other way around?
- Karl: We were in the Mojave Desert first just to--training how to survive [laughs] in hot climates because we were in the Mojave Desert in November. It was 110 in the daytime and 40 degrees at night. They gave us little stoves to put in the tent to keep—your body has trouble getting used to that kind of temperature, from 110 to 40 each day. November was the coolest time, of course, in the winter season. In the summer it was hot all the time [laughs].
- Jim: But then you ended up in a very, very wet climate in the Philippines.
- Karl: Yes. Swampy, and, uh—
- Jim: Just the opposite.
- Karl: Hot. Yeah. It was swampy and hot. And we'd be in fox holes and try to—we'd put mosquito netting over the foxholes to get away from the bugs, mainly mosquitoes. And that also stops the air from circulating, and you perspire [laughs] really bad.
- Jim: But in the Mojave, you had animals to worry about, didn't you? Scorpions and things like that?
- Karl: Yeah, scorpions and bugs, yeah. They were crawling all over, and we slept on the ground at first, and there were—after a while we got a tent and cots.
- Jim: Did you have trouble with scorpions in your shoes, climbing into your shoes?

Karl: No, we always shook 'em out [laughs] before we put 'em on, but I didn't find any in my shoes.

Jim: Did any of the other boys get bit?

Karl: Yeah. I never learned all the details. They just had to go to the medic right away.

Jim: But it didn't keep them off of duty?

Karl: No, no.

Jim: Well it wasn't too severe. Do you feel like your training was adequate as it turned out? You know, you got to _____ [?].

Karl: Yes, some of the training we didn't really need, but most of it was adequate, yes. It was hard for them to decide, I suppose, exactly what we needed [laughs] for training.

Jim: That's right. I suppose the people who are training you really haven't had any experience either, so—

Karl: Right. That's right, yeah.

Jim: Well, the desert is a beautiful place, but it's awful dry and I'm sure it was difficult having those wide swings of temperature.

Karl: Yes, yes. I saw some of it after—now, later after the war. My brother-in-law lives in Pahrump, Nevada. That's near Las Vegas [laughs] and that's on the edge of the Mojave Desert. We visited there this spring.

Jim: Yeah. Was your clothing adequate?

Karl: Yes, we had no—

Jim: No problems.

Karl: We had khakis and fatigues. No wools. We didn't need any wools.

Jim: No, of course not.

Karl: So we had adequate clothing.

Jim: Early in the war, you know, they had some problems with clothing in certain areas because they couldn't get the right clothing to the right spot.

- Karl: When we were in the States, we couldn't get fatigue clothing. Ours were all worn out. I had a pair of coveralls on one inspection, and one knee was out, and the rear end was out, and that was all the fatigues I had. [laughs] And they told us all the new clothes were going overseas. Course, when we went overseas, we got two new pair of fatigues.
- Jim: I see. What about the food in the desert? Did they manage to bring decent food to you?
- Karl: Yes. It was good nourishing food, I might say. It wasn't always what we'd like, [laughs] but it was good nourishing food. That was the main thing. We got sick once in California going to a firing range. The cooks made potato salad in the afternoon and then they took it back to camp, but of course there was no refrigeration all that time, and we all got ptomaine poisoning from it. Yeah.
- Jim: That's always the danger of that.
- Karl: Yep.
- Jim: Tell me about your Battery. How many people was in it [unintelligible]?
- Karl: The Battery had eight sections. Ours was section eight. We had fifteen men to a section: a sergeant in charge, two corporals, and a t-corporal [T-5, technical corporal] was in charge of the power plant and the motor to run the gun—and then the rest of us were privates and PFCs.
- Jim: Right. So you all did everything together, then?
- Karl: Right, right. We had a rear echelon of quad mount .50 calibers [machine guns] for the back of our vehicle. We couldn't turn our 40 millimeter guns around fast enough to get to the back, so the machine guns protected us from the back.
- Jim: Oh.
- Karl: Quad mounts.
- Jim: So is that on a vehicle?
- Karl: Yeah. It's on a little—like a trailer, I guess. Four machine guns mounted on it with a protection in front. But although one of our—we had this protection in front of us, but one of them in Battery C, a bullet lobbed in behind this protection, and that person was killed.

