

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

ROBERT MCCOY

Ammunition Train, National Guard, World War I & Captain, National Guard, World War II

1979

OH
1515

**OH
1515**

McCoy, Robert., (b.1898). Oral History Interview, 1979.

Approximate length: 1 hour 30 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

Robert McCoy discusses his service with the 3rd Wisconsin Infantry, the 4th Wisconsin Infantry, his time in Europe with the 107th Ammunition Train during World War I, his work with the National Guard during the interwar period, his service in the Pacific during World War II, as well as his family's legacies. McCoy explains how he began with the 3rd Wisconsin Infantry, guarding bridges in River Falls but was then transferred to the 4th Wisconsin Infantry as a drill sergeant. He then outlines how the 127th and 128th infantries of the 32nd Division were created. McCoy describes the role of motorized ammunition Company C of the 107th Ammunition Train, which he led as First Sergeant during World War I. He discusses his time in the National Guard during the interwar period at Camp Douglas (Wisconsin) and Fort Benning (Georgia), and the climate leading up to World War II. He talks about his time in the Pacific during World War II, both in New Guinea and Australia. McCoy also gives several anecdotes about his father, Robert B. McCoy, and his grandfather, Bruce E. McCoy.

Biographical Sketch:

Robert McCoy served with the National Guard in the 3rd and 4th Wisconsin Infantries and was then drafted into the 32nd Division, serving with the 107th Ammunition Train during World War I. He then continued as a member of the National Guard following his return to the United States and was promoted to Captain. With the commencement of World War II, McCoy was again called to active duty and served with the 32nd Division in New Guinea and Australia.

Interviewed by Thomas Doherty, 1979

Transcribed by the Audio Transcription Center, 2015

Reviewed by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Abstract written by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Interview Transcript:

[Tape 1]

McCoy: Whenever you ask the question and I'll try and answer.

Doherty: Well, so, I want to go back and talk a little bit about the--well, first of all, about your experience in the First War. I saw the picture the other day. Were you with the 32nd in the First War?

McCoy: Yeah. Yeah.

Doherty: With the 128th?

McCoy: No. Shall I go back to the beginning?

Doherty: Fine. Yeah. I appreciate that.

McCoy: Well, we were called out March 26, 1916, I believe. Or was it '17? Maybe it was '17. And we were divided up--my--I belonged to the 3rd Wisconsin Infantry--Company L, Third Wisconsin Infantry. When we were divided--that was a German scare, then. And there were certain contingents sent around to guard the railroads, bridges, and tunnels throughout the state. I happened to be in the bunch that were sent to Black River Falls to guard two bridges over Levis Creek and Black River Falls. They're railroad bridges. We were there for about, I don't know, two, three months. Routine guard duty there. I don't know if we--whether we accomplished anything, but damn it, we were there. Then they started to organize more troops. And they were going to organize three more divisions. The fourth--or three more regiments: the Fourth, the Fifth, and the Sixth Wisconsin regiments. Well, they organized a company of infantry in Black River Falls. Well, I had been assigned up there--along with my cousin, who wants to--or has that picture, too--as drill sergeants for this new company. We were transferred to the Fourth Wisconsin Infantry from the Third Wisconsin Infantry. And we had that bunch of raw recruits in Black River Falls, big fellas. We used to laughingly say they were 18 inches between the eyes and 17 hacksaws [??] [inaudible]. Never seen the uniform, but they're big, husky fellas, willing to learn. And we drilled there, oh, for a month, and then we were congregated down at Camp Douglas, and the First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Regiments. My father was in command of the Fourth Wisconsin Infantry. He raised that almost single-handedly.

Well, we trained at Camp Douglas, went to Waco, Texas in that September, that Fall, I believe. No, my memory may not be exact on the dates, exactly, there, but that fall. Then they decided to form the Thirty-Second division, of which Wisconsin and Michigan were to be the components. Well, we had six regiments and they were going to reorganize it under the German plan of a square division.

And the companies were to be increased to 200 men. That meant--and then, Wisconsin was to furnish the 127th and 128th infantries, Michigan, the 125th and 126th. That was to be the 32nd Division. It was born there in Waco, Texas. Well, of course, they used the First, Second, and Third Regiments--to fill in and make the 127th and 128th. But they were below strength because they had increased it to 200 men. So they used the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth, split them all up, and filled up the two--other two regiments, and made some auxiliary troops. Well, my company, Company C, Black River Falls, was transferred to a motorized ammunition company of 107th ammunition train. Well, we trained then. Of course, we didn't have any vehicles or military infantry training.

We trained there at Waco, Texas until about February [inaudible]--about January, I guess. Then we had orders to move. Well, we packed up--this is just a little matter of interest --we packed up and loaded all our gear on the train and all we had left was our--what we carried on our backs. And we were in those pyramidal tents. And one of these damn northers struck. One thing, that's what we call a cold front up here. Well, we got about twelve inches of snow and cold in there. And it froze up the trains with our baggage on it down in Waco railroad yard. And as a result, we were two days late getting out of there. And we had to live in those tents with just our--we carried on our back. And it was cold. Oh, jeez, it was cold. Well, we finally got out of there. And we were six days and seven nights on a train, getting up to Camp Merritt, New Jersey. Well, waiting for transportation there, an epidemic of mumps and measles hit us. So it happened that my barracks--I happened to be one. I was a sergeant then. And we were quarantined, my particular barracks, lower floor. Well the two--the division left and we had to stay there for 30 days. Well, we ended up that and went over as a company of casuals. Casual means that you're just a number and nobody's friend. And we experienced that.

[laughs] Well, we got over to Germany--or over to France at--landed in Brest, I think it was. And we were [inaudible] barracks there for a couple of days. And then our platoon was ordered to Limans, which was a replacement center at that time--Limans, France. Well, we figured we were due for replacements in the infantry. Meanwhile, the division had gotten over there and General Pershing declared it a replacement division then. And he took all of the captains and men of the companies, fellow companies from the 128th infantry away from the division. And there we were, split up. So--but we were lined up there this particular morning. You go here, you go there. And lo and behold, our Lieutenant Nelson showed up from my company. He arrived there with orders to pick up that platoon and bring it back to his company, which was--we were then--oh, I've forgotten it, the name of the damn place it was--not far from Saint-Macaire. Well, we were happy. We got on the--on that narrow-gauge train and joined our company.

Doherty: This was Company C?

McCoy:

Company C, 107th Ammunition Train. Well, we trained there and trained, got trained, and General Haan, and fighting to get the division back on the combat basis. And finally, they did. They succeeded. And they filled it up with draftees. Well, then, they had to train for a while with--to get some semblance of military order. And we were then issued 26 of these Nash Quad four-wheel drive, steel-bodied trucks to haul ammunition. I don't know if you ever--they don't make them anymore. I don't know if you ever seen them. They're about four or five feet wide and twelve feet long with a steel body about four feet high. All steel, four-wheel drive, four-wheel steer--well, plus two motorcycles and a light truck, a repair truck. That was our stuff to work with. The division--I'm hurriedly going through with it now. We were ordered down to the Alsatian border for our first active duty, which we were told later was just a rest area for both the Germans and the French troops. And they had a sort of a reciprocal agreement: if you don't bomb Belfort, we won't bomb Bard--oh, I've forgotten the name of the town over in Germany, there. Well, they didn't do that and they agreed to it. But we--the troops were given training in sending out patrols at night, learning how to do it and so forth. And they--one of our patrols--not our company, but one of the infantry was fired on and killed a man from Sparta. Well, that brought them down to earth and they commenced to be a little more military. Then they would actually win something.

