

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN R. MOSES
Armored Division, Army, World War II
1995

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Moses, John R., (1919-2007). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 3 sound cassettes (ca.138 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 3 sound cassettes (ca.138 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

John R. Moses, a Madison, Wisconsin resident, discusses his service as a lieutenant in the 3rd Tank Battalion, 10th Armored Division in the Army during World War II and his work as the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs from 1962 to 1982. Moses was born in North Dakota where his father, John Moses, was a prominent lawyer and politician who became Governor and later a U.S. Senator. Moses mentions that he and his father disagreed about the United States' policy of isolationism prior to the war. Moses touches upon how the Depression and WPA projects affected North Dakota. In 1941, Moses was drafted into the Army and went through basic training at Camp Callan (California). He discusses his basic training in detail, describing the outdated World War I artillery and surveillance equipment they had to use. He describes the frenzy on the Army base during Pearl Harbor and how his coast artillery unit used spotlights to look for Japanese attackers off the California coast. Moses mentions his isolationist views changed after Pearl Harbor and says he was psychologically ready to serve. Moses also remarks that civilians in San Diego treated servicemen with more respect after Pearl Harbor. Moses relates that his first assignment was to Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands (Alaska). He describes the scenic ferryboat trip to Alaska that he took with the 206th Arkansas National Guard. In Alaska, Moses became a switchboard operator. He describes ongoing tensions with Captain Warren Dodgeson who refused to process his request to go to Officer Candidate School (OCS) and later acted cowardly in battle. Moses details his participation defending Dutch Harbor against a Japanese air attack. He also relates a humorous story about he and a friend smoking pipe tobacco to annoy Captain Dodgeson. They were assigned to dig ditches as punishment, which they did not do. Moses suggests his negative experience inspired him to be a better officer than Dodgeson. In 1943, Moses left Dutch Harbor to attend OCS at Fort Knox (Kentucky). He characterizes officer training as rigorous and also discusses his tank and artillery training. Moses feels some of his commanding officers who had not seen combat resented soldiers who had. After OCS, Moses was assigned to Camp Gordon (Georgia) to the 10th Armored Division where he led field exercises with Sherman tanks. In 1944, after D-Day, Moses was finally sent to Europe. Moses related that his unit was the first ship to off-load in Cherbourg (France) and that they had to disembark by climbing down nets into the mud because the ports had been destroyed. He mentions that even this long after D-Day, the French still greeted the Americans as liberators, decorating tanks with flowers and offering soldiers food. He tells a story of a farmer in Normandy who offered him some calvados (apple brandy). Moses proceeded to travel by tank to Metz, by the German border. Moses explains there were five men to a tank, and as a platoon leader, he

usually rode in the second tank in a line of five. By this time, Moses was part of the 20th Corps in the 3rd Army and belonged to one of General Patton's Divisions. They were trying to build a bridgehead across the Moselle River above Metz. Moses discusses the numerous failures while trying to build a bridge heavy enough to transport tanks under constant fire from the Germans. He tells a humorous story about bored soldiers trying to kill a wild boar by setting a trap with hand-grenades. The grenades went off and caused a commotion. A division-wide alert was issued; they never caught the pig. Moses reveals that his greatest fear in combat was of showing the men he was commanding that he was afraid. Finally, his tanks crossed the Moselle River in the dark, but they found themselves facing off with German tanks in a small village. Moses feels that German tanks were far superior to American tanks and explains the differences in detail. He also characterizes German soldiers as a competent, respected fighting force. Moses states that his tank was hit during the battle and he jumped out, landing safely in a ditch, but losing his glasses. Moses managed to climb into the second tank in line, but that too, was pierced, and he was seriously injured by shrapnel. His men helped him hide out in the woods and eventually got him back to a hospital. Moses tells how an African American ambulance driver rushed him to a hospital in Verdun because the field hospital closer to the frontlines did not have enough beds to treat Moses. Moses explains that his wounds were severe and gangrene had set in on his hip. He had surgery in Verdun before being moved to Paris and then England. He mentions that the ambulance driver took them on a quick tour of Paris before taking them to the hospital so they could see the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower out the ambulance window. Moses states that his career in the military was ended by his wounds but that he was lucky enough to walk again. He describes life in the hospital ward, the general good spirits of most casualties, and the good treatment he had from professional doctors and nurses. The head nurse in the ward, Donna, became a life-long friend, and Moses later married a close friend of hers (his second wife). At one of the hospitals, Moses ran into a man from his unit in Metz. This soldier explained that when Moses was wounded and slipping in and out of consciousness, he had been the one to give him a morphine injection in his rear end. Moses was finally shipped to a hospital in Chicago and retired from the service in December, 1945. He moved to Wisconsin with his first wife where he attended UW Madison Law School on the GI Bill. He discusses the challenges of raising four children while attending school. Moses characterizes the Madison campus as "all veterans" and felt that having servicemen in college made the experience "more serious." Moses mentions that he used the veteran's home loan program to buy a house. Moses touches upon his participation in veterans groups, particularly the American Veterans Committee (AVC). When he moved to Gays Mills (Wisconsin) to open a law practice, Moses briefly joined the Lions Club, VFW, and American Legion; however, Moses appreciated the AVC most because of its motto: "citizens first, veterans second." He describes his forays into local politics, running campaigns for state legislators and serving as the School Board President of Gays Mills. He explains that he became involved in politics in 1948 writing position papers for Democratic candidates on national issues and managing "The Wisconsin Democrat" newsletter from 1948 to 1950. In 1961, Wisconsin Governor Gaylord Nelson appointed Moses the director of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs and charged Moses with overhauling a department that had previously been

looking for excuses to deny veterans benefits and loans. Moses served as director (later, his title changed to secretary) for four different governors. He details the intricate political atmosphere within each administration and portrays himself as earning much bipartisan support at first, then falling victim to partisan disputes. He mentions encountering anti-veteran bias in the legislature, and he covers in detail a conflict with Governor Patrick Lucey. Using the line-item veto, Lucey “gutted” a veterans bill that Moses helped draft, then he changed a law so he could remove Moses from office. Moses fought against his removal in the State Supreme Court and won. Next, he discusses at length the challenges of working with Vietnam veterans who did not come forward to claim their benefits like World War II vets. Moses initiated the WISVET program in the 1970s, which was the only statewide outreach program in the nation to find Vietnam vets wherever they were and help them receive their benefits. Moses states he is most proud of building up a program for part-time study loans for veterans returning to college and of improving conditions at King Veterans Home.

Biographical Sketch:

John R. Moses (1919-2007) was born in Hazen, North Dakota. His father, John Moses, became North Dakota’s Governor and later a U.S. Senator. Moses served as a lieutenant in the Army during World War II in the Aleutian Islands (Alaska) and in France, where he was injured in 1945, earning a Purple Heart. After a stint in several European hospitals, Moses finally returned to the U.S. and attended the University of Wisconsin for his BA and Law degrees. He practiced law in Gays Mills (Wisconsin) from 1952 to 1962 before becoming the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the State of Wisconsin, an appointment he held from 1962 to 1982. Moses participated in a number of veterans organizations in Gays Mills and Madison, most notably the American Veterans Committee.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995

Transcribed by Karen M. Emery, WDVA Staff, 1997

Edited by Jackie Mulhern, 2007

Abstract by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2009

Interview Transcript:

Mark: Okay. Today's date is July 19, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. John Moses, presently of Madison, a veteran of World War II and a former secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Good morning.

Moses: Good morning, Mark.

Mark: Thank you for coming in. I really appreciate it. I suppose we should start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to your entry into the military.

Moses: I was born in North Dakota in 1919, finished high school in a small town in the central part of western North Dakota, had one year at the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks, then worked at one thing or another, winding up with two years as an adult probation officer in Washington, D.C.

Mark: What did your father do for a living?

Moses: My father was an attorney who came from Norway in 1905. Finished his education in this country and went into the practice of law in North Dakota. He got into politics rather early, first as state's attorney, compared to our district attorney here, then as Governor of the state. He was Governor for three terms.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Moses: When he died in 1945 he was a United States Senator from North Dakota. So I had a mixed background. The law in a small North Dakota town, and then the politics, the campaigning and the politics that went on after the elections.

Mark: You were exposed to this at a very early age?

Moses: Yes, I really was. Drove my father on some of the campaign tours when I was 16, driving around the state.

Mark: So, this is kind of unrelated to the military history interview but I'm curious, these were the Depression years and I was wondering about your impressions going around the state with your father and your own economic well-being prior to 1941. I was wondering if you could comment a little bit on that.

Moses: It was definitely the Depression years. The Farm Depression started in North Dakota in about 1927. The Depression with the Wall Street collapse in '29 was married to a very deep drought that extended actually until about '39, '38

or '39. So the Depression was very real. Farmers were losing their farms, the land was blowing away in many cases, drifts of dust up over the fences and hiding outbuildings on abandoned farms, and that sort of thing. That's what I grew up in.

Mark: So, when it came to your making a living after you graduated high school, did you have difficulty finding something to do?

Moses: Actually there were jobs available. I took a job as, first of all, as a surveyor's assistant out in the Badlands of North Dakota where a federal project was buying up sub-marginal land, developing it for ranching, and fencing it, developing water, and then leasing it to cattlemen's associations. That job was under one of the federal agencies but it paid, as I remember, about \$100 a month which was not bad at that time.

Mark: At that time, no.

Moses: I'd been offered a job teaching the country school at \$30 a month with room and board which was also not bad. But there were jobs to be had. The federal programs to put people to work, WPA and associated programs, were functioning. Although times were very, very tough and many farmers lost farms in that period, life went on; it was just a very reduced level.

Mark: So in 1941 you entered the service. I'm unclear as to whether or not you enlisted or whether or not you were drafted.

Moses: Actually, I was drafted. I had a problem that I was in sharp disagreement with my father at the time. He came from Norway, was an Internationalist, as they were known in those days, those who were willing to look beyond the border. I felt that we should take advantage of our insulated situation and stay out of the war. And so it was only later that I became convinced that my father had been right and I had been very, very short-sighted.

Mark: So, when you got the greeting in the mail, do you recall your reaction? Do you remember your response?

Moses: Oh, I had been expecting it so there was no great surprise to it. No, I'd been expecting it. I was reconciled to it. I didn't go in as, because you see, I went in in September of '41 before the, before Pearl Harbor. The country at that time was very much into the war experience. I had a brother who was younger than I who was in the North Dakota National Guard who went into service a year before I did. So we had that and there were people all around us going into service.

Mark: If you would describe for me your entry into the military. I remember mine fairly clearly; getting on the plane, having the drill sergeant yell at you, and the haircut, and the whole business. If you would just describe where you went, and who you saw, and what you did on the way to basic training.

Moses: We went from North Dakota from Bismarck. I had been working in Washington, D.C. and my draft board was in Washington, D.C. but I had the registration transferred to Bismarck so I could go in from North Dakota. As I remember, a group of us got on the train, were helped down to the train by someone from the Selective Service Board, locally. Went to St. Paul to Fort Snelling. We went through the usual physical examinations, accumulation of shots, the measuring for clothing, and finally, after about a week at Fort Snelling, a group of us were sent to Camp Callan, California. I remember being excited about that, the trip out there, because I was given the brown folder with all of the papers for the group being sent down.

Mark: Why was that? Were you the oldest or more educated?

Moses: I was probably older and possibly better educated. I don't know why, I don't know why. We went down by first class train. We were limited in what we could order in the diner but it was sort of an exciting vacation really. The group that I went with included people whom I became very close to during training and afterwards. I remember transferring in Los Angeles for a train going down to Camp Callan and then reaching Camp Callan in the middle of the night, being given bedding and taken by truck to a barracks, it was black and dark rather, and put to bed, and then got up to the bugle about 5:00, two or three hours later.

Mark: And then commenced your basic training.

Moses: Then commenced the basic training.

Mark: So, what did this training consist of? One of the things I'm interested in, this is very early in the war, I'm wondering about your comments on the equipment that you were issued. Did you have the World War I rifles or even the broom sticks as sometimes you hear about?

Moses: We had rifles. We had the 30.06 Springfields. We had the old World War I tin hats. The equipment was, for the branch of service into which I was sent, was quite good. I was put into a coast artillery, anti-aircraft, unit. I tried to get into the armored force at that time and they simply were sending you wherever they had requisitions for bodies.

Mark: 'Cause you mention in the notes here "everyone from Halverson to Phillips." Just arbitrarily sent?

Moses: Arbitrarily, yeah.

Mark: So, I'm interested, why did you want to go into armor? I mean, a lot of guys I speak to want to go in the Air Force. That seems to be the romantic thing.

Moses: I'd always been interested in history. I don't know whether the armored force seemed more romantic. I read a lot of military history before that and I was deeply interested in the accounts of the German blitzkrieg tactics. Felt that that was something that we were going to have become involved in and I wanted in on it. Tried very hard, and I'm sure I could have if I had pulled strings, have gotten an assignment to the armored forces. My father was Governor at that time, and even in the pre-war period, even in the wartime period as a matter of fact, political preference was seen.

Mark: I was going to ask you, having been the Governor's son, had you wanted to avoid military service, could you have? And why didn't you?

Moses: Oh, I don't know whether I could have. Quite frankly, Mark, the idea never came to me. I, at that time, was ready to go in, psychologically. I can't say that I was anxious to serve, although I was ready to serve. I knew that I was going to have to. I felt that it was appropriate for young people of my generation to get in. I felt quite strongly by that time that the isolation of the '20s and the '30s that had kept the armed forces at a ridiculously low level were a significant factor in bringing us into the war. It made the attacks upon us possible in the thinking of the Japanese and the Germans. And so I felt that we were going to have to develop an armored capability and I wanted into that.

Mark: Okay. But you ended up in the coast artillery for now?

Moses: Yes, yes.

Mark: What was your discipline like in basic training?

