

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Edward H. Knop  
Communications, U. S. Army, World War II  
2005

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**Knop, Edward H.**, (1923- ), Oral History Interview, 2005

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **ABSTRACT**

Ed Knop speaks of his family's lineage in Wisconsin, his Army training and assignments prior to being discharged in February, 1946. Knop talks about his Reserve units, subsequent reunion efforts and working for the U.S. Post Office until retirement. Born in 1923 in Fond du Lac (Wisconsin), Knop talks about his parents' ancestry. Inducted into the Army in November, 1942, he in-processed at Fort Sheridan (Illinois) where he remembered the Army sent his uniform to be tailored due to his short arms. He recalls hearing of Pearl Harbor's bombing on a little radio and mentions being initially rejected for service due to poor vision. Knop discusses basic training and tank destroyer training at Fort Hood (Texas), subsequent communications, schooling and his initial attempt to become an officer. Following assignment to the 671<sup>st</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion, Knop touches upon basic training, his opportunity to go into the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) and a follow-on assignment to 4<sup>th</sup> Armored School at Fort Knox (Kentucky) to act as the opposing force for officer training. He mentions the build-up for the Japanese invasion towards the end of 1944 and his transfer to Oahu (Hawaii) where he was used for labor details. Knop speaks of drawing slips to see who would be assigned to the 305<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 40<sup>th</sup> Division in Hokkaido (Japan). He talks about the Japanese people and stores and his feelings about the dropping of the atomic bomb. After his discharge in February, 1946, Knop mentions using the VA loan to guarantee a home loan, using the GI Bill for a semester of college and starting the VFW post in Horicon (Wisconsin). He touches on his unit not having combat experience and reunion efforts. Knop details his Army Reserve service and assignments within Wisconsin before retiring as a Major.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Knop (1923- ) born and raised in Fond du Lac (Wisconsin), was drafted into the Army in 1942 and served with a tank destroyer battalion conducting training stateside. Following brief assignment in Japan overseeing work details, Knop was discharged in 1946 and pursued a career in the U.S. Post Office while serving thirty years in the Reserves.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.

Transcript edited by John J. McNally, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Work-Study, 2006.

**Interview Transcript**

- John: This is John Driscoll, and today is July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005. And this is an oral history interview with Ed Knop, who is a veteran of World War II of the United States Army. And we are at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives conference room. Ed, thanks an awful lot for coming in from Horicon and agreeing to the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?
- Ed: I was born on April 12, 1923, in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. My parents had lived in Fond du Lac. My mother's family had lived there for perhaps since the 1840s.
- John: Oh, wow. Oh.
- Ed: And my father's family were German. When they came to this country, there was family in Lomira, and they lived there. My father was born in Lomira in 1884, I think. They moved around a little bit. My grandfather was a machinery expert working for the Van Brundt Company in Horicon. And later for John Deere.
- John: Okay.
- Ed: And so, they traveled some. I went to high school in Fond du Lac and graduated in 1940. I was just seventeen at the time. They had gone through a program back when I was younger where they had mid-year graduation, and they wanted to eliminate that program, so I went through fourth grade in a half year. And ended up graduating probably a little younger than I should have been.
- John: Brothers, sisters?
- Ed: I have three sisters. One older than I, two younger. And one has passed away, and the other two live, one lives in Horicon, the other lives out in Arizona.
- John: Good. Early employment, work?
- Ed: Well, my father was in business. And he had a store in Horicon, and so it was kind of paint and appliances, and I went to work with him after I graduated from high school. My only other experience there was, of course, in the manpower shortages in the early years of the war, I worked in a canning factory one season, which was very educational.
- John: I'll bet.
- Ed: And that was in 1942. And then in November of 1942, the induction process started. I got my preliminary physical and 1A card and we went into Milwaukee in January, late January. I think there were four bus loads of inductees, prospective inductees. We all went in and, as it happened, there was a bad storm the night before and so we didn't leave Juneau before noon and stayed overnight in

Milwaukee, and went through the process the next morning.

John: This was 1940...?

Ed: '43.

John: Okay.

Ed: And we were given one week's leave and went back in the next week, and went to Fort Sheridan.

John: Fort Sheridan. Oh, yea. Most of the fellows from Wisconsin that I talked to started out at Fort Sheridan.

Ed: Yea, that was a fast experience. Little remembered. One thing I can remember is, since I am rather small, my arms are short, and they took the trouble to take my OD wool shifts, and send them to the tailor and got them cut back an inch. I thought that was good. When I hear people complain about uniforms, there we were coming in by the thousands and they still had time for that.

John: That's great. What do you recall of Pearl Harbor Day?