Well, we were there for--oh, there again, I don't know how long. Meanwhile, the flu epidemic hit us, a big flu epidemic. And we were down there at Belfort and, God, nobody seemed to know what it was, but everybody had a fever and, God, our hospitals there were full, so all our doctors could do was tell the men to stay in their bed--in their bunks. And that's what they did, and there was fully 80 percent with our troops in their--on their bunk. It didn't affect me. I didn't get it and I was only 18 years old then. I was immune to everything, I guess. And, [laughs] well, we got over that. Then the Germans were making their big push down through Paris and Chateau-Thierry. Maybe I don't pronounce that right. We called it Chateau-Thierry. And the division was ordered up there. Well, of course, our company, being motorized, traveled overland. And the infantry was hauled up in trucks. And we were hauled up to that area. And they went into combat there. The German--the Marines had their scrap at Belleau Wood there. And we followed right in there. And they--the troops were moving so fast ahead against the Germans that they--we had difficulty supplying them. God, they were moving--the Germans were retreating. But they had rear action posts going, too. At that time, my company was singled out to haul small arms ammunition instead of artillery, see. We were supposed to haul artillery ammunition. But we were placed under the direct command--Captain Crandall [sp?], the division munitions officer. It was an ideal assignment and we were relieved from my battalion, and we operated on the orders of Captain Crandall, whom we didn't see only once in a blue moon. And we took our orders by telephone or courier. And we hauled that small arm--pistol ammunition, caliber-30, pyrotechnics, small-caliber stuff--smoke bomb. And we went right up to the CPs with this stuff. I might add that, of our first set of trucks, we drove them ten thousand miles, eight thousand of which

was in absolute darkness. Everything was done at night. And then we followed through, clear up to the Vale River. And it was a--I don't know. You've got to hand it to those truck drivers in our company. By God, they had a feel it--they'd be driving along, inching along the way at night. And then one of them would stop and get out and walk ahead, and there would be a big shell hole in the road. What in hell told them? I don't know. But then they'd go around it. Well, we kept--I had a--by then, I was a first sergeant. My cousin, the first sergeant, had been sent away to officers training school, and I was made the first sergeant of the company then. And we divided the company up into sections of about five trucks, four trucks, to a section. So one section of caliber-30, one section of pyrotechnics, one section of machine guns, and so forth, always loaded, and always two days reserve rations on every truck--because if we sent a section out, due to the traffic jams and the road conditions, whether we were going three miles or ten miles, sometimes it took twenty-four to forty-eight hours, boy, to get back.

Doherty: You mentioned traveling at night. Were they totally blacked out, or were there some dim lights or something?

McCoy: Oh, no. [laughs] We were up in the front lines, right up to the CPs, you know.

Doherty: Okay.

McCoy: Yeah. No lights at all. And there were some close skirmish--or close accidents. Of course, our trucks--four-wheel drive--or four-wheel steer. It was new then and the rear steering arms were about half as big as your wrists and, god, they'd break. And you'd get up next to a building and the front ones would turn this way and the back would turn in, so you couldn't get away from the building if you-- [laughter] And so the boys were ingenious. They blocked off the rear wheels and they became a two-wheel steer then. And we couldn't get repairs, no repairs. So finally, it got to the point where we'd have to junk one to keep some of the rest going. And that's the way we operated, and went all through that campaign. Then we came back after that was over and through the rest area. Then we went on up to Montfaucon and they were starting the Meuse-Argonne scrap there. And I don't have my dates exact there. I can't remember [inaudible] forty years ago. And we were supplying the troops when that big push started. [laughs] We were there in Montfaucon, south side of the hill, and one afternoon, I was there with the--we were living in tents, little pup_tents, and I saw a man stumbling across the field toward us, swaying and stumbling. God, I swear he looks familiar to me. I went out to see what it was, and God, it was my father. He said, "Son, I've been called to division headquarters for disciplinary action. General Haan wants to see me. Probably, I'll be sent home." "What for?" I asked. I was just a Sergeant. I couldn't--"Well," he said, "there was an inspector came up there and was starting to go through my outfit which had just come back from the front, giving them hell because they wasn't shaved, and their clothes were torn, and their shoes weren't polished, and so forth. I told him to get the hell off the place or I'd kill him if he should come back." He reported that to Pershing. Pershing reported it to Haan.

Haan called Dad in. Dad went up there and what about all this? [??]. Dad told him and he said, "You can have any regiment in this division you want, anytime. Keep on doing what you're doing. And you know what I told that officer that threatened to--you threatened to kill? I told him, for god's sakes, don't go back to that outfit."

Doherty: What outfit was it that your dad had been leading at that time?

McCoy: Hundred and twenty-eighth Infantry.

Doherty: Hundred and twenty-eighth?

McCoy: He was then in command of the 128th Infantry. So that's what Haan and Pershing thought of Dad. All those goddamn inspectors in those years, fresh from the headquarters, sheets on their bed and a bath every day, come home and three meals and nobody shooting at them. Kind of arrogant fellas, but we had no time for them. And they didn't bother him. Then how can you expect troops coming out of the lines and in the lines for three weeks, in the mud, the dirt--you can't expect them to look ready to dress parade. Well, we--they took that and they broke that German line. Meanwhile, they had that fight at Gavini [sp??], where they--Dad went out three o'clock in the morning at the hillside. He had orders to take Gavini. And he looked it all over and he drew the plans for the fight on some toilet paper. And it was a very difficult maneuver because you had to go so far and then make a turn, which is damn hard to do in the night--in the daytime--how far is--where you're supposed to go and all of that. But his--the regiment executed it fine. It was a hell of a fight in Romaine from Gavini. They took it. And Dad was decorated by the two--the Belgian government and the French government and got the Distinguished Service Medal from America. Well, then we--that was getting toward the end, then toward the armistice. The armistice was signed, and we then thought, oh, hell, we're going back to a rest area. No, we didn't. But I did get a leave of absence. Leave--first I've had--and a couple other sergeants and I, we went down to Nice, France. And then we got ten days leave down there, plus time going and coming didn't count on your leave. You--it might take you a day, or two days, or three days to get there. We had ten days there, all expenses paid. Well, I went swimming in the Mediterranean Sea on Christmas and damn near froze to death, but just to say I did. [laughter] We got back up to where I left the d--my outfit and it was gone, already on the way up to Germany. Instead of hauling ammunition, we were now ordered to haul supplies, [inaudible] supplies. Our trucks were so badly shot and bruised up that we turned them in and they were--we were transported up by rail. And then, when we got up to Germany, we were given cargo trucks, these max trucks, not ammunition trucks. And then we were--my outfit was stationed at Heimbach, oh I don't know, maybe 10 miles from Koblenz [??]. And we spent the winter there in Koblenz hauling supplies to all--the division was in the Army, but our 32nd was in the Army of occupation. And that went on. And April twentieth, my outfit--well, we were being sent home then. April twenty-fourth, I think it was, we were loaded and started out via the 40

