

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Richard M. Lawrence,
United States Army,
World War II.

2003

[Edited by Richard Lawrence]

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Lawrence, Richard M., (1926-), Oral History Interview, 2003.

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.)

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.)

ABSTRACT

Lawrence, a Beaver Dam, Wis., native discusses his World War II service with the Army Corps of Engineers. Entering service shortly after his 18th birthday, Lawrence touches upon the apprehension he felt about being away from home. Lawrence describes basic training at Fort Sheridan (Illinois), Corp of Engineering and special instruction utility battalion training at Fort Belvoir (Virginia), and advanced training at Fort Lewis (Washington). He describes the construction teams of his unit that were to reconstruct buildings and bridges and touches upon his driving experience at Fort Lewis for the 3189th Engineer Service Battalion. He talks about his unit's training in preparation for war with Japan, and the announcement of V-J Day. Lawrence comments on the unit's expectation that they will be discharged, and their disappointment when they are kept around the post doing little jobs like delivering Christmas mail. He expressed his gratitude at meeting people who were stationed at Fort Lewis that were from Beaver Dam and being able to reminiscence. He touches upon the deactivation of the 3189th in the fall of 1945. Lawrence talks about being transferred from Fort Lewis to Camp Beale (California) and waiting to get involved in occupation duty in Europe. Lawrence describes his frustration at a transfer to Camp Stoneman (San Francisco Bay) instead of discharge and his unit's subsequent departure for occupation duty in Japan. Characterizing his stay at Yokohama on Tokyo Bay as very delightful, he talks about being attached to the 8th Engineer Squadron, a part of the 1st Cavalry Division, and provides much detail on the Division and his overseas service. Lawrence describes how the downtown area of Tokyo had been totally destroyed by fire, not the atomic bomb. Discharged in 1946, Lawrence speaks of his attendance at the University of Wisconsin where he graduated as a mechanical engineer and then went to work for Madison Gas and Electric. He touches upon the special V-5 and V-12 programs and how he felt they were unfair programs. He tells that he is a member of the American Legion.

Biographical Sketch

Richard Lawrence (b. 1926) served in the Army Corps of Engineers from September 1944 to October 1946 and in stateside service and occupation duty in post-war Japan. He currently resides in both Madison, Wisconsin and San Diego, California.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

Transcript edited by Gayle Martinson, 2004.

Interview Transcript

John: Okay, this is John Driscoll, and today is December 11, 2003. And this is an oral history interview with Richard Lawrence. Richard is a vet of the United States Army, World War II. We are at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, and good morning, and thanks for coming in for the interview.

Richard: Good morning to you, John, and I appreciate the opportunity to, I guess, relive old memories.

John: Great.

Richard: With sixty years hindsight.

John: Yea.

Richard: I was born June 13, 1926, in Beaver Dam, and grew up there. And attended all the levels of school, primary school, secondary school and high school, and I graduated from high school in 1944. Which was some three years after the U. S. hostilities started in World War II. So it was inevitable under the Selective Service Act that I would be given some consideration as to joining the Armed Forces.

John: I am sure. Yes.

Richard: So a couple days after I graduated, I had my eighteenth birthday and I went down and registered for the draft, and was classified 1-A. And eventually I was inducted, on September 30.

John: 19?

Richard: 1944.

John: '44. Okay. Let me stop for just a minute, Richard, and ask a question I ask almost everyone. Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Richard: Sure.

John: What were you doing? What do you recall about that?

Richard: Well, let's see. I was fifteen, sixteen years old, and it was a Sunday. And we heard about it. I was out with a group of friends my age. We knew that war was coming but it didn't dwell on our minds. And we were just doing what teen-agers did. And of course, somebody gave us the news, and everybody said, "Where is Pearl

Harbor?”

John: That is exactly what I remember.

Richard: And it went on from there.

John: Okay, you graduated from Beaver Dam?

Richard: Beaver Dam High School, 1944. And I had, at that time, plans to attend college sometime, somewhere, but obviously they were going to be interrupted.

John: Yes.

