

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
LESLIE R. MOEDE
Surgeon's Office Clerk, Army, World War II.

1995

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Moede, Leslie R., (1919-2005). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 32 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 32 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Leslie R. Moede, a Reedsville, Wisconsin native, discusses his Army service as a clerk during World War II in the European Theater and his work as a County Veterans Service Officer in Manitowoc County, Wisconsin. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in agricultural education, Moede talks about being drafted, basic training at Camp Wolters (Texas), guarding the West Coast from Japanese attack with the 35th Infantry Division at Inglewood (California), and additional training in the Southeast. Moede talks about assignment to the 35th Division Headquarters Surgeon's Office as a veterinary assistant. Shipped to Tavistock (England), he talks about working to organize efficient and accurate records in the field. Sent to Normandy thirty days after D-Day, he recalls his first time under fire, learning not to have the higher-ups in the division travel bumper-to-bumper, and seeing aerial casualties at the Battle of St. Lo. Moede speaks of his unit's tendency to occasionally get ahead of the front lines, such as at Nancy (France). He details the responsibilities of the Division Surgeon's Office, including coordinating evacuation of casualties and tracking casualties and prisoners. Moede reveals that when attached to Patton's 3rd Army, he noticed fewer casualties in his records. He tells of "liberating" eggs and honeycomb, getting a sense of the German Army's collapse, having the flu during Battle of the Bulge, being quartered in civilian housing, and finding cognac hidden inside wall paneling. Moede reports witnessing murdered political and Jewish prisoners who were locked inside a burning barn by Germans, and he reflects on home-front Americans' inability to believe the atrocities committed by the Nazis. He characterizes some of the men he served with, including a family-man doctor who contracted a venereal disease in Germany. Moede comments on gambling, heavy alcohol use due to "liberated" liquor, and developing a smoking habit. He talks about returning to the States to prepare for the invasion of Japan, getting discharged after V-J Day, and supporting President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs. After buying a farm near Reedsville, Moede discusses teaching veterans through the on-the-job Veterans Administration Farm Training Program and the federal loans available to veteran farmers. As a County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO), he characterizes a Vietnam War veteran he worked with who suffered post-traumatic stress disorder, reflects on differences between America's 20th Century wars, and expresses disagreement with the stereotype of "the poor Vietnam veteran." Moede speaks of helping form the United Veterans Council so that the disparate veterans' organizations would have a stronger political voice. He describes other activities as a County Veterans Service Officer and joining several veterans' organizations.

Biographical Sketch:

Moede (1919-2005) served in the Army from 1942 to 1945. After the war, he owned a poultry farm near Reedsville (Wisconsin), taught with the Veterans Administration Farm Training Program for fifteen years, and served as Manitowoc County Veterans Service Officer from 1960 to 1983. He also spent fourteen years involved with a veterans training program at Reedsville High School Wisconsin and served as president of both the Association of County Veterans Service Officers and the Northeast Wisconsin County Veterans Service Officers Association.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995

Transcribed by Karen M. Emery, WDVA Staff, 1998

Checked and corrected by John Calvin Pike, 2011

Corrections typed by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2012

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Transcribed Interview:

Mark: Okay. Today's date is June 28, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Leslie Moede of Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, Reedsville, to be precise, a veteran of the 35th Infantry Division in World War II. Good afternoon.

Moede: Good afternoon.

Mark: Thanks for driving all the way down. I know just how long a trip that can be from up there and it's no small task, and I appreciate it immensely. I like to start the interview by having the subject tell me a little bit about where they were born and raised and what they were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Moede: Well, I was born in the rural area of Reedsville, attended the Reedsville High School, worked for a year as a farm hand, then I spent four years at Madison and graduated with a degree in Ag Education.

Mark: Was your father a farmer as well?

Moede: Yes.

Mark: So, that's the line of work you had always hoped to go into?

Moede: Plus the fact it was difficult to get a job. Those years jobs weren't that plentiful.

Mark: Now, was it difficult to get into school as well?

Moede: No, it wasn't. I had the help of an uncle of mine who really motivated me. Because I know I left home with \$50 in my pocket. That was my earnings for two months on the farm. And I spent \$27.50 for tuition, \$10 for room rent, I bought some used textbooks. I had a few dollars left. You don't eat too well but if you're motivated, if you really want an education, you can get it. This is one of the things I always told my veterans when I was a Service Officer—if you want something badly enough, you can get it. Then after, immediately after graduation, I entered Service, went to Camp Wolters, Texas, for Basic Training in message center work.

Mark: Let's back up a second. You were conscripted, were you not?

Moede: I was, yes.

Mark: When you got the infamous greeting were you in school? Or were you back in Reedsville?

