

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WILLIAM E. MEISEKOTHEN
Radioman, Army, World War II.

1999

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Meisekothen, William E., (1923-). Oral History Interview, 1999.

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

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

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 45 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

William Meisekothen, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a radio operator with Company C of the 386th Infantry Regiment, 97th Division in Europe and on occupation duty in Japan. Meisekothen touches on ROTC training at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, basic training at Camp Wolters (Texas), six months of college in Mount Pleasant (Iowa) with the Air Corps, rejoining the infantry at Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri), field training at Fort San Luis Obispo (California), and amphibious scout training at Camp Pendleton. He reflects that he felt his training was intended for the Pacific theater, but his regiment was shipped to France instead. Meisekothen mentions duty as a radioman, crossing the Rhine River at Remagen, fighting through Germany, and being outside Plzeň (Czechoslovakia) when the war ended. Meisekothen details being in combat: close calls, taking cover from artillery fire, being pinned by machine gun fire, retreating into a forest, souvenir hunting, and taking German prisoners. He tells of getting lost while on night patrol and running across General Patton, who gave him directions. Meisekothen reflects on the difficulty of seeing the German casualties he felt responsible for while advancing in Germany. He talks about the destruction he saw in Europe and living on C-rations. After returning home for a couple weeks on furlough, Meisekothen discusses waiting for the invasion of Japan on Cebu Island, being relieved that the atomic bomb ended the war with Japan, and spending six months on occupation duty. He describes being the first patient in a hastily set-up military hospital when he had surgery to remove his appendix, and afterwards being sent to guard a military warehouse in Fukaya (Japan). He recalls losing his chance for R&R on a dice roll, keeping in touch with one of his comrades, and writing a silver star recommendation for a dead soldier. Meisekothen expresses frustration that he was never promoted beyond private first class, even though he was working with office records in Japan. He portrays his contact with a family of Japanese civilians and mailing them clothes after he was discharged. After looking over the areas his unit would have had to invade in Japan, he states his belief that he would not have survived the invasion. After the war, Meisekothen discusses attending medical school.

Biographical Sketch:

Meisekothen (b.1923) enlisted in ROTC in 1942 and served on active duty from 1943 to 1946. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1949 and attended medical school at the Stritch School of Medicine, affiliated with Loyola University (Illinois). From 1952 until his retirement in 1986, he worked first as a general practitioner and later as an ophthalmologist, and he eventually settled in Oregon (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999
Transcribed by John P. Danish, 2009
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

- Jim: Talking with William Meisekothen, US Army, World War II, in the 386th Infantry Division.
- Bill: Infantry Regiment.
- Jim: Regiment, excuse me, I'm sorry.
- Bill: [unintelligible] that was—
- Jim: I misread your—Okay. You enlisted in the ROTC and then you went from the ROTC right into uniform when the war came?
- Bill: Yes.
- Jim: Where did they send you?
- Bill: I went to Battle Creek, Michigan as induction where they're interviewed for what you wanted to be. And probably I made a big mistake there. I had one year of school and I told them I wanted to be a doctor; they said, "Well, we can't send you to one of the programs for medicine 'cause you've gotta have two years of college." However, this happened to be in, I guess, June; he said, "July we have a class starting at Marquette for dentists; there's an opening for you if you want it." I can remember him saying it. "I don't care to be a dentist," I said, "I will be a doctor only." He said, "*Okay.*" And I was immediately sent to infantry basic training.
- Jim: It didn't take long to realize you'd made a mistake?
- Bill: Yes, at, at Camp Wolters, Texas I went—
- Jim: You went through basic there?
- Bill: There, yeah.
- Jim: As an infantry man?
- Bill: Yes, infantry.
- Jim: Right.
- Bill: And then, oh, probably just before I finished infantry training there, I enlisted in the Air Corps and went to Shepherd Field. At Shepherd Field there they were sending us to college training detachments or into pre-flight. Having one year of college I had my choice which I wanted, and I thought all my friends said how great that six-months college

experience was, so I chose college. I was sent to Mount Pleasant, Iowa, to their college. At the end of our six months there we were waitin' to decide what field we'd go to and an order came down: anyone who came from infantry training or tank corps training was to be returned to their respective things, so that was the end of my Air Corps.