Richard: My parents were in Beaver Dam. My father was a World War I veteran. Your museum here has some of his artifacts, too. From that point on, our lives were pretty well planned. I guess if I had to call myself any particular term, I would say I was pretty much a typical citizen soldier. I knew I was going to be drafted. I had no thoughts of entertaining a Regular Army career. But I was willing to participate. I didn't volunteer. A lot of people volunteered. And of course, all the time, from 1941 up to 1944, young men just a year or two older than I am were disappearing from Beaver Dam. They were serving in the Armed Forces. And the history of the conflict is well established. By 1944, the Americans, well, D-Day was just a couple days before my high school graduation, so they were on the European continent and they were making progress in the battles in the Pacific. I think the Battle of Midway had probably taken place, when the Navy was getting to dominate with superiority. Finally, on September 30, I found myself at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. And after several days indoctrination, I was sent on my way to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, for my basic training. I think I should comment, in those days it was bewildering. I wasn't alone. There were some of my classmates that went in the same day. But kind of interesting, a friend of mine whose name began with the letter L, like mine did, so we were in line together, he went in the Navy and I went in the Army. I have no idea what the selection process was. I think back that then, I was just barely eighteen years old, I had been around the state of Wisconsin a little bit, had never traveled anywhere. And I had to be apprehensive about the whole thing. Not so much the idea that war was going to be involved, but the fact that I had never been away. And a lot of us had never been away. And somehow we survived.

John: A young kid out of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, suddenly at Fort Sheridan and facing the United States Army, what was that like?

Richard: Well, it was a new experience. The wooden barracks were not very palatial but, like a lot of kids, I had gone to the usual YMCA and scout camps and everything

else. So had most everybody else. It was still a mild time of the year. It wasn't cold. So we didn't need a lot of heat, or anything like that. Obviously, we hadn't packed for the experience. We wore the same clothes we came in for several days. And then they finally issued us some clothes, the bare minimum. I guess there was probably fatigue uniforms and the dress wool uniforms. I'm not sure we had suntans in September. And aboard the troop train we went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, which is located basically on the Potomac River, near Alexandria.

John: Yes. I know it well. Was that for boot camp, or had you had your boot, basic camp?

Richard: No, we were only at Fort Sheridan three or four days.

John: Okay.

Richard: This was for basic training. Fort Belvoir is a Corps of Engineers camp, but the training was in a different portion of the camp. It was basically for replacements for either infantry service or Corps of Engineers service. Infantry, of course, and the Corps of Engineers were bearing the brunt of the effort in the European Theater. So we went through a basic infantry basic. Some friends of mine who went in the Air Force, they said, "You mean you had to do those things in your basic training?" It involved learning about weapons, you know. I am not anti-gun or anything. I just never got into hunting. But I learned how to shoot the M-1 rifle and the carbine, and qualified on the ranges. I've never used a gun since then. That was it. I was trained as a specialty as a truck driver/mechanic. And I was there until May of 1945. Sometime after the first of January, 1945, I and some others were recruited for a special construction utility type battalion that was being formed. The type of outfit that might have about four or five hundred personnel broken up into specialty construction teams, and things like that. It would go in maybe behind the initial troops that had secured the area and you know, do reconstruction and things like that.

John: What type of reconstruction? Buildings, bridges?

Richard: Well, we built, some of the small units built buildings. One unit trained to fight airplane fires. Others could build roads or bridges. Later on, out at Fort Lewis, Washington, they built the non-coms club. And they went to an artillery range and built that. We can get into that a little bit later, as we get on. I think what really happened, of course, all the time we were watching what was going on in Europe, and all of a sudden, it must have been the early part of April or the early part of May, came V-E Day, which was a welcome thing. Then that un-knowing GI in the lower level questioned, I think, "Well, what are we going to do? What are we going to do? Are they going to let us out?" And the answer, obviously, was no. So

this Colonel Moore, who was recruiting for battalion, and he did recruiting. If you think back and you hear all the jokes about the Army being fouled up and not knowing what they were doing, they did know what they were doing. It was just that we didn't know what was going on and that bothered us more than it bothered them.

John: That's a good way of putting it.

Richard: So, the war was still raging in the Pacific, so there was no doubt what direction we would be going. And I had kind of an interesting career, I guess, if you could call it that, for two years. They selected that I was going to be a truck driver and handy person, clerical type around the headquarters platoon, and so on. I was not going to be doing construction. I didn't have any skills like that or anything. But I was in the early part of the formation of this group and we were sent to Fort Lewis, Washington. We called ourselves the advanced party, for training purposes, in anticipation of the invasion of Japan. Gradually, more people were coming in to form the other units. We had some over-age people, people in their thirties.

John: Oh, yea?

Richard: Because a lot of them were people who had done construction work, people who could operate heavy equipment. They had those skills, and then we had a lot of people like me, people my age, and we always said that were we not only potential cannon fodder but they were scraping the bottom of the barrel. The draft had been going on for three or four years.

John: Yea. That's true.

Richard: There wasn't much left. We got to Fort Lewis, which is in a different climate than Fort Belvoir. I really liked the Pacific Northwest. I just never got a chance to go back and locate in Seattle because I stayed here in Madison, but I thought it was okay. Now, we were on the ocean side of the mountains which is a much more temperate climate. I had an interesting experience. They took a couple of dozen of us and sent us over the mountains to a place called Yakima, or near Yakima, where there was an artillery firing range. And we built a building for them at the firing range. We spent about six weeks there. Yakima was a town of about thirty-one thousand and the most hospitable people that we ever ran into. They had a little USO there, they entertained the troops. It was a wonderful experience. The Yakima Valley, of course, is noted for its fruit growing and things like that.