Moede: I was in school and in my senior year. I had my examination at Two Rivers with Dr. Moriarity, who was the examining physician, and we talked about my schooling and how nice it would be if I could finish--graduate before I entered Service. So I returned to Madison and I got my postcard from the draft board saying I was 4-F because I had flat feet. And the day after I graduated I got another postcard from the draft board saying I was 1-A. My flat feet had been cured.

Mark: That's funny how that happens sometimes.

Moede: I always thanked Dr. Moriarity for that, although there were times I wished I hadn't graduated. After I got out of Service I would have gone back to college, probably got my masters / doctors, but I didn't.

Mark: So, on campus at that time, as the war was starting to gear up. Now, I grew up after the Vietnam War and, of course, the legends or whatever you call them are, you know, there was a lot of resistance to that war and yet with World War II it seems completely the opposite. What was the atmosphere like on campus?

Moede: Really, I have no recollection of feeling one way or the other at that time. This was early, this was in '42, and I really don't have any feeling whatsoever. I know there were, after I was in the Service, when we were out in California, the young Service people couldn't do enough for you. But here in Madison during that period of time, from the time I was drafted until I entered service, I had no recollection of anybody saying anything bad or good. Maybe it was because I was tied up with school and had no social life.

Mark: That could well be. So, if you would, describe your entry into the military. Where did you go for your physical, where did you get sworn in and how did you get down to Camp Wolters, Texas?

Moede: Fort Sheridan. From Fort Sheridan we got a troop train and we went to Camp Wolters, Texas. If I remember correctly, we had our heavy ODs [Olive Drabs – Army fatigue uniform] on and this was in August and we had a three or four hour layover in St. Louis and I don't remember when I have perspired so profusely in my life as I did in the marshland yards there. Anyhow, we got to Camp Wolters and received our three months of Basic Training. Mine was actually in what is called message center work—coding and decoding messages. Then we got on a troop train and we had no idea where we were going except that some people would be singing “California Here I Come” and finally we did get to California. My group unloaded at Centinela Park in

Inglewood, California, and we found out that we were now part of the 35th Infantry Division and that Division was spread out all over the West Coast protecting the country from a possible attack by the Japanese.

Mark: And did you buy that? I mean, you say that with kind of a smirk on your face and I'm wondering, in retrospect did people really believe that at the time?

Moede: I'm a little cynical once in awhile. I wasn't too sure the Japanese were who attacked us but I didn't mind being in California. We spent some time there. Finally, we shipped to San Luis Obispo for additional training. We left there and we went to Camp Rucker, Alabama, for some more training, then we had the Tennessee Maneuvers for additional training, then we finally went to Camp Butner, North Carolina, to embark for overseas.

Mark: I see. Now, as far as your training goes, if you think of the Army, you sometimes think of discipline and a lot of drill sergeants yelling at you in four-letter words and all these kinds of things. Did you have any difficulty adjusting to military life? Or did anyone around you seem to? Did you just take it in stride? Did you accept it? Or was it difficult to deal with the discipline and the rigorous structure of the military?

Moede: Not really 'cause I'd been on my own for, ever since I graduated from high school, and I just accepted things as they were. Why fight something if you can't win? So I accepted the military the same line-up all the way through. I was really never, oh, there was a few times when I was fearful when we were overseas, but most of the time I felt, well, so this is life, what's going to come is going to come, what's going to happen is going to happen, and if it's good fine, and if it isn't, there's nothing I can do about it. So as far as the Basic Training was concerned, no, we had very, I think, nice people that gave us our Basic Training. There was nobody trying to, like you hear about the Marine Corps, that type of training.

Mark: That wasn't your experience?

Moede: No.

Mark: So, you were not trained as an infantry man, is that right? You were--

Moede: Well, yes. We did have our Basic Training—rifle training. I got the expert medal in the M1 and the carbine, bivouacs, eight hour marches with full field packs, that sort of thing. Yes. Along with that, the message center work.

Mark: So, you went overseas from North Carolina then?

Moede: Well, I'll discuss just a little. I was with the 2nd Battalion Headquarters of the 1037th Infantry Division which was part of the 35th Division. And at Camp Rucker, Alabama I happened to check billboards, or whatever they have there, and I saw where the camp was looking for a veterinary assistant. I thought, hey, I graduated the Ag School and the veterinary assistant sounds like a nice job. So I put in a transfer. Well, the transfer got to division headquarters and it stopped there because at that moment they had a vacancy in the Division surgeon's office for a veterinary assistant. And so that's where I ended up— Division surgeon's office, 35th Division Headquarters.

Mark: And what did they need a veterinary assistant for?

Moede: Well, you know, they inspect messes and so forth. So the veterinarian assistant took his clipboard and pencil and pen and wrote down all the comments of the Division surgeon or the medical officer would make about. This is what the TO called for. [Technical Order]

Mark: I see.

Moede: Actually, there was no, really no need for it.