Moses: The discipline was tight and tough. They had the old Army drill sergeant idea of breaking you into compliance with the system. It was not a problem for me. You got to resenting some of the people, some of the officers and sergeants, because you actually dealt with non-coms rather than officers. I learned at a very early stage that the old advice not to volunteer for anything was stupid. You looked at alternatives and you knew you were going to be caught with something so you volunteered for what seemed to be least onerous. And so I came into some fascinating training simply because I had volunteered.

Mark: Like what?

Moses: Well, I remember when we were on the way up to Alaska right after Pearl Harbor, got up to Fort Lawton out of Seattle, waiting for a ship to go up to Dutch Harbor, and I was immediately put on KP in the pots and pans section. We were all buck privates, of course, rank trainees, hadn't even finished the training period. And after the second long, long day of starting before it was light and ending after the light had gone, washing pots and pans in this tremendous kitchen, a friend of mine, who had gone into training with me, and I decided that there had to be a better way. So we stopped at the post office the next noon, because we were given some time off in the middle of the day, mainly to get postage stamps as I remember. And we saw the back of the post office in this old brick, old Army post, post office. The back of the post office area was piled high with bags of mail. It was approaching Christmas, the post was new, they didn't have, they hadn't expanded the staff sergeant's postal staff at all, and so we decided that this bore looking into and we asked the staff sergeant how things were going. "Oh," he told us, "it's going very badly." So we said, "Well, both Jim and I are experienced in handling mail and we've got a full day assignment but," I said, "we get some time off in the middle of the day. We'd be happy to come in here and sort the mail and get it out." "Oh," he said, "would you?" "Sure, sure." He asked what we were assigned to and we told him we were on KP over at the big double kitchen. And he said, "Well, we'll change that." and so the following morning we started at a reasonable hour sorting mail. Quite frankly neither of us had had any experience at all but we worked hard, we wanted to keep this cozy arrangement, and we helped him, and he was very, very grateful when we finally transferred out. Sort of, I don't know whether you ever read O. Henry.

Mark: No, I'm not familiar with O. Henry.

Moses: O. Henry was one of the books that I devoured and he had one volume made up of short stories, all of his things were short stories, entitled "The Gentle Grafter." I've often thought that perhaps my looking for assignments that were not terribly burdensome was taken from O. Henry.

Mark: It could well have been I suppose. Back to basic training a little bit, could you describe some of the men who were also in your training. Were they also draftees? Or were they volunteers? Where did they come from?

Moses: They were, for the most part, draftees as I remember. The draft was working quite smoothly by that time. There were volunteers. I think the volunteers had come in earlier. It may be that volunteers had options on assignments but I was not aware of it at the time. They came from all over the country. There were a large number from the Middle-West as I remember. Quite a few from up the coast in California. I became close to a young man from Burlingame in

the San Francisco area, another one from Berkeley, very close to people from Minnesota and Wisconsin—remember at that time I was from North Dakota. The equipment you asked about earlier was good equipment for the period. The Army air defense had not moved beyond the World War I strategy. The searchlights and sound locators, to locate the slow flying planes flying not too high overhead, flash the searchlights on them and then the guns took over. The antiaircraft guns were 75 millimeter, not very long range, adequate for World War I, not at all for World War II. We learned to use those big horns to zero in on a plane flying over and were confident that when we had a competent crew on the sound locators and the signal came to flash the lights that the searchlights would come on the plane flying overhead. So we had confidence in the equipment but, of course, it didn't take us long to learn that the world had moved on from searchlights and sound locators.

Mark: In Alaska you found this out?

Moses: In Alaska, yes.

Mark: We'll come back to that 'cause I'm interested in this. The whole idea of coast artillery and that sort of thing, it's foreign to me so I'll have some questions about that.

Moses: Well, coast artillery at one time was very important to the defense of the continent. The antiaircraft effort grew out of the coast artillery. It seemed as if it were closer to the coast artillery than it was to the field artillery so it was developed there.

Mark: At this moment I'd like to get your recollections on the attack on Pearl Harbor. Now, you were in a sort of different position than most of the veterans I've spoken with in that you were in the service at the time. I'm interested in how you found out about the news; your reaction, and the reaction of those around you, those in uniform already and, perhaps, most immediately affected by it.

Moses: I learned about it that beautiful Sunday down in San Diego. A brother, or a sister rather, and brother-in-law had taken two of us, there'd been a North Dakota picnic the day before as happens in Arizona and California and areas where groups from one state or another have come, and on Sunday we were being shown around the hills outside of San Diego. We looked down on the harbor and there were the Naval ships in the harbor and everything seemed very peaceful, and we got back to the house later in the afternoon, turned on the radio and, of course, the radio was filled with news about the attack. There was shock, disbelief initially. They couldn't do it to us, you know. We were too big, and too strong, and these Japanese were sort of a second rate nation, second rate people, probably didn't have the brains or the skills to challenge us. And reality set in rather quickly as news from Pearl Harbor

came because they had done a complete job. We were assigned immediately. The word got out for all servicemen to return immediately to their bases and so Ralph and I were taken down to the highway going out to Camp Callan, about 15 miles north of San Diego, and the very first car that came by pulled over and braked to a stop and gave us a lift out. Very different from hitchhiking into or out of San Diego before Pearl Harbor.

Mark: How was that?

Moses: Oh, there were still places down there that said “Dogs and Servicemen Not Allowed.” They looked down on servicemen, even when they should have realized that between the Navy and the Army and the Marines down there, the prosperity of that area was highly dependent on the military establishment but we were second rate citizens until the war came and then nothing was too good for us. We got back out to the base, we’re immediately told take our searchlight sound locator unit out to the cliffs overlooking the Pacific and set up there to tie in with the anti-aircraft battery that was assigned to us, and so we did. I was classified as a platoon leader, as I remember, at that time. In training you finally worked up to where you were given an acting role and I was acting platoon leader so I got the unit set up, posted the sentries, and we went through the night. Exciting as could be. There were planes overhead, rumors flying that the Japanese were attacking. I remember one of those I had on sentry duty shouting, “Halt! Who goes there?” and I can hear the bolt, ‘cause we were issued our rifles and a clip of five cartridges--

Mark: After the attack you mean?

Moses: After the attack, yeah. All of this after the attack. And I ran over to where Jim was posted and he’s at the head of a draw that went down, a very steep draw. The bluff there was probably 200 feet high above the coast, above the beach. What he was challenging was a red light about 20 miles up the coast that somebody had forgotten to extinguish and he was sure it was a guy smoking a cigar coming out of the draw. People were jumpy as could be. It’s a wonder that there weren’t incidents.

Mark: So there was serious concern that there was going to be an attack?

Moses: Very much so. Not eventually, that it was imminent. If they could attack Pearl Harbor, they could attack the west coast. There was, a story went around about a Japanese truck farmer just outside the camp who was supposed to have, in the middle of his crop whatever it was, a field crop, supposed to have cut an arrow pointing to Camp Callan so that it could be seen from the air but not from the ground. Well, it was ridiculous and yet everybody believed it and was willing to believe anything after Pearl Harbor.

Mark: Now, it didn't take long until you were moved up to Alaska.

Moses: That's right.

Mark: Would you describe that process for me?

Moses: When we got back to the barracks, probably on the second day, and I don't remember precisely on this, we were told that we were going to the Philippines and we were to get an issue of tropical clothing and to prepare for that we all got fresh haircuts, I remember, and made ready for shipment to the South Pacific. But very quickly it became apparent that it was not going to be possible to reinforce the units there on the Philippines and so, I think it was a week after Pearl Harbor, that we were told that we were, a group of us, they cut an order, you know, with a lot of names on it, were being sent to Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands as replacements. We were on the train by the 15th, so it was very quick. Went up slowly to Seattle, stationed at this old Army fort, brick barracks sort of thing with brand new frame barracks thrown up as rapidly as they could, and double mess hall with a single huge kitchen, and lots of dirty pots and pans. And it took awhile for them to get a ship to take us up because everything was being pressed into service, everything was being used that was available. They finally got a World War, well, it was pre-World War I Puget Sound ferry. Very small, very slow. I remember we were a group of us, 14 of us, were in one room just above the boiler room, steel plates on the floor and incredibly hot. And yet it was a beautiful trip up. It was a contract transportation. Whoever owned the ship contracted to take us up and feed us on the way and we got boiled fish and potatoes, and boiled fish and potatoes, but it was sort of exciting, you know. There was nothing really burdensome about it. Played a lot of bridge on the way up and watched the scenery.

Mark: Which was beautiful I take it.

Moses: It was beautiful. The north Pacific is probably, when it's bad, probably the roughest stretch of ocean in the world. For some reason or other the weather smiled on us and it didn't snow or blow, the sun shown, we coasted majestically up the Inside Passage past Ketchikan and Juneau and watched the gold mine which was then functioning on the mountain back of Juneau, cut across to Kodiak Island, very slowly up, rather down, the Alaskan Peninsula past the snow-capped volcanoes. Beautiful, just beautiful. The weather held all the way to Dutch Harbor.

Mark: So, once you got to Dutch Harbor what did you do to get set up?

Moses: We were assigned when we got there to the Arkansas National Guard regiment.

Mark: Which was which one? Just for the record.

Moses: Arkansas National Guard.

Mark: Do you remember the number?

Moses: Yeah. 206.

Mark: 206.

Moses: Yeah.

Mark: 206 coast artillery, right? I'm sorry. [TALKED OVER]

Moses: Pardon.

Mark: It's right on here.

Moses: Yeah. They had been up there for about six months and there were barracks in the Army base, Fort Mears, but I was put in a pyramidal tent, one of the World War I, but the Indian War pyramidal tents that had wooden floor, small Sibley stove named after General Sibley, the Indian fighter. We had to heat with, we had to use pressed sawdust logs that they shipped up because there was no wood at all on the islands. It was cold, it was very cold because a fire wouldn't last through the night. But we survived.

Mark: I suppose it was damp, too.

Moses: Quite damp.

Mark: So what were your daily duties then between then and the attack?

Moses: I was assigned to a switchboard in the orderly room of this Battery A. Had had some switchboard experiences as a kid 'cause one of my friends in North Dakota was in a telephone company family, small telephone company. The captain and I didn't get along from the moment I came in. He was a teacher, an eighth grade teacher of mathematics from a small school in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Was given to talking about his successes with women, and his social successes generally, and how he was a friend of this general and that general. He was disliked intensely by the enlisted people in the unit and perhaps they did a better job of concealing their contempt for him than I did. I think that my problem started out when one of the officers in the unit, from Little Rock, Arkansas, an attorney named Rose with the ...

Mark: With the infamous law firm?

Moses: Well, infamous, it was the best law firm in the state of Arkansas.

Mark: It still is, I guess.

Moses: Probably still is. But he said that he looked at my 201 file and he felt that I ought to apply for officer training. He said they're looking for people with your sort of AGC, Army General Classification, test scoring and with your background. So he said, "You must apply for officer training." Well, I, in my mind, questioned whether that was wise just coming into the unit but finally after about three months I did, and the captain and I, from that period on, were definitely not friends. I applied, he put the application in the, kept it in his basket. It was only when after the Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor that the Battery A was broken up into two batteries and I was assigned to the second of the batteries with no first sergeant, a captain was assigned to command it, and I was the only one in the battery, who could type. And so they wanted me to be the battery clerk. By that time I was so sour on the military, on the National Guard, on the 206, that I said, "No, I won't do it." And, of course, they could have assigned me but I think they were desperate at that point and wanted somebody who would cooperate. And finally I agreed to be the battery clerk but only until a replacement came in with the proper qualifications. But the new first sergeant and the new captain were such fine people that I quickly changed my idea, and the replacement came in, I was told he was available, and I asked them as humbly as I could if I could stay, that I'd like to stay. And so I did. And it was then that I was able to get an application for OCS processed. The problem was that after the Japanese attack it was six months before they permitted anybody to go to the Air Force or Officers Candidate School or transfer out of the unit and so it was much delayed.

Mark: Now this is Arkansas National Guard which is different than the regular Army unit you were with. I was wondering if you could describe some of the guys in the Arkansas regiment and, being a Yankee in there, I assume there a few others but, did you feel, were you made to feel you were a minority?

Moses: We were made to feel welcome I think. I made some very close friends among the Arkansas people. So many friends that I've gone back to reunions of the 206th down in Little Rock. There was a lot of good-natured kidding about "damn Yankees" you know, and about Rebels. They came from all over Arkansas. There were guys from down in the river bottoms who had very little education, there were people with college education. It was, I think, no different really than if I had been assigned to a unit from North Dakota so it wasn't a traumatic experience at all. As I remember, we bonded quickly and quite well.

- Mark: That's interesting actually. So, as for the attack on Dutch Harbor, if you would just give me a sort of narrative of what led up to it and your role in it. And you mentioned some of the outmoded technology involved with antiaircraft artillery. I was wondering if you could comment on that as well.
- Moses: After I reached Dutch Harbor the searchlight sound locator units were being disbursed around the island to protect the island. But at the same time there was word of the new radar technology and while I was just getting broken into the unit they started shipping up radar units. They were SCR 264 as I remember—Signal Corps Radio 264—some of the very earliest of the radar. Crate after crate of parts and big manuals on how to set them up and how to operate them and nobody really knew. We had some electricians in the outfit because we had the electric tie between the searchlights and the control unit and the guns. We had power generators that we had to use whenever there was a scare. We did finally get the first searchlight unit, or radar unit, set up but it didn't function for us. And it wasn't until after the attack that they sent technicians up who did put it into operating order. We knew that the Japanese were moving up. There was word that there was a task force on the way, oh, probably as early as May, mid-May. I remember a notice that the battery commander posted on the bulletin board several days before the attack to the effect that, "Wolf has been shouted before but this is the real thing so when you leave the barracks take with you what you'll need for survival because when you come back the barracks will probably be burned down." And yet in spite of the fact that we knew they were coming when we got up the morning of the first attack and were ready to go down to the barracks area, I was on an outpost at that time, to go down to the barracks area for breakfast and the first bombs landed and we identified the planes overhead at about 10,000 feet and belatedly the first antiaircraft fire took off, it was unreal. It wasn't possible. Not all the training in the world prepared you for this notion that there was somebody shooting at you, somebody trying to kill you, you know. I don't think that the people slowed down very much except that it, everybody went through the same experience. It can't be happening and yet it was. I was impressed with the way people did respond. We stayed up there on the outpost on the hill overlooking the Naval air station and fired at the planes 10,000 feet with our 30.06 rifles, the only thing we had. Expended a hell of a lot of ammunition. And then the Jap Zeros came charging down and strafing areas where there seemed to be antiaircraft fire coming and so we fired vigorously at the Zeros. It made you feel better, even though we didn't see any planes falling.
- Mark: With your Springfields again you mean?
- Moses: Springfields, yeah. There was an antiaircraft machine-gun set up but only after the attack, set up on our outpost. And the Navy almost immediately contributed a number of Oerlikon 20 millimeter antiaircraft guns, the type that

were used in multiple mounts on ships early on. But we had very little in the way of rapid-fire anti-aircraft weapons. The first bombing did take out about half of the barracks, about half of the warehouses. It hit the hospital. The second day bombing was low-level and they destroyed the seaplane hangar and installations around the place. Hit most of the oil storage tanks. So it was a dramatic thing.