John: Apples.

Richard: Apples. But I had some good experiences, working for the platoon, driving. It was

late May or early June, driving from Fort Lewis over to Yakima through the cascade mountain passes. And the chinook pass had just opened up the early part of June, so there was a lot of snow. And I was carrying a little second lieutenant with me, from Alabama. And having been raised in Wisconsin, I knew about snow. But he didn't know snow. So, he was amazed. This was a six thousand foot pass and we drove over it essentially in the clouds, see, with this wall of snow on either side of the road. Lieutenant Rogers was impressed. June, July, '45, well, we were still out at Fort Lewis but we continued our training in preparation for the invasion of Japan. And everybody was predicting dire things about that. The Japanese would fight to the last person in their homeland. And we were packing equipment and we had been designated a unit number by then, the 3189th Engineer Service Battalion. Nobody was looking forward to going overseas for combat. Obviously, it was a potential duty of ours. Then, lo and behold, in August of 1945, V-J came along, V-J Day. And the invasion training stopped then. I think, back at that time, the whole thinking was probably changed. Instead of anticipation and working as a unit, and creating some sort of *esprit*, it now became, "What is going to happen? When are we going to get out? When can we go home? Why don't they discharge us?" And things like that. And the rumor mill in the service is just so full.

John: Fantastic, isn't it?

Richard: Everyday there were different ideas.

John: That is something that I hadn't heard before but I can understand it. After V-J Day, I can see sort of the purpose went out of it.

Richard: Yea. I didn't realize it at the time but this is what happened.

John: You guys weren't soldiers. You were civilians.

Richard: We were civilians, yea.

John: You wanted to go home.

Richard: Especially the guys, these older construction men, heavy equipment operators, they had wives and families for a lot of us it was kind of interesting. I was in the barracks out at Fort Lewis. One of the nice things was the 3189th was a kind of a small unit. We didn't have a whole division. There a young fellow who had a bunk across from me said, "You are from Beaver Dam, Wisconsin?" I said, "Yea." He said, "I'm from Waukesha." And it turns out he was a cousin of mine. John Owens, from the Welch side of the family. So I met a cousin I never knew before my mother's folks came from the Waukesha area.

John: Okay. Isn't that something?

Richard: And during the time I was there, because we stayed there until the end of 1945, there were other people from Beaver Dam at Fort Lewis. I remember seeing one or two. And there were people over in an area named Bremerton, where the Navy yard is. And we'd go over there on Sundays to visit with them, and get a little bit of Beaver Dam reminiscence. And then we'd go down to the Navy yard and see some of the sailors that were from Beaver Dam coming off the ships there.

John: Great.

Richard: Getting to Bremerton was an adventure because we had to take the bus and the ferry. Now, this has nothing to do with my military training but there was a famous bridge out there, across the Puget Sound Narrows, down near Bremerton, that collapsed. It was called Galloping Gertie.

John: Galloping Gertie. I think I saw that on television. A newsreel of it.

Richard: Yea. Somehow, somebody took some film of that and it was the most famous piece of film about, they say engineers' mistakes don't hide, you know.

John: That's right.

Richard: The wind came down this narrow gorge and set up the right harmonics and just twisted and turned that bridge.

John: That is amazing.

Richard: I've been back in the area since then. There is a new bridge there and it's called Sturdy Gertie.

John: Okay. I like that. I hadn't heard that. That's good.

Richard: Well, that was somewhat a sideline. During the fall of '45, they did de-activate the 3189th. It was no longer. And the men with longer service points, everyone had points, began to be discharged. And gradually people began to dribble away. They were being siphoned off. We weren't really functioning as a unit. We were just all together doing things. We helped, doing little projects around the post. We built the non-com's club there, during that time. They didn't let us sit there around idly but we didn't work too hard. They had a big gym, and they wanted to refinish the floor in the gym, so we helped to sand and refinish the floor. Things like that. There were no formal inspections or military things going on, like there were back

on the east coast, near Washington, D. C., where these were much more formal procedures.

John: Sure.

Richard: And as Christmas came along, they sent us on detached duty up to Seattle, a number of us. We helped deliver the Christmas mail. By this time we were all hoping to get back into civilian life.

John: I can imagine.

Richard: But they gave us two and a half ton trucks at the post office. They weren't our trucks, our outfit's. And some of us were drivers. I'm driving around. And they filled them up with Christmas packages and they had people help deliver them. I suppose the Post Office was suffering manpower shortages.