Mark: It doesn't sound terribly complicated as you describe it. [Moede laughs] I suppose someone with a knowledge of, I don't know, germs or biology or something might have been useful.

Moede: And when you're not an officer, a commissioned officer, you don't have that kind of authority. Your freedom to do what you think perhaps should be done, but just flow with the water. You survive that way. [laughs]

Mark: Okay. So, you went overseas from North Carolina. On a ship, I take it.

Moede: Yes, on a troop ship with the canvas bunks held about six high, I think. There wasn't too much room. I don't remember how long it took to get there. We were in a convoy of course. We ended up in England, at Tavistock, England. The name comes back. And we had some more training there prior to the invasion.

Mark: Now, you arrived in England probably somewhere in early '44, I take it? Or late '43 maybe?

Moede: May of '44.

Mark: May of '44. Much later than I thought. I was wondering if you had much contact with the English people at all? Or were you too busy training to--

Moede: Not really. We went, I remember, once or twice we went to a local theater and I found when I would ask for directions the English language is very hard to understand. Almost as difficult as German. The Limey accent or whatever. I had problems. So we didn't socialize much.

Mark: I don't suspect you had much time to either.

Moede: No, no.

Mark: What sort of preparations were you making for the invasion of France? How much did you know about what was going to happen? Did you have an idea of when you were going to be going across the channel?

Moede: I'll tell you, in the Division Surgeon's Office where I was at that time, it was a matter of trying to get at an efficient organization so that accurate records could be kept because as the stuff comes in from the field during the war sometimes it isn't like back at home. So this is what we were doing. The troops, of course, were doing their thing. I don't, I imagine we did hear some rumors of things. Probably we did. But we landed in Normandy 30 days after D-Day. In fact, I spent, that was July 7 and July 8, so I dug my first fox hole on the eve of my birthday and I watched the beautiful fireworks—a lot of anti-aircraft fire and shells, the noise and stuff.

Mark: So, what did you think at the time? Were you--

Moede: I wished I were back home.

Mark: You were scared.

Moede: Yes. This is the first time under fire, you know. It's a different feeling. I'll have to tell you that I always felt the side that would win the war was the side that made the least mistakes because our division made a terrible mistake in Normandy. We were in a bumper-to-bumper convoy and the forward echelon contained the general, the chief of staff, all of the brains of the division. So here we are parked at Normandy, bumper-to-bumper, and we get out and we smoke cigarettes, and here we, over there we see a lot of fellas jump down, then they'd get up, then they'd jump down, then they'd get up. Finally, we realized that they were under fire, 88 fire, you know. Then we start to think, hey, what are we doing here? Why are we bumper-to-bumper? The best target the Germans could ever have. It would wipe out the whole Division. So then we moved. Somebody got the bright idea we should move. [both laugh]

Mark: Now, was this mistake repeated? Or did you learn from this mistake?

Moede: We learned from it, yeah. There were other mistakes but we learned from this one. There was no more of this bumper-to-bumper kind of thing. Normandy was the very, let's say, mildly stressful situation with the hedgerows. We had a lot of casualties.

Mark: Yeah. I was going to say, now, you got there, the Battle of St. Lo, had that started yet even?

Moede: Right. We got there and we helped take St. Lo. We were there when the armada airplanes flew over, you know, an almost endless ribbon of airplanes. It was kind of awe inspiring and yet you felt very sad because you could see planes exploding in air and then some parachutes falling, some no parachutes, you know, and the planes would drop. We lost a lot of planes there. We lost a lot of air people. We also bombed our own troops there at that time because the smoke bombs, the wind blew the smoke away and the people that were doing the bombing didn't realize this so some of our troops were killed at that time.

Mark: In fact, a general was killed.

Moede: What?

Mark: In fact there was a general, an American general who was killed in that. [Lt. General Leslie McNair] So, as the combat is going on, you're not--

Moede: I was not a combat--

Mark: No, I—so, I'm interested to know what you're doing as far as, I mean, what sort of organizational details does it take?

Moede: Our Service, Division Surgeon's Office, was responsible for the coordination of all of the medical units to make sure that everything was being done to evacuate the wounded and to care for the wounded and the sick, and those with the battle stress. The Division was credited with inventing the idea of mounting the litters on the jeep for transportation back to the various medical centers. And then we also were charged responsibility to keeping track of those that were killed, those that were captured, those that were wounded and so, we had to have a daily log of this. Supposedly the forward echelon, division headquarters, should be relatively safe place to be during a war but there were times when we, many times we were under shell fire. There were times when we blundered into areas where we had no business being because we were ahead of our fighting troops. I remember one time we pulled into a little German town and we were lost. The forward division was lost. They had to ask, there was a gal up in the third floor of this one building, had the window open, was leaning out, singing in English "Don't Fence Me In" which

was a popular song at that moment. And so somebody asked her where we were and she mentioned the name of the town and then somebody asked, “Well, where are the American troops?” She said, “A long ways back.” We had no business being there. Somebody goofed up, read the map wrong. I say it, the side that makes the least mistakes, wins. [both laugh]

Mark: So, after Normandy then, the 35th Division went across France then.