Mark: Was it an effective raid?

Moses: The raid was quite effective, yes. Yeah. We were in an outpost but overlooking the beach and the captain had, the captain whom I disliked had, urged that we dig foxholes but away from the beach on the sheltered side. A group of us, and I think most of us who came to this decision were replacements, were not used to following the captain's orders or at least liking them—we realized that if there was a landing—and there were troop transports identified with the two carrier task force—we realized that if there was a landing, it was going to come up the gullies from the beach down about 400 feet below us and so we tried to set up foxholes, connecting foxholes overlooking the area that we thought would be attacked and the captain didn't like that. I remember he ducked down into his switchboard hut when the first attack came and stayed there until after the second attack. The morning, mid-morning after the first attack a truck came up from the base area loaded with ammunition, 30-caliber ammunition, rifle grenades, an assortment of small caliber stuff, and I was outside the CP, Quonset hut, dug into the hill. The driver wanted to know how much ammunition we wanted dropped off and I went in and got the first sergeant and asked "Old Dipper Lip" how much ammunition should be dropped off and he said, well, he'd have to ask the captain. So he called the captain down in the switchboard hut which was on the other side of the mound and dug way down into the hill and he came back and he said, "That son-of-a-bitch says we don't want any ammunition. We're a highly sensitive unit up here and we don't want to draw attention to our position." I said, "Sarg, go on back inside." and so he went back inside and we off-loaded everything that the truck driver would let us have and stashed it away. If there was going to be an attack, we wanted something to fight with.

Mark: I get the impression that this captain had a very negative, he made a very negative impression on you.

Moses: Oh, yes.

Mark: I don't want to jump ahead of your story but I want to touch on this now. When you eventually became an officer did you look back on this gentleman and how he conducted business? Was he kind of a negative example for you?

Moses: Well, I don't realize that I did. I'm not sure that I did. He was not respected by the Arkansas people either including the first sergeant who after that experience became more and more of a hero because he would take the side of the enlisted men against the captain.

Mark: I was just curious. I wondered if you thought back to him when you were making a decision.

Moses: No, I don't think I, I think I tried to wash him out of my hair. Actually, when I was invited to go back to the reunions—and I still get the invitations and carry on correspondence with some of them and I do intend to go back—but they've always been very careful to tell me that Warren Dodgeson (sp??) is not invited and is not expected to be there.

Mark: Even after 50 years?

Moses: Even after all these years. Yeah.

Mark: People keep track of that sort of thing.

Moses: Yeah.

Mark: So after the attack then, what changed at Dutch Harbor there? How did you get back on your feet and get operational? What sorts of things did you have to do?

Moses: We were not concerned, of course, with rebuilding the base area. That was somebody else's problem. Our problem was to make sure that the outpost we were on was more secure. And we did that in spite of the captain. And then when I was transferred to another unit the captain was very responsible and we, I think, became an efficient unit. I'm not saying we had not been before because the training had been there. But to just fill in on this captain experience—by the time of the attack and before the attack and before the captain showed his colors by hiding in the switchboard hut, he and his executive officer—and the word came back from the switchboard operator down there that they each got under the lower, there were two double bunks there in the hut, and they each got under the lower bunk and pulled the footlocker in after them through the period of the attack, but before the attack some of us had become increasingly brave with the guy. We acknowledged we were going nowhere in his unit and I remember a replacement from Berkeley whose father was a big banker up there and who became a close friend because we were outsiders and we smoked pipe and we liked to order tobacco from an outfit in New York—Wally Frank. And we had had a couple of shipments by that time even though it took an awfully long time to get it up there. So we decided that when the captain moved up into our hut and made it

the CP for the battery and took over the desk at the outer door and strung blankets across the rear third of the unit and made that his quarters and the executive's quarters that we were not going to cooperate any more than we had to. He let it be known that he had a very sensitive nose and couldn't stand the smell of tobacco. So we got out our most fragrant pipe tobacco—and we had the upper and lower bunk right next to the switchboard desk at the outer door and because with his coming the lights were kept on up there all the time and he got a corps of Arkansas boys around him so that he could tell stories about his great successes in this and that—and we then took our most fragrant blend of tobacco—as I remember it was Yenidge Delight—and we stoked up, lit up and lay there behind the blankets puffing the smoke out into the area and he was right almost beside us. And there was silence first, and then coughing, and then a great scratching of chairs and we figured we were safe because he couldn't object to us smoking in our own quarters, couldn't make it stick, so we smoked and he disappeared. And every time he tried to set up shop there in the two or three days before the attack we got out Yenidge Delight. Well, after the attack and he was able to come out from underneath his bunk in the switchboard hut on the second day, on the third day, he then assigned Basil and I to walking searchlight guard at night and to digging a new, deeper CP hut for him and his executive officer during the day. Because there was nothing up there to interest him during the day he would get his jeep driver and they would go on down the long hill, past the Naval air station, and over to where there was an officers club. To illustrate how changed our position was after this experience, the first sergeant, as soon as the captain disappeared down around the corner with his jeep, would get us up out of the hole and we could go off and get some sack time and there were volunteers who would go down. And the captain would come up and he was absolutely dumbfounded at how fast that hole got dug and we'd be down there because there was a lookout posted and when his jeep was sighted coming up the hill we'd get out of bed and go down with our shovels and we'd smile up at him, you know, and dig vigorously when he came to check on it. It became obvious to him that this was not punishment enough so he exiled us to an outpost. I was sent out about six miles to an outpost on a headland that rose up 1,000 feet from the stone beach. The hill was so steep that you had to use a rope to climb up it. But it was so remote that there were no officers ever came out there and we lived very well. I was there until the big battery was broken up and I was assigned to the second battery and then we were brought back from exile. [chuckle]

Mark: So, you left Dutch Harbor then to go to OCS?

Moses: Yes.

Mark: That was, jeez, it had to be early '43?

- Moses: It was early '43. It was in, as I remember it was April when we got back to Washington, to Seattle. After a few days there went by train to Fort Knox.
- Mark: If you'd describe what sort of training you had to become an officer. You had been through basic training, had been in the military. What did they teach you and what did you have to learn?
- Moses: Well, the Officer Candidate School had been set up as a 90-day operation. When we got back to Fort Knox we were, those of us who came to that Officer Candidate School, were put into a demonstration regiment. The demonstration regiment was used to put on tactical exercises for the basic training, for the guys coming in, the fresh recruits or fresh draftees, and so we were used to put the tanks through the exercises. However, it became clear that the demonstration regiment was getting to be huge because it was made up entirely of people who'd come back to the States from overseas. Some of them with combat, some of them with a lot more combat than I'd had. The commanding general, the word came down, was bitter because he'd not been given an overseas assignment; he didn't want to be sitting back teaching people and he resented the guys coming back from overseas so there were, we were there for, oh, I would judge, two-and-a-half months in the demonstration regiment, nobody being assigned to class. There were guys who got into an OCS class who'd been drafted after I came back to the States and went through the course, and in the meantime, they'd increased the course from 90-days to 120-days. Finally, one of the fellas in the demonstration regiment learned that the overall commander, the port commander, was a fella whom his parents had entertained socially in upper New York, upstate New York and so, ostensibly simply to pass the greeting from his parents, he got in to see the commanding officer and he told him about the situation in the demonstration regiment. We were then quickly assigned to one class or another. The training was rigorous, it was far tougher than the basic training I'd experienced in California.
- Mark: In what sense?
- Moses: Much more emphasis initially upon physical development and upon the long hikes and the long runs, the precision drilling on the drill field. And then the class work came in and we, I thought it was a very effective school for giving us what we needed to get into the armored force, to function in the armored force. And then the training with the equipment, the guns—you qualified with this gun and that gun, the tank gun. I still have a, the only weapon, handgun or personal weapon, that I got marksman qualification on regularly was the Browning submachine-gun. That was before we were issued the stamped metal submachine-guns that were standard in Europe. But the training was good. The field exercises were good, I thought. I came out of it feeling that I was ready, you know, to go into combat. I wasn't assigned to a division

immediately. I was assigned to the cadre there in the basic training operation from November until the following April and so we were in the business of actually commanding men and training men and doing what we had been put through. When we left Fort Knox I was assigned to the 10th Armored Division and it had been in training in Camp Gordon, Georgia—at Augusta, Georgia. When I got there it was about 100 percent over strength in officers. They were trying out officers with units then shipping them back someplace else and trying out more. But the training was good. The field exercises were good. I came to like and appreciate the people I was with. The commander of my battalion was a West Pointer who was a brilliant guy--

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A]

Mark: So, as we left off, you were joining the 10th Armored Division.

Moses: 10th Armored Division, yes. You want to continue with this?

Mark: Yes.

Moses: Okay, fine. The training was quite different. It was in, under different circumstance, different geographic location. The sand flats and the piney hills around Augusta were hotter than the devil in the summertime but we went out and we did the job and we came back and we felt good about it. There was a bonding in the process.

Mark: Now, this is where my ignorance shows up being a medical technician in the Air Force. What sort of tanks were you using at the time? Were they the Sherman tanks?

Moses: We were using the Sherman tanks. The Sherman tanks. They were about 35 tons. They were, the weapon was a 3-inch, 75-millimeter cannon that was relatively slow. It had relatively limited armor piercing capability, relatively lightly armored in terms of armor plating, but fast and maneuverable and they were turning them out in great quantities. Our edge when we got into combat was not the quality of our equipment, it was in the supply of equipment that we had, the almost endless quantities of them.

Mark: So you trained in Georgia for--

Moses: Trained in Georgia until September and then we, the first week in September, we started shipment overseas.

Mark: Where did you leave from? Out West somewhere?

Moses: Left from New Jersey, port of embarkation just across from New York.

Mark: Camp Kilmer?

Moses: No, it wasn't Camp Kilmer. I can't remember the name of it even. It was a place we had never been to before, didn't expect to come back to, and we were there for a very short time so I took no interest. I suppose I know the name of it but it's escaped me now. There was little chance for preparation for going overseas. I'd been married when I came back from Alaska to a girl to whom I had been engaged before the war and we had a daughter by that time and she had come down to live with me in Camp Gordon, Georgia and then went back to live with my parents in Bismarck when my unit was shipped overseas. We were the first unit—we went over in one of the large cruise liners that had been converted for troop shipment—and we were the first ship to off-load in Cherbourg harbor. They were still using the beachhead, Omaha Beach and the other off-loading areas, but Cherbourg had been so thoroughly destroyed, that is the landing portion of it had been, that the port had not be restored so when the ship came in to Cherbourg harbor we scrambled down landing nets into boats that took us to shore and then into two-and-a-half ton trucks and up the long hill to the flat back of Cherbourg where, in the rain and the mud, they permitted us to put up pup-tents. And that was my introduction to France.

Mark: Now this is, I lost track of time here. This was--

Moses: This was mid-September by the time we got--

Mark: In '44. So Paris had been liberated already. You weren't that close to the front.

Moses: No, we were still in the Cherbourg area and we were awaiting our tanks, tanks and other equipment. When we got the tanks we had to break them in because they were fresh off the assembly line. They were new tanks.

Mark: How did you do that? Just drive them around for awhile?

Moses: Drive them around for awhile and you had to use the rubber treads in order to keep from tearing up the macadam roads there. And then when you went into combat you had to change to steel treads so that you didn't get your treads shot away so fast. There was a lot of work to be done. There was time though, too, to get out and see if you could find some drinkable calvados.

Mark: Did you?

Moses: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I can remember we had word that there was a farmer way off away, a large farmer, who had calvados, and very high quality calvados, so we drove over there, four of us in a jeep.

Mark: Four officers.

Moses: Four officers in a jeep and none of us spoke French but we managed to convey to him that we would like to buy calvados and brought the money out and he invited us very seriously, very soberly into his house and explained that he didn't have any to sell and he showed us a broken panel in the door to one room that the Germans had kicked in hunting for calvados. Then he gave us to understand that he wouldn't sell us any but he would like to offer us some. So we had two or three drinks of very fine apple brandy, as fine as any grape brandy could possibly be. There wasn't much time for that though. I was the newest officer in the division, in point of service with the division, so whenever there were assignments I would up with the assignment.

Mark: Like what kinds of assignments did you get left with?

Moses: Oh, guard duty—I don't remember that there was anything out of the area but it was the housekeeping assignments that somebody had to do and that there was no regular assignment for.

Mark: So, as tank officer, how many tanks are you in charge of? How many men?

Moses: I had five tanks.