Ed: Well, of course, that was a Sunday. We were sitting there and I can't recall if we'd been to church, but I can remember the little radio there that was telling us the story, and, hard to believe, but it had happened. And we were in the war more extensively, although everything at that time was unsettled, to say the least. I can remember, it was in 1940, and the presidential campaign of Wendell Wilke. He came through Fond du Lac on the Chicago Northwestern line and stopped at the Northwestern station. And just before that, the National Guard unit had been leaving for Louisiana from the Sioux Line depot.

John: Okay.

Ed: So we knew we were in something.

John: What did you and your friends feel, you know, suddenly you're jerked out of your life and sent off to harms way.

Ed: Well, everybody was going. We were younger. We were just nineteen or so. At that particular time, I think it was in November, of '42, that a group of us had gone into Milwaukee to interview the recruiters. One of them enlisted in the navy, another one enlisted in the air force. I had poor vision and the recruiting sergeant held my glasses up to the light and said, "Well, you might get into limited service, but I can't take you now." By the time January came around, I went through the physical with no problems at all.

John: Yea.

Ed: That deficiency really didn't matter.

John: Then, after Fort Sheridan?

Ed: On the train. And we had a hard time getting out of Fort Sheridan because it was snow and cold and heavy train, but we went down through Illinois, St. Louis, Texarkana. By the time we got down to Dallas, we had run out of food on the train, and so the whole bunch of us walked - I wouldn't say marched - we marched like a bunch of school kids - up to the service center there, the USO or something, and got a sandwich there and got back on the train. And we sat there and went to sleep and woke up down at Killeen, Texas, outside of Camp Hood.

John: Okay.

Ed: And, but as far as what our thoughts might have been about being in the service, it was the thing to do. We were all young and, perhaps, not too many of us meaningfully employed. So it was an adventure.

John: Okay.

Ed: Went through the testing and assignment process there at Hood and we were broken down into various types of training that - Hood was established as a tank destroyer center, a concept which was proven false during World War II. But was greatly advocated by General McNair, who was the chief of the army ground forces, and the commanding general at Camp Hood was a General Bruce, who was an advocate of tank destroyer ideas, also. Went through basic training. I had been somewhat involved in rifle marksmanship, .22s and things like that, prior to entry. And just about the time we were going to the rifle range, I developed what they said was the measles, and spent two weeks in the hospital. And I thought I would be set back to another unit, but they never bothered anybody that way. I never qualified with a weapon in basic training, just kept on going. And, at the end of nine weeks of basic, they separated the people in the unit based primarily on their test scores. And the upper level went off to communications school, and the lower level stayed there in basic training. And so I went to communications school, and about the fifth week or so, it was announced that they were looking for officer candidates, and we would be assisted in preparing our applications, if we wanted to do that. So, not having anything else to do, I went along with the others in that respect and the communications school was six, or eight, weeks long. And in about the sixth week, they called me out and said I had to go before a board and in one week I was processed through and approved for OCS.

John: Oh, great.

Ed: But I had to sign a waiver. Because of my eyes. So, off I went. I didn't complete communications school then. But I got promoted to technician grade five. The old T5 stripes. Because you had to be in that pay grade. And I went to OCS for two weeks. And then they came to me and said "They didn't approve your waiver so you have to go back to school."

John: Oh.

Ed: The advantage to it was very simple. It got me promoted and they didn't take that away from me.

John: Okay. All right.

Ed: So, I finished up the communications school and was assigned to a newly activated tank destroyer battalion at North Camp Hood, Texas.

John: Communications radio?

Ed: Yea.

John: Okay.

Ed: Pretty basic stuff. I never used it again. Well, I did only in regard to tuning the radios on our own armored vehicles. This was a newly activated battalion, the 671st Tank Destroyer Battalion, and it was one of the last tank destroyer battalions to be activated. And we went through basic training again, only it was then basic unit training, where they were developing leadership and skills within the unit. We spent a very hot summer there in Hood and then I got my rifle marksmanship in.

John: Finally.