Jim: You didn't fly at all?

Bill: No, I never even made it. I just had the six months of college. Then I was sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and they were forming a new division at that time and I happened to be with infantry there and they put me right there.

Jim: What did they train you to do, Bill?

Bill: In—well, really it was strictly field training and I—the division was pretty much filled about when I came in; I came in as a replacement or just added to make it fill. And we went from Fort Leonard Wood. Then we—I think our next stop was San Luis Obispo, California, and there we were trained for, basically, amphibious training for the invasion of Japan, obviously, we felt it was, and I was in the infantry there. I was a radio man and worked as a scout most of the time in the training. They had a volunteer program to go down to Camp Pendleton and train for scouting, more or less because you had to be a rather accomplished swimmer, which I was. I qualified for the program, went down there for a month in training, and we really trained in rubber boats, five- or seven-man rubber boats, for invasion of places, and then I went back to the same outfit I was with at San Luis Obispo. And I think from there we were, while the war was going on, we were gettin' ready to head to the Far East. And I think this is about the time—I'm a little hazy, but I don't know if it was just before the Bulge or right around in there. And really they were, we were packing up equipment to head to the far Pacific. We get on the train, no one said anything. Instead the train goes down to Florida; I ended up at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and I went with a group of—my company went on a Liberty Boat to France.

Jim: Did anybody explain anything?

Bill: Nothing was told to us, that we were going to Europe; nothing.

Jim: When you got on the ship to go to England or France, you still didn't know why things were changed?

Bill: Why it was changed, we never were told. And we just went over there and—I think that was about—it was probably a little before the Bulge, because things weren't goin' the way they wanted 'em to go, obviously, because we weren't trained for the—well, we were trained,

it was infantry training, but still; we thought we were going to the Pacific.

Jim: That's what you were training for.

Bill: Yeah.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: So we landed in Le Havre. I think they—to the best of my remember, they split the 97th Division up at that time and I was with the 386th Infantry Regiment and we moved right up; it was past the Bulge time then. We moved right up to the Front or went through France and, I think, I—we were attached to Patton for a while. And finally, my best memory is when we finally hit the Rhine River.

Jim: What was your rank by this time?

Bill: Oh, I was a PFC; my entire service there was—

Jim: No change?

Bill: I had no chance of changing because the outfit was pretty much filled when I come in and we—

Jim: Your specific duties were just basic—

Bill: Basically I was a radio man and messenger; my MSO or MO number, I guess they call it. And it was interesting. I remember we were on the Rhine River before any Americans crossed. We were going, looking, going across the Rhine—I went across the Rhine with a group and I remember we were landing at Cologne and our mission was scouting. And we didn't spend too much time [laughs] on the other side, and we came back and then our—about that time I think they were, they probably made the breakthrough at Remagen Bridge 'cause, I *think* we crossed there; but I don't remember. And then we went through all of Germany; we went back up through Cologne, Solingen, and then I remember our push; we went back and then I joined Patton's group again. Our regiment 'cause we were heading, we ended up at Pilsen [also spelled Plzeň], or just outside of Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. And I had several, I don't know if there were four or five, months combat through Germany.

Jim: [unintelligible] when you were there?

Bill: Ah, just—we had two or three rather severe battles there, and, ah, the one I remember the most is one morning we started off early and we were on top of the hill with a tremendous sort of a big valley and then it

was highlands on the other side and that was our objective, to go through there. And we were, ah, my company, Company C, was headin' straight down, probably through the middle of it. We had a, a woods on the left side that I remember and, ah, we got, oh, not even halfway down and pretty soon, ah, we got into a barrage of mortars that were coming, so everyone hit the ground. We just laid there and finally the captain that was leading us, yelled, "I want that radio; I want that radio!" So, I was quite a bit back then and, ah, so I started gettin' up, runnin' and fallin' down, and runnin' and fallin' down and the mortars start hitting again. I remember looking back 'cause one hit right behind me and here the two fellows that I was with, it took 'em out. And I just, just luckily—

Jim: You missed that by ten seconds?