Mark: And this is a--

Moses: And each one had a crew of five, including myself. As platoon leader I was tank commander of the number one tank. There were two of them that had two-way radios—the tank commander, I mean the platoon leader, and the platoon sergeant. The other three tanks had just receiving radios so it was important that you remembered who you were dealing with when you were giving orders to a tank. There were two sections. One section of three tanks—mine—and one section of two tanks which was under the platoon sergeant. We were trained in field maneuver and felt we knew how to maneuver when we ran into a strong point and it worked fairly well in actual practice when we got into combat.

Mark: So, getting into combat took how long? You got there in September you said. You seemed pretty busy.

Moses: We got to France in mid-September and we passed around, once the tanks had been, and all the equipment had been received and broken in, we passed around Paris. As I remember the name of the place, the name of the suburb, Noise Du Sec [probably means Noisy-le-Grand?], spelled "Noise," and we all thought that was funny as hell. We found, even that long though—by this

time it was late September—even that long after the liberation of Paris that every time an allied unit came into town it was greeted as if it was made up of heroes. And we had people in the streets in the built up areas running along beside the tanks offering pieces of bread and drinks of brandy from a bottle—you'd have to furnish your own canteen cup—and flowers, mind you. Decking the tanks with flowers even that late. I can remember one very sweet lady. The only thing she had to offer was a baking pan, a shallow baking pan, with stewed pears and a big spoon [chuckles] and she would, you reach down and got a stewed pear in your hand, and ate the stewed pear. They simply were so happy to see American troops that they couldn't do enough for them. We ran into the first combat situation when we reached the area before the forts of Metz. Metz was still holding out on the Moselle River. Nancy, to the south of Metz, had been captured but there hadn't been much development beyond Nancy. Patton's troops had been halted for a period of about two months when all of the gasoline was diverted to Montgomery. Montgomery was moving into the area that was most heavily fortified and yet he kept demanding that the British have a share of the glory. And so, while the Siegfried Line beyond Metz was very lightly staffed by German defensive when Patton was stopped, by the time Patton received and assigned gasoline it was, the forts were quite well armed again. We fired as artillery, the five tanks, well, the whole division, on the forts of Metz—probably not very effectively. But we were, we had the assignment of becoming a part of the 20th Corps in the 3rd Army made up of Patton's divisions and perfecting a bridgehead above Metz. Since it was felt that the forts of Metz wouldn't be able to hold out against direct frontal attack we would get a bridge across the Moselle between Luxembourg and Metz and strike inland there. The land across the Moselle was not particularly suitable for tanks and yet it was what we had and it was what we were faced with. Because I had placed so high in all of the map reading and compass exercises, I was given the point platoon in one of the three armored task forces that was made up of armored infantry of tanks, field artillery, mobile antiaircraft, all of that. We were to get the bridgehead across and the three armored task forces were to file across it and spread out. Each of us had assigned targets on the Seine River, bridges to cross and strong points to reduce. The weather though had been very much against us. It had been rainy and wet and by the first part of November, because we moved up and moved around in the mud actually in Luxembourg part of the time, it was early November before we seriously got down to thinking bridge crossing. In the meantime, it had been raining and the Moselle was very high; all of the low lands were sodden. You couldn't get a tank off the road and be assured that you'd be able to get back on. We cut and carried poles, small trees, that we cut and stripped of branches so that if we did get off and get stuck, we could chain two or three of those to the front of the front treads and walk our way out as the tread rolled the tree trunk underneath. We went on, while we were waiting for the bridge that never did come, we went on a number of reconnaissance missions—cavalry reconnaissance officer and

myself in two jeeps usually—to see and report back on the progress of the doggone bridge. The commanding General Middleton couldn't believe that the bridge wasn't across—I kept telling him it wasn't—so he'd send up a reconnaissance unit to report back what our eyes had seen. And even when we came back and reported that we'd watched them try to get the bridge across and they'd get a segment across and artillery fire would blow it up and float it down, the general didn't want to believe it. So it was a very trying period under increasingly bad weather conditions. We took diversion as we could. I remember one time in the Meuse-Argonne Forest where the remains of the trenches and dugouts could be seen although the forest had grown up and they had fire lanes cut in precise angles through it. My unit, my platoon, was right next to the forest itself and in setting up our outpost on one of these fire lanes we discovered that there were lots of tracks of wild boar; lots of them. And so we decided that we'd like some fresh pork and we got C ration cans and nailed them to a sapling on one side of the trail and then put a hand grenade in there with the pin pulled and a chord tied across to a sapling on the other side of the trail. Then we went back and waited, waited to collect pig. The first night, the first hand grenade—think we had three grenades on this one trail—and the first night we tried it and the last night we tried it. The first grenade went off about 2:00 in the morning and immediately there was a division-wide alert. [laughs] There was an attack coming through the forest on this northeast flank and all units were to stand by. They sent scouting groups out into the forest. And then the second grenade went off and finally the third grenade. Nobody got to sleep through the night and, of course, nobody, the pigs were more elusive than we had imagined and we didn't get any pig and it was probably a good thing we didn't. And nobody knew what the night raid was about.

Mark: Until now.

Moses: Until now.

Mark: I've got a couple of questions that I thought of while you were relating these experiences. One, this is your first combat experience in the European Theater, your first combat experience leading men into battle. I was wondering if you could comment on how this was different than you Alaskan experience, if it was?

Moses: Well, in Alaska I was simply one of the men. I went and did what I was ordered to do and did it and tried to do it well. With the responsibility of even a small unit, the platoon, you had to approach it quite differently. And of course my training, and my experience by that time, had been considerably extended. I remember that my greatest fear was that I would show fear somehow, that I would be found wanting. And so that was this drive to do things well and do things bravely. I'm sure that that's something that men in

all wartime experience have faced. Some broke. All of us were afraid, or most of us were afraid. But many of us were more afraid of showing fear than we were of the actual danger facing us.

Mark: That's among the officers, you mean? Or do you mean generally?

Moses: I think that's true among men, fighting men, too.

Mark: But as an officer do you think you had particular work to not show fear?

Moses: Yes, yes. Because you were trained to feel that they had to look up to you, they had to respect you or you wouldn't be effective. And that's true, that's true. And probably my experience with Captain Dodson did enter into that too because he was so thoroughly despised.

Mark: Although subliminally, as you mentioned.

Moses: I wasn't aware of it at the time, yeah. I remember when we finally did get across the Moselle. It wasn't on a pontoon bridge although they kept trying. It was an infantry bridgehead that was being extended farther and farther into the forest on the far side of the Moselle around a little town named Kerl, K-E-R-L. When we finally did cross, it was on a "bailey" bridge that had been put on existing piers in the city of Fioville [Vitteville? Fronville?] just down the stream from Metz. Then we had to travel in the dark as rapidly as we could along the Moselle because there was a German fort that was still in German hands on high grounds above us. We got across and then we raced through the night, my tank in the lead because I had the point and I was supposed to show the way. There was no combat at that point but we got safely into the infantry bridgehead and then first one and then the second and then the third of the armored task forces as they came in were fed into a narrow road through the forest that did have resistance but I was not the first unit to go through. The burning tanks and the casualties were from one of the other task forces. When we did get through the forest and got on the road we were to take, I had the central of the three task forces, and we faced German opposition at the face of a small village. It was artillery fire on us but they had knocked out, they had destroyed a small bridge over this stream, probably no more than four or five feet deep and no wider than seven or eight feet, but with the bridge out and everything soggy, there was no way to cross until the engineers built the bridge. I can remember those poor devils walking up with timbers on their shoulders, under mortar fire, protected from direct observation by the trees along this creek but no protection of course from shrapnel, and laying the timbers and getting us across. When the bridge was complete, our training had been to—by five tanks that were in two groups on high ground back of this little bridge—the training had been that the commanding officer didn't take the first tank. He could be in the second tank all right or the third tank

but he didn't take the first tank because the first tank was usually the first one to get knocked out and if the first tank contained the commanding officer, you lost control of the five tanks in the process. So I ordered the sergeant of the second section to go across the bridge and rode across the bridge and made a right-hand turn around the clump of woods and the face of this little town—stone buildings, one street going through up to the church, and then around, and another street coming across this way—the face of the town had two-headed tank guns and infantry with machine-gun fire. We were moving really ahead of the main German defense force but they did have defense there. I ordered the sergeant in command of the second section to cross over and we'd stay on the high ground until he got to the village and we could fire on the face of the village when we could see the guns. All of this, oh, 300 hundred yards at the greatest distance, 100 yards from when you crossed the bridge to the face of the town. It was that close. He just sat in his tank and looked at me. His head was out but he just looked at me. The show had to get going so I cut across in the lead tank and, of course, I was the first tank knocked out. We got up to within 100 feet of the face of the town, probably a little closer than that when the antitank guns went off. Couldn't see anything at all. There was a low haze on the ground and it was afternoon and we saw the flash of the guns and one of my treads was knocked off. There was a small ditch right beside us and the gunner panicked at that point. Instead of staying in—our training had been to, first tank if we were in a line, was to engage the gun on the right if there was one and if there was more than one gun, the second tank engaged the gun on the left. We never really got to that point because the gunner started trying to scramble out.

Mark: Of the tank you mean?

Moses: Of my tank, yeah. The tank had not been pierced although the second round that was fired at us did bounce off the armor and made quite a racket. And he rode me up enough in the turret so that I was fully exposed. At that point the tank driver started out, shouted he was getting out and so I got out of the turret and dropped down into the puddle, into the ditch of water that was lying there. The second tank didn't engage because it was knocked out. It was following behind us. So here we are, two tanks immobilized in the face of this town and the third tank in line was the sergeant's tank who had refused to go across and instead of staying and engaging he spun around and in going over this little bridge, he went over it so fast that he kicked the timbers out. So there we were on the wrong side of the creek, two tanks disabled, with the Germans firing on us. Well, we got artillery fire on the face of the town quickly enough. I suppose we'd been in the ditch for half an hour, full of water, about this deep. And the Germans, knowing that we were there and trying to dig us out with flat firing stuff. We got back then under the cover of the artillery fire on the face of the town and I took over the third tank then, the only other one with a two-way radio. Through the night we tried to get warm and get, no dry

clothing because all the clothing was left on the tank, all the spare clothing. Loaded up the ammunition and took off the next morning. But it was, for the most part, the men behaved wonderfully well. You know you were afraid of being afraid yourself. You were afraid that maybe they would panic. The only one in my experience who panicked was, well, my gunner was very, his brother was the commander of the tank immediately behind me that also got knocked out.

Mark: His brother?

Moses: His brother, yeah. Two in the same unit. But the only one who panicked, really, was the sergeant of the second section.

Mark: I was going to ask you to sort of discuss the Germans and their capabilities in combat. As you mentioned, the Japanese had been underestimated, many had underestimated the Japanese. I'm wondering if you had a similar impression or did you, perhaps, overestimate the Germans?

Moses: I don't know—we had a very healthy respect for the German capabilities and for the German training for the German soldier as a fighting man. I remember as we were, we had just gone across the Moselle and we were filing through the forest and the leader, the platoon leader in the lead platoon of the first armored task force was a guy from my battalion, a fellow I knew very well. As a matter of fact he was from my company. And he said he'd lost tanks and he'd lost men. He was waiting for the third unit to move out of the way and then he was going to continue his drive. And I remember him leading across and swearing, he said, "Don't trust the sons-of-bitches. They're good soldiers." he said. He said, "They're good soldiers. Don't believe them, don't give them a chance." He was totally convinced, you know, that they were highly competent, and they were. Far more experienced than we were and their training was at least as good as ours.

Mark: Now what about their tanks? There's much made about the Tiger tanks, the Panthers.

Moses: Their tanks were better than ours. When they started in they used relatively slow tanks but the Mark IV was a good tank, the basic tank, but it was relatively slow.

Mark: Was that the Tiger?

Moses: No, no. The Panther was the Mark V. Mark VI as I remember was the Tiger. Panther was an improved basic tank with more sloping armor to it so it was more difficult to pierce. It had a heavier gun. They were mounting 88s on the Tigers. They were not mounting anything more than, I think, a 76 on their

Panther and on the Mark IV. But they were better tanks than ours. They had better armor, heavier armor, they were lower in profile, the guns were better, and their training was extremely good. And, of course, the Tiger tank, you simply, it was a little like hunting a bear with a pack of hounds. You just hoped that you had enough dogs to divert the doggone bear and cut him to pieces when he couldn't swat you but you knew that you were going to lose some dogs in the process.

Mark: I was going to ask, how did you combat the Germans in their admittedly --

Moses: The only way you could was you moved ahead until you got stopped. And you, under Patton, you moved as fast as you could. When you got stopped you tried to take out the opposition, to move around the opposition. With the ground so wet at that time of the year it was difficult. But that was the training, you got stopped so you moved around it. And you brought in the artillery that was always close behind.

Mark: I was going to ask, was this something you learned in Georgia in your training? I mean, were these tactics--

Moses: You were taught that, yeah. And basically it was training that had been learned from the German tactics because the German tactics were, had been studied from the beginning of the blitzkrieg.

Mark: I'm just curious if you perhaps knew, I mean this might not be even as a young tank officer, you might not even know this, but the Russians had been fighting the German tanks for years at this point. I'm wondering if some of the Russian techniques ...

Moses: I'm sure it came through.

Mark: But you couldn't tell from your perspective?

Moses: We couldn't tell. No, it wasn't a part of our training. We were taught what the Germans were capable of and then we were given options to try to counter that.

Mark: I see.