Ed: But along with that summer, they started a program, the Army Specialized Training Program, ASTP. Yea. Whereby they were contemplating a lengthy war and they decided they better get some of these kids back into college and develop some intellectual skills that way. So quite a large percentage of the group, getting fed up with going through basic training the second time, applied for this program. Nothing happened. We completed our basic unit training and went, moved down to the South Post at Camp Hood, and went into advanced unit training, and after a few weeks, we received our primary weapons, which were a 76mm Gun Motor Carriage M18. They were one of the first tracked vehicles the army had that had a torsion bar suspension. We proceeded with training and were going through gunnery training and getting set for our principle testing and in the meantime I had got promoted to sergeant. And the word came out that about fifty percent of the gun commanders in the battalion - there were thirty-six primary weapons in the battalion - and about fifty percent of the gun commanders were on orders to go to the Specialized Training Program. This upset the colonel to a great degree. And he managed to get it changed whereby anyone who didn't rank in a very high level of their army testing thing didn't have to go. And I was in that top rank. But I had just gotten promoted to sergeant and so when we went up to Camp Maxey, Texas, which is up in the northwest part of Texas, for specialized training and reassignment. I'll cut it short. We were tested, interviewed, and I said, "I don't want to go to college. I just got these stripes, and if I accepted that program, I

would have been demoted to private first class.” Besides, we had developed *esprit de corps* in the unit that made it, well, that’s where I wanted to be. So, we went on. The only problem was that, after we completed our training, then, I went back to the unit, of course. And after we completed our training, they really didn’t know what to do with us. Troops were, infantry divisions were being sent to Europe. There were no maneuvers on at that time where we could be tested or trained further. So they sent us to Camp Swift, Texas, which was down near Austin.

John: Okay.

Ed: Six months there. And we were in, I think they called it 4th Army Special Troops. And so that took us through to the middle of 1944, and then they shipped us, still didn’t know what to do with us, so they shipped us up to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Also in School Troops, at the 4th Armored School, where we became, I guess our primary mission there was to be the opposing force to officer training classes that were going through the armored school. And when they’d go out on tests and stuff like that, we furnished the opposition.

John: You were the bad guys.

Ed: Yea. And that went on until the end of 1944. And they decided that it was time to start the build-up for the Japanese invasion. So we went to Oahu. And we spent six months in Oahu. And, once again, we had no training. So they used us primarily for labor details and a variety of things around the island. Which was quite interesting.

John: Oh, really?

Ed: Because we worked on board freighters down in Honolulu Harbor. We worked in ammunition dumps around the island, and quartermaster dumps. Any kind of place where they needed labor. And for about a six weeks period, we operated the training program for island inductees at Schofield Barracks.

John: Inductees from Hawaii?

Ed: Yea. That was interesting because the people that we were working with were primarily Filipino or of Filipino descent. The bulk of the inductees were of Japanese descent. And those were people that went into the, what was it, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team?

John: The 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Very famous.

Ed: And I don’t know where the Filipinos went. They were good kids. And we did that for about six weeks, and then we got ready to move out and in June we went on down to Leyte. And we were on the beach in central Leyte, and started getting ready. Lot of gunnery training. The war in Europe ended in April, I think, and we watched the 8th Air Force come over and go through there. So, ultimately, in

June, we went on down to the Philippines. And then they told us that we were going to get new vehicles. A new M36 tank destroyer, which was equipped with a 90 millimeter gun. They had used those extensively in Europe and we never got them, though, because they dropped the bomb and the war ended. But we got all of our winter clothing, and steak every night, or almost every night.

John: Enjoyed it?

Ed: Yea, we had a good time there. Then, there was one of those chancy things that came up. They needed some infantry replacements, to fill out the infantry divisions, because they were going to Japan and separate battalions like ours, they really didn't know what to do with. I know, I've got cards at home where I sent my new address, and I think there are three or four with a different APO, as they moved us from one headquarters to another. But on this one particular day in September, it must have been, they came into, or we got information that they wanted fifteen people from our battalion. And volunteers, to transfer to the infantry. So, with five companies in the battalion, each company had a pool of three.

John: Okay.

Ed: Well, in our company, they announced it, was anybody interested, report to the first sergeant. And I think there were at least a dozen, and I was one of them. And we drew slips out of a steel pot, and the first sergeant had marked three of them. Whoever got a marked slip packed up and left for the infantry? What we did, we got on another transport and went over to Cebu, and we were assigned to the 77th Division. The division proper was leaving the day we got there, but they left us in the rear guard, you might say, to police the area for a couple of weeks. And we finally got transport and went up to Hokkaido.

John: Okay.

Ed: 77th Division was the only division in Hokkaido. Large land area but rather populated. And I was assigned to the 305th Infantry Regiment, and they were stationed at a town called Ashigawa. Which was really the farthest north of any major unit in Japan. And we were there, of course, through the winter until late January and then, of course, the point system started sending us home. And got home and was discharged on February 15, 1946.

John: Did you have any interplay with the Japanese people?