Jim: Oh my. And this is a 40 millimeter only, or was it, did it change?

Karl: 40 millimeter anti-aircraft.

Jim: Right.

Karl: They also made a 90 millimeter, but we couldn't shoot that high. We were shooting at Japanese planes.

Jim: So the 90 would be too big for shooting in the air, you mean?

Karl: Well they would be higher up. We couldn't shoot that high with the 40.

Jim: Right. I understand that.

Karl: Yeah.

Jim: Were those explosive shells you used?

Karl: Yeah, they would hit and kind of explode on contact, yeah.

Jim: But they didn't have any proximity fuses?

Karl: No, no.

Jim: Tracers? [unintelligible]

Karl: Yeah, yeah. I forget how many tracers there were on the 40s [.40 caliber machine guns], but on the .50 caliber, every fifth one was a tracer. Of course to see where we were and what we were hitting [laughs].

Jim: See how it's going.

Karl: Yeah.

Jim: Yeah. Did you operate as an independent gun, or were there groups that _____ [?] in the Battery? Always operated in a group with you, or—

Karl: Well, the Section 8 like I was in was fifteen men, and then the rest of the battery would be strewn throughout the island. We would be separated from them. They'd bring food to us and stuff like that. We were separated from the rest of the Battery until it was, well, kind of the war was over in the Philippines. Then we got back together again and then they told us our next place was Okinawa [laughs].

- Jim: Right. But the guns didn't shoot together. I mean, there wasn't a group of -- [unintelligible]
- Karl: No, no, no. Whatever came near us we would shoot at.
- Jim: Right.
- Karl: We would have to determine that in each section.
- Jim: Right. But you ran your own gun, I guess is what I'm asking.
- Karl: Yeah, yeah.
- Jim: Rather than grouped in a battery.
- Karl: Right, right.
- Jim: Okay. Now, your LSD [Landing Ship Dock] arrived to Hawaii. Is that kind of ordinary?
- Karl: What?
- Jim: Your LSD arrived in Hawaii, and [unintelligible].
- Karl: Well, when I left the States to go to Hawaii, a number of us got seasick. I did. And coming back from Hawaii, back to the States, we got seasick. But in between, going to battle, we didn't get seasick. We never flew. The Army always went by ship.
- Jim: And then there was another LSD to Eniwetok.
- Karl: Well we were right near it and that's when they changed our orders [laughs]. We were going to go to Eniwetok, and then they changed our orders to the Philippines.
- Jim: Did that come as a surprise to everybody?
- Karl: Well it was a surprise. [laughs] We didn't know where we were going until they exactly told us. I suppose it was for safety features.
- Jim: Think about it, did you really have as much information about what was going on in the war in general when you were in those situations, or did you feel that you were sort of limited in your—?
- Karl: Yeah, we didn't know much about what was going on in Europe until we'd see somebody's newspaper or something like that. I worked for the

Capital Times in Madison and I was getting the Capital Times delivered to me, but I [laughs] wouldn't get any for six months. It was just when the mail would catch up to us.

Jim: What about the Stars and Stripes? Would you get copies of that on a regular basis?

Karl: We got that once in a while, but that was mainly in Europe. See, they didn't really deliver the Stars and Stripes in the Pacific theater.

Jim: [unintelligible]. When you got to the Philippines, was there shooting going on when you were landing, or did you land in an area where it was quiet?

Karl: No, shooting was going on, but the infantry was ahead of us. They went in four hours ahead—we went in both invasions, Philippines and Okinawa, at two o'clock, 14:00, and the infantry had already been in there, but there was still shooting going on.

Jim: Right. But the beach was secure?