Moses: It was difficult when you came up against one of the big tanks because you knew that our heaviest guns, our heaviest tank guns couldn't pierce the armor on the big tanks. Virtually everything they had could pierce ours. You tried to stay hull down if it was possible but it wasn't possible very often if you were going to move. For example, on the next day when I was finally knocked out—see I didn't last very long in combat—the next day when I was finally

knocked out I had only three tanks. I had command of the reserve platoon but the reserve platoon was commanded by a lieutenant from Georgia who couldn't read maps. Wonderful guy but he couldn't read maps. He was panicky at the thought at being out there alone so we kept in very close radio contact. When I moved across the one creek with the blown bridge but we were able to get around it, and he followed, and we got up to the woods there was a German town just below the slope of the hill and while we were there there was a lot of German armor moving beyond the town trying to get back because we'd out-flanked them. And so we were knocking out German mobile troop transporters and knocked out a couple of tanks with the three but they had direct observed artillery fire on the face of the town and it was antiaircraft fire, the 90, the 88s rather. And so my tanks moved up to block the road up from this little German town and I sent the support platoon around the head of the woods. There was some mobile infantry that came up through the woods about that time and were subjected to tree burst fire from the German artillery and were terribly decimated but I lost track of the reserve platoon around the corner. My three tanks were on the crown of the hill. Had to be there because of the German armor going by and presumably German armor down in the village although we couldn't see down there. But there was no chance to hull down. We had to move back whenever the fire, the battery fire, got too close and then come up in a new spot. And it was that all through that second day until finally a Tiger tank did manage to get into position close enough off that we didn't, we never saw it, until it fired and it knocked out my tank. The tank burned. We were able to get out. The tank, the round came in where the driver would have been sitting but he was a wild character who had been court-martialed, been up to T-4 and down to buck private so many times, third grade education, from down in the South someplace, but a great tank driver. He knew his tank. He was the only one I ever knew who was absolutely fearless. He tried to break me before we really got bonded. There had been this quiet spell toward late in the afternoon, light is failing, and he pleaded with me to get up, let him get up on the 50-caliber. The 50-caliber was the only, the weapon that we had that had large enough tracer fire to follow when you saw a group of enemy off in front of you. The two 30-caliber guns were not adequate and so I finally said, "Well, leave your hatch open."—we hadn't been fired on for about half an hour—leave the motor running and get up on the top." And so he did and that's when the round came in. Just barely got up there and because I had lost all of my glasses, the ones I had on mud from plopping into the ditch the day before, the spares that I had stashed all around my tank, left back there with my tank. I was without glasses. And so I had the platoon sergeant direct fire from the tank I'd moved into and I was sitting as gunner, loading the cannon from the rack of shells that was underneath the turret floor, and this round came in through the front—the heaviest armor we had—went underneath the little jump-seat I was sitting on. Fortunately, I was sitting sideways instead of facing forward and last we heard of it it was going out the back end of the tank. Armor piercing,

88, high powered, a tremendous weapon. The tank started to burn. I was the only one who was wounded. Had shrapnel, well, when a shell came into a tank it made a hole the size of the shell on the outside and then it flaked inward so that much of what tankers were hit with and killed with was armor plating from their own tank that came in as shrapnel. I collected a lot of that but I was able to climb out of the turret, jump to the ground, and run with my men toward the woods before I passed out the first time.

Mark: It sounds miraculous in retrospect that anyone got out at all.

Moses: Yeah. I suppose the shock of the initial wound, because I was very badly wounded, left you able to run the way a deer runs when he's been shot.

Mark: So you passed out then and must have awoken in the hospital?

Moses: No, no. I passed out. Before I passed out, as we were running, I told them not to go into the woods, to stop at the edge of the woods because the Germans were firing into the trees. They didn't have the proximity fuse as we did. Their artillery would explode only on contact. So very effective way of fighting infantry in the woods was to fire into the trees, high enough above the infantry so that the bursts would throw shrapnel down. I came to and I was lying at the edge of the woods with the other four men lying close to me but we were under direct observation and there was mortar fire. I remember that, in one case, a round landed between me and one of the other men. It didn't hit us. We were, I mean we were as flat as any human beings could be on the ground. And then I passed out again. The next time I came to one of my tanks had run back and had run over me to cover me. I told him, when I came to, I told him to get back on the hill and stay there and maintain guard. In the meantime, it got dark and the driver of this one tank, the sergeant's tank, platoon sergeant's tank, the total rebel who had been trying to break me when I first came in, went back into the woods, found a half-track that was still usable. There was one person wounded in it. I suspect there were some dead in it that he simply left there but he came back in the dark and they loaded me on and we took off through the, cross the creek. Actually, we didn't cross the creek with the half-track. We got down to the bridge. It had been partly blown. It was blown so that the tanks couldn't go across it but I felt, because I was in this, coming in and out of consciousness, I heard them discussing it and wondering whether or not it would take the half-track, and I told them to give it a try, that I thought we were enough lighter to try it but gun it, and so we did. The nearest aid station was back several miles so it took awhile for the sergeant to find the aid station. And then I can remember, again coming in and out of it, being given a transfusion—I suppose just intravenous fluid—then bundled into an ambulance with three others and off we went to a general hospital, field hospital. Got to the first field hospital about 2:30 in the morning and were told at the entry that they didn't have any room for anymore

casualties. Well, the driver says, two black drivers, wondered where another hospital was located and they sent him to a hospital in Verdun and we got there about 45 minutes later through the dark. I was very lucky, very lucky. The hospital that I came to was staffed by doctors and nurses from a hospital in Rochester, New York but the hospital was very highly regarded. The surgeon who went to work on me knew what he was doing. I had been, one chunk of shrapnel had shattered a rib and torn the diaphragm and then ruptured the spleen, presumably so hot that it cauterized the wound in the spleen otherwise I would have bled to death. And I had shrapnel all around. I had one chunk of shrapnel that they dug out of my rear-end about like that. They told me later that they were not sure they were going to be able to save me because gas gangrene set in on my hip and so the only thing they could do was to excise the tissue and hope that—there was no chance of amputation, you know—so they did and I lived.

Mark: I was in the medical field when I was in the service so I'm a little interested in this. Would you like some more water?

Moses: No, that's all right.

Mark: In this general hospital you stayed in, how long did you stay there? 'Cause as you go through your records, you were continually moved backwards to another hospital. To England and ...

Moses: It was there about 14 days. As a matter of fact, I was there so long that when Metz fell they had moved the hospital unit into a building in Metz. They left a small detachment there. They were my hospital unit.

Mark: Is that right?

Moses: Yeah. A couple of nurses and a doctor and a ward boy. And they finally, apparently, felt that it was safe to transfer me so I was shipped to a tent hospital, another field hospital, beside an airfield and I was to be flown immediately to England. Well, the weather was such that they weren't flying anybody anywhere. After being in that tent hospital on a canvas cot for three days without dressing on the wounds we were put in a train and sent to Paris. It was there that they did the secondary work. And I was there probably for only four or five days. I don't remember the time precisely. I remember though the ambulance driver taking me to the first hospital and then to the second one in Verdun. Very concerned about us, mad because they wouldn't accept us at the first hospital and, without consideration whether any of us had abdominal wounds, offering coffee to us. I had a sip of coffee, lying on my stomach had a sip of coffee. I remember the ambulance driver that took us from the train to the hospital in Paris. Got off this hospital train and four of us in the ambulance and probably all of us injured about as badly, all of us very

seriously injured, and the driver said, “Have any of you seen Paris?” Three of the guys said, no, they hadn’t. He said, “Would you like to see a little Paris on our way to the hospital?” I think all of us said yes. So he drove around and he got to the Eiffel Tower and he moved the cab around, or the ambulance around so that you could see through those two little windows in the back-end, you know. [laughs] So we saw the Arch de Triumph, we saw the Eiffel Tower, and a couple of other things before we got to the hospital [laughs]

Mark: So, there was no question that you weren’t going back into combat. You were badly enough injured that getting you back to the line was not a--

Moses: That’s right, that’s right. There was no question of it. I had lost all of the gluteus maximus muscle, part of the gluteus minimus muscle. They weren’t sure that I would ever walk again. When I finally left the hospital in England the doctors warned me that this area where they had excised the gas gangrene, the gangrenous area, might light up again and I should be warned about it. So after I was finally discharged from the hospital 13 months later the lymph glands on the right side kept ulcerating and having to be treated. It was a tough one and they knew immediately that there was no going back. The first thought was whether they would save me at all.

Mark: When did you become ambulatory again? Was it in England or where you back in the States?

Moses: I was in England with a cane when I was able to move. The wounds still hadn’t healed. Then plastic surgery in England but there was still an area with open infection. I was able to move around with a cane. We went into a playhouse in Wooster once on the back-end of a truck to see a play. I remember we went to Birmingham to see a—oh, who was the great British conductor? Sir something or other, who conducted the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra at that time. I remember being terribly impressed with that. So I was able to move around but it was only when I was ambulatory that they decided to ship me back to the States.

Mark: I see. So, I was going to ask this question you touched on already, but you’re in the hospital just sitting around with a lot of other wounded men. I’m wondering what the hospital staff did to keep you occupied. You mentioned going to the --

Moses: The hospital in England was equipped with a library and one read a lot. I couldn’t get to the library so they had to bring me books. The nursing staff was very, very caring and concerned. The ward doctor in my ward, it was an officer’s ward, was a guy I still maintain contact with. It was a retired surgeon from Galesburg, Illinois. We got to be quite friendly with others around us, in

beds around us. The doctor was worried about my not gaining weight. I dropped down to about 105 pounds, mind you, from a normal 165 at that time.

Mark: For a guy your size, too, yeah. You're not a short guy.

Moses: And, so I persuaded him. I said, "Doc, I need something to stimulate my appetite. Why don't you prescribe some bitters from the officer's club?" So he said, "We'll try it." So from that time on every afternoon one of the ward boys would come back with an enameled pitcher with bitters. I suppose there was a quart or more in that damn thing; much more than I could drink so there was a captain in the bed across the aisle from me who would come over in his wheelchair to share the bitters. And it did make a difference. I did get my appetite back. The head nurse in the ward became so close and so caring that I swear I was in love with her. Maintained contact with her after the war. She was older than I. I was married at the time. Met her sister and brother-in-law. Met the guy she married. She married the feature editor for the *Chicago Tribune*. Her brother-in-law was city editor on the *Chicago Tribune*. And I kept in touch with her all through the years. One of her closest friends was my wife, the woman whom I later married. They were in the same hospital unit, although I don't remember meeting her there. After Mil and I were married—we've been married for ten years—we determined to get back in touch with Donna and we did and we went over to see her regularly, two or three times a year until she died last year. So the bond was very tight.

Mark: It sounds like it. I've got one last thing I want to touch on—I'm not sure if we'll have time for anything else—and that involves attitudes and morale and psychology of the wounded men in the hospital. Many of them probably had amputations, these sorts of things, being wounded in combat. And having worked in Veterans Affairs perhaps you'd have a little more perception of some of the problems that can be faced by wounded veterans. Could you just describe how people held up under those conditions and dealing with their wounds?

Moses: Well, my recollection is that they held up very well. The only case that I can recall where there was anything less than courage in facing the wounds was a guy in this hospital in Verdun. I can remember him crying out in the night and screaming and the nurse who was—and I was in and out of it all during this period—the nurse who was such a sweet gal said, "He isn't wounded anywhere near as badly as you and most of the others here are wounded." She said, "We think that he shot his toe off to get out of service." But that's the only case that I can remember where there was other than courage, at least shown to us around them. The people, the amputees—I ran into the assistant driver on this second tank I'd been shot out of, also a renegade who had lost a leg, in Bastogne. My unit had wound up in Bastogne after I'd left it. And Castle (??) was in high good spirits, he was so happy to see me and fill me in

on everything that happened. Even seemed to be in good spirits when he told me about all the guys who'd been killed in Bastogne. But the thing that really tickled him most about his whole experience in combat was that when we were lying there at the face of the woods, me obviously badly shot up and my clothing partly burned around the butt area, they'd exposed the major wound, the only one that they saw at that time, and dusted it with sulfa powder, but then against the chance that I might be suffering pain, and I didn't, they got the morphine syrette out and he said, "I never thought I'd have a chance to shoot an officer in the ass." But he said, "I begged them to let me have the needle and I'm the one that shot you in the ass lieutenant." I remember the people in bed beside me, near me, even those that were going back to combat, didn't seem to be really upset about it. I didn't wonder at the time. It's just my recollection of it.

Mark: That's interesting. So, from the wounds you suffered I would imagine you had some lingering effects of that after your discharge.

Moses: Well, I was retired as an officer, as three-quarters totally disabled. The VA rated me at 70 percent totally disabled and that's been the rating throughout. I've been fortunate in being able to walk. I was never able to climb steps after that. My deer hunting was level land deer hunting. But amazingly fortunate because most of the function, normal function, remained and still remains. I've had bad circulation in my legs, particularly in the right leg, the one that was very badly injured. That's the only leg where there's been ulceration and VA doctors have been quite confident that the wound affected the circulation further and aggravated the vein condition. I've been lucky. Very lucky.

Mark: Okay. Well, I suppose this is a good place to stop for today.

Moses: Well, I'll tell you what, if you can point to a rest room --

Mark: I will do that.

[STOPPED FOR THIS SESSION - END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

Mark: Okay. Today's date is, what is it? The 17th of August, 1995. We're continuing our interview with Mr. John Moses, interview number 1995.44. God, we're getting up there. I hit 50 the other day. Okay. Again, thanks for coming in. We left off last time, the war was just about to end so I think we should start today by having you tell me a little bit about your memories of VE Day and then VJ Day.

Moses: Actually, Mark, my memories of VE Day are not the celebratory things that most veterans remember. I was a patient in the hospital for VE Day, down in Chicago. I was on leave from the hospital for VJ Day. It was simply a

private, family relief that I felt at the time. I wasn't in any of the large groups of people such as the Times Square mob. I was relieved, tremendously relieved, but I was out of it in any event.

Mark: Uh hum. There's been much controversy in this 50th anniversary year about the bomb. Do you recall, do you have thoughts on that?

Moses: I was surprised, of course, and very much relieved because, although I hadn't any background to expect the magnitude of the event, I felt that it was properly done and that it did save lives. I've been distressed by all of the controversy over it because the war was still going on and certainly the Iwo Jima and Okinawa casualty lists should have indicated an assault on the home islands would result in tremendous casualties, both sides. It was a horrible thing and yet all war is horrible. All killing is horrible. It was just of a greater magnitude than we'd been experiencing.