Ed: Some. We had Japanese people working there, doing labor details around the place. We were in a Japanese barracks. It was a Japanese army post and they brought in the coal, took out the ashes, and stuff like that. And they would eat their lunch in our rooms. And we'd trade cigarettes and I have a Japanese flag I picked up that way. So, the one thing that I regret more than anything else. Another sergeant, a friend of mine, had appointments at a photographer to get our pictures taken. And we were on the streetcar going into town, and a young



Japanese man approached us, and recognized us. We didn't recognize him. But he had been our company commander's house boy for a brief period of time. And he recognized us. And he invited us to his home. But we had this appointment. So, being duty bound, we went and got our pictures taken and never saw the young man again. So that is something I really regret.

John: It would have shown you another side of them.

Ed: Yea. Well, the people there in Japan, I know, the first time that we went into town proper from the military base, there wasn't much in the stores, but there was a department store there. But they had, in their showcases and things like that, little signs in English telling you what it was, in other words, a kimono or an obi, a sash, and different things like that. They had done that.

John: What was the feeling - this is still so controversial today - what was the feeling back then about dropping the bomb?

Ed: We had no thoughts about it at all. It ended the war. It was relief for us. As in later years, I got more information on it. I have seen articles written by people who were in positions who knew what was going to happen and where we were going to go, because we were in the IX Army Corps, which included the 77th Division, and the 98th Division, and the 81st Division. And, because of their experience, the 77th was probably slated for primary invasion purposes. And we would have been, the way they used tank destroyer units, we'd be almost just like tanks, to reinforce direct fire.

John: Yes. Assault forces.

Ed: So it was a General Sacton who at that time was in the operations and planning section of some unit and he had the opportunity of going into Japan in the occupation force and visiting the site that they were going to bring about the invasion. He was happy that we didn't do it.

John: I can believe it. Yea.

Ed: But it would have been ghastly, to say the least.

John: Yea. So many people I talk to said possibly a million casualties, and heaven knows how many Japanese casualties.

Ed: That was one of the southern islands and they were much more heavily populated than Hokkaido.

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

John: And you came back?

Ed: February 15th, 1946.

John: And you got out right away?

Ed: I was completely discharged.

John: Okay.

Ed: There was one advantage in going to the infantry that helped me in my future military career. And that was the company commander whose unit I was assigned to said, "Well, you were a sergeant in a tank destroyer battalion. You were a squad leader. In the infantry, a squad leader is a staff sergeant. So we are going to promote you."

John: Okay. That helped. That is good. And then, when you got out, what did you do? Right after you got out?

Ed: Well, I went back to work with my father.

John: Oh, okay. Sure.

Ed: And continued there until after he died. And I did not really care for retail business and we were, to say the least, under-capitalized. And so I went to work for another hardware store in Beaver Dam. And there was an opening developed in the Horicon post office, and I applied. And was hired there.

John: Oh, good.

Ed: Worked there as a letter carrier until I retired.

John: Oh, good. Good. That's great. Ah, did you use, you got the GI Bill. Did you use it?

Ed: A little. I went to college for a semester but there were pressures from home that, come back. And so I did. I guess I used it after Margaret and I were married in loan guarantee for buying the home.

John: The house. Okay.

Ed: That kind of thing.

John: Okay. What about VFW? Legion? Any veterans organizations?

Ed: Well, I, they didn't have a VFW post there in Horicon. They did have an active Legion post. A young man, or a veteran activist, started the VFW post, and I was one of the charter members, and I am still a member now. But I have been active in the Legion, because that's where my friends were.

John: Okay. Sure.

- Ed: And I served as Post Commander three times and Finance Officer.
- John: What about - ever get together with any of the fellows? Reunions? Stay in touch?
- Ed: No. I don't know whether it was because there wasn't any combat experience, which really cements a unit. There was never anything like that. However, there was, in my squad, one of the men, he lived in Minneapolis, and there were other people who were friends of ours in Wisconsin and northern Illinois. And he tried to get us together. And we did, one time. He was taking a vacation up in Door County and three of us came together. And I did keep closer contact with that one individual over the years until he passed away a couple of years ago. But otherwise, there was an organization called the Tank Destroyer Association, which had been started out in California. They had certain goals, and it was one of these organizations that had their goals, and one of them was to put a monument down at Fort Hood, Texas, another monument at the Armored Museum, the Patton Museum, in Fort Knox, and also instigate a book. They did those three things and then the organization disbanded. Which I thought was great. But they did have a couple reunions that we went to, one down in Fort Hood and another one in Louisville, Kentucky.
- John: I had an uncle that was in a tank destroyer outfit. Now I was nine years old, so this is what I remember, that then became tankers. And he went to the Pacific. He was killed at Peleliu. But I remember he had a patch that had like a tank getting bit by a tiger.
- Ed: Yes. Black panther. Yep. I wear that, if I put my uniform on. Yea, it was, the problem was that their concept was developed from the desert warfare of the early 1940s in North Africa. And it was a defensive unit, primarily. They activated probably as many tank destroyer battalions as they activated tank battalions.
- John: Oh, I didn't know that.
- Ed: And there were a lot of them. And there were some that came from the old national guard units, like the 32nd Division. They brought their anti-tank companies together. I'm not too sure what that was but I had a brother, my oldest sister's husband, was in the 32nd Division, and he was in the 632nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, that was almost organic to the division. However, he went into pilot training. Got out of the mud.
- John: Okay. This is a tremendous story. Something I haven't asked. Do you remember what you got paid?
- Ed: Yea. I would think when I went in, I had a bond allocation, and of course, there was the insurance. I was getting paid about \$19 a month.
- John: Okay.