Moede: I’ll need that to refresh my memory.

Mark: Sure. Which one?

Moede: Let’s see. Attached to the 3rd Army in northern France, Le Mans.

Mark: So, that was under Patton then?

Moede: Yes.

Mark: Under Patton.

Moede: In fact, we found in our records, that every time we were attached to the 3rd Army, we had fewer casualties than any other time. And yet there were people that hated Patton. But he was a good general. And because of his tactics of going ahead, you know, instead of sitting like Montgomery did—that’s another story, too. We were in Nancy, France, and our next objective was Kaiserlautern, Germany. And so the word came down we didn’t have ammunition or gasoline. We found out later that General Montgomery threatened Eisenhower to withdraw his troops which had tied up a bunch of Germans in the northern area, you know, if he didn’t stop Patton because he didn’t like the publicity Patton was getting. After Patton slowed down then we got gasoline and ammunition and we had a lot of casualties and when we pushed off because we had given the Germans time to regroup, defend their area. We went all the way to southern France then we came back and we got to Nancy, France—that was another thing. We made a slight mistake there at Nancy.

Mark: What happened?

Moede: The Division Surgeon’s driver was tied elsewhere so he asked me to drive his jeep. So we crossed the river before Nancy, which we shouldn’t have done because after we were driving a ways, we realized we were in German territory because we saw the German tanks, we saw the mined area and so forth. We finally got up to Nancy, however it is pronounced, just in time to see our troops crossing the river to our side.

Mark: Getting your hairs up again.

Moede: So we're lucky. Oh, I must tell you two things. In Normandy, after we were there a few days some of the people in our group liberated eggs from a Normandy farmer and so we were going to fry our eggs in a mess kit. We had these cans of butter that came with, I guess, K-rations and so we dumped that into the mess kit and held it over a fire and nothing happened. It don't melt. One of the fellas finally had a bright idea. He said, "Hey, we've got some wine. Let's poach our eggs in wine." So we did. We poached our eggs in wine. We didn't have any bread to go with them because for about 30 days after we were in Normandy we finally got some bread. And about the same time we liberated some honey from a bee hive wherever we were at the time. And so we toasted our bread over the bonfire, the honey with the bees wax, we put on the bread. I tell you, there's nothing that tastes better than that when you haven't had bread for thirty days. [Mark laughs]

Mark: I'm sure.

Moede: Little things come back in time.

Mark: I understand. So, after Normandy you must have moved a lot faster once you got out of the hedgerows then, over the course of that summer. Did you get a sense that the German Army was starting to collapse?

Moede: I guess we did, yes. I'm trying to recollect—okay, find your way back—look at these notes here to see where we were. I know we got down to southern France, near the border there, because there was a pocket of Germans that had to be cleared out. And then we came back again to Morhange, to Lehning, Saint-Jean-Rohrbach, Woustviller, Sarreinsming, to Metz. We had our Christmas dinner at Metz. And then we got notice that we had to go to the Bulge, which we did. It was very cold, 10° below zero. And at the Bulge I got the flu. And so we were, at least the people from our office were, quartered in the doctor's home in Belgium, or in that area there. And I remember very distinctly that at that time I received a package from home. My mother had canned some homemade chili and also some pork loins, which she had packed in lard. And I asked my Sergeant Hall, my buddy, to heat up a can of this chili for me. And here I am, big high fever and stuff, you know. So he did. He brought my canteen cup full of hot chili. It was the best chili I had, also. Then we were with the 7th Army and then we transferred to plant army [??]. We were back and forward. We were in Holland. We were in Belgium. We were in Luxembourg. At one time we were quartered in a director's room in the Ruhr, some steel company, whatever, with beautiful walnut paneling and so forth. And, you know, at that time we really didn't have much respect for the paneling and stuff so we smashed the paneling to see what was behind it

and one fellow got a beautiful silk Nazi flag. And I was luckier. I had nine bottles of top-shelf cognac that I found.

Mark: You sound pretty resourceful. All of you guys did, actually.

Moede: Which we nursed for a long time. Kaldenkirchen, Germany. Kreul, Germany. I don't know, all of these names aren't quite as familiar as they were 50 years ago.

Mark: Oh, I'm sure, I'm sure.