hommay literal cart [??]. And we went back to--we went to Limans, where we were all deloused again, and then over to Brest, France, where we were fed, and got in there at two o'clock in the morning. Our kitchens were going 24 hours a day, feeding troops, coming and going all the time. Big installation. And we were--after a couple days, put on board, and I was on--and my outfit went on an old battleship. I think it was the Battleship Louisiana. And we took a tub that was about 400 feet long and 100 feet wide and relegated to the junk heap years ago, but they were using it for transport. And, well, they packed us in like flies, but we didn't care. We were going home. And we were thirteen days, I guess, coming back. We landed again in Camp Merritt, went through the usual processing, put on board a train to--for Camp Grand, Illinois, and we arrived there, and I was separated from the service, May twenty-fourth, just exactly thirty days from the time I left Germany. Now that's pretty good for the Army.

Doherty: May 24, 1919, was that? Or --.

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: That's --

McCoy: Yeah. Yeah.

Doherty: As First Sergeant of that ammunition unit, what was your job? You weren't a driver except for--

McCoy: No. No. We had--it was a regular company. There was a--I think we had ninety-six men, a hundred men, something. We had to supply all of the components of the front lines of our division. And my job, of course--we would get orders in from Captain Crandall. So-and-so wants X number of this, X number of that. I think the dump is here. If it isn't, find it. [laughs] So they [inaudible]--

Doherty: So your job was to take it from there and make sure they handled it [inaudible]?

McCoy: Yeah, and to get it loaded and to get it up to them, and come back, and replace which we had unloaded, so we were always constantly ready for--and we were. And, of course, we had the administrative duties, trying to get supplies, trying to keep knowing where these dumps were and when they were moved forward so that we knew where the new locations were. And we were pretty successful. And damn it, we were.

Doherty: Yeah. Yeah. Sounds like it.

McCoy: We were successful and we were cited for it. You got to hand it to those drivers. They're the ones that earned it. They're the ones that did it. The rest of us, we're just telling them. But -- .

Doherty: But you had to find the way, essentially. It was your responsibility to find the ammunition and find the--where it was supposed to go and make sure the right stuff got to the right place. So -- .

McCoy: Yeah. As far as we could.

Doherty: And you were nineteen, twenty, eighteen, nineteen years old at that time?

McCoy: I was nineteen then.

Doherty: That's quite a responsibility.

McCoy: And no officers.

Doherty: I was going to ask you if you had a company commander. Apparently not.

McCoy: Oh, he was in the hospital. He had a collision with a Frenchman, driving a truck, and they hit head on, and the shield--his windshield come hit him in his mouth.

Doherty: Ah.

McCoy: And he had to have all new teeth put in. So there was a few months in there that I was the only--we had no lieutenants. They were gone somewhere else. And I was in command of the company.

Doherty: Nineteen years old, your own company?

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: Were most of the men from --.

McCoy: Black River Falls.

Doherty: Black River Falls?

McCoy: But we--.

Doherty: Were there any draftees in that company?

McCoy: But we had a lot of draftees. They--we--they increased the size. The River Falls Company--I've got some pictures of them. We had got down to where we had only 40 or 50 of them, but when we had almost that many draftees. We got a whole bunch of them from New York and New Jersey. They worked in the *shoit* [shirt said in accent] factory down on *Twenty-toid Street* [23rd street said in accent].

Doherty: [laughs]

McCoy: That's the way they talked.

Doherty: The shirt factory.

McCoy: Yeah. The little Jews and kikes-- those little fellas. And --.

Doherty: You mentioned pyrotechnics. What is that? Flares and --.

McCoy: Flares. Yeah. And pistols. They carried pistols, those sort of things.

Doherty: What were they used for?

McCoy: To--if they thought there was a--to light up the area for the troops. If they were-- thought they were--saw somebody, they'd fire one of these and, hell, it would light the whole goddamned area. And we were taught if the Germans put up one of those, wherever you were, standing, or on your belly, or anywhere, freeze. Don't move. They won't--if there was suddenly a bright light, and they see these things, if you see them moving, they could see that. If you don't move, they probably aren't going to see you.

Doherty: You mentioned also that you had a brother in the [inaudible].

McCoy: Now my brother was with the military police, older brother, Bruce, with the 32nd Division. Well, it was the military--the 107th Ammunitions and--107th Trains_and Military police. That's the name of the outfit. He was with the military police and I was with the ammunition train. My cousin, who lived with us, but went to school, graduated from OCS school down there in [inaudible], in France, and was assigned to the Thirty-sixth Division. I think that was an Iowa division or something. Didn't see him again until after the war. So we got back home May twenty-fourth, I believe it was. It was 1919, probably was 1919.

Doherty: Also, you had a granddad in the Civil War, was that?

McCoy: Yeah. My granddad was a captain in the Civil War.

Doherty: Was that a militia unit, Wisconsin militia?

McCoy: Yeah. He was in the 44th Wisconsin and was in two or three maneuvers in the Battle of Lookout Mountain and down there in the wilderness campaign.

Doherty: He was?

McCoy: Yeah. And he was wounded. And then, when he got over that, he was made the-- he was an intelligent, self-educated man, but he was made a judge advocate for

the Army down there. And he served out the rest of the war. Well, my father went to the Spanish-American War. He had a brother, my uncle Clark, who was in the same thing. I was born when Dad was away in Puerto Rico, '98.

Doherty: Now, I just met a man up at King a couple weeks ago, named Harry Ripson, who was in Puerto Rico back then, part--the Third Regiment?

McCoy: Third Regiment. Yeah. Yeah.

Doherty: Diamas [??]? Was that the place? Something like that.

McCoy: Well --

Doherty: That's one of the places [overlapping dialogue; inaudible].

McCoy: Did he mention Aibonito Pass?

Doherty: Well, he mentioned going down river on a raft and coming up against the Spanish at some bridge. And that was the --.

McCoy: Well, that was the--that was a different outfit than L Company that my father was with. My father was in on the fight of Aibonito Pass.

Doherty: *Eboniza*?

McCoy: Aibonito.

Doherty: Aibonito. How did you get your commission fairly quick?

McCoy: Well, after the war, everything was integrated, I mean, as far as the Army and National Guard was concerned. But they--in 1920, I guess they started to reorganize. And in--they organized a company in Sparta, an infantry company again, and, well, I guess it was probably a year later. Then they had the--in 1921, they couldn't--the--they--we were about two-thirds full and they didn't have a full complement of officers yet. And Captain Holden, who would later--manned 128th in later years, was the company commander. He'd been--he was one of the captains of the old 128th that was taken away by the First Division in '59. And he was given command of the company. He came to me one day, and he says, "Would you like to be a Lieutenant in this company?" And I says, "Hell, maybe." That was something way beyond me. What the hell do I know about being a lieutenant? Well, yes. Well, He says, "You come up and enlist and we'll make you an officer." Well, that's what I did. I enlisted, and two days later, I was given a first lieutenant's commission. Not a second, a first.