John: Sure. Sure. I hadn't thought of that.

Richard: Well, nobody did. And they had us in the barracks up there and they fed us, gave us per diem expenses, things like that. Anyhow, unfortunately, over Christmas and New Years there, I contracted the flu, and had to be hospitalized and everybody else that was up there on this mail project went back to Fort Lewis, and by the time I got back there, they had all been sent someplace else. Well, this was inevitable, anyhow. The outfit was being broken up. I only point this out to say that my life in a dedicated military unit was very brief. I never had a chance to establish any real ties or *esprit*. And the 3189th, to my knowledge, has never tried to have a reunion or anything like that.

John: Okay. That's a question I was going to ask.

Richard: So then I hung around Fort Lewis for a while and then pretty soon, I am not exactly sure of the date, I got transferred to a place in California, Camp Beale. North of Sacramento. It's called Beale Air Force Base now.

John: Okay.

Richard: It's north of Sacramento, near a town called Marysville.

John: Oh, yea. There was an army post there in the 1840s.

Richard: I suspect there was. I suspect it goes back. Pre-Civil War days. All that was going on, again, is we were in a holding pattern, waiting for something to happen to get us involved in occupation duty. I would say not in Europe, but in Japan. So I spent

a few weeks there. They had us doing various things. For two or three days, some of us were driving Jeeps from the brig to the place where they were having court-martials, transporting prisoners and things like that.

John: Okay. You said something I hadn't heard. The war was over. The invasion of Japan wasn't going to take place, but you were thinking in terms of occupation?

Richard: Well, it was pretty obvious that they weren't going to discharge us right away. So they were talking about occupation duty.

John: Okay.

Richard: Yea, I was a truck driver, so I was driving dump trucks. These were bigger trucks. Kind of interesting, going out and hauling gravel in from a creek bed, and running heavy equipment, which I wasn't qualified for. But it was kind of interesting. And in March, late March, they loaded up a bunch of us. We went to a place called Camp Stoneman, which is on San Francisco Bay, near a town called Pittsburg. And lo and behold, they put us on a ship headed for Japan.

John: Oh, wow.

Richard: By that time it was known that we were headed for occupation duty, and that was kind of disappointing because some people with nearly as many, or more points, were getting discharged. But we weren't, so we were kind of disappointed. We had an uneventful cruise to Japan. It took about two weeks, I guess. None of which was really delightful. We actually, went to Yokohama, which is on Tokyo Bay, and spent a couple days on board the ship. There was some concern about where are they really going to send us, but I wound up pretty well. They send you to what they called a replacement depot and then they apportion you out. I wound up being sent to the Engineering Squadron, they called it in the cavalry, attached to the 1st Cavalry Division. Army groups, the infantry and so on, have battalions but cavalry groups have squadrons. Instead of a company, you had a troop.

John: Okay.

Richard: And again, it was a completely new experience. I was nineteen years old at the time, and I was half way around the world. Fortunately, it was peace time and that was good.

John: Still, the war was just over. Was there evidence of the bombing when you got to Japan?

Richard: Well, that is an interesting comment. The First Cav was located at Camp Drake,

Japan, which was about eighteen or twenty miles from downtown Tokyo, and I was with the 8th Engineer Squadron. So we were in the Tokyo area. This is a point I try to make with a lot of people who talk about how the war ended with Nagasaki and Hiroshima, but there were actually more casualties in Tokyo as the result of the firebombing there. And people look at me and say, "Well, so what?" Nothing is as horrible as a nuclear bomb.

John: Right. It was okay to burn them but not to nuke them.

Richard: So, effectually, the whole city of Tokyo, except for the downtown area where there were masonry buildings, was flattened from burning. Now, this was six months after the end of hostilities, but by that time the vacant lots had grown up a bunch of weeds and people had scrounged metal, wood, anything they could to build shelters. But it was pretty sad, it was pretty devastated. The roads were still full of bomb craters that we had to detour around when we were driving. The people, they were quite a bit different from what is going on in Afghanistan and Iraq now. The people were very passive. Now, those who were really bitter, when we would go by on the roads, they would turn their back on us. They wouldn't look at us. But they were not aggressive, or anything like that.

John: Okay, there was no guerrilla--?

Richard: And around the camp, of course, we used a lot of them to do some of the menial work, pick up stuff and that. They were very happy to be able to earn a living, and so on. You know, there were a lot of young ones there, a lot of little kids. That impressed me. Going up to the replacement depot on the train to Tokyo Harbor, it was very slow traveling. We stopped a lot. And the troop train stopped on the tracks, immediately swarms of kids came out wanting a hand-out of some kind. And there was no protective fences or things like that around the tracks. My immediate impression was that life was pretty cheap. They didn't care if they ran them over or not. They didn't protect them. That was a sad thing.