Moede: Then we went up to the Elbe River. Oh, yes. At the Elbe River, Grasleben, Germany, a small village, salt mine—found wine and champagne. I'll have to tell you about that too. Hanover. We were to cross the Elbe River on our way to Berlin and then we were, got orders to stay 'cause this was apparently the deal that President Roosevelt had made at the Yalta Conference, that the Russians would take Berlin and we wouldn't. And so we had to shoo the Germans back across the Elbe that were trying to swim to our side, trying to escape the Russians. A lot of that doesn't make sense, you know, but that's what happened.

Mark: I mean, what did people think at the time? What did you think and what did others think? I mean, did you care about the Germans in the first place? I mean, you had been fighting a war--

Moede: I think so. Oh, I forgot. We also, you know, the atrocities. We did overrun a barn that was, had political prisoners and Jews in it. They had been herded in and then grenades were thrown in and the straw was set on fire, the doors were closed. When we got there there were still some prisoners living under the piles of dead prisoners. At that time, which was our first experience with that type of atrocity. I can't even recall the name of the place where it happened or what but I remember this. And maybe that, you know, when we got back home, really our people in this country had a hard time believing that the Germans could be as, or the Nazis, I shouldn't—I think there's a distinction—could be as horrible, evil as they were, for what they had done in these camps. It's hard to conceive that one human being can do this to another human being.

Mark: And you think a lot of people back in the United States here didn't understand that?

Moede: That's right. Even my parents didn't.

Mark: I see.

Moede: Because we're German ancestors, yeah.

Mark: I was going to say, that part of Wisconsin, it's very true. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

Moede: I know, during World War I, my father was very much opposed to our entry into. He said all it's going to do is make money for the manufacturers, and I guess it did. Most wars do. This is where I was always anti-Vietnam War. I really thought it was—[break in tape] World War I my father was very much opposed to our entry into it. He said all it's going to do is make money for the manufacturers, and I guess it did. Most wars do. This is where I was always anti-Vietnam War. I really thought it was stupid 'cause that was after World War II. I can't really think of anything else.

Mark: I've got a couple of questions about some of the men you served with.

Moede: What?

Mark: Some of the men you served with, this Dr. Mac that you had mentioned to me before, for example. If you could tell me a little bit about him and some of the other enlisted guys you served with and the sort of backgrounds they came from and how everyone got along.

Moede: You want the story of the trip from Metz to--?

Mark: I think it's a great story.

Moede: Well, on the way, we had our Christmas dinner at Metz and then we traveled up to the Bulge 'cause at that time we were, apparently, the closest division that could come up there and help. Colonel Mac was a very astute politician as well as being a doctor. He was married and he had six children at home. He did have a fraulein in Germany and contracted a social disease. So on the 26th of December when we took off for the Bulge in our open jeep with the windshield down at 10° below zero, we, first time we were kind of amazed when Colonel Mac stood up in the jeep and dropped his pants and took a hypodermic and shot himself in the rump. But then we learned later that he was doing this every two hours because he had contracted a social disease and so he was trying a cure. And, of course, getting up every two hours, he wasn't quite as stiff as the rest of us were when we finally got there and we fell out of the jeep, we were so frozen. [laughs] Okay, about, yeah, enlisted people. There was a Shorty Haines [?] from Ohio. A good poker player. In fact, the night that I joined the 35th from the 2nd Battalion, 137th, I was sleeping in the bunk and Shorty Haines comes over, shakes me, he says, "Les, can you loan me some money?" "Why?" He said, "I'm out of money and I've got a terrific hand." "All right." So I don't know what I had—\$30, \$40—I gave it to him.

The next morning he comes up to me and he says, "Well, here you are." and he takes a big roll out and he peels off what I loaned him the night before. This is Shorty Haines [sp??]. In civilian life he became a Blue Cross-Blue Shield insurance man and became actually quite wealthy. Another one was Sergeant Hall who was from Nebraska. A really nice person and I spent most of the war with him. The two of us were forward echelon. There was also a Sergeant Smitty who, when we were still in the States, was married and had twins. I recall that he had a terrible time trying to get some assistance from the Red Cross because he needed financial assistance due to the birth of the twins. And he became an electrical engineer after Service and also did very well for himself. Hall, Sergeant Hall became part of the federal government and rose to quite a high position there in armed forces-related activities.

Mark: Now, were there very many other college men such as yourself? Or were there people who hadn't been to school yet? That you know of.

Moede: Yes, there was another sergeant who was with the 102nd Battalion and I exchanged Christmas cards with him; I just can't think of his name now. He was a college graduate from Stanford.

Mark: So, if you had some free time, what did you do for fun while you were in Europe? Writing letters, you mentioned that your friend there did quite a bit of gambling.

Moede: Yeah, I played cards, too, yes.

Mark: Any good?

Moede: At one time we liberated a lot of wine and champagne and cognac. Really a lot. Each of us had a locker, ammo locker, full. One had the champagne, one had the wine, and one had the cognac. The only trouble was none of that stuff tasted very good out of a can, a metal, aluminum canteen cup so we just had to tip the bottle. It tasted better that way. In fact, after I got out of service I went strictly to Coke for quite a few years. I needed that.