Mark: Okay. So, you returned to the U.S.

Moses: I returned to the United States in April, actually, on a hospital ship. Landed at Charleston. It was a wonderful trip back because, instead of being crowded as we had been on the troopship going over, the hospital ship had lights on all the time, very good food, movies on the back deck for those who could get out to see them. We sailed south of Bermuda where the weather was warm. It was a lovely thing.

Mark: And you were in a military hospital somewhere down South, I take it, for awhile.

Moses: No, I was in a military hospital in Chicago. It was Hines General Hospital at that time. Right next to the VA facility. And the VA hospital, I think, did take over the General Hospital buildings later.

Mark: And so you were finally discharged from the hospital, and discharged from the service then I presume.

Moses: Yes. I was retired from the service December 18, 1945.

Mark: And, so, describe what you did after the war. Did you go back to North Dakota? Or did you go to college right away?

Moses: No, I stayed in Wisconsin. I had established Wisconsin residency, married a girl who was a Wisconsin resident although she'd come from North Dakota. I actually entered the university in January of '46.

Mark: That was right after you got discharged.

- Moses: Right after I was separated. And I stayed in college at the university, completing my undergraduate work, and going through the law school, and getting my law degree.
- Mark: So you spent a good six years then? Oh, you had some college before.
- Moses: I had the equivalent of two years before. Yeah.
- Mark: But still that's a good four years on campus here. That's quite a long time.
- Moses: Yes, it was a good long time, good long time. It was difficult under the GI Bill because I had two children when I entered the university—not one child, but two children in the course of the fall semester. So about every third semester I had to take off and work for a semester in order to make ends meet.
- Mark: I was going to ask you about the GI Bill and Public Law 16 which might have applied to you as well. Did the GI benefits—I was going to ask how well they financed your education. You've already indicated. I was wondering if you could elaborate on that?
- Moses: They did quite well. It made possible college education where it would not have been possible otherwise. For me it would have been possible but for most of the fellows coming out it would not have been possible. It was an amazing act of foresight as far as government was concerned.
- Mark: So, describe the campus for me. In terms of how many veterans there were, how ...
- Moses: Oh, it was all veterans.
- Mark: at the time?
- Moses: It was all veterans, really. They had to put up temporary classrooms down in the flat where the library is now located. They were Quonset hut type classrooms, close together. One had to move from one class to another in the 15 minute time that was allowed, and sometimes, 10 minute time at that time, sometimes it was way up over the hill to the next classroom. So, it was a very busy time. Uniforms were common because the fellas coming out of service wore out the uniforms. They were good quality and they simply wore them until they were ragged.
- Mark: Now I assume that they weren't paying attention to Army regulations necessarily. You might wear a coat with other pants.

- Moses: Well, it was mostly shirt and pants.
- Mark: But more informal I assume.
- Moses: Oh, very informal. Nobody wanted to dress up anymore.
- Mark: And what were the classes like? How did the GIs affect the classes? 'Cause you had been to college before so--
- Moses: I think the classes were more serious, really, than my college work before the war. These fellas, for the most part, had been in service and out of the mainstream for a long period of time and when you're young a couple, two, three years, four years seems like an eternity and they had a lot to make up for. We had a lot to make up for. So we were deadly serious about it.
- Mark: With you war injuries, did you have trouble getting around on campus? That Bascom Hill --
- Moses: Not at that time. I've been very fortunate ever since the war in that I'm limited in going up steps but other than that I plodded along with the best of them.
- Mark: Now you were married and had children.
- Moses: I was married, had one child when I came out of service, had the second child in '46, third child in '48, fourth child in '50 so by the time I graduated from college I had a full grown family.
- Mark: You had made your contribution to the "baby boom."
- Moses: Yes, I had. I had indeed.
- Mark: Now that's not uncommon for a lot of vets. I'm interested to know what sort of housing problems you may have experienced. Or did you experience any at all?
- Moses: Yes, mine was a little different. I tried first of all to find a place to rent. I did rent a flat in Stoughton, nearest to the campus I could find. A flat where they would accept children and where I was told we could have a dog.
- Mark: That was hard to do I take it.
- Moses: Very, very hard to do. Many of the places for rent wouldn't permit children. Then about after six months renting that place the owner who lived in the lower portion of the building had a daughter move into town with her husband

and so we were out. We cast about without success and finally decided to buy a lot and build a very small place, and I did. Built on Lake Kegonsa. Paid a horrible price for a lake lot, \$1,000, and in recent years those lots have been going for \$75,000, \$80,000.

Mark: If it's not too personal a question—to finance that, did you use GI Bill at all?

Moses: I used the GI Bill.

Mark: The Bill?

Moses: Well, the veteran's loan, the home loan program.

Mark: The state program, you mean?

Moses: No, the federal program. The VA guaranteed loan. And quite frankly, I don't remember where I got the down payment. The house itself cost \$12,000 including the lot. There wasn't a tremendous obligation involved.

Mark: Yeah. Now these might seem like mundane questions but, you know--

Moses: No, no, no, no.

Mark: we both work with Veterans Affairs and so --

Moses: It's part of the period, really.

Mark: Now, as we discussed earlier, you were a member of the American Veterans Committee.

Moses: Yes.

Mark: This is the point where I ask—did you join any veteran's groups? Perhaps you could describe your activities with that group. And then, did you join any others at that time?

Moses: I joined no others at that time. I became a member of that group because I had read about the organization and it's statement of principles and I admired it tremendously.

Mark: Tell me a little bit about their principles.

Moses: Well, the slogan that they adopted at the beginning was "Citizens First, Veterans Second." And they followed through on that. They are still in existence, they still have a very supportive program for veterans but their

interest is, as I think it should be, in what happens in the country as a whole. 'Cause, after all, that affects veterans and non-veterans alike. They had some inspiring leaders at that time. People who went on to become national leaders in Congress.

Mark: Even a President, actually.

Moses: I beg your pardon.

Mark: Even a President.

Moses: Yes. And it was simply an exciting time and an exciting group. We met in the homes of members in the Stoughton area and it became, after about nine months, a social event. We'd started discussing serious matters and then we got to discussing our experiences and then we'd get into the funny things that happened because, wonderfully, the funny things are the ones that really stick. The horror of war leaves you after a time. Probably the only thing that guarantees mankind it's sanity. Then we would meet with the women. They initially were in the kitchen preparing lunch and serving cold beer to us. But that was not really very much fun, for either them or for us, and so we had joint meetings and had wonderful times. I didn't join another veteran's organization until I got into the practice of law in Gays Mills and felt that I would join the Lions Club and the American Legion, and the VFW in the hopes that somehow organizational activity would bring me some clients.

Mark: Back to the AVC for a minute, did you stay active in that throughout your college career or did you--

Moses: No. Well, throughout my college career, yes. And I maintained membership, I suppose, for eight or ten years after that.

Mark: Now, if I'm not mistaken, they ran into trouble by the late '40s or early '50s. Accusations of communist infiltration and that sort of thing. Did you get any sort of sense of that?

Moses: No, no. As a matter of fact, I don't even remember the charge being made except that anything that was even faintly liberal was, had, that tar brushed on it.

Mark: In some quarters.

Moses: In some quarters, yeah. As far as I could see, there was no basis for it at all. The same charge was made against some labor unions in the period right after the war. In some cases, with some merit. As far as I knew, there was absolutely no hint of communist infiltration.

- Mark: What sort of people joined the AVC? Were they mostly college guys such as yourself? Or were there other non-college veterans?
- Moses: Well, most, those whom I met with were largely non-college although the group in Madison—it was a strong group in Madison on campus—but in Stoughton it was, a fellow who ran his father's gravel pit, a fellow who got a job as a mail carrier, Carl Thompson who was an attorney at the time and later ran for Governor and then was state senator for many years. People like that.
- Mark: So, you finished law school then, jeez it had to be about '48 or '49?
- Moses: Finished in '51.
- Mark: In '51. Now you started getting involved in politics before you left law school then?
- Moses: Well, I was involved in politics in 1948. In 1948 I was in charge of writing the position papers for all Democratic candidates on national issues. And Miles McMillan, who then was editorial writer for the *Capitol Times*, wrote the position papers for the state issues. I didn't have any background in the state so it was not possible for me to do that. Then in 1950, from 1948 on, then I was the business manager of the Democratic newspaper, *The Wisconsin Democrat*. We had a monthly publication we were very proud of. In 1950 I managed the campaign for Governor that Carl Thompson ran and we came close. If it hadn't been for the outbreak of the Korean Conflict, I'm sure we would have won. But, you know, close doesn't count in politics or elsewhere.
- Mark: What attracted you to politics? I mean, obviously, your family background must have played some role in it.
- Moses: Well, I was, history was my principle interest in college, and government, and it naturally followed that I'd be interested in the process. So I was then, and have always been, very much interested.
- Mark: If I'm not mistaken, your father was in the Republican party. Is that right?
- Moses: No, he was a Democrat.
- Mark: Oh, is that right? I'm mistaken.
- Moses: But he and I disagreed vigorously before the war on some issues.
- Mark: Like isolation and that sort of thing?

Moses: That's right.

Mark: So, you finished college and you set up law practice in Gays Mills.

Moses: Yes.

Mark: I'm interested in the steps between law practice in a small town and then becoming secretary of the department. Could you just follow through on this a little?

Moses: The practice in the small town was very difficult. I picked the spot because it was beautiful to begin with and I liked the area and I thought it would be wonderful to bring up a family in a rural area. The county seat, however, and the courthouse was 35 miles away.

Mark: Is that Virocqua? What county is that?

Moses: Prairie du Chien. Crawford County. And there had never been an attorney in Gays Mills so I was building from scratch, completely. The bank was a competitor in a real sense. They drew wills and did income tax work. And so the process of establishing a practice was a slow one, a very slow, painful process. If it hadn't been for the fact that I was drawing retirement pay, a very modest retirement pay at that time, I probably would not have been able to take a family through it. I became very interested in school activities there and was president of the school board for the ten years that we lived there, from within three months of the time that I got there. Got into politics out there and ran, against the advice of my friends in Madison who said that it was a Republican area and that I would get no law practice at all if it became known that I was a Democrat, but I ran the campaign for the candidate for the assembly the Fall that I got there. We moved there in September and I took over immediately.

Mark: How did you do?

Moses: We lost. We lost by a reasonable margin. The seat had been held by a Democrat the year before, the term before, by Pat Lucey. His father was the candidate whom I managed the campaign for and he just was not the candidate that his son was. Fine fellow, but not the candidate. I stayed active in politics there. Was involved in congressional campaigns. Became known as a notorious Democrat. I never felt that it really hurt my practice. The state senator was one of the leaders, Republican leaders, in the assembly, or in the senate rather. A big impressive fellow who had been a farmer and then auctioneer. Whenever he was in town in the off-session time he'd stop in at the office and we'd visit about one thing or another and then go across the street and have a cup of coffee and a piece of pie and invariably he would,

when we were saying good-bye, very cordial sort of thing, he would draw himself up to his full height and look down on me because he was 6 foot 4, and he'd say, "Moses, I can't figure how a smart young feller like you can be a Democrat." [laughs] Then we would both laugh, wave and that was that until the next time.

Mark: So, it was in Gays Mills then that you joined the local Legion and that sort of thing?

Moses: That's right.

Mark: As you mentioned, because of business.

Moses: It was an organization that would make me acquainted with people, give me a point of contact. That's right.

Mark: Did it help? I'd be interested to know if it had an effect at all.

Moses: I suppose in that I was active in some local organization it had some impact. I made friends though through my school activities. Made a lot of enemies because it was at the time when the school reorganization drive was on. They were trying to combine all of these little single one-room schools around the state into either consolidated schools or integrated school districts. It was a battlefield at that time. I lost clients whom I had felt were strong friends simply because they were on the other side of some of these school integration actions.

Mark: So, it was 1960 that you became the ...

Moses: It was actually '62. Actually '62. I was appointed in the fall of '61.

Mark: By whom?

Moses: Governor Nelson, Gaylord Nelson.

Mark: How did he select you as a candidate? I mean, I'm sure there were other Democrats who happened to be veterans.

Moses: I think it went back to the fact that I had been very active in the state party. Gaylord Nelson was a good friend, personal friend. We were deer hunting companions all through the early years.

Mark: How'd you meet him by the way? Was it in college?

Moses: No, he was in local politics in Madison and was a state senator and was involved in actions that involved the party at both the county and the state level. Because we did associate in these party activities we got involved in hunting together. John Lawton, who was an attorney, lobbyist, good friend of Gaylord's, was one of the group. He was looking for somebody, hopefully, who would be identified as a veteran to take over as then director of the Department of Veterans Affairs because the then director was rapidly incurring the wrath of veteran's organizations, of legislators, Republican and Democratic, and certainly was an embarrassment to Nelson.

Mark: Now this was Huseby?

Moses: It was Gordy Huseby. Gordy Huseby was a fine person. He was a book keeper, an accountant, and he ran the department that way. When I took over his desk he had every one of his paper clips in the paper clip portion of the top drawer arranged in the right way, you know. Not at random end-to-end but in the right way. And that's the way he conducted the department. The people, analysts seemed to, well, they did have the feeling that the boss wanted them to find some reason for denying benefits. He wanted to be careful with how the money was handed out.

Mark: Fiscally conservative.