John: You know, I've never talked to anyone. That would really be something going in there, into a country that was just devastated, and yet you didn't have sniping, bombs or mines. But, of course, the emperor told them, I guess, to behave or something like that.

Richard: That was right. And they gave the emperor complete obedience. It wasn't say, like the Italian campaign which was door to door fighting in all those villages. Really guerrilla warfare up there. Kind of like they are experiencing in the Middle East now. Yea, the emperor gave his approval to all of this and the Japanese listened to him. The emperor was living there in his palace. The palace grounds is right in downtown Tokyo, surrounded by a moat. Pretty much private. And in those days

the real king of Japan was Douglas MacArthur.

John: Right.

Richard: And, in spite of what all the people say, he did a good job of leading the occupation, and all that.

John: He really did. He was very old man at that time, too. And he was even older in Korea. He retired from the U. S. Army about 1935, so he was an old man. But he did a great job there.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

John: Okay, this is side two of our interview tape. So we were talking about Japan.

Richard: Yea. We never had to work too hard, this occupation duty. Let's see, it was the 1st Cavalry Division. You've seen their patch? The big yellow one with the black bar across it and the horse's head on it. The division had one horse that belonged to the general and he used it for recreation. Our engineering group was across the highway from the main body of the camp, which was a nice thing. A little isolated there. Didn't get a lot of things. And it was pretty luxurious. I guess the odd thing about me was, here I was just coming overseas with about eighteen months service while a lot of these combat veterans of the 1st Cavalry had come up through the Philippines and other places, if I recall. Didn't have much more than eighteen or twenty months service, but they had all spent that overseas. So there was a lot of comment, was I bad or something like that? I got sent overseas with that much service.

John: Well, when you went, for instance, went to Japan, you had been drafted for the duration, hadn't you?

Richard: Yea.

John: You hadn't been drafted for a number of years?

Richard: No..

John: And when it ended, when you were in Japan, did you have an idea when your time would be up?

Richard: Well, not specifically. We were hoping, we had great intelligence from an Army newspaper called the *Stars and Stripes*. *Pacific Stars and Stripes*.

John: Okay.

Richard: And a lot of news was about the thirty-six pointers are going home. Then the thirty-two pointers.

John: Oh, okay.

Richard: It kept filtering down and as time went on, your point total went up and the discharge point totals went down.

John: And you were waiting for them to cross.

Richard: I looked at some old letters that I wrote and there is a lot of speculation and a lot of rumors about when the point totals were up. And if you were married and had a family, you would have special consideration.

John: Okay.

Richard: But all through the summer of 1946, there was a little bit of a conflict going on because here these point totals for eligibility were coming down and we were wondering how soon. Because I wanted to get back to Madison and start the fall semester at the University.

John: Okay.

Richard: And my father was back in Beaver Dam, doing the pre-registration and things like that for me. This was kind of the battle that was going on, internally, as far as we were concerned. And I ultimately made it, at the end. I did get out in time to spare for the fall semester but it was nip and tuck.

John: Okay. All right. A little bit more, going back to Japan. The interplay with the people over there. After a while, did things, I don't know if you can say returned to normal but...

Richard: Well, I am sure it did, although it was hard to tell. I was there five months, six months. Naturally, as the days went by and you were allowed to see these young Japanese coming on the post, doing work, why you got to meet a lot of those. We had some opportunities. They created a club for us. Oh, by that time I was promoted to Technician Fifth Grade, a corporal. That happened just before the 3189th broke up and it was pretty obvious by then that with all the veterans from Europe and the Regular Army people that were coming over, there weren't going to be any more promotions. There were a lot of high ranking non-coms coming back, the old veterans. So that was my final rank, at the time of discharge. But we

had a club for non-coms there. And they could hold parties and they even made arrangements, they got some young Japanese women and we could hold dances and things like that. It was a very amenable situation. It almost sounds like a country club. There was a Red Cross center over on the main post and there were both men and women there, Red Cross personnel. And there was a pool over that way, a swimming pool.

John: But the 1st Cav, that was a Regular Army outfit. Was there much interplay with Regulars?

Richard: No.

John: Any problem with them?

Richard: No, no problem at all. If anything happened, it would be that, "Well, we are the 1st Cav, and we went through hell, in terms of combat coming up through the Philippines and other islands, and so on." And they were the ones that really did the combat. I was really very fortunate, in that respect. Well, I guess I can just say I was lucky. I didn't have any combat time, there was no real hostility about this. I remember a man I worked with here in Madison for a year or so who had been in the Marines, and they came into Japan on the northern island, up near Sapporo. And there was some hostility from the natives up there. And, of course, he spent some time there, he was a tough Marine. You know, it was one of those things, at the time going back to when I was drafted, a lot of people, a number of people were selected for programs designated V-5, or V-12, or so on and they sent them over to some college, someplace, and ultimately were going to commission them as officers, and they got to stay in the States and go to school. But I wasn't that fortunate.