Mark: A break from the alcohol?

Moede: A break from the alcohol, yeah.

Mark: Was there a lot of drinking? That's one of the things you often hear about the military is a lot of drinking.

Moede: Oh, yeah. I never liked beer but there was a lot of beer liberated too. In fact, I never really drank until I got in the Service. I didn't smoke either until I got in the Service. I got all my bad habits in the Service. [laughs]

- Mark: So, when the war in Europe ended you were where? You were in Germany somewhere. I'm wondering if you remember when you heard the news that the war had ended.
- Moede: Oh, when the war ended. Okay.
- Mark: Well, in Europe and then in Japan, I guess, later.
- Moede: When it ended in Germany we must have been in the Maria Laach area at that time on R&R, rest and relaxation, I think. See, we did have eighteen months of combat.
- Mark: You were up there a long time.
- Moede: Yes. Metz was supposed to be an R&R and it wasn't. V-J Day, I was home.
- Mark: In Wisconsin already?
- Moede: In Wisconsin. I was on furlough from Camp McCoy because we were to report there in 30 days to regroup for the continuation of the war in Japan. And then V-J came and so I got my discharge. But otherwise, yes, our Division was slated to--
- Mark: Go over.
- Moede: Go over.
- Mark: And, so, what was your reaction when you heard the Japanese had surrendered? You heard of the atomic bomb and all that.
- Moede: Yes. I was glad President Truman was president because maybe he did kill a lot of Japanese but he saved an awful lot of American lives. There's no question in my mind because the Japanese were a very formidable foe and their spiritual, I guess you would call it a spiritual drive as far as combat was concerned, was different than ours. We were draftees, most of us, and when the war was over with we had no desire, even when we were in combat areas, we really had no desire, really outstanding desire, to go on and kill people. We're not made up that way. It isn't the average American boy. And that's what we were.
- Mark: Okay. And so you're back home, and the war ends, and you're discharged. What were your priorities in life? What did you want to do to get your life back on track? You mentioned, perhaps, you want to go back to school or

something. I'm interested in what steps you took to get readjusted back into civilian life.

Moede: Well, I had saved some money in Service so I bought an eight-acre farm.

Mark: Near Reedsville somewhere.

Moede: Near Reedsville. And I raised turkeys. I drew my \$100 a month unemployment compensation for 12 months while I was doing this. And then the GI Bill was in effect and so I decided I was going, since I was farming, I was going to enroll in the "on the farm training" program. And I attempted this and I was told I was overqualified, that I should teach. So I did. And then I had classes at, out of the Reedsville High School, for 13 years. Actually, we had 20 veterans and the school charged \$25 a month, well, actually a little bit more than that because I received \$25 per month, per veteran. So I was earning \$6,000 in 1947 which was pretty good money.

Mark: Pretty good money back then, yeah. Now, this was a federal or state?

Moede: This was a federal, GI Bill, federal program. Every state had them. I met a couple awfully nice veterans who were "on the farm training" people. We used to have conventions at Madison at the campus each year and get some refresher training and that sort of thing.

Mark: And so what sort of, what did you teach these young veterans about farming? I'm interested in the course content, what they were supposed to learn. And what sort of problems did the young veteran have buying a farm or getting back into farming or whatever the case may be? What were some of the obstacles he faced?

Moede: Well, most of the farmers in our area were dairy farmers so this is what the training, the emphasis was on dairy farming, raising crops, and the breeding of good stock, and trying to increase milk production by both breeding and by feeding, and that sort of thing. The young farmers really didn't have too much difficulty getting back into farming. Some of them were farming their parents' farm. Some would rent a farm. Some were hired hands who were going to, after they had accumulated some money, buy a farm. Loans were relatively easy at that time, to get for farm, for real estate.

Mark: Were these veteran loans? Or just regular bank loans?

Moede: Regular bank loans, although the Department of Veterans Affairs had some loans at that time.

Mark: The state one, you mean?

Moede: No, really, there were some farm loans made on their second mortgage program. There were some economic assistance loans which, at that time, was up to \$3,000 at 2% interest, which was an awful nice loan—co-signer basis. I don't know more that I can tell you. I do know that it took three years to complete the program for each veteran. That they felt it was not only, they felt if they got paid while they were doing this, but that the material presented to them at that time was material that really improved their farming habits.

Mark: Yeah. Okay.

Moede: Still have people coming up to me now—I can't even remember who they are, you know—"Oh, yeah, you were my vet trainer. Remember?"

Mark: As for other types of readjustment problems, having been a Service officer you well know. I mean, sometimes veterans have problems psychologically readjusting. Sometimes they don't feel that the rest of society has accepted them or understood what they went through during the war period. Looking back, do you remember any such feelings or experiences that you had?