Bill: If, if he, he wouldn't have called me; well, no, I had gone probably about in, um, two or three minutes. So I hit the ground, was froze there and [chuckles] then there was a little violent English: "Get that radio up here!" [laughs] So I got up and decided I'd run and just, um, trying to get him—just as I was approaching him, apparently we ran. We got up into the machine gun range, so machine guns opened up and I hit the ground and then I crawled up to him. And I knew something happened when I hit the ground and I got up to the captain, he starts swearin', "Look what you bring me!" And here, they shot—the machine gun took the top off the radio on my back.

Jim: Wow.

Bill: And [chuckles] that's probably the closest I came, and, um, it hit up there because one of the guys said I landed right by a Texas fellow. He said to me, ah, "Gosh," he said. "Those things are really flying!" And I looked at him and I said, "You know, you got a hole in your helmet!" It never touched him, but a bullet went right through his helmet, right there.

Jim: Missed his head?

Bill: It, it didn't hurt him at all, just went in one—the edge of the helmet and out the other end. We laid there a long time; it seemed like we couldn't do anything. The captain said, "Well, let's—we gotta do a little more here; let's go down to the woods." So we all crawled into a woods and then they turned their anti-aircraft 88s on us that exploded right at treetop and, um, that was, ah—

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: —probably the scariest thing of the whole thing because a number of guys around me were hit with flack and I never had anything. And after

that experience I just thought, “Gosh! I’m supposed to survive this place!”

Jim: [laughs]

Bill: But, um, this is where we finally never could get air support, and finally we got artillery support to the town. And then we just moved on and captured all the Germans we could in there, and that’s where I got, off a SS Captain, I got my German Luger there. That’s when I—

Jim: The SS?

Bill: Yup. That was in there, because they—most of the, this was—I guess they called them the Wehrmacht German Army but their officers, many of them, were the regular German Army. But that’s really the closest that we came. Other times we’d spend a lot of time ridin’ on tanks, movin’ fast through Germany, a little bit in France, too; but it was—

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: We sort of supported them.

Jim: Did you get another radio?

Bill: Oh, yeah, sure thing. I had another radio after that.

Jim: Um huh.

Bill: But it took a while to get it, you know; we hadda wait for it. So it surprised me. We did a lot of going through Germany; that was the only real severe fight we had, and there was a number of times where there was little pockets of resistance and we could keep moving and a lot of times we let the artillery take out a town and then we’d move in. And one of the more scary things that you learn, too, is, um, when you go through the houses that the German troops had occupied and they’d throw a lot of their equipment in a room, maybe with two doors, and after while you’d say, “Gee! We gotta go through the house and out that other door, should I walk over that stuff?” Well, I never did. I would even leave and go around. And the guys who’d walk over, every now and then one of ‘em—they were all booby-trapped and—

Jim: What were they booby-trapped with? Grenades?

Bill: With grenades and things like that.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: They had a trip wire and some guys sort of never learned that; they were looking for souvenirs and stuff and blew them apart.

But those, it moved pretty fast and probably my—the only other good experience I can tell you about is, I was on night patrol in a Jeep and I was manning—there was a lieutenant with— a driver, lieutenant, and I was manning a 50-caliber machine gun on the back of the Jeep. We finished a night patrol and we knew we were lost and we couldn't figure out where. We thought, well, we'd better go back, and we weren't—we were making the outfit another push in, further in Germany. So, I—that's why we were out on that night patrol, to see where we'd been. And finally we came, at daybreak, we were comin' to a crossroad and we still looked at the signs, and we thought, well, gee, someone turned those signs. We're not where we thought we were. So we went on a little way and all of a sudden the lieutenant said, "There's a Jeep up ahead; let's go up and maybe they can tell us where we are." So we drove up there and here's General Patton and his aide sittin' there, up early in the morning, waiting for the whole group to move past him on that day's push.