Moses: Oh, fiscally very, very conservative. The result was that after a promising beginning, many of the programs had slowed down to practically standstill. I asked Nelson when he appointed me, what instruction. Because I resisted this for about three months. I asked him what his instructions were and he said, "John, I don't have any instructions. The program isn't working. I don't know what's wrong but," he said, "you go in and find out and make it work." and so I did. When the appointment was announced in the fall of '61, Nelson was into the third year of his two two-year terms and the Republicans at the state level decided they wanted to start blocking his appointments. And so they sent word back to Crawford County, to the Republican organization there, to dig up any dirt they could find on me and then send it in because they wanted to block it in the state senate. And the county chairman who had been a former legislator, former leader, as a matter of fact, former speaker in the assembly, and was defeated by Pat Lucey. So there was animosity there and I was associated with Pat Lucey. But I had become very well acquainted with the Republican county chairman through school activities. And together we worked to merge the two districts of Gays Mills and Soldiers Grove, and he was apparently so impressed with the manner in which we went at that that he became a good friend. And so he sent word back that the Republican county organization in Crawford County was all for the appointment. There was nothing that they had to pass on that could be used against me. They then went to the vice-chairman in the county who happened to be a client of mine,

and a tavern owner, decent enough guy; not a friend but a decent guy. And he sent back the same word, "No, we think this is a good appointment." So it came in to Madison. It turned out that the speaker, that the chairman of the veteran's and military affairs committee in the senate, was a senator from Green Bay. Staunch, conservative Republican who had had two sons, policemen, rather improvident, who had applied for veteran's loans and been turned down by Huseby. Probably with good reason. I never did look into it but he was bitter against Huseby and he knew that until Huseby could be, that until a successor to Huseby could be endorsed by the senate, voted on by the senate, that he was going to have to sit there and look at that guy who had turned down his two sons. So I was introduced to the state senator the day I was told to come in to meet with the committee. I didn't know that this was going on, had no idea what was in the works. I came in to have lunch with one of Nelson's staff members and he said, "Stay away from the senate. We're going to try to have Carl Thompson, who gets along with many of the Republicans, handle this." And, so, we went to lunch at a place down away from the Square and sitting on the corner barstool was the Republican senator from Neenah-Menasha. I know your tape is running out.

Mark: That's okay.

Moses: And he had been a Democratic assemblyman when I first knew him and I did a lot of work for him because there was no staff for legislators at that time and I was, and others in college, were doing research, were writing speeches, writing legislation, and all of that, and I had gotten very well acquainted with Draheim (sp??). Liked him. He liked me. He then had a falling out with the Democratic leadership in the state but I was not a part of it at that time. And so when I came into the bar he was sitting there with another of the state senators and he greets me very warmly and introduces me to his good friend Bobby Knowles, who was the brother of the Governor later. Said, "This is a good man, Bobby. We've got to support him." I then went in to have lunch and while we were sitting there another Republican state senator came over to the table. He knew the man I was with, the staffer. And he said, "Moses," he said, "I know about you. Close friend of ours called to say that he wanted me to support you." And he said, "This close friend used to baby-sit, he and his wife, used to baby-sit me way back when up in Wisconsin Rapids and I have a lot of respect for him." Then we got up to the senate and I'm hiding in the Democratic caucus room waiting for Carl Thompson to come to see if he couldn't persuade one or two of the Republicans to support me and the state senator from my district, the tall guy that used to drink coffee with me and kid me about being a Democrat, caught sight of me and came over and grabbed me and said, "I want you to meet Leo O'Brien." who was the chairman of the committee. And O'Brien had been contacted by an American Legion friend from the western--

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A]

Moses: ... He said, "We want to get this through right away. Got to have a hearing but," he said, "I don't think that we need to notice it for public hearing." He said, "Let me get the fellas together." About that time the bell rang and they had a call and when they were recessed again he came over and grabbed me and he said, "Come on out in the corridor." And he had assembled the other four members of the committee out there. And he said, "You all know Moses here." And he said, "We're all for him, aren't we?" And the vice-chairman of the committee, a Republican and later a judge from Kenosha, said, "Well, yeah, I guess so Leo." I'd never met him before. He said, "We're all for him now, aren't we?" And they all said "yeah." The Democrat didn't know what the hell was going on because they had heard that the Republicans were going to squash this one. So they held a public hearing out in the corridor. O'Brien said, "Unanimous vote?" Nobody denied it. And so they went back in and he reported it. And that was my public hearing and my confirmation.

Mark: And so you took over the job.

Moses: I took over the job then in January.

Mark: I'm curious to know what awareness you had of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs before you took the job. For example, you didn't mention it when we were talking about --

Moses: I had had an economic assistance loan at one time.

Mark: After you went to Gays Mills?

Moses: After I went to Gays Mills, yes. A small loan. I forget what the purpose was.

Mark: And so you had had some contact. You were aware of it.

Moses: That was the contact I had. Other than that I was aware that there was the department because I was aware generally of the structure of state government. But I had not been active in any veteran's organizations then nor since. I had not been known as an advocate for veterans. It was simply happenstance that Nelson needed somebody, needed somebody he thought would do the job, and I was there.

Mark: Now, when you took over, was it broken? And what were the major problems facing your administration and the veterans of the state in general?

Moses: Well, the initial problems were that there had been a conscious effort to conserve the monies and that was reflected in the analysis process. The were

looking for means to deny loans and we changed that very quickly. I said to all of the analysts, the home loan program was virtually dead, but we brought everybody in and just said, “Now, look. We’re here to help veterans and we’re looking for means to approve these loans. I don’t want any loan approved that doesn’t fit the standards but we’re here to approve loans and grants.” And we did. There was an education grant program that really was only part of a World War I, the remnants of a World War I program, and we got that thing moving. It was the part-time study grant program that paid the cost of tuition, reimbursed, tuition and textbooks for part-time study. We had a problem defining part-time study but we worked that out and in time we were making 70,000, 80,000 grants a year. We had people who started from scratch and got their Ph.D.s with the part-time study grant program. I was very proud of it because it meant that people could go to work at a job and also work to improve themselves and build themselves up. I don’t know where the program is now. I think it’s still functioning.

Mark: I think it is. There’s all kinds of different loans.

Moses: But it was a great program. But there was nothing to begin with; it was the remnant of a World War I program. The home loan program was chronically short of money because they kept taking, the legislature, kept taking money out of the veterans trust fund for other purposes. We got the program moving so that when Lucey finally came in in ‘71 we very quickly were in need of money. The last two Republican sessions provided some money for us but it was not an adequate supply of money and Lucey quickly determined that there wasn’t going to be enough general fund money available because the program was really booming and so then he asked if we’d study an alternative. We then came up with the straight-out loan. Not the second mortgage loan; that had been there before. I was a member of the committee that, the study committee, that came up with this second program. The chairman of the committee was one of Lucey’s cronies who had been FHA, state FHA director. I proposed, I brought in all of the details on the Oregon home loan program—highly successful—but I said we can’t do it the way Oregon is doing it independent of private lenders because this far, this long after the war, there’d be too much active opposition from the lending community. So we structured it to have the loans, the applications, go to the private lenders, have them process the applications under guidelines that we laid down, and then send the loan in to us for an underwriting review, and we made the underwriting review and approved the loan, and then they closed it with state money, and collected it, for a fee. And it’s worked very well. We used the general obligation bonds initially and I think we still should be using them but there were those in the Department of Administration who tried regularly to slow the program down and they pushed us into revenue bonds at a higher interest rate.

Mark: If you would describe some of the internal workings of the department. There was a board and various directors and sub-agencies. And then I'm wondering how support was for veteran's programs in the legislature. Because you had to deal with both Republican and Democratic Governors and I suspect the assembly changed hands a couple of times, too.

Moses: As far as in the department is concerned, the board was and is the policy body. But, as with any policy body, the temptation is very great to step over the line into administration and I had to stop that very quickly when it was my Democratic friends on the board whose toes I had to step on and get them to back off. We rarely had problems after that until the Dreyfus appointees to the board. And they started, although Dreyfus was a good friend of mine, his appointees proved not to be very friendly. And so we had some increasing problems. Apart from the policy board, there were advisory groups. There was a CVSO advisory committee that functioned and was functioning well. And there was the veteran's—what was it?

Mark: Council of Commanders or something like that.

Moses: Well, that's another, a third group. It was the Veterans Council which was made up of representatives appointed by the commanders and that kept increasing in number as new organizations came in. The submariners would go to the legislature and have them authorized to have a delegate to this council. But the council didn't function really as it should have. There were those that were strong members and who were willing to accept leadership roles and then the rest were simply followers. So we tried to involve the commanders by creating a Council of Commanders and this was in an effort to bring in the American Legion. The American Legion is the largest organization among veterans.; always felt that they should have the leadership role. As a matter of fact, they hesitated to become involved in matters that involved representatives of other organizations and at one time or another the Legion was in the Council on Veterans programs and then out of the Council. There was a non-governmental body, lobby body, made up of representatives from veteran's groups and the American Legion frequently refused to cooperate with that body. At one time in the early years we had very successful annual dinners and we called them Legislative Appreciation dinners held in the Park of 400 or 500 people. The individual organizations would invite their local representative and state senator to the dinner and they'd be seated at big round tables together and we managed then to get the message across to the legislators and they saw how strong veterans were throughout the state. It was an exceptionally fine thing. Except that the American Legion, after participating in the beginning, wouldn't participate. And so there was this constant effort to involve them too.

Mark: What was their reluctance? Just that they were the biggest?

- Moses: They were the biggest and they felt that they should have the lion's share of the, they didn't want to be involved in any group where they were simply a representative without the controlling votes on it. They resented having a small group like the Army-Navy Union with maybe 300 members statewide having the same representation that they had. And there's merit to that too. But no matter how hard we tried we were always having to placate the American Legion and to somehow beg them to come in and participate.
- Mark: And did they eventually?
- Moses: They now are, they now are. After a period, after a long period of non-participation they are now participating in this annual, I don't know what they call it ...
- Mark: Legislative Appreciation Day, I think. Or something like that.
- Moses: Something like that.
- Mark: We just had one a couple of months ago.
- Moses: Yeah. I used to come to them except that I stay away from things where it might appear that I'm trying to horn in again.
- Mark: I see. Now, you served for 20 years and the department went through a lot of changes. I mean, for example, your title became "director" to "secretary." If you could comment briefly on how the department changed—and I suppose this would be way to lead into the big controversy surrounding your job.
- Moses: As the state moved on, the effort was made to make more uniform the administrative agencies and so they were made departments with secretaries. There was an effort made under Governor Knowles to cut way down on the number of agencies and the proposal came out of the committee to, it was the Kellett (sp??) Commission, so called, headed by a paper manufacturer friend of Warren Knowles from up in the Neenah-Menasha area. And Kellett (sp??) was a very smart guy, and astute as could be, and the commission came in with recommendations that would have put the Department of Veterans Affairs in as a bureau of the Department of Welfare, Health & Social Services. We, at that time, were probably at the peak of our clout. We had got these annual recognition dinners going and we had the independent Veterans Council, very active, doing lobby work on a direct basis, telephoning legislators when key issues came up. It functioned very well there for a time and so we were able to convince the Kellett (sp??) Commission that the whole reorganization effort would be killed unless they backed off on Veterans Affairs. The lobby effort was headed by a close friend of mine, World War I

veteran who had been state adjutant and commander of the American Legion, had been commandant of the Veterans Home, a very personable guy, a very compelling guy.

Mark: What was his name?

Moses: Uhm, oh, hell. I have short-term memory. I'll bring it out.

Mark: That could be looked up.

Moses: I'll bring it out. And the Governor, Governor Knowles, was persuaded that unless he backed off on Veterans Affairs the whole thing would go down the tube and so we were pulled out and left as a separate agency. We did, however, find we had to battle constantly within Administration, the budget analysts and the rest, for separate but equal treatment. We were constantly downgraded in terms of classifications. I had the head of the Bureau of Personnel tell me that he didn't know what he was going to do with these people because there was a bias against veterans and that was something we had to fight. However, we did retain our independence. The strength that I had in dealing with the legislature was that, 1) in spite of the fact that I was a known and notorious Democrat the Republicans all knew that in my job as secretary the only politics I had was veteran politics. And I regularly wrote position papers for Republican candidates for Governor, for state senate, and for Democrats. I was brought in to closed caucus sessions in both parties to discuss legislation that was before them. They knew that they could trust me and I never did anything to lose that trust. We had the very effective organization outside but the greatest strength that I had was the fact that when this program was set up during World War II it was thought of as a trust program and, therefore, they wanted to separate it from political partisan, political manipulation, so they made the secretary, or the director then, appointed by the Governor, subject to senate confirmation but after that to serve an indefinite term. As with all other public employees, you could be removed for cause but that was the, they had to prefer charges and make them stick otherwise you couldn't be removed. So I could talk in a friendly but firm fashion to Governors and heads of legislative committees and I did.

Mark: Of either party?

Moses: Of either party, of both parties, yes. When Lucey came in, now we had made tremendous strides under Governor Knowles, not because Governor Knowles was deeply sympathetic but because he was not able to effectively block our movement. When he went out of office we were friends but he knew that he'd been moved around and he was the sort of fella that didn't resent it deeply. When Lucey came in I had written, first of all, I had represented his parents in all of their legal business out in Crawford County in the ten years I was there.