Karl: The beach was pretty well secure. We had to wait for our guns to come in. They would pull our .40 mm gun in with Ducks, these Army Vehicle Ducks. The Duck would float but the gun would sink and dip into the coral reefs, and that was quite a procedure to clean that up after—

Jim: You mean the duck couldn't hold the gun up?

Karl: No, the gun was on its own four wheels, [a] trailer, pulled by the Duck.

Jim: Oh, I see.

Karl: The Duck would float, but the gun would not [laughs]. And sometimes the—well, the top of the gun was probably about five feet, and all you would see barely the top of it sticking out of the water when they were pulling it in. And it had quite a bit of cosmoline on it to protect it, but we had to clean all that off before we could even fire it.

Jim: I'll bet. That took you some time, I bet.

Karl: Yeah. Well, cosmoline's like a grease, so you have to have some kind of cutting agent to clean it off and, gasoline or something like that.

Jim: Then you were in the Philippines for how long?

Karl: Boy, I can't remember exactly?

Jim: Weeks or months or just a couple weeks, wasn't it?

Karl: Uh, I'm trying to—

Jim: Roughly.

Karl: I'm trying to think. When did we go into the Philippines? October 20th?

Jim: Yes. [unintelligible].

Karl: And then Okinawa.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Karl: We went in the Invasion of the Philippines on October 20th. And then we left Leyte on March 13th, '45. So we were there quite a while. And then from there we went April 1st to Okinawa. So we were in the Philippines about five months in that area.

Jim: So tell me what living in the Philippines was like. Was it full of bugs and raining all the time?

Karl: Yeah, lots of rain [laughs]. Something crawled, at night, left a fluorescent trail over my shoes, and when I went to look at it with a flashlight, there's nothing there. It was just a fluorescent trail that a bug would leave, or whatever it was. We never did find out what that was.

Jim: Did you get bit?

Karl: No, the only thing I got was jungle rot on my right foot. I didn't get bit by anything. That was from too much moisture.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Karl: Wet.

Jim: Did you have trouble getting a change of socks?

Karl: Yes, and in Hawaii, when we were training, they had us crawl through an infiltration course under barbed wire with live bullets shooting overhead, and then at the end we'd jump into a hole, but don't get your rifle wet, and the hole was full of water. So then we would jump in and after that we had a five-mile march, but they would not let us change our socks. And that's when I got jungle rot on my foot, walking with wet shoes and socks.

- Jim: So almost everybody else did too?
- Karl: Yeah, well, some of them got—others got jungle rot, but not all of them. Everybody's body is different [laughs], I guess, as to how much it can take.
- Jim: Okay alright, and your food arrangements in the Philippines were they still good?
- Karl: Yeah, we got K-rations, and that's twenty to a package, so then they would always have to break a package open because we were only a fifteen-man gun crew. They would not give us a whole package that was for twenty men. They'd give us just enough for the fifteen men. And sometimes they'd bring us flour. I was kind of designated the part-time cook or something for the section. They'd bring us flour and they would say, "This is your breakfast. Make your own pancakes." So we'd do that every once in a while.
- Jim: You got pretty good at that?
- Karl: Yeah. The pancakes were about like shoe leather, but we found a can of baking soda, floating in water that was half full and dry inside, so every time we had pancakes, I put a little bit of that in, and then we'd have fluffy pancakes. That was a treat, and we had to really save [laughs] that can.
- Jim: Your Battery never fired you, so you must have—
- Karl: No.
- Jim: —been—and you weren't too discouraged—
- Karl: No.
- Jim: —or else maybe they didn't want your job.
- Karl: Yeah. On Okinawa, it was funny, we were sleeping in tents and we knew a lieutenant who was talking to the Seabees who were building a road, and they came up and made us a cement platform, and we built a little kitchen on it. It was a little building, half up with screen. So that was our kitchen, but we slept in tents [laughs]. We didn't even have a building [laughs]. But they thought that would be a nice deal for us. It was all right, but it was—
- Jim: Did you interact with the natives in the Philippines at all?
- Karl: Not too much. Not too much. They would—