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: First lieutenant.

Doherty: Well, did you have a term of enlistment back then, or was it open-ended?

McCoy: Well, it was for three years.

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: But you--they--that was a policy. You had to enlist before you could be an officer. You had to enlist and then you were--whatever you call it--discharged, to receive a commission.

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: So then I became a first lieutenant there. Well, we soon had the thing filled up, and we went to camp, and we trained, and we followed orders. I was an ambitious--a stickler for orders. If an order came down, by God, that was for us to obey and that went through the whole company.

Doherty: Camp McCoy, was this?

McCoy: No, Camp Williams.

Doherty: Camp Williams.

McCoy: Down at Camp Douglas. And we would--well, I don't know. That went on, I guess, and I was commissioned October fourth or second, something, 1921.

Doherty: Who were the men who went into the guard at that time? Were many of them veterans of the First War, or were they--.

McCoy: Oh, yes. Yes, some. Some. Not too many. It was mostly all new fellas.

Doherty: Who were the new guys? Were they--what was the attraction of the Guard for them back then? Was it the money?

McCoy: Well, I don't know. I suppose then the Guard was thought of more kindly than it is today. The 32nd had made a very enviable record in Germany and they paraded the boys when they came back and they made us out to be quite heroes. Of course that puffed us up. [laughs]

Doherty: Sure, sure. Well, it was true, too, wasn't it?

McCoy: Well--.

Doherty: There's something to that.

McCoy: They did. Some of those boys were--they really went to town, most of them. They were a very ingenious bunch of kids. You can't tell me that the American soldier is just a dumb--at that time--just a dumb cluck. He was a common American boy, full of hell and high water, and ambitious, but patriotic. That's something they don't know anything about today, patriotism. Oh, they were--we had a good outfit, built up an excellent esprit de corps. We were then--we had been the old square division type. Now we were going to be the triangular division, three regiments, and so forth. Well, I was made the captain, 1930 or '31--'31, I guess.

Doherty: Did you get any formal training along the way at, oh, any Army schools or anything?

McCoy: No, no, no. But I'd had a lot of that at home, with my father being an officer.
[laughs]

Doherty: I suppose so. Yeah.

McCoy: Oh, yeah. I knew what orders were, and when he whistled, we all dropped everything and came running. I had an idea what it was. And then I was made a regimental assistant, S3, plus the regimental gas officer. Well, among other things, I was sent out to the Edgewood Arsenal Gas School in Maryland for a six-weeks course in chemicals, and gas, and so forth. Then time went on. We got--then I was made a regimental supply officer. Then they--got along 1939 and there's talk of war again. And we had maneuvers in the fall of '39 out here and we had a big maneuver in--I don't know. Was it '39 or '38? The Fifth Army moved in here. We had a hell of a big six-weeks maneuver between the Army and the--the reds and the blues, and they operated all over through this area of Black River Falls and down West Salem and all over in through here.

Doherty: Well, there was the Second Army maneuvers in 1940, and then, they had the Battle of Wisconsin and--was that--.

McCoy: Well, that--in 1940?

Doherty: It was a couple of months before activation.

McCoy: Well, that could've been it, maybe.

Doherty: Okay.

McCoy: That could've been it.

Doherty: I was going to ask you about that later on, too, what you--

McCoy: Yep.

Doherty: Okay. I'm sorry. I interrupted. You were talking about the late '30s, when things were starting to heat up over in [inaudible].

McCoy: Well, hardly. That's what happened and were--had this maneuver. Now maybe you're right on that. Maybe I haven't gotten my dates, but 1940, I was called out to go to Fort Benning, October 4, 1940.

Doherty: October fourth.

McCoy: So if they held that maneuver, it must've been--.

Doherty: It's August.

McCoy: August, huh?

Doherty: August. Yeah.

McCoy: Well, maybe that was it, then, because I was in that big maneuver to-- I was with the 128th Infantry. Well, we were called down to Louisiana, but--that's October first. I was sent to--there were four of us from Wisconsin sent to a command and staff school at Fort Benning, Georgia, and we were ordered down there October first, and that was for three months. So I was one of the four that was ordered down there. And the meanwhile, the division--I think it was October 15th--and trained for Louisiana. And they were building up a camp for them to make--

Doherty: I want to talk about Louisiana, but before we do, I want to talk about the late thirties some more. Were people aware--people in the 128th in the--especially the enlisted men--aware of what was going on in Europe, paying much attention at that time?

McCoy: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. In their back--in their minds, that was in the background. They--we knew something about it. And that may have been one of the reasons why we could keep our ranks full, the interest, so on and so forth.

Doherty: Yeah. What about the--in the late thirties--I know that whenever they raised the strength level, they had volunteers right away, people join up all--.

McCoy: Of course, they had the draft going then, too, you know.

Doherty: Okay. So people had a choice between the Guard and the draft and the Air Corps, if they could get in, or--.

McCoy: Yeah. Mm-hm.

Doherty: Maybe the Marine. What was the standing in the community? How did the community look at the guardsmen, say, '38, '39? Was there a different image then than there is now?

McCoy: Yeah. Oh, yes. Far different than it is now. But the image of the Guard, its whole history, it wasn't as good as it should've been because the--sometimes you're for the summer in campus and boys down there for two weeks, they have it out on their own. They'd get drunk at night, and so forth. Well, those stories got back home. And as a result, they weren't looked upon as the nicest place to be in, but that always reminded me of that poem by Kipling--not Kip--Kipling. "I went into a public-house to get a pint o' beer, The publican he ups and sez, 'We serve no redcoats here.' I outs into the street again an' to myself sez I: 'O it's Tommy this, and Tommy that, and Tommy, go away'; But it's 'Thank you, Mr. Atkins', when the band begins to play. I went into a theatre, sober as could be, They gave a drunk civilian room, but 'adn't none for me; They sent me to the gallery, and around the music-halls, But when it comes to fightin', Lord! They'd shove me in the stalls! For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, and 'Tommy, 'ow's yer soul?' But it's a 'Thin red line of 'eroes' when the drums begin to roll."

Doherty: [laughter] Yeah. But what was the attraction for you between wars? Why did you stick with it all that time?

McCoy: Well, I had been through it, through World War I, and--but by that time, they had--before then, there was no compensation. Only when you were on active duty--there was no drill pay or anything like that. It was all volunteer. But after that, they established a pay scale that--oh, it wasn't much, but then, some money was a lot of money considered today. And my pay scale, I used to get sixty-six dollars and sixty-seven cents every three months, as a first lieutenant, for going to drill once a week. Of course, then, when we went to camp in the summertime, I got, I don't know, ninety-two, ninety-three dollars. Quite a difference from today. But --.