Jim: Oh, my goodness!

Bill: So, [chuckles] we saw Patton and our lieutenant said, "Gee,"—or he said, "Where you boys from?"

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: Yeah. And we just said that we were really lost, we were on night patrol, we didn't know which way we were. He said, "Well, you're in front of the lines now; go that way and you'll find [laughs] your lines."

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: And it would sort of impress what we had heard about him and really made an impression on me then.

Jim: He was out there?

Bill: He was out there all the time with his troops.

Jim: Was he pleasant to you?

Bill: Oh, yeah, he was.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: No, he just wondered what outfit we were with and—

Jim: Sure.

Bill: —what we were doing, so, he probably didn't know the individual things that each group was doing. But next thing, probably, I just remember is Roosevelt died, the War was basically over. We were heading towards Pilsen and we were told to dig in and stay there and if the Russians don't stop, we're supposed to stop them. They were supposed to stop before they got—apparently this agreement on Berlin and—

Jim: Right.

Bill: —and Pilsen and all those things as theirs, so we started digging in there, and, gosh, we didn't hardly get dug in and I remember the word came down, trucks were loadin', everyone was to head back. So we went back and we took—trucks took us to Le Havre and—

Jim: On the way back, then.

Bill: All of us came right back to the United States.

Jim: No stops from the Elbe River right back to—

Bill: Straight, straight back. And I guess the equipment that was all packed was to be sent back later and all of us went straight back to the United States. We were given—I don't know or remember if it was two or three weeks furlough or we were supposed to report and we reported and reassembled and went to—I forgot where we really met; I know I had to go back to Camp Grant and then I was taken—I thought we met somewhere up around Fort Ord or up, anyway, close to Seattle.

Jim: So you went back to the Pacific?

Bill: And so we got on the boat and from Seattle we went straight to the island of Cebu.

Jim: You were in the United States then [unintelligible]?

Bill: Well, we had a two- or three-week furlough.

Jim: Oh.

Bill: And then we—

Jim: You went home then?

- Bill: Yeah. And then we went back and reassembled and headed for the island of Cebu to prepare for the invasion of Japan, what we were really trained for.
- Jim: [unintelligible]
- Bill: But the atomic bomb was dropped and—
- Jim: [unintelligible]
- Bill: It was very fortunate. Because I know I would've never survived the invasion of Japan. We saw—
- Jim: If they were training in rubber boats to make a beachhead, you'd have never made that.
- Bill: And we, um, we saw the—I stayed in Japan, probably, six months. And the unfortunate thing about it, not only myself, but a number of fellas in our outfit had more points accumulated from service in combat than we needed. We should have been sent home, but they didn't; they just kept our outfit intact. Everyone had a deaf ear; we went straight to Cebu, ready for the island.
- Jim: What was the explanation why you couldn't get out?
- Bill: 'Cause the outfit—well, you know, it was just the talk that we were a fighting force that was assembled to do that and they needed us there and—
- Jim: After August 15th they didn't need you there.
- Bill: Well, we still went, 'cause—and then when we got over in Japan after a while they started sending them home with the high point numbers first. And I had a chance, or—I think I spent probably six months in Japan before I went home.
- Jim: Where were you stationed in Japan?
- Bill: Well, I land—we were the first troops, practically, that went in and we landed at Yokohama, went in, and I—really when I—shortly after landing we went out in a field and I can't remember the exact days, but I remember waking up one morning with a terrible pain in my right side, and I thought, "Gee, I must have appendicitis." So I had a heck of a time; we had no sick bay there. I tried to tell people, and finally they put me in an ambulance and took me, and I thought they'd never stop driving. Anyway, I got to a place and there was no—none of the aide stations were set up, no military set up—