- Jim: Get chased away.
- Karl: They kind of stayed away from us.
- Jim: Okinawa? What about there?
- Karl: Well, they would stay away—be less to walk, talk to us there because that was Japanese territory.
- Jim: I'm sure they were terrified of American soldiers.
- Karl: Yes. Philippines, we were liberating the Philippines, but then to settle the war, we took over Okinawa, which was part of the Japanese, but we had to keep going to try to have them surrender [laughs].
- Jim: Right. Did your health remain good during your experience over there?
- Karl: Yes, I had a collapsed lung at work when I was working sixteen hours a day before I went into the Service. That was in November. And then in January, in Milwaukee, I took half a day to decide whether I was in or out of the Service because I had a fresh scar on my lung. But going in the Service was better for me because I was out in fresh air. At the newspaper, we were working around hot lead and we were always breathing in fumes of this hot lead, which wasn't good for the lungs. So the Service experience probably was the best thing for my health.
- Jim: Get away from the lead. You encountered a different kind of lead.
- Karl: Yeah [laughs], yeah.
- Jim: Did airplanes ever attack your battery?
- Karl: Yes, we had some crippled American planes near us in the Philippines, but of course the Japanese didn't know they were crippled. And they were trying to bomb those planes and they missed and hit our .50 caliber machine gun with the quad mount, and just blew it all to pieces. And the fella that had his duffle bag there, the duffle bag was gone, and it blew all his personal belongings up.
- Jim: I assume those were .20 mm shells.
- Karl: Yeah, yeah.
- Jim: They exploded.

- Karl: Yeah, it just wiped out the whole 5th. It was sandbagged around it and built up, but it just wiped the whole thing out.
- Jim: You were on the ground at this moment?
- Karl: We were by the .40 mm, around inside of the sandbags for protection. So we stayed there until the attack was over.
- Jim: And did that happen several times? You didn't encounter any kamikazes in there?
- Karl: No, no. We didn't encounter—
- Jim: Did you see any of those ships being crashed into by the kamikazes?
- Karl: No, because we were farther inland. We weren't near the beaches and that. We went inland right away.
- Jim: Well, what was a typical day in Okinawa? When you got up in the morning you didn't know whether it's going to be anything to do or nothing. Or did you always have something planned?
- Karl: There wasn't any definite plans. In the Philippines, we had what we called "Wash Machine Charlie" come over in the middle of the night. It was just like a piper cub plane, just *putt-putt-putt* along, just enough to keep us awake all night, keep us on alert. And then—
- Jim: You were supposed to shoot it down?
- Karl: We couldn't, we couldn't. Oh, it was out of our range, but the search lights were on him. It was out of the .40mm range. And some of the .90mm would shoot at him, but I don't know if they hit [unintelligible] [laughs].
- Jim: [unintelligible]
- Karl: They can't seem to hit him. That's true, I suppose. He's going too slow.
- Jim: Too slow.
- Karl: [laughs]
- Jim: They're geared for something faster.
- Karl: Right.