[break in recording]

McCoy: Soldier-minded. Oh, we just stayed--I don't know--enjoyed the--enjoyed it.

Doherty: Were you farming during that time?

McCoy: Yeah. Yeah. Living right here.

Doherty: Right here?

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: We came up here in 1931. Yep. It was a social world, too, down there during the camp in the summertime. Officers' wives came down. They'd set up a--they set up what they called a squaw camp for officers' wives and they were living in tents there. And General always had his mountain parties. Somehow, rather, he was able to accumulate this--at that time, it was prohibition, but he could get--captured alcohol. [laughter]

Doherty: Which general was that?

McCoy: General Clement

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: But they all had it. The adjutant general in his office. Oh, Christ. They confiscated all that stuff, you know. Roach was a prohibition officer for the state.

Doherty: He was?

McCoy: Yeah. He--there was always plenty. [laughter]

Doherty: When did General Lobel [sp??] come in? Did you know him at all?

McCoy: Oh, I knew him. Yeah. He was appointed Adjutant General, I think, about 1922, something like that. He was only twenty-nine years old. He was a secretary to Governor Blaine--Blaine's office. Now that was a political appointment for--. But it turned out Emerald [sp??] was successful. He--you got to thank Emerald [sp??] for the organization of the Forestry Protection Services the state now enjoys. He organized that all the way through the forest-fighting equipment. And he was Adjutant General a long, long time, up until World War II. Then he resigned and he went over to Europe as a colonel, the General Eisenhower's headquarters, I believe. And General made him a brigadier general while he was over there again. Oh, I knew Emerald. Oh, yes. Of course.

Doherty: What were his personal qualities? What did you like about Emerald?

McCoy: Well, as a personal friend, I wouldn't particularly associate too much. As an officer, he treated me fairly. In fact, sometimes, I think he went over backwards, if something I wanted [inaudible]. But he was a different type of man than I enjoyed. He was all right.

Doherty: Okay.

McCoy: I could say some other things, but I won't.

Doherty: Okay. So let me turn this off here.

[break in recording]

Doherty: Well, all officers--.

McCoy: Oh, yeah. Officers were mounted. I had a mount.

Mrs. McCoy: Would you like some coffee?

McCoy: Yeah.

Mrs. McCoy: Are you comfortable out here?

Doherty: Well, I'm fine.

McCoy: I am.

Mrs. McCoy: How about the sun? Doesn't it bother you?

Doherty: It's warm but it feels good.

Mrs. McCoy: It doesn't bother your eyes?

Doherty: No, no. No, no. That's--I'll put my hat on if it [inaudible].

Mrs. McCoy: All right. How about a little coffee?

Doherty: I'd love some coffee. Thank you.

Mrs. McCoy: And there's some cookies.

Doherty: Oh, boy. That looks good.

Mrs. McCoy: I've set up--the table was all set up for you in--.

McCoy: [inaudible]

Mrs. McCoy: In the living room, if you want to go in there.

McCoy: Yeah?

Mrs. McCoy: You have your coffee and--.

Doherty: Should we do that? Okay.

[break in recording]

Mrs. McCoy: The other one's [inaudible].

Doherty: Oh, this is fine. This is fine.

Mrs. McCoy: Mm-hm. Is that all right?

Doherty: Sure. You bet. This is fine with me.

Mrs. McCoy: Okay.

Doherty: Would you care to join us, Mrs. McCoy, and talk about this?

Mrs. McCoy: I don't think you care about my--.

McCoy: Well, maybe you can--.

Mrs. McCoy: Comments. Oh, I can't remember too much about your first--

McCoy: [inaudible].

Mrs. McCoy: I will have a cup of coffee with you.

Doherty: Huh.

McCoy: Yeah. Okay.

Mrs. McCoy: I got a couple of books out for him to read last night, but--.

McCoy: They were over there.

Doherty: Okay. I've got a copy of this from the library, the last copy of the National Guard from 1939 they had at the Historical Society Library.

Mrs. McCoy: Yes.

Doherty: I've got that at home.

Mrs. McCoy: This one? And--.

Doherty: Yeah.

Mrs. McCoy: But the other one is--.

Doherty: This one, I haven't seen.

Mrs. McCoy: That's for World War I, isn't it?

Doherty: Yes, it is. World War I.

Mrs. McCoy: Mm-hm.

Doherty: That was your dad here, RB McCoy? All the officers were mounted? Was social life during the year a factor, too? Christmas parties and that sort of thing--was that a factor?

McCoy: Individual companies, yes. In Sparta here, we used to have a--what they call the military ball every New Year. And my god, it was the so-called four hundred and elite turned out in their long dresses, and so forth. It was a thing of the year, military ball. You remember that [inaudible].

Mrs. McCoy: How well I remember.

McCoy: In fact, we used to have to lead the grand march. [laughter]

Doherty: Oh, yeah?

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: The grand march? Was that kind of a promenade?

Mrs. McCoy: Oh, yes.

McCoy: Yeah.

Mrs. McCoy: Just like a junior prom, you know. Everything was--.

Doherty: Was this event looked forward to by the officers' wives and young officers?

Mrs. McCoy: Oh, yes.

McCoy: Yeah.

Mrs. McCoy: It was the event of the year, at that particular time, for the whole community.

Doherty: Oh.

Mrs. McCoy: But--

McCoy: The armory was just packed-- full of 'em.

Mrs. McCoy: That went on for several years.

Doherty: Did other companies--Platteville, Marshfield, and so on--have events like that, or was it--

Mrs. McCoy: Oh, yeah.

Doherty: Kind of use--they did?

McCoy: I suppose they did.

Mrs. McCoy: Mm-hm. They all did. It wasn't too long ago, we were in--it wasn't this last year, but I guess the year before, a couple years ago, invited us down for their big military ball. So they evidently-- it might've been a special occasion that they were having a special celebration or something. But they were having a big military ball and that they've invited a lot of other people.

McCoy: And that was connected with the University ROTC.

Mrs. McCoy: Of Platteville.

McCoy: Of Platteville.

Doherty: Oh.

Mrs. McCoy: Mm-hm.

Doherty: What time of year in Sparta was that grand--the big dance held?

Mrs. McCoy: Oh, usually in the--early in the spring.

Doherty: Spring, okay.

McCoy: I thought it was around New Years, wasn't it?

Mrs. McCoy: Oh, no.

McCoy: Really?

Mrs. McCoy: You're thinking of the Hotel Seventy [??].

McCoy: Oh.

Mrs. McCoy: It figures. [laughs] New Years Eve. No. That isn't it. Let me think.

Doherty: Did the Sparta group have a Christmas, New Years, kind of get-together?

Mrs. McCoy: Well, they might've had a few parties, small parties, but the--.

McCoy: No traditional--.

Mrs. McCoy: The annual military ball was the big event for the Sparta Company.

Doherty: In terms of training and that sort of thing, do you think the Guard was keeping up to date with what was going on elsewhere in the world? In Wisconsin, for instance, was the training kept current with technological improvements, and so on, in equipment?