- Ed: Didn't need much money. And I was too young at the time to spend much money because I never had much.
- John: Yea.
- Ed: But, later on, of course, as a sergeant, I think I was getting, I think the base was \$78 a month, of which I probably got \$40 or \$60. Something like that.
- John: Okay. What a tremendous story. Anything else you want to add to this before we wrap up?
- Ed: Well, as far as the military goes, in 1947, after I had been out for about a year and half, I thought I'd like to join the Reserves. So I went up to the Reserve office in Fond du Lac and talked to them, and, sure, sign here. But he said, "You were a staff sergeant. We have a program for commissioning persons who were staff sergeants or higher during World War II. Would you like to try for that?" "Sure." That was in November, or so, of '47. And I was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in April of '48, or so.
- John: Did you go to school?
- Ed: No.
- John: Oh. Okay.
- Ed: There was no requirement for military education. And I floated along and was assigned to various units. One unit we had based in Fond du Lac was the 432nd Civil Affairs Military Government Unit. It was in Fond du Lac primarily because three individuals from that area had been in civil affairs in Europe during World War II. The unit is now been moved to Green Bay, years ago, and has been quite active. But those were in the formative years, back in the '50s. And we were trying to find out just what we were doing. So I spent some time in that until they, we had trained in Beaver Dam, which was close to home. And we had a number of people enlisted in the unit, then. But then they said, well, you can't train in Beaver Dam anymore. You have to go to Fond du Lac for training. And that was an objection. And they searched around for another unit we could get. And there was a unit in Milwaukee that was an anti-aircraft, automatic weapons battalion, that had one battery that was not doing well, and so they transferred it to Beaver Dam. And we had great fun. It was about three years we had that in the late 50s. Until they deactivated all automatic weapons units because they didn't need them anymore. They had missiles.
- John: How long did you spend in the Reserves?
- Ed: Well, I, until I was fifty-nine. I had close to thirty years in, altogether.
- John: That's great.

Ed: But I went into the 84th Division and, after a while a training division that was based in Milwaukee and has not been moved. But we had a couple of companies there, and those were skeleton companies, about twenty-five, thirty men. And, for training purposes. And we'd go to active duty at Fort Leonard Wood, Fort Jackson, Fort Polk, Louisiana, and work with the active army at training, basic training. That changed after I got out, but I was a company commander for some time, and then I was a staff officer.

John: What was your rank when you came out?

Ed: Major.

John: Oh, that's good.

Ed: Is good.

John: That's right. Well, what a remarkable story. This is just great. A friend of mine, he just passed away, Stephen Ambrose, the writer.

Ed: Oh, yea. I read some of his.

John: He was giving a talk here several years ago to a bunch of guys from World War II, vets, and the discussion was going along the line, I didn't really do anything. You know, I did this or I went here, but I really didn't do much. And Ambrose said, "Wait a minute! You were giants! You went out and saved the world!" And you guys did. Every one. You were lucky enough not to get into combat but every guy was doing something, and gal, was all part of it. Yea.

Ed: Well, that's the element. The element of chance. I think of the episodes that I made decisions, like to go to OCS. I got promoted. Well, I kept my stripes, but couldn't stay in OCS. I came back having those striped put me more in line for a squad leader's job, or something like that in the tank destroyers, so I got promoted to sergeant. I refused the opportunity to go to school, which may have saved my life, too, because the ASTP program shut down and most of those people went as infantry replacements. And then, of course, at the end, transferring to the infantry and getting promoted to staff sergeant, and then enlisting in the Reserves. And being offered the opportunity for a commission. So it's a lot of, you never know what is going to happen. But you make your choices and see what happens.

John: See what happens and how you can handle it, yea. Okay. This is remarkable.

**[End of Interview.]**