- Jim: I had a similar experience in Korea. They had people going over in a light plane just to harass our ship.
- Karl: Mm-hmm.
- Jim: Well, did nothing change at all in Okinawa as far as your living status except that you had a place to stay other than in a tent?
- Karl: Yeah, they had us in tents and, for a while there, we got cots right away. In the Philippines, we didn't get cots until later and we were sleeping on the ground. That was bad with the bugs. But in Okinawa we had a ten-man tent and a five-man tent—a six-man tent they called it—for the fifteen-man crew. And we just didn't—it was scary at times, but one night we had a—I think it was on the Philippines, yeah—one night we had a—heard a bunch of excitement outside in the dark. We thought it was probably the Japanese, but it was a carabao [water buffalo] that had been wounded and was roaming around, and we didn't know what it was. [laughs]. We thought at first it was Japanese.
- Jim: You should of shot it. Give it to you and you could cook it.
- Karl: [Laughs] Yeah. It was a huge thing, a huge thing. Like a big bull whale.
- Jim: Right. I'm surprised somebody didn't decide it would be good to eat.
- Karl: Yeah, I don't know. I don't know what became of it after that.
- Jim: [unintelligible] So what happened on VJ day? I'm sure there was a lot of shooting going on in Okinawa on that day.
- Karl: Yeah, we asked if we could shoot our guns, but they said, "No, no, no, no, no." No shooting any guns because the war was over, and then after that we heard that some people had been killed by stray bullets celebrating their victory.
- Jim: Yeah, that was the article I read, it said boys got killed, drinking and shooting, and then, you know.
- Karl: Yeah. So they told us not to shoot off our guns, which was probably wise 'cause hearing afterward that some were killed because of celebrating.
- Jim: Yeah, lose your head once.
- Karl: Yeah.

- Jim: Tell me about the Red Cross or the Salvation Army. Did you encounter any of those folks?
- Karl: Very little. Once, in the Philippines, I think we had some coffee, they gave us playing cards. This was the Red Cross; they gave you decks of playing cards. But on payday, when we got our money, they were around to collect the money for our cards that they supposedly gave us. So I didn't quite understand that.
- Jim: That was a common complaint about the Red Cross that they charged for everything.
- Karl: Yeah.
- Jim: The Salvation Army gave it to you.
- Karl: Yeah.
- Jim: But so then you—in your summary there you mentioned _____ [?]. You complained about that, and then you didn't say what that was about.
- Karl: Oh, when the war was over?
- Jim: Yes.
- Karl: Yeah, the—
- Jim: What was that? Was that the name of a ship?
- Karl: Yeah, that was the name of a ship. We left Okinawa with sixty-one points and some of our fellows were a little disturbed that ones with fifty-five points being in the Service less, of course, but were coming home with us. That was—
- Jim: Now that's what the complaint was about?
- Karl: Yeah, it was just an internal thing.
- Jim: Oh, I see.
- Karl: Yeah. Nothing to do with the government [laughs].
- Jim: Oh, I thought maybe they treated you badly.
- Karl: No, no, no, no.

- Jim: How long did it take you to get home from there?
- Karl: Oh, from Okinawa, we thought we'd be home for Christmas. But three ships came in and some general was in charge there and he said, "No, no, this is good duty. We'll just sit here for a while. We don't want to go home yet." And then so finally when the third ship came in, 900 enlisted men went around the officers' tents and said, "We want to go home." So the next ship that was in, we were on it, but I didn't get home till January—well got in the States January 10, 1946. Then I was discharged at Camp McCoy, January 19, 1946.
- Jim: Well what did you do for six months when there was no war?
- Karl: Basically nothing, just twiddled our thumbs.
- Jim: In Okinawa.
- Karl: That's when I tried a few cigarettes, but I never did enjoy 'em so I never did start smoking.
- Jim: Well, with your previous history then you shouldn't be smoking for sure.
- Karl: [laughs]
- Jim: But I didn't understand that, why they would keep you there for six months with absolutely nothing to do.
- Karl: Well, the officers thought it was good duty, just sitting there—
- Jim: In Okinawa?
- Karl: In Okinawa.
- Jim: But there's nothing for you to do by then.
- Karl: No, no.
- Jim: All you do is wake up and wait for the next movie.
- Karl: [Laughs]. We thought every day we'd get—well, we thought, maybe today we'll get up a ship today to go home. It took from when was the war over, it took from—October was it? October was—when was V-J Day?
- Jim: August.