McCoy: Well, as far as I know, I would say yes, as far as it was possible for them to know it. But sometimes I think we were figuring to fight the next war the way we fought the last war. That was the impression I got down at Fort Benning. They were teaching us things that happened in World War I and not too much emphasis on what might happen in World War II or World War III. You might say we were two or three jumps behind. Now that was just my own impression and I could be wrong. I don't know for sure about that. But we--I remember we were having a maneuver and--see, I guess it was Australia. And they had figured out--the division had figured out time schedules, just like they used to at Fort Benning. At 3:01, the head of the battalion will be at this road junction. They will cross that road and it'll take them eight minutes to cross that. Then, another group will be there, and so forth, almost by the second. We arrived there at that road junction, my battalion. [laughs] But the road was blocked with everything. I couldn't move. God, it was--everything was blocked. And Slaton Bradley came up. I knew him. He was a nephew of Colonel--or General Bradley. He was a--Slaton was general--was an instructor at Fort Benning. So I--and he came over to Australia, and he came up, and he says, "My god." I says, "Yes. There's Fort Benning for you." [inaudible] amazing. He says, "If I live long enough, Bob, come out of this, I'm going down to Fort Benning and tell them to forget all this by-the-minute stuff, and before any of them writes their manuals, to have them come out and watch a maneuver." What eventually turned up, there was a two-wheel milk cart in the middle of the intersection there, which was holding up the whole damn bay. Poor fella didn't know where it go. Troops all around him, and there he was. [laughs] Something that the powers that be, when they wrote the problem, didn't anticipate. They don't anticipate human nature, accident, weather, breakdowns, runaways. They don't anticipate that.

Mrs. McCoy: Well, Bob, what was your training when you went to Camp Douglas? It was marksmanship. You had good rifle teams, and so on, and so forth. But there was not a lot of technical training for anything.

McCoy: No. We were taught to--the manual and the rifle, and marksmanship, and parading, and squad D's and oh, yes, and so forth. And we did have a few problems once in a while, but it only involved the higher officers as they were moving their troops around here and there. And we, of the underdogs, were

moved here and moved there. Why? We didn't know, you know. They don't get that information. And so as far as that was--for the younger ones, [laughs] that was just another chore.

Mrs. McCoy: But there was a great deal of patriotism. My country, right or wrong, you know. Once he got in the Guard, they were their protectors. But I--you don't have that feeling today. There isn't that pride.

Doherty: Well, you know, one of the things I wanted to ask is one of the--it seems that a driving obsession of almost every activity of the guards nowadays is--has to do with recruitment and retention, getting people in and holding onto them. Was that as much of a concern back then as it is now?

McCoy: No. No. I don't think it's as bad as it is now.

Mrs. McCoy: You were nearly always at full strength.

McCoy: Yeah. It--as I said, they'd had a pay scale, and they--that helped a lot to attract enlistments. And--

Doherty: And there were some unpaid drills back then, too.

McCoy: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Doherty: It's unthinkable.

McCoy: Yeah. If you didn't attend, you didn't get paid. And if you missed too many, then they were t--they were trying to establish a disciplinary code so that you could do something about it. But that didn't work out too much. And if there was somebody who habitually missed everything, they discharged him, rather than go through the rigmarole of trial or anything like that.

Mrs. McCoy: But you didn't have the trouble with discipline at that time, for having [overlapping dialogue; inaudible].

McCoy: No. Not--

Mrs. McCoy: Or that they complain about. But I guess that's true in business and everywhere.

Doherty: Yeah.

Mrs. McCoy: Same sort of [inaudible], or what's going to happen to him?

McCoy: Attitudes have changed.

Mrs. McCoy: They certainly have.

McCoy: [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]. Yeah. Yeah.

Doherty: In 1940--we were talking a while ago about the maneuvers in 1940, the--out here at Camp McCoy and all over these counties, I guess.

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: That was an opportunity for the division to put the battalions to the test in some fairly complicated maneuvers. Do you recall--did the battalion, the companies and so on, live up to your expectations? Did you discover any deficiencies or anything you weren't expecting?

McCoy: Oh, yes. Yes. One of the biggest things that was at fault, communications. They were just starting to come in with these walkie-talkies and they didn't work too good. And we were learning that--don't ever send a message verbally because it can end up entirely different from when it was given. Write it and send three or four different carriers different directions with the same message, hoping that one can get through to them. [laughs] Well, I tell you, you're asking some questions that we of the lower echelons don't know anything about. We were just the toys in the game. Where we were moved and why, I never did see any of the general orders, what our mission was, or anything of the kind. It just so happened that my regiment was on reserve at that particular time. So we didn't get into any action except to move around.

Doherty: Oh. And the final showdown, the reds and blues?

McCoy: Yeah. We were reserves.

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: Reserve Regiment.

Doherty: What about down in Louisiana? They--a year and a half down there, or so--were you satisfied with the training that you and your battalion got in the--when you finally started for overseas, did you feel ready to--

McCoy: Well--

Doherty: To take them off?

McCoy: Well, we would have been, yes. We would have been, had we been going somewhere else but in the jungle. We didn't know anything about jungle. We'd read some--see pictures and read stories and pass it over, but that's just somewhere else. But that jungle, that's something else. And the heat and the warm water that they had to drink, at least it was wet. We were trained--a lot of it,

motorized, down in Louisiana. And everything--wherever we went, we were moved by motors. And over there, you were--walked or got a ride on a outrigger raft that those Navies had over there.

Mrs. McCoy: You had to go right back to basics.

Doherty: Yeah.

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: Yeah.

McCoy: It was entirely different. And the terrain--my God, the--going through the washout in the canyons, and up the mountains, where along with them, they called them trails that the--you'd have to get ahold of a bush to hold yourself up while you were crawling up the mountain, up the side. And then, that kunai grass, as tall as this room--and then you'd go down into a run or a water run. There's a small creek that would run into the ocean. And when the tide was out, it would be dry, and when the tide come in, there'd be water coming in, and you'd have to wade across it, and so forth. That was the jungle. That's putting it very easy. You still have to eat. And if you can find that which is dropped from an airplane, you'll have something to eat, providing you like corn willie.

Doherty: Yeah. [laughs]

Mrs. McCoy: Well, how soon did the Jeeps and equipment get up into the jungle, where you were able to use them?

McCoy: Not till MacArthur got up there.

Mrs. McCoy: Well, when MacNider was--was MacArthur already there when MacNider came?

McCoy: Oh, hell no. MacNider was up there.

Mrs. McCoy: Yeah. That's what I thought. Well, they didn't use the same--

McCoy: MacArthur didn't get up there--MacArthur didn't get up there until, oh, after Christmas. Then he didn't get very--he only went as far as you could go by Jeep. He didn't get up near the lines.

Doherty: I was talking with a couple guys from Company C, the old Marshfield Company C the other day. And all three of them were evacuated within three days of the attacks on Cape Edenderry. Two of them were hurt by fire from our side and one of them was hit by a sniper or something.