- Jim: [unintelligible]
- Bill: —yet at all, and they, the doctor that examined me, I'll never forget his name: Major White. And he says, "Yeah, you got appendicitis," and he said, "Well, we're debating whether we're gonna send you out in the harbor to a Navy ship to have surgery or here." And next thing I knew, they said, "Well, there's a school, a schoolhouse up the ways; we're gonna set up our surgery there." And I think I was the first patient in the schoolhouse. I remember, he did a spinal on me. There was no one there; they had three or four guys holdin' lights up like that and he took out my appendix there.
- Jim: With no help?
- Bill: With, he, he had, he had—
- Jim: Somebody to hold you down?
- Bill: Someone, yeah, he had someone helping him. But I remember they said, "Well, we'll have a bed for you by the time they're through." And this schoolhouse I was the first patient in, and from there they thought I should have light duty for a while, so I went up to the town of Fukaya. And it was a big Japanese military warehouse where they had stocked and I was up there with a group; it was a group from my company that was guarding it. So, I—
- Jim: You were still together?
- Bill: Pardon me?
- Jim: You were still together?
- Bill: So I went back and joined them there. That's where they'd been assigned, and there was, I don't know, four or five of us that were supposed to guard this there. They had a lot of, um, nice equipment. That's where I picked up the two brand new Japanese carbines that hadn't even been issued yet to the troops that just were in their boxes. I brought a couple, sent a couple home with me.
- Jim: Okay; let's back up a little. When you took prisoners in Germany, how did you arrange it? Somebody assembled them and you processed them, or how'd that go?
- Bill: No, we captured a number of 'em. I know I—on several occasions I was asked—maybe two or three of us were supposed to take them to the back, to the rear, and we didn't like that because that may have meant another five or ten mile walk with these guys going back to the rear until the rear guard caught up with us. And more and more and

more it was less and less, but some of those walks were very long, and I guess I had the ability of being able to read maps, not get lost like some other guys, so it was one of my chief jobs to take prisoners back.

Jim: To where?

Bill: We took them just to the rear and—

Jim: A field?

Bill: And—

Jim: Or was it fenced off?

Bill: Yeah. And led off into a group that was assembling. All of them were coming from all over and they assembled them, and so then we returned to the front.

Jim: Were you impressed by how young they were?

Bill: Oh, I—

Jim: So many people have said that.

Bill: Definitely young. In fact, some of the fire fights we'd get in we'd be shootin' our carbines. They'd be shootin' at us, we'd be shootin', and we could see over hedges their helmets goin' up like that and, um, then finally when enough of that went on, they said, "Well, let's move forward." You had to take that area; we'd move forward and I'd see some of these kids that we had hit in the areas where I was shooting. I don't know if it was me or someone next to me, but it just sort of turned me when I went up here and I could see I shot, shot the guy's head off on one side with, um, that, in [clears throat]—so many of them that were wounded as we went along, um, were just young kids. And wounded in the belly and, and all we could do is yell for one of our aide men to go up and, and, ah—

Jim: Try to do something.

Bill: The same way as going through, taking out houses where we think we had, um, fire comin' at us when we'd be pinned down. We'd have our fellas use the bazooka and put it through the window of the house as we went through and it, it was a bad feeling, goin' in and hearin', seein', two or three old German people, we just blew their heads off.

Jim: [unintelligible]