- Karl: May 8th. No that was V-E Day. September 2nd was V-J Day. The Philippines. The Pacific. And that was V-J, Victory over Japan, September 2, 1945. So we were—didn't get back to the States until January 10, 1946. [September 2nd was the formal signing of the surrender document]
- Jim: Your meals get better after the war was over and your [unintelligible]?
- Karl: Yes, we got a little better food then, because we were all together as a group and we'd have, like, a little mess hall, rather than sitting out in the open by ourselves with fifteen men. We didn't have tables or anything. As far as eating, wherever you set your food that's where you ate [laughs].
- Jim: Just ate out of mess kits.
- Karl: Yeah, mess kit and canteen cup. Yeah.
- Jim: Didn't do any practicing with your gun or any of that?
- Karl: No, they wouldn't—
- Jim: They didn't want you to shoot anything.
- Karl: They didn't want us to shoot because they were afraid of people getting injured.
- Jim: And that's when you could have seen some civilians, but you say you didn't.
- Karl: No, they stayed away from us, especially on Okinawa, because they were of Japanese descent. They stayed away from us.
- Jim: Sure. I thought after the war you might have had a chance—
- Karl: At first we thought we were gonna go to Japan as occupation forces, but most of our fellas were afraid of that. We were glad we had enough points. At the time, it would have been nice that we did visit, see Japan, but at that time our people were afraid they might get a knife in the back or something like that going into Japan with just taking over the country.
- Jim: Well, so it comes down to, well, frankly you had a well-conducted experience. I think everything was so overdone for you and—
- Karl: Yeah.

- Jim: You moved around at will without any [unintelligible]. Did you feel that you were well prepared for your job?
- Karl: Yes, I think they gave us very good training. Even practicing in the Mojave Desert, shooting at—
- Jim: Right.
- Karl: And that was good training for going into the Pacific and the hot climate.
- Jim: So how many planes did you shoot down then, Karl?
- Karl: I had the picture and I forgot what it was now. It was nine or ten that we saw and got credit for actually going down. We hit planes, but they would fly away and then we wouldn't get credit for shooting that plane down because we didn't see it go down.
- Jim: But you did get credit for a grounded plane?
- Karl: Yes, yes.
- Jim: Oh, that's excellent. Was that better than the other batteries?
- Karl: I think it was about average. It all seemed similar in that area. One Jap Zero came over the hills by us once, and he turned his whole bottom [**End of Tape 1, Side A**] to us to try to get away from us, and that was a big target then. That one we really—we just knocked it out of the air.
- Jim: Now, after the war, you went into a veteran's organization, the VFW, shortly or—
- Karl: Shortly after. Well I got out in January '46. I joined the VFW, Veterans of Foreign Wars, in April of 1948.
- Jim: And you've been a continual member since that time.
- Karl: Continual member since then, yeah. I've been a VFW member over fifty years now.
- Jim: It sounds like a good organization. I get a lot of mail requesting funds, but they—
- Karl: Oh, yes. I get requests from all of them: DAV, American Legion, VFW, all of them. They all need money, I guess, but there's a limit as to how much you can give to, especially after you're retired.

- Jim: Exactly. Do you favor any particular veterans group over another?
- Karl: Well, I favor the VFW, of course.
- Jim: And, did you join the DAV?
- Karl: No, I've sent them money, but I've never had any—
- Jim: I don't know of any organization in the state that I have [unintelligible]
- Karl: Yeah.
- Jim: [unintelligible]
- Karl: Right, right.
- Jim: And the American Legion, what about that?
- Karl: Well even their national headquarters once sent me a letter to join them, but I said I think I had enough because when you belong to an organization you're asked to volunteer to help do things. We have steak night at the VFW, we work at that. And then, so, I didn't want to bother to join any more organizations because it would just be more volunteering. My wife and I volunteer a lot right now. We volunteer at the VA hospital every Thursday. We volunteer with another group, the Ready Group of Oscar Mayers. That's for retired people. We just got through doing Warner Beach and cleaning the whole shore.
- Jim: Well that's a big action here.
- Karl: Yeah, that was a big thing.
- Jim: Yeah, that's wonderful. Now the American Legion, I guess, [unintelligible]. You read about it in the newspapers.
- Karl: Yeah, I knew a few fellows that belonged to American Legion, but I never did get too involved with them.
- Jim: A lot of people there in Madison that you know, or knew from before, are members of the VFW?
- Karl: There's a lot of Madison in the VFW, but there's—
- Jim: [unintelligible] [both talking at once]
- Karl: They're not ones I knew before the war.