McCoy: Yeah. Well--.

Doherty: They were talking about the difficulty in moving, and that there'd be a--I guess there were two tracks and you had to go up those tracks or there was no other way to get up there. And while they were talking about it, I was trying to imagine where you would be in this scene. They were moving on some bunkers. You'd have to be back a ways. And hire headquarters was way the other side of the mountains. How did you communicate with the company commanders and the guys up there to pass along instructions, and so on?

McCoy: Well, we had telephones--connections. And as long as they--.

Doherty: Were they wire? Wire tel--.

McCoy: Yeah. We carried field telephones. And we had them--I had them from our CP out to the east battalion. And then there was one back to regiment. But they'd call me and--the regiment would call me, and I'd go back there, and they'd tell me what they wanted done. And I'd ask them a lot of questions, and they'd say, "I don't know. That's up to you." "Who's going to feed me?" "I don't know. They're going to drop--the planes will drop it to you." "Where?" "Oh, somewhere out there." That's the information that I would get.

Doherty: Did you have to have panels out or anything for the planes, if you were to mark your positions for them, or --?

McCoy: Wouldn't have done any good. They couldn't see down through the umbrella.

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: You couldn't see. The only thing we could do--when we did operate with the planes, when they came over and bombed us, we had a plan--I had this plan in mind. We had a man right close to the beach, but not on the beach, but close in the brush, with a long pole that he could stick out. And on that, we had a white rag. And that was out there. And then, he was to--when he saw the planes coming, he was to pull a string, and that rag would drop. That meant that they were just about on the target, where to drop their bombs. But I couldn't put out any panels. They were sweeping the--they had their machine guns that would sweep the beach.

Doherty: At the coast, or the beach. Yeah.

McCoy: Yeah. Then they-- [laughs]

Mrs. McCoy: Would you like some more coffee?

Doherty: Half a cup, please. Thank you.

McCoy: They did bury C Company, once, you know, where they dropped the bombs on them.

Doherty: One of the guys was hurt by--.

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: One of those bombs. Yeah.

Mrs. McCoy: You want a little more?

McCoy: Please. Yeah.

Doherty: Well, was there a first sergeant or someone else, the company commander, on the phone to you while the troops were moving forward?

McCoy: Oh.

Doherty: So that you'd get a situation report, and so on, from time to time?

McCoy: No. We wouldn't get that on--when--if there was a--if we were making an advance, the phone service was out. They carried along, but the--hell, that was always the last thing, when the wire strung out, you know.

Doherty: Okay.

McCoy: They had to do it by runner. They'd come back, or this and that, and say, we're held up at this point, or we need this or that, or what will we do now? And that had to be done by runner. When we got more or less stabilized and the wire people could run their wires up, then we'd have telephones up there. But we didn't have any established front lines like they had in the war.

Doherty: Yeah. Yeah.

McCoy: It was all--the jungle is all different than what we were--what we had in Europe.

Doherty: How would you get your first indication as to how things were going up there? Would it be through the runner or would it be through casualties coming back, or--

McCoy: Yeah. Through the runner.

Doherty: Okay.

McCoy: And--

Doherty: Seem to me there'd be a real limit as to what you could say at that time. You could do such--.

McCoy: There was. We--.

Doherty: Stop or keep going, but that was--.

McCoy: You couldn't see twenty feet in front of you. And all you had was somebody's word of mouth, and you--sometimes that isn't exactly dependable.

Doherty: Yeah. Yeah.

McCoy: And so you just had to hope for the best and then, if they had been going along and reached where they were supposed to go, then we would dig in and I'd verify it. And when I was sure of it, then I would send a runner back or a message back and tell regiment where I was and what had been accomplished and what next, you know. And if there was something I wanted--but there wasn't any use asking for anything. You didn't get it. Oh, things are--in the fog of war, things don't work out always the way they do in the manuals.

Doherty: It occurred to me that you and the other battalion commanders would be in the most intolerable position out there, in that the regiment and the division had high expectations and no real understanding. And meanwhile, from the other end, you were getting the word from the companies and the guys coming back as to what it was really like out there. And--.

McCoy: Yeah. We--and they didn't believe us.

Doherty: Yep.

McCoy: You can go ahead and take that. And then after they were utterly exhausted, then they order another advance the next morning.

Doherty: Well, you said yourself, that you learned from your dad when--an order is an order and you move when you're told to move. What--psychologically or emotionally, what was it like for you to be caught in that situation, when you knew the higher headquarters didn't understand the--how impossible their orders were. Were you able to--.

McCoy: Well--.

Doherty: --say, "Look, we can't do it, we're not going to try?" Or were you--.

McCoy: Oh, no. No. We had to do it. That is one of the damnable things of a man that's got to give the command that somebody's going to die. And lots of times, I think of those kids we left buried in the sand in New Guinea, due to an order I issued,

and so forth. They did it. And here, I'm home, and they're dead. Ah, well, that's the Army for you.

Doherty: Yeah.

McCoy: I lost some kids up there, some nice kids. God. And they did what--they had faith in doing what I asked them to do. But the powers that be, said we weren't doing enough.

Doherty: Yeah.

McCoy: That we were cowards, that we wouldn't fight. And they wanted the Australians to come in there. And then they finally got some Aussies in. We were glad they did come up. They didn't do any better. [laughs]

Doherty: Yeah. They got creamed in those Bren Gun carriers.

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: [inaudible].

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: We talked about a couple of generals the other day. One of them we didn't talk about was Sutherland, and he was one of the powers that be, wasn't he? Did you have any--.

McCoy: No. He was the right-hand man of MacArthur. No, I never met him, never saw him.

Doherty: Oh, okay.

McCoy: I don't think he ever got up there in the front. I don't know. I never saw him.

Doherty: Did you ever see and meet MacArthur? Did you ever have any-- .

McCoy: No. I've--personally, I've never met him. I knew who he was and I've seen him, but no, I never met him.

Doherty: What was your role after you got out of New Guinea? What job were you doing?

McCoy: Well, then I went into the hospital. I had malaria and dengue fever. And I was assigned to the first camp headquarters and company at--down--outside at a racetrack outside of Sydney, Australia, which was the incoming center for troops arriving to be outfitted, oriented, and distributed, more or less. When they'd come in there, it was our job to fit them if they needed something. And it was also my

job--I also--every new outfit that I had to give the orientation lecture of what to expect and what not to do, and so forth.

Doherty: Are these individual replacements coming into--.

McCoy: No. They'd come as units.

Doherty: Come in. Okay.

McCoy: Yeah. One unit came in there, a field hospital, commanded by a lieutenant colonel, doctor, who was--he and I went to the university together around 1920 and '21.

Doherty: Madison, University?

McCoy: Yeah. Let's see. He was a great football player, too. He was the head of this field hospital unit. And we just had a few minutes' talk and we sent them on up. And that was our job there. Then they were--I had another job. It seems with all these ships that we were sending up with supplies, up to New Guinea, Port Moresby, some of them were, more or less, being hijacked, and go into Australian ports, and the Australians would unload the ships and take their own stuff, take the stuff all for themselves. [laughs] And so they put an American officer on board every one of these ships. I don't know what in the hell that one officer could do to stop them if they--but apparently, that's what did. And I was put on board there to make a trip up to New Guinea to see that the ship got there and find my own way back. Well, I'd had to do that twice.