- Bill: Yeah, blew their heads off. There they were sheltering near the fire. They, the people were using their homes and during, um,—but we stayed all—practically, I slept outside very little. Most of the time we had a group of three or four of us that always were together in a house and, ah, we'd spend all our nights there. And that winter was so cold, and I remember one time about daybreak we always left and started assembling to see where we're gonna go that day, and coming out in, we were going down and here we ran into a group of Germans, five or six guys the same as us.
- Jim: [unintelligible]
- Bill: They were sleeping in the same town at the other end [both laugh] as we were. And I remember that one time I went to bring up my rifle 'cause I thought someone might have had a bead on me; my finger was so cold I couldn't pull the trigger, I couldn't. So all I could do was fall on the ground, 'cause I couldn't pull it from—
- Jim: So, how'd that contest end?
- Bill: Well, they took off faster than we did. We took off after them is more or less what it amounted to. And a lot of them were, had German cars; we saw a lot of German staff movin', too. I don't know, just we moved and I think I felt I was all in the front some thirty-four days or somethin' we were in the Front. Finally when we did get a relief, there was— two of us were picked in our company to go to the Riviera for—
- Jim: R and R?
- Bill: R and R. And a fella by the name of Eddie Bopy[?] and myself were picked and the lieutenant says, "Here, I got one dice. High man goes, high man gets it." And Bopy threw first; he threw a three. I said, "Boy, this is great."
- Jim: [unintelligible] on the table.
- Bill: I threw two. [both chuckle] So he went. That was really discouraging.
- Jim: Did you ever see him again?
- Bill: Oh, yes. He's—in fact, he's the only fella that I really kept contact with, and I met him—oh, I visited him in Pennsylvania, I visited him in Florida after I retired. About three years ago—I wish I would have saved it—he said that he heard, I don't even remember the man's name, um, from one of our—this one battle that we had, um, that the fella that helped wipe out some machine guns. I can't remember his name, but, um, he was killed there and the captain said, "We gotta write this guy up for a Silver Star." And he asked me and Jerry Griner,

and I remember a fella from Minneapolis, that we'd get some information and write it up for him, which we did. And then Eddie Bopy said that, or he told me he heard later that this guy got the Congressional Medal of Honor. And he sent me a copy from the book when he was visiting the museum in Washington, D.C.

Jim: Oh.

Bill: And he sent a copy of this thing, and I remember getting' it in my Christmas card maybe three years ago. And I don't know what I did with it, but I was looking all over for it and I never have been able to find it. But I do remember reading; I said, "Gee, I remember that battle and some of these things weren't the way I wrote it." So I think when it got back it was dressed up a little bit.

Jim: Yeah, sure.

Bill: And also, I guess they felt that our regiment had most—the 97th Division was in there but the 386th was, I guess, by far the best regiment in the division. And we were at the front all the time.

Jim: What is that?

Bill: And that's—

Jim: Thirty-four days [unintelligible]

Bill: So.

Jim: Well then, when you went to Japan, was that the same group? How many of the guys that were with you in Europe were still with you in Japan?

Bill: Ah.

Jim: Just a few or—

Bill: Practically all of them; the outfit went. You didn't— **[End of Side 1, Side A]** You didn't get any points. The only fella we had that I remember there was one fellow that joined us that had fought in the South Pacific and he came home with injuries. He was gonna be a regular Army man, so he was put in our outfit and he was happy going back to the South Pacific again. But when we went to Europe and then we came back, he's the only guy that I know didn't. They said he went AWOL. He was not gonna go back after being in the South Pacific, Europe, and coming back; he wanted no part of it. And I think we all went and, most of us, and we just started trickling out. I spent the last time, or as soon as I got out of Japan, I guess they—after we landed in

Japan and I got out of the hospital, I should say, I went back to the headquarters and they had me start working in headquarters 'cause I had had college, so I started working' on the records and I was getting a little upset with them. I said, "Gee, you're having me do this kind of work and you don't give me any advancement in my rank; I'm still a PFC." And they just said, "Well, we'll get to that." And then I thought, "Well, yeah, I'm going home in about a month like that." So when they did find out I was going home, they offered me to go to regimental headquarters and work in the Non-Com. They said you have a future there in regimental headquarters; you can work right up to the top. And I just said, "No thanks. I'm going home, not going back to school." And I was glad I did because I subsequently heard, and I can't verify it, that that outfit stayed there quite a while and then went to Korea.

Jim: So that'd been a kick to end up with three wars.

Bill: But I had enough points that I came back to the States and got out and went back and finished at Wisconsin.

Jim: Alright, now tell me about your contacts with the Japanese civilians.
[unintelligible]

Bill: Very good. I—

Jim: 'Cause you couldn't speak any Japanese?