Moede: The World War II veterans that I worked with, both as "on the farm training" and as Veterans Service Officer, really got back into the normal life without a lot of hassle or a lot of problems. I can't recall any, both as a trainer and as Service Officer. I did run into problems with some Vietnam veterans. In fact, this is the time I--

Mark: Sure, you can.

Moede: Okay. One morning I came into the office and a veteran was sitting there waiting for me and he came into, I went into the inner office, and he followed me in. He sat down, he was crying, he was saying, "Les, you've got to help me. You've got help me. I need help, Les." "Well, what's your problem?" And he said, "Yesterday," this was Sunday, "I was sitting on the davenport with my wife and we were discussing the coming birth of our child." And he said, "The next thing I knew, I was over in Vietnam. I was living all the bad things." He said, "I didn't know what to do." He said, "I'm here. I need help." Well, I'm no psychologist, no psychiatrist, just a County Veterans Service Officer. I said, "Have you told anybody about these experiences that you had?" He said, "No." He said, "I can't. I can't tell my parents what I did. I can't tell my wife what I did." I said, "Do you go to church?" "Yes." and he named the church. I said, "Have you given any thought of talking to Father so-and-so about this problem, about these things that you've done over in Vietnam that you can't live with now?" And he said, "I don't think I can." He said, "I just can't." Now, this is a man who was a businessman, who had

come back to Manitowoc, was a businessman, was not a far-out freak if that's what you want to call it.

Mark: Or screwed up kid. A pillar of the community-type is what you're saying.

Moede: Or screwed up kid, yeah. Anyhow, we talked some more and I said, "Look, my suggestion is that you talk, you go to see Father so-and-so and you ask him to pray with you. And tell--" —he finally told me what he had done, you know— "--and just pray with him and I'm sure he will help you." It must have worked. He never came back in the office again. I never saw him again. I'm sure if it didn't work, he'd have been back. Maybe my psychology is all right.

Mark: But this sort of thing didn't happen to World War II veterans apparently. As much at least. It didn't, these sorts of experiences, you've never heard a World War II veteran say that sort of, having that sort of experience?

Moede: No. World War II veterans are really, I can't recall that I had any kind of episodes similar to this, you know.

Mark: Nightmares and that sort of thing? No nightmares or any of that kind of--

Moede: No, no, no.

Mark: Interesting.

Moede: Korean not either, no. Just the Vietnam Era. I can see where there was a big difference—World War II, Korea, Vietnam.

Mark: In what sense?

Moede: Well, as far as I was concerned, I didn't believe in this domino theory and I felt the war was unnecessary. I felt that our country really wasn't supporting this war like they supported World War II and the Korean War. Also, the availability of drugs and the stress that the veteran must have been under over in Vietnam because you couldn't tell who was the enemy and who was the friend. Everybody looked alike. You did things that you would never have done at home. And you lived like an animal. You reacted like an animal, the stress of being, and the mosquitoes, the, whatever you could recall from your bad dreams. I don't know how they, really, how the Vietnam veteran, that so many of them did come back and were able to live down their experiences. I really believe, I just don't understand how they could. I don't know how I would have reacted under those circumstances, you know. I remember one time, it's when I was Service Officer, there was so much newspaper publicity about the Vietnam veteran, the poor Vietnam veteran that I got kind of fed up.

And I think I've got it here, I wrote a letter at that time to the president of our association and asked him to bring it to the attention of the Board of Veterans Affairs—hold a second so I can find it—I believed in using the newspaper.

Mark: I can see that.

Moede: Another thing I did that I felt helped the Service Office was forming the Oneida Veterans Council. We can talk about that a little later in time.

Mark: We can talk about it now if you'd like. I was going to ask, if you could tell me a little bit about how you became the Service Officer. While you're looking for the article.

Moede: Okay. I ran out of veterans on the farm training program. And at the same time Mr. Eckert, who was a County Veterans Service Officer, retired. So I wrote the state examination, along with about fifty other veterans, for the position and I was appointed by the county board. Apparently, I passed the exam and the county board members have felt I must have been a pretty good fellow so I was the Service Officer then for twenty-four years. One of the things I found out when I became a Service Officer that all of the veteran's organizations—and we had many in Manitowoc County—the VFW, DAV, Sub Vets, AMVETS, and so forth—were, oh, distrusted one another. There was no cooperation.

Mark: Politics between the different groups.