John: Yea.

Richard: I have a cousin of mine that did that. There were others in my high school class. I don't say these things with envy. It was the luck of the draw. That was the way it happened.

John: I have a nephew who joined the Navy, enlisted, and became a corpsman. And then decided he wasn't coming out until they made him a doctor. And they put him through college, through medical school, and he is a j. g., I don't know what his specialty is, but he is a Navy doctor. And every cent of the cost the Navy paid, and every day he was going to college was Navy time. You've got to hand it to him.

Richard: Yea. I have a nephew who learned how to fly at Federal expense and now is an airline pilot.

John: Okay.

Richard: They are old airline pilots now.

John: Yea. Okay, then you came back. When did you leave Japan?

Richard: Oh, sometime around September 8, '46. I think a week or so before that they got us out of Camp Drake and back to the replacement depot.

John: Did they take your unit, or were you on your own?

Richard: Just groups of us. Individuals. On our own. We had reached the magic number.

John: But you knew you were coming back for discharge?

Richard: Yes.

John: That must have been great.

Richard: Well, it was greater than coming over. One of the ironies of coming over in March. As I say, we left from Pittsburg, California. Got on board the ship and steamed out of San Francisco Harbor underneath the Golden Gate Bridge, and all these signs are there, "Welcome home, welcome home."

John: And you are going the wrong way.

Richard: And all the music was playing, "Going to take a sentimental journey." Well, we were not taking any sentimental journey. So, there was quite a bit of irony about that.

John: So then you got back. Where did you get released from?

Richard: Fort Sheridan.

John: They brought you back close your point of enlistment, didn't they? Did you have any Reserve time to serve? Or anything like that?

Richard: No. There were several interviews I had where that was discussed. Going into the Reserve, and so on. And I think some people did. I showed them that I was really a civilian soldier.

John: Well, that is the guys that fought the war, the civilians. Yea. Okay, you got out at

Fort Sheridan. What did you do after that?

Richard: Well, this was September 30. By that time I was about two weeks late for the start of the semester but they allowed that.

John: Did they let you in anyhow?

Richard: They let me in anyhow.

John: That's great.

Richard: This is no longer a military life, but I was part of that large group of veterans that came out in the mid-'40s and turned the University around during the later '40s. Lee Sherman Dreyfus and people like that. My first living place here in Madison was in a class room in those buildings out at Truax Field, where they had the radio training school. And they converted them into classrooms. And we got up in the morning and got on board the buses that took us down to the campus.

John: I had never heard that. I knew Truax was a training school, but I didn't know people were living there.

Richard: I think all those buildings are gone.

John: Yes. Yes.

Richard: I think MATC [Madison Area Technical College] probably covers most of that area now.

John: Okay. There were some of World War II barracks there when I was with the state, the Department of Administration, and we built the Adjutant General's Headquarters out there. Big Pentagon West, we called it. Beautiful. And they had to tear down the last of the World War II wooden buildings. They still had something in them. I know when you walked on the floors, you could feel the plywood bend. What did you do in school?

Richard: I majored in engineering. Graduated as a mechanical engineer.

John: Okay. And then you went with MG&E [Madison Gas and Electric]?

Richard: This is kind of an interesting thing. Why was MG&E hiring? Why did they want engineers? Not to build electrical systems, but natural gas had been introduced to the state of Wisconsin in 1949, and I graduated in June of 1950.

- John: Oh, I didn't know it was that recent.
- Richard: Yea. It had been planned for much earlier, but the war put a crimp in all that. So MG&E was getting people who had a little technical background to go out and promote the use of gas. My engineering background led me to that. In fact, my engineering specialty all my life was heating, ventilating and air conditioning.
- John: HVAC. Okay, sure.
- Richard: But, lo and behold, a short time, there were ten or twelve of us doing this, graduates, most of them were electrical graduates. Some of them were mechanical, I guess. And, of course, came the hostilities in Korea and they were gearing up again for that, and most of these fellows heard the siren call and went gladly to the West Coast, to Lockheed and places like that that were building airplanes for the Korean War effort.
- John: Now, could you have been called back for Korea? Did you have any commitment to the government for that? Do you remember?
- Richard: Well, as a discharged veteran, they gave you a different draft classification. You were no longer 1-A, you were 1-F, or something like that.
- John: Yes.
- Richard: And sure, I was still physically capable. I suppose at some time they could have dipped down but they didn't need to.
- John: I know, in my time, I had four years regular and four years reserve and my reserve time was up when they were just starting to call up for Viet Nam. And I was very worried, but then, I got my discharge and then I was out. I guess I could have reenlisted but I was finished. They couldn't have taken me.
- Richard: My brother-in-law, the father of those two nephews, the airplane pilots, he was a Navy flier. He was a carrier pilot. He was on the *Essex*, I think. No, the *Hornet*. He had to ditch once. Anyhow, he was flying as an airline pilot in 1950 and he had some reserve obligation and he got called back up for the Korean War as a pilot. He and my sister got to tour Africa and places like that.
- John: Oh, okay.
- Richard: He was a Navy pilot. So it could have happened that way. But I was really free and clear unless they re-instituted the draft.