Bill: No. We had a friend of mine, Bob Burnhart, I remember he was working in supply a little bit. He was in the same company I was but he got sent into supply for some reason or another, and he met some Japanese people and we visited them many times in their house. They all spoke English very well and they had such a shortage of things. I remember they had some little kids growing up, and after I got back to the States, well Bob and I got together. He had their addresses, and they needed shoes, and he had a lot of sizes and stuff, so we bought clothes and shoes in this country and sent it over to them.

Jim: Oh, that's wonderful. While you were there, did you bring stuff from the PX over to them?

Bill: I can't remember whether we did or not. We visited them quite a bit and I'm sure we did because they would always want to share stuff and I—whether we did or not doesn't—

Jim: You probably did.

Bill: Not if—I get my memory back now. But I really, um, thought the Japanese people were fine. I had nothing—

- Jim: I was there in the '50s when I was in Korea; my experience with them was the same. They were very charming and no problem.
- Bill: Yeah.
- Jim: No problem, better behaved than the Americans.
- Bill: I went down to Tokyo and Yokohama several times while I was there just on weekends and stuff, and I remember looking where we were gonna land with the invasion plans and I thought, holy man! [laughs] I would have never survived.
- Jim: Sure. So when you finally got out, then you went to school as soon as the G.I. Bill was—
- Bill: Yeah, yeah. I went right back to Wisconsin; in fact, I went around the clock for two years to graduate.
- Jim: You went through your pre-med there?
- Bill: Yeah, finished.
- Jim: And went on to medical school at Wisconsin, too?
- Bill: No, I went to Stritch/Loyola in Chicago.
- Jim: Ah huh.
- Bill: After med school I—
- Jim: Oh, by the way, was your appendix “hot”?
- Bill: Oh, yeah; it was “hot;” in fact the—
- Jim: [unintelligible]
- Bill: The doctor that did it, it didn't take him very long and he did it under spinal—
- Jim: Right.
- Bill: And I thought to myself when I looked at the scar and later went into medicine, I thought, “Boy, that thing must have been pointing up because the scar's about two inches long.”
- Jim: Yeah.
- Bill: So, he must have cut right down on it.

- Jim: Right down on it.
- Bill: And it popped out.
- Jim: [unintelligible] the incision, right.
- Bill: Yeah.
- Jim: Yeah. Well, that's good. And where did you take your eye work, Bill?
- Bill: Well, I spent thirteen years as a GP.
- Jim: Oh, that's right. [unintelligible]
- Bill: I—
- Jim: You went back to Madison?
- Bill: I had a lot of debt from med school, so I felt obliged to pay my debt back to the med school. That's why I went in general practice, but I liked general practice. After a while, though, I felt I wouldn't live to fifty. I was so busy delivering babies, taking care of families, that I decided I'd go into something else, and I thought, well, where I wouldn't need to make house calls, wouldn't need to be up all night, is either ophthalmology or dermatology. So I chose ophthalmology because I thought I knew more dermatology as a GP than ophthalmology so I wanted to go into ophthalmology. I practiced that until I retired in 1986.
- Jim: Where did you get your eye work?
- Bill: At the University of Wisconsin.
- Jim: Oh.
- Bill: Yeah, yeah.
- Jim: So, you've had a fantastic experience. You kept in contact with only one man with your original group?
- Bill: Eddie Bopy, yeah. The other—well, I did keep in contact with Bob Burnheart for about two years and while I was in Wisconsin here we got together, but as soon as I went off to med school I lost contact with everyone. I guess I was studying and not writing them and if they wrote me I never, never really followed it. But Eddie Bopy is the only one that I—somewhere or other, probably by Christmas cards I got from him; others I never heard from. Maybe if I'd sent a card, too.

Jim: I see.

Bill: And so.

Jim: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

Bill: No.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: Never, no, no.

Jim: They [unintelligible]. [pause] I can't think of anything else. I wanted to ask you, did you ever have any contact with the Red Cross, either in Europe or Japan?