Doherty: How long of trip would that be?

McCoy: Well, the last time it was six weeks. The trouble was, we couldn't get unloaded. There were so many troops coming in through many ships. And we had what you call secondary stuff, probably, oh, clothing and supplies, not food and that stuff. So we weren't given priority, one thing. Well, I finally got sick of that, just sitting around that boat and moving from one harbor to the next around in there. And I came back by plane. I called the Air Force over there and told them I wanted to go back to my base. So I--the next morning, four o'clock, I was on board the boat--the ship--the plane and went back to Australia. And then I was in--this is getting along toward the end of the war, then. And I was assigned to the inspector general's division. They were trying to make a--[laughs] an audit of equipment, and where it was, and how much was expendable, and--oh, God, what a mess. And I think it was--actually, I think I was assigned there because they didn't know what the hell else to do with me and they knew that we couldn't do anything. [laughs] Pretty soon we got the auditors to come home.

Doherty: What was your major command after the 32nd? Was there a theater command that you came into then?

McCoy: I was an executive officer of the first camp headquarters company and assistant inspector general.

Doherty: Oh. Come home by ship again or did you fly home?

McCoy: Oh, no. I shipped.

Doherty: Shipped.

McCoy: Yep. Came home in the Lauraleen [??].

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: And went over on--oh, another one of those Grace Lines. There are three of them. Went over on one, came back on another.

Doherty: What about homecoming for the 32nd? Were there enough of the original troops to come back in the body and parade down main street, that kind of thing, in any of the units? Or was it pretty much piece meal after the New Guinea?

McCoy: Well, actually, of the boys that left, due to the attrition and transfer, and so forth, probably, there was less than twenty-five percent that would come back of the original in one bunch.

Doherty: Yeah.

McCoy: The rest would be either already back, or in hospitals, or transferred to some other unit, or they went--they didn't come back. In fact, Dad was the only Wisconsin officer left in the Thirty-Second Division, almost before the end of the war. You see, there've been a lot of them killed and a lot of them transferred and sick. Yep. When we--in Black River, when we came home, there was--God, I don't think more than thirty, twenty-five or thirty of the original boys in one bunch.

Doherty: Could you tell me a little bit about how Camp--well, Camp Robinson, was it, became Camp McCoy?

McCoy: Well, when they--father [inaudible], father and my grandfather. And that range out there--we called it the ranch, about three thousand acres of pasture land. They used to take in cattle. But it was in the hills there and father saw that it would be a good artillery range. And he interested-- the Army invited him to send artillery battery in to try it. Well, I think it was 1907 or eight. Maybe it was six. There was a battery of artillery, came from, I think, Snelling, Sheridan, and Leavenworth. Three of them. And they were very much impressed with it, and they got Dad to get more land for them. They had to work through the War Department, of course. And so they finally accumulated more land so that they had about 14,106 acres.

And they called it Camp Robinson. That was the lower camp, the family camp there now. And then they named it later. They had what they call the North Camp. That's where you are now. That was just a series of screened in kitchens, and so forth, for that maneuver we had in 1912. That was called Camp Bruce E. McCoy, my grandfather. And then the war came along and it was--that was 1922 and twenty--yeah. 1926, they changed the name, by presidential order, to Camp Robert B. McCoy. Their presidential order is hanging up in their headquarters.

Doherty: At headquarters?

McCoy: Yeah. It's framed in there. I think it's 1926, signed by that president from Massachusetts that--that one-- that--"I do not choose to run." What was his name? Wife's name was Grace.

Doherty: McKinley?

McCoy: No. No. He was--he came to fame during the Boston police strike. And he was a very non-talkative man.

Doherty: Oh. Grover Cleveland?

McCoy: No, no.

Doherty: No. That was [overlapping dialogue; inaudible].

McCoy: This was after Harding.

Doherty: Well, I--.

McCoy: Oh, god. I don't even remember the presidents. [inaudible] my tongue there.

Doherty: Is he the man whose picture--has a picture of the Indian--real sober face with an Indian headdress on?

McCoy: Maybe it was.

Doherty: Yeah.

McCoy: It wasn't Harding. It was--.

Doherty: I think I know who--the man who came before Hoover.

McCoy: Yeah. Yeah.

Doherty: Yeah. I don't know his name, either. How did your family happen to settle in this area? Did--or and about what time?

McCoy: Well, after the Civil War, my grandfather was sick for a year, but he--they were living down in Racine County. Out there, he was a farmer. And he went out west to--they were homesteading, you know. He went out west to look around, and he homesteaded a considerable amount of land in Nebraska. And incidentally, the land that he homesteaded, the City of Lincoln is now on.

Doherty: Wow.

McCoy: [laughs] But he came back and his wife wouldn't go out and live amongst the Indians. That was all a wild country. So he didn't--he let it--he threw it up. Well, then, he came back and he came up here. We called it Lafayette then. They were building the railroad through from Milwaukee to LaCrosse. It's up there in the Lafayette Corners. He was right there, where the--that big automotive repair shop is, right along near the road, where the bridge--there's a creek down below there. That's what we call Lafayette Corners. That's Tar Creek or Tar Falls. And he lived there and he had a mill, a flour mill. And he traded with the Indians, made flour for the Indians, and he sold firewood to the railroads for their burning engines. They'd pile it along the railroad and they'd stop when they needed wood. But in the spring of 1876--he called it the Spring Freshit [??] of 1876--the water came down in a sudden flood and hit that bridge, which was above his mill. His mill was built right across the creek, floated the bridge down and hit the mill, [laughs] all the way down the creek, along with 1000 barrels of flour. [laughs] So he came to Sparta and built another mill, which later burned down. Then he built another mill in Sparta. Meanwhile, he had gone out west and established a silver mine in the hopes that the railroad would come that way, and it didn't. So that went plooy_[laughs] And that was what happened through the years. Meanwhile, he had accumulated--he had my father had accumulated this three thousand acres up here.

Doherty: And your dad also had the newspaper in town, this--.

McCoy: He was county judge.

Doherty: Oh. Judge. Okay.

McCoy: He was a county judge, and the director of the bank, and the clerk of the school board, and colonel of small arms practice, and, oh, God, he--

Doherty: Did you--your family have any connection with the newspaper? Somehow I [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]

McCoy: Yes. My grandfather ran the newspaper.

Doherty: Oh, okay.

McCoy: Monroe County Democrat.

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: Yeah.

Doherty: Okay.

McCoy: And my Uncle Clark died in 1909 was one of the first war correspondents. He went with a company and that was--we used to send letters back in the--he was one of the first so-called war correspondents in the country.

Doherty: Oh.

McCoy: So that's--in a nutshell, that's the history of it.

Doherty: Okay. Thank you.

[end of interview]