- Jim: Knew them from West High?
- Karl: Uh, no, no. None of them were. Because afterwards I grew up on the east side, and mostly people that we knew were east side, and—
- Jim: But you went to West High. How did that happen?
- Karl: Well I lived out on Oregon Road. My father ran a farm for a year, and then after that, he went to work in Madison, and I would try to go in by car with him, and then get on the bus, and go to West High. I'm one of the youngest of three boys in our family and my other two brothers never got to go to high school so I was glad to go to any high school.
- Jim: Because they were—
- Karl: They started work right after eighth grade.
- Jim: On the farm.
- Karl: No, we lived in Oconomowoc then. My one brother worked. He started high school in Oconomowoc, but then he worked at a hamburger joint. Cook all night and then try to go to school in the daytime. So then he quit school. [laughs] That was his first year in high school so none of them got to really go to high school.
- Jim: That's unusual these days.
- Karl: Yes, it is. I'm the youngest and I got—when I was asked to be an apprentice at the newspaper, I had to have a high school diploma. And my brother, oldest brother, was seven years older than I am, and well he's gone now, but anyway, he was an electrician, and they did not require a high school diploma to be an electrician. But that was just seven years difference.
- Jim: Well, times have changed.
- Karl: Yep.
- Jim: Well, anything you'd like to add, about your experience, which you felt was different or unusual or a special event?
- Karl: No, I wasn't too enthused at first of going into the Service, but it was the best thing for me. I think it was best for my health after being injured at work. It was a good experience, I think, the sum of it. There were times you wished you weren't there, but overall it was a good experience.

Jim: Well, I hope so. You went in at that time when you were a child, and you come out as an adult.

Karl: Right. Yes, I went in at nineteen and I'd never been out of the State of Wisconsin until I went into the Service. Got sent to Illinois, Camp—I can't remember the camp now in Illinois; we were only there a day or two. Then I went to Camp Hulen in Texas. That was a camp with five-men huts, little buildings. That camp isn't even there any more now [laughs], right on the Gulf of Mexico. And from there we went to Mojave Desert for nine months, and then overseas.

Jim: That's a big jump for a little boy from Wisconsin—

Karl: Yes.

Jim: —who'd never been out of the state.

Karl: That was—

Jim: Cultural shock.

Karl: I was really homesick.

Jim: Oh, I'll bet.

Karl: But, uh—

Jim: Did you have some girlfriend to write?

Karl: Yes. At that time, yeah.

Jim: Did you ever marry her?

Karl: Yeah, I did, but—

Jim: Oh.

Karl: She left. I married her down in Texas.

Jim: Oh, I see.

Karl: But she, uh, she wanted—went on her own in '48. She didn't want to be married, so—But now I've been married—the second time married—almost fifty years. We married in '51—the second time—and, uh, it

was—we've had a good experience now, with four children: two boys, two girls.

Jim: Sure. You encourage them to go into the military?

Karl: No, I more or less left it up to them. I have a son-in-law that was in the Army National Guard, and he was in the Air Force part time. In all, he was in twenty years and he just retired at forty-six from the military and he'll get a third pay now, and my daughter told him to take it easy for the summer. He's playing golf. Gonna look for a job next, in the fall [laughs].

Jim: All right. That should do it.

Karl: How many did we have killed in World War II from West High? I think there was three or four, wasn't there? Two? Three?

Jim: Many more than that. Many more.

Karl: Many more than that? I can't remember.

Jim: I think it was fifteen.

Karl: Was it that many?

Jim: Fifteen or sixteen.

Karl: Wow. Were you in World War II then?

Jim: Yes. I was in the V-12 Program.

Karl: But then what did you do?

[End of Interview]