Bill: Oh, I think I probably went in Red Cross centers in Japan, but not in Europe. I had nothing. In fact—

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: It was unfortunate; we had no time to sight-see or really do anything. It was strictly we got there and we're put into combat immediately. And we came back, I think, twenty-four hours after the War ended we were trucked right back to La Havre and sent back to the United States.

Jim: Getting ready for the next war?

Bill: Yup.

Jim: There—how about the USO? Did you see any—

Bill: Oh, yeah, I saw—not in Europe I didn't, but I saw USOs in Japan they had, and of course, they were great in the training. When we were on the West Coast we spent a lot of free time in the USOs out there.

Jim: Any of the troops come and visit you in Japan, entertainment troops?

Bill: Not that I saw.

Jim: You didn't see any?

Bill: Early, ah—

Jim: Probably too early for that.

Bill: Early for that, yeah.

- Jim: Did they warn you when you first got to Japan about saboteurs or anything [unintelligible]?
- Bill: Oh, I can't remember.
- Jim: Um hum.
- Bill: Really, because I know when I got up to that military warehouse, these guys had been there maybe a week before I got there and—
- Jim: Japanese soldiers?
- Bill: No. The other four or five fellows from my outfit that were—
- Jim: Yeah.
- Bill: —up there, just guardin' the thing there, but I was very surprised. I thought we'd have to have our guns drawn and something like that and, no. The Japanese people crowded around the village and it was a very friendly attitude.
- Jim: They quit so precipitously.
- Bill: I really don't think I really worried about ever being—
- Jim: You were [unintelligible]
- Bill: No, and I never heard of anyone that was sabotaged or anyone that was killed as a result of it. I thought I was in a very calm area. I think that the Japanese people were just as glad it was over as we were.
- Jim: Sure. Did you see any of the effects of bombing when you were—
- Bill: Nope, I saw nothing of that where we went.
- Jim: [unintelligible] the devastation and stuff like that.
- Bill: Some of it, yes, I guess; some of it we—
- Jim: It was still there when I was there in the 1950s, so—
- Bill: So, it's just where in—Fukaya, I thought, was about forty miles from Tokyo, and so I remember from when we'd get up on that third floor of the warehouse the beautiful vision of the mountain—Fuji.
- Jim: [unintelligible]

- Bill: —there, so this was in the area but it's—there was certainly no damage anyplace there, and I don't recall going down by almost running from Tokyo to Yokohama if there was damage there. I saw a lot of the fortifications that they had and that, but I don't recall much. Europe is different; we saw tremendous damage. And I remember in Cologne a lot of damage, in Solingen lots of damage, in Rheims, I guess in places. In fact, I got a few pictures that I brought home of the tremendous damage in those areas.
- Jim: Did you have any trouble getting mail anywhere?
- Bill: I didn't get much mail in Europe. I don't hardly recall ever getting mail there.
- Jim: From your folks?
- Bill: It could have been there and I read it; but I don't, it didn't—I guess I didn't have a girlfriend that I was looking forward to mail or something, but I just don't remember.
- Jim: Just your mom would be the only one who would write you.
- Bill: Yeah. Although in Japan I do remember there we got mail consistently.
- Jim: Yeah. And how about food? When you were in Europe was it trouble getting food up to you?
- Bill: Yeah; we outran our food; it was practically C-rations for all of it.
- Jim: C-rations [unintelligible]
- Bill: We moved and I don't think I had a hot meal from the day I started combat 'til we left there; it was always C-rations because the kitchens never caught up with us.
- Jim: Too far to go?
- Bill: Yeah.
- Jim: And the Rhine River, you didn't cross it except on exploration?
- Bill: We went across the Rhine. Right when we got there they were looking, and it was very close to Cologne, too, and the biggest thing that was scary about the whole thing is we were told that the Rhine had a swift current. But man, was it swift! We were coming back, supposed to come back two miles from where we entered; we ended up about five miles.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Bill: We couldn't.

Jim: You had a rubber boat?

Bill: Yeah, we had rubber boats.

Jim: Too hard to paddle.

Bill: And that current was too great.

[End of Interview]