- John: Then, did you do your whole career with MG&E?
- Richard: Yes. I worked there forty years. Retired in 1991 and so I watched Madison grow all these years.
- John: Yes. It certainly has. Do you get back here from San Diego regularly?
- Richard: I still keep my Wisconsin football tickets.
- John: Oh, do you?
- Richard: I've been going to those games for fifty-plus years.
- John: That is tremendous. That's very. Well, you've been through some ups and downs.
- Richard: Oh, yes, I've seen a lot of rotten football. I remember John Coatta, the quarterback, who still holds some passing records for the University. And I also remember John Coatta, the coach, who had one of the worst records. Twenty-three losses in a row, or something like that. Which reminds me. This is beside the me. We talked earlier about the special programs, V-5 and V-12. One of the most famous athletes in the UW Madison history was in one of those programs. He only played football for Wisconsin one year and then he got into a V-5 program, and the University of Michigan took him, and he won twelve letters over there.
- John: That was Hirsch?
- Richard: Elroy Hirsch. That didn't seem fair, did it?
- John: No. That's right.
- Richard: It was interesting watching sporting events in those days. You had teams playing football that were really top notch teams. The Great Lakes Naval Training Center and Camp Grant.
- John: Brown. Paul Brown coached at Great Lakes and then came down and started the Cleveland Browns, and then the Rams went to L. A., or the Browns. And then went to Cincinnati. Yea, he coached at Great Lakes.
- Richard: And Army and Navy were great competitions. But those things have all changed.
- John: Yea, what a remarkable story. This is great.
- Richard: But Elroy was a twelve-letter man at Michigan.

John: I wonder if he tells people that now, because his big, I come in contact with him. I did a lot of construction work on the campus and his big job, he will tell you, is to go out and play eighteen holes and then take the check and send the donors on home, and deposit the check with the Foundation. I wonder how many of them know about his Michigan background.

Richard: I'm not sure he is capable of that any more, at this day and age.

John: Do you have a family still in the Madison area?

Richard: My wife has a daughter here in Madison. I have a son in Chicago. And I have a daughter in Lake Forest, California. My daughter, who is also an engineer by training, started with Boeing in Seattle.

John: That is tremendous. Yea, that is a tremendous story.

Richard: I don't know. Well, I guess during the time we were in Tokyo, it was not too onerous but we got to do some touring, tried to drive up and see Mount Fuji but it was overcast with clouds. I had a similar experience in Washington, going up to Mount Rainier. It was overcast that day too. Things like that.

John: Sure. Ah, when you came out, you had the G. I. Bill. Did you use that?

Richard: Absolutely. That was one of the greatest benefits ever devised, and I have been a member of the American Legion since 1946.

John: That was another question I was going to ask you.

Richard: So what the American Legion did for the veterans in terms of the G. I. Bill, yea, I had forty-eight months of eligibility that saw me through my college career. That and, I don't get much agreement about these things these days but I was looking through the Legion history upstairs. I supported their desire for universal military training. I think this is probably a point. A lot of us eighteen year old kids probably didn't have the discipline that we should have but just getting into that barracks and being limited to that space, when they take possessions and being on your own, and so on, some of those habits have never left me. And I think it did me good.

John: Yea. That's great. That's tremendous. When we wrap up here, I need a release from you that will allow the museum here let students and, this program, the interview that I just turned in upstairs is number four hundred and seventy-six. These are tremendous stories. You know, a hundred years from now, when we are

all gone, they'll have the campaigns and they'll have the overview. But they won't have anybody talking about what it was like being in Japan with the city all burned down like that, or going into occupation duty when the war was over, and all that. These are very, very important stories. I write, when I'm not like this and when I'm not playing with my grandkids, I'm a writer. And a very good friend of mine just passed away, Stephen Ambrose. And he wrote several, he wrote fifteen books or so, but several of them on World War II from the point of view of the guys that were in there slogging away, doing it. And he said once to a group of vets, "You people were giants." And they all backed up, and they said they didn't do anything, and he said, "Yea, you did. All together, you know, you went out and saved the world. That's what you did." They sat back. And it is true, you know. Every kid that went did his thing, whether it was this or that or something else. But it was all part of keeping this world going.