Moede: Yeah. There was no cooperation whatsoever. I decided, hey, why not get together, get these fellows together, at an organization. So I spent maybe a whole year speaking to all of the organizations, telling them that I thought it would be best for the veterans in Manitowoc County if there was one organization that could speak for all veterans. It would become a lobbying organization. It would lobby the County Board of Supervisors for the things that the veterans in Manitowoc County felt they should have, like the eternal, that flame thing. That happened during my term. The veterans memorial, that was my idea. As I left I got the council to start working on it and then Bill Stiefvater took over and did a nice job on that. But you can do this only if you speak with one voice. The other thing is I found that it was to the advantage of the County Veterans Service Office, also, because I could use that organization for political purposes of my own.

Mark: Well, it's a lot fewer people to deal with.

Moede: What?

Mark: It's a lot fewer organizations to deal with if you have just one group to talk to.

Moede: That's right. The organization knew from the past that when they asked the county board for something they'd never get it as one organization. I wish I could find that. Anyhow, this Vietnam veteran and all this—anyhow, I got so angry I wrote this letter to the president of our association asking him to bring it before the Board of Veterans Affairs. In this letter I stated that I was sick and tired of reading about the poor Vietnam veteran. I said, of all the Vietnam veterans I have in Manitowoc County, I don't consider a half a "poor Vietnam veteran." I don't feel that it's necessary for me to take them by the hand and hand-carry them to the feed trough. I said they are very capable of doing this themselves. They have gone to college under the GI Bill, they've established businesses, they have done this and they have done that. I don't think they are a "poor Vietnam veteran" that needs this--

Mark: And so what happened as a result?

Moede: This social, what do you call this social services-type of assistance?

Mark: Safety net?

Moede: What?

Mark: Safety net?

Moede: No, I feel they didn't need that type of--

Mark: Yeah, they didn't need that sort of thing.

Moede: They were capable of taking care of themselves. When you're looking for something you surely can't find it. I was real proud of that letter.

Mark: And so what happened as a result of that letter?

Moede: It became an official part of the minutes, official minutes, of the Wisconsin Board of Veterans Affairs and was published as such. That made me feel good.

Mark: So, as a CVSO, what were your biggest challenges as far as serving the veterans? What were the biggest challenges facing veterans?

Moede: As Service Officer?

Mark: Yeah, in your experience. I know I can only speak for yourself, of course. In your experience.

Moede: Well, I really, I'd have to do a little bit of thinking. I can't recall at the moment what I would consider the biggest challenge. My job was to help the veteran in any way that I could. To cut the red tape, if possible, with the Department of Veterans Affairs or with the Veterans Administration. There was a lot of this red tape, foot dragging, and so forth. And this was my job. And I did it to the best of my ability. I utilized the newspaper. I wrote articles about benefits weekly. I had a program on the radio which I was interviewed by the WOMT and WCUB, weekly programs, again bringing to the attention of veterans and their dependents, things that were available. This is part of your job is to get out the word.

Mark: Right.

Moede: You can't do it through veteran's organizations alone because less than 50% of the veterans belong to veterans' organizations.

Mark: Right.

Moede: You've got to catch the others. You've got to catch their widows too.

Mark: So, I've just got one last area of questions and that involves veterans' organizations. We've already been talking about this a little bit. Did you, personally, join any such groups? Did you join the local Legionnaires or the VFW?

Moede: I will tell you this story about that. In our village of Reedsville we had Dr. Carey, who at one time was state commander of the American Legion. And I was on the farm working, grinding something. I got a piece of steel in my eye so I went to Dr. Carey to have this piece of steel removed. And so I was leaning back in his chair and he said, "You're a veteran aren't you?" "Yeah." He said, "Do you belong to the Legion, regional Legion?" "No." Still fooling around with my eye, you know. And he said, "Don't you think you should belong to the Legion?" "Yeah, I think I should." So then he took out the piece of steel that was in my eye. So I joined the American Legion. [laughs]

Mark: Very good salesman, huh? [laughs]

Moede: Yes.

Mark: And, so, when was this? Was this--

Moede: This was shortly after I got home.

Mark: Right after you got home.

Moede: Yeah. In fact I had, really I had no idea, I didn't know anything about veterans' organizations at that time, you know. It was a field entirely foreign to me.

Mark: I see.

Moede: I had, oh, I remember when we were in high school we'd have the Memorial Day parades and then the Legion would furnish the soda pop and the food, you know. But that was my contact with the Legion.

Mark: That was about it.

Moede: After awhile I joined the VFW. I joined the AMVETS, and so forth.

Mark: As a Service Officer, I'm sure you joined a lot of different groups.

Moede: Yeah.

Mark: Would you say you were an active member, especially right after the war? Did you go to the meetings? Did you hold any offices or any of that sort of thing? Or did you just, was it a social outlet for you?

Moede: I was not a very active member of the Legion. When I became a Service Officer then I spent many evenings speaking to the organizations. This is, again, part of my job, you know, to get out the information, answer questions, and so forth. I really tried, I really tried to make-- [Tape ends abruptly]

[End of Interview]