Richard: Well, I can't argue with that. I don't want to take any credit for myself but I am familiar with Ambrose, the name Steve Ambrose and the things he wrote. One of the people he wrote about, he singled out, was kind of a contemporary of mine. It was Jim Underkofler, from Wisconsin Power & Light.

John: Oh, yea. I know the name. I don't know him.

Richard: Well, he came from Portage which was, again, a similar small time like Beaver Dam. And he did very well in the utility business. My class at the University was 1950 and my class president was a local attorney, Tony Brewster.

John: Again, I've heard the name. I don't know him.

Richard: Well, Tony served in the service, but not during World War II. I think it was a little later. But when we had our fiftieth reunion back here a couple of years ago, of course, [Tom] Brokaw had written a book about the greatest generation. Tony used that a lot at his theme, pointing out that we did come along and function in a key role at an appropriate time.

John: Yes. Can I get your address. When we wrap up here, I'll take this home and transcribe it, type it, and then I'll give the museum here a paper copy and a disk, and the tape. I will send you a copy of this transcription, so it will be yours. When I send that to you, that will be what they call un-edited. It will be my typing from this thing here. If I get something wrong in it or a name wrong, or something like that, that is important, don't hesitate to drop the museum a note saying "He said it was Camp So and So and it was actually Camp Something Else." Because it will be a couple of months before they will go through and do a final edit so there is time to see something you want to change. That's fine.

Richard: When you are in basic training, you start out by learning one thing that you never forget. The first thing is your Army serial number. 36847226. I'll never forget it. But then they started issuing you rifles and you have to learn the serial number of your rifle. They all look alike but they all have different serial numbers. And of course, there is a rifle rack on the floor that you are living on, the platoon. And you kept them there and you went out and fired. But every time you changed companies or something like that, they were re-issued another M-1 rifle. Then you had to learn to shoot carbines when you had the same...Well, one of the joys of August, 1945, the hostilities were over. We no longer had to have any rifles so they took those all away from us.

John: In Japan?

Richard: No, we were still in the States.

John: In the States, okay.

Richard: No, we never had them in Japan, either.

John: Oh?

Richard: I suppose they were there, somewhere. But I was working kind of in supplies in Fort Lewis, and so on, and knowing that we were going to go overseas. And when we got overseas, having access to all these things, sometimes temptation. Well, I had been wearing these OD pants, or this jacket, and you know what it looked like around here in 1946. All the students at the University had GI clothes on, or something like that.

John: Good clothing. Now, Fort Lewis has an unhappy role in the history of Wisconsin. When they had the Berlin Crisis, they called up the Guard, the Wisconsin Guard, and sent them to Fort Lewis. Whatever the Army unit at Fort Lewis was, I think went to Germany and they called up the 32nd Division and sent them to Fort Lewis to fill in for them. And I know a dozen or so fellows who really don't like Fort Lewis because they had come out of the Army, joined the National Guard, and they figured they'd go to dances once a month. They spent a year sitting out there.

Richard: Well, I never got to any of these places but there were engineer camps we heard about at Fort Belvoir. One of them was Fort Leonard Wood, out in Missouri, and the other one where people did basic training at and they really hated was Camp Clayburn, down in Louisiana. That was an engineer camp, and they thought that was really the lowest possible place you could get to.

John: I have known so many guys who were in the Army and I've never heard anything good about Fort Leonard Wood.

Richard: Oh, no. We go by there on our way back to California every year.

John: It's right near Rolla. Now this bandit I have been telling you about, this general, he and John Frémont, the explorer, started a railroad out of Rolla, going west, and they ended up selling stock in France. And they both got indicted for fraud *in absentia*. Neither one of them could go back. This fellow was quite a crook. Okay, what a remarkable, remarkable story.

Richard: In that connection, the book has been out about a year or so called *Measuring America*. Written by a man named Linklater. And it starts out quite interesting from a technical point of view, telling how we got all these dimensions. The rods and things like that, acres and things that came down from English history but what it really went into was the political things that took place in measuring and subdividing America, you know. The Louisiana Purchase and all the things like that. So you might want to pick it up. Andro Linklater, or something like that.

John: Okay. That is great. I read somewhere, years ago, that an acre was what man could plow and scythe in a day.

Richard: Possibly. I don't recall that.

John: This goes way back. I am going to shut this thing off.

Richard: Yea, go ahead.

[End of Interview.]