I had run his father's campaign for the Assembly. When he was, when he and his wife, had the real estate operation here they would, I would, speak at least once a year to all of their real estate salespersons telling them how to utilize the growing second mortgage home loan program. Good relations, good friends with other members of his family. But I knew this guy. I knew him very well and I knew that we were going to have difficulty. Before the election I wrote the policy position paper on veterans affairs for Lucey and I also wrote a policy position paper for the Republican candidate and I did it from their point of view. It was as strictly impartial as an advertising agency would do it, made it most effective. I welcomed this sort of thing because it gave me a chance to put my pitch in to both parties and both campaigns. And we got along fairly well until we came in for more general fund money in the, it was toward the end of his first term. And he then created the commission to study an alternative to the second mortgage loan program through the veterans trust fund. He wanted, through his chairman of the commission, a very limited program. He wanted to do away with the second mortgage home loan program. I felt we had to keep that at least until we saw whether the direct program would float. And so when the commission finally brought in its report, although the substance was what I had proposed using the Oregon program as a pattern but having the private lenders originate the loans and then service them, the Lucey edge on the commission recommended what became known as the Katz plan; a very, very limited direct loan program. And we fought that, and fought it successfully. Lucey finally accepted the broader program. I mean didn't accept it but I mean the joint legislative committee brought in this broader program that I wanted—actually, it was what I wrote—and it passed both houses very handily and Lucey line-vetoed 23 different places, absolutely gutting it. We went over it and I became convinced that nobody could make the program operable the way Lucey had ripped it and so I said so publicly. The legislature accepted what I had, my position on it, and came back with the identical bill that had been sent to Lucey initially, and he accepted it. But he was mad, he was very, very angry. The staffing that was necessary to implement the program, that we had felt was necessary, had been substantially cut back. The chairman of the Joint Finance Committee then was Walter Hollander (sp??), a Republican, a fine person, a student of government and a gentleman, and he said, "John, if this isn't enough, you come in and tell us and we'll give you what additional staff but try it this way." So the program passed. Lucey signed it and then he withheld authorization for me to employ the limited number of added staff that was necessary and so the applications started coming in and we started falling behind. Finally, Lucey blasted me publicly for inefficiency and incompetence. And about that time we were just beginning to get the edge without any of these added staff and we started moving the loans out. Finally, this was, it started in September and by the end of November we were at the point where we were going to need another general obligation bond issue. They were really moving out. My people were working late at night. They were as much

involved in this, you know, because it was sort of a personal challenge to everybody in the department. And finally Lucey plaintively called me and said, "John, don't you think that you're overselling this program a little bit?" And I said, "Governor, I'm doing what the law tells me I've got to do." Well, by this time he agreed to let the additional staffing come on board and even with that we were not staffed as we should have been but we were moving the stuff out. He then decided in the next legislative session that he couldn't put up with any more of that and so he introduced a bill that would change the indefinite term to an "at pleasure" appointment. The thing was argued vigorously in the legislature. It became sort of a "cause celebre." It was going to be a close vote although we had virtually all of the Republicans and a lot of Democratic votes on it too. And then Lucey started bringing people in one-on-one to his office telling them that, "Look, this is necessary to get responsible government in Wisconsin. I promise you that it will have absolutely nothing to do with John Moses' tenure." And he did that with 20 of the newly elected Democrats. The state commander of the American Legion was apparently promised something because he came in and lobbied for passage of the bill. And it passed by, I think, two or three votes. And that was in February. In March the Lucey board started turning the screws down and finally at a very, very emotion wrought meeting at King, the Lucey board presented an eight page statement of incompetence and declared that I was fired and started the procedure to name a new secretary. I sought legal advice on it. The people I went to felt that under the statutes, while Lucey could have-- if he had framed the legislation properly-- could have accomplished his end, he hadn't done it right and so we fought it, carried it to the Supreme Court and I was put back in.

Mark: Now, this also became kind of a cause among veterans' groups if I'm not mistaken. You had a lot of support among the veterans' organizations in this state.

Moses: Oh, I had tremendous support among the veterans' groups. They formed a committee, a defense fund committee, and raised, oh, I forget how much but it was a very substantial amount of money toward my legal expenses which by that time were fairly substantial. There were meetings held around the state to dramatize the issue. Feelings were really very high and Lucey, shortly after the firing, after all of the fireworks began, resigned to accept the ambassadorship to Mexico, an appointment by Carter. The Lieutenant Governor had been a state senator, Schreiber, and before the Lucey resignation it was clear to political analysts that Lucey was in serious trouble in the state, in part because of the veteran issue. The programs were very popular, I had been a popular administrator of them, and it was felt that he was being ambitious and underhanded in the matter. And Schreiber came to me, because he was considering running for the nomination against Lucey in the next election, and asked for my support. I was very cagey about it, I wasn't

pledging support to anybody, Republican or Democrat, but I didn't discourage him. He then, apparently it got back to Lucey's people because they told him that he was either going to have to maintain the Lucey position as far as Veterans Affairs was concerned, and John Moses, or he was going to have the active opposition of the Lucey organization. So he then backed off. The principal, the Lucey man who handled all of his communication with the board, was Dan Wisniewski, who was Lucey's secretary and later became Tony Earl's secretary, and he's still floating around Madison some place. Wisniewski would come to the board meetings and would actually call board members away from the board table to give them the latest instructions or to tell them what to say. He was, his purpose throughout was to render me, to defuse me, but he went at it in a way that the Lucey people got from the hard Democratic machines of the East, of Massachusetts. You don't get mad, you get even. He did his best to destroy my reputation. The one thing that I noticed as this was developing was that --

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE B]

Mark: We're on Wisniewski, as I recall.

Moses: Yeah. And Wisniewski would, was the one who drafted the eight page statement of incompetence. I disliked him immensely for what he was doing to me and for what he was doing to my family. But we survived that. The problem was that Wisniewski and the other Lucey people would go into the Democratic caucus and, as new legislators came in, their line, as early as '72, was that "Moses, you can't trust him. Yeah, he's nominally a Democrat but he's an apostate Democrat and he's gone over to the Republicans and we've got to get him out of there. You can't trust him. You can't believe what he says." And this feeling that I had for the prior 11 years, really 12 years, that they accepted me, that they knew that I was playing fair with them started dissipating. And that in my own party, members of my own party. And it was clear that it was a campaign to discredit me from the beginning so that they could get at the department. And that was simply how it ended as far as I was concerned.

Mark: Dreyfus came in in '78?

Moses: Pardon.

Mark: Dreyfus came in in '78?

Moses: Yes. Dreyfus came in in '78.

Mark: And how did that impact the department and your administration?

Moses: Well, Dreyfus had been a friend of mine. He was running against Schreiber. Schreiber was Acting Governor and he was, Dreyfus was, a sort of a maverick. He got the Republican nomination and he was running against Schreiber. I felt that Dreyfus, as I knew the man, would be helpful to us and we had a number of sessions in the course of the campaign. We got him to speak to the CVSO convention up in Door County that fall, early in the fall. Fog closed in so that he couldn't, he and his party, couldn't go back to Green Bay to catch a plane so they had to stay there. And I gave up, my wife and I, gave up our room to him and we slept on sofas out in the living room of this lodge. And the next morning my wife made breakfast for everybody, for his party. We were the first ones to have him at our home after he was elected Governor and sworn in. Somebody at a Milwaukee news conference asked him, televised conference, what his position was going to be on veterans affairs and he said, "I don't have any position on veterans affairs." He said, "I'm going to ask John Moses what his advice is and I'm going to follow it." And it was essentially that, except that his Secretary of the Department of Administration was a former university chancellor from LaCrosse who knew that I was, that Dreyfus, considered me a good friend and that I was close to him. And he came to me in January just after Dreyfus had been sworn in, and said, "Now I know that you're a good friend of the Governor," he said, "but if you try to go to the Governor, over my head," he said, "you're going to find that I'm going to fight you with everything I've got all the way down the line." And, so, there was no chance for me to go to the Governor. He did fight me just the same and the same personnel people who'd tried to keep our classifications lower than other comparable agencies, tried to keep our budget down, tried to keep us from more general obligation bonding when we needed it, tried to push us over to revenue bonding. They worked on the Secretary of Administration and so we were fighting the Dreyfus administration virtually throughout. And his board members proved to be not very friendly.

Mark: Now, what do you attribute the hostility towards veterans programs to?

Moses: Towards veteran's programs?

Mark: Yeah. You mentioned several times now there wasn't always support in the legislature and among the state administration for the veteran's programs. I think you even used the word "discrimination" against veterans once.

Moses: Well, there was discrimination against veteran's programs from the budget analysts and personnel. Not all of them, some of them were entirely objective and fair. And I had good friends among some of them. Some of them were hostile, generally. The attitude toward veterans usually came from several sources. One, there were a lot of people among the pencil pushers who were not veterans and there was, and is, and always will be, a form of jealousy against those who have served by those who have not served. A feeling that

perhaps there shouldn't be any special consideration, fail to see that if there's going to be a balancing of the scales somehow, the veterans who had been asked to make all of the sacrifices are going to have to be given some boost to weigh the scales evenly. There were those who agreed with the need for helping veterans, as Dreyfus himself did and was in this category, but who said well, "John, isn't there a time when we can say we've done enough for veterans?" And then these people are sincere as can be. And they fail to see that the veteran's problem is not simply the four years or three years or two years that he served but the extent of disadvantage that follows him as long as he lives in some areas. Some of it was a matter of jealousy, some of it, I think, took the popular caricature of veterans—the American Legion conventioning, beer guzzling, cigar smoking, ribald, womanizing—you know, the caricature, and reacted against veterans as a group.

Mark: Was there a partisan aspect to it? Did you find that one party was more favorable or less favorable than others?

Moses: Initially, the Democrats in the legislature were more favorable. People like Horace Willkie who became Supreme Court Justice, and Carl Thompson, and others, fought to retain things that were being proposed taken away by Republicans. The veterans trust fund, set up to fund the programs by doubling the liquor tax and applying half of the net proceeds for veteran's programs, built up quite rapidly initially, and the program got started rather slowly initially and so there was, by 1950, there was a pretty good balance. So the Republicans in the state legislature, Warren Knowles and, oh, the fella who became secretary of defense under Nixon--

Mark: Laird.

Moses: Mel Laird, and others asked, "Well, can't we slow this down? There's plenty of money there. We don't need to keep this diversion of liquor tax revenues." And so they took away the liquor tax revenues and that meant that there were no new monies coming in and that was what caused the almost total breakdown of the programs by the time I came in. Democrats fought that. The Republicans were in control felt that it was reasonable to divert the liquor tax revenues. And incidentally, the diversion of liquor tax revenues played a significant part in Lucey's election the first time because the lobby effort that we had developed and the support we'd developed in the legislature, in both parties, made possible a passage of legislation that restored part of the liquor tax. That was in the '68 session of the legislature. It was bitterly fought. The Republican leadership thought they had it blocked from vote. At 2:30 in the morning on the last day of the session, everybody was groggy from lack of sleep, and they made the mistake of turning the floor over to one of their Republican members whom they thought was perfectly safe and he moved for a vote on it. And that was it, it passed. I had John Shabaz, who is now a

federal judge, who was a leader in the assembly at that time, come staggering over to me with a grin on his face and say, "John, you old son-of-a-bitch. You beat us on this one." But he was grinning, you know. He knew it had been a fair fight. And Knowles then vetoed the bill. There was violent reaction among veterans who had normally not taken any political part, both Republicans and Democrats. It was felt that that reaction against Knowles and the Republican party played a significant part in Lucey's election.

Mark: Okay. I've got three things that I want to get to.

Moses: Okay.

Mark: First is your administrative style. I don't know whether or not you are terribly aware of it but people have a lot of fond memories of the Moses administration, in the department here, still. You had apparently inspired the staff to work in a high moral type of manner. I'm wondering if you could comment a little bit about your style in running the department. Did you do anything consciously?

Moses: Well, first of all, when I first came in, and throughout, I tried to make myself as totally familiar with all aspects of the program as I could. When it came to the museum here for example, there was nothing. The pictures on the walls that made up a big part of the exhibits in the Capitol, when we took them down we found that the walls had not been painted from 1917 when the museum first occupied the place. I was not able to get all the development of the museum that I wanted. We had one initial stage, we had plans for a second stage that would have given us respectability but the legislators, principally the Democrat from Dane County--

Mark: Risser?

Moses: Risser. Principally, Risser blocked it and principally because he felt that the legislature needed that space and if we became too firmly entrenched there it would be difficult to get it for the legislature. He was never sympathetic to veteran's issues but I think his main reason was that he felt the legislature needed the space itself. But when we were getting started, when I was first understanding where we should go, I spent time in the Smithsonian talking to their military history curator, getting advice on what to do, and where to go, and how to handle the flag restoration. At that time there were no really acceptable methods of restoring the flags. That was before they developed what is now being used. When it came to the Home at King, I started subscribing to the gerintological society quarterly, bulletin rather, and read it, and spent a great deal of time up there. I found that it was a sleepy old soldier's home and far behind the times, far behind the needs, of the veterans who were there and the veterans who would be coming. So it became known

that I was trying to understand what was going on and trying to correct things that were not being done right. They felt, at King, when I got the long-range study plan approved and we completed and brought it in and got the legislature to accept that, that there was something to work for. Here in the department, I knew everybody by first name. The only time the people addressed me as "Mr." was when there was somebody from outside the department in. It wasn't that they didn't have respect for me, it was that I wanted them to feel that I was, that we were co-workers, you know, working for the same goal, and trying to give them to understand what the goal was. It was an easy thing, really. I couldn't have accomplished what was accomplished here for the program if there hadn't been the broad support from everybody in the department.

Mark: Very effective as well it seems.

Moses: Yeah, sure, it worked, it worked.

Mark: Another thing I wanted to cover before I forgot was, was the department's relationship, and your relationship personally, with the county service officers. This is an area in which I've done some research. It's mostly out of personal curiosity but it's also a part of state veterans affairs that is sometimes overlooked. So, I'm wondering if you could describe your relationship with those persons.

Moses: There was a great deal of animosity toward the department from the county service officers who felt --

Mark: For what reason?

Moses: Who felt that Huseby, my predecessor, was trying to keep from helping veterans, was trying to keep from finding veterans eligible when applications were submitted, was trying to keep from getting adequate funding to provide the programs the legislature had authorized. And so when I came in it was a matter of testing. They wanted to see whether I was going to be different. I told them that if they had a problem with any decision coming out of the department, I wanted them to feel that they were representing their veteran and to fight as hard for their veteran as they could. I said that unless they do that, and this was the subject of several statewide meetings with them, I said that unless you do that your veterans are not going to be well-served and I'm not going to be doing the job that I should be doing. We developed a camaraderie, oh, with some exceptions. The Dane County exception, for example. Dane County had a county veterans service officer who had been in for a long time, very strongly entrenched here, very active in the Democratic party, and he felt that he had been promised, either directly or indirectly, the job to replace Huseby. And he was indignant when my appointment was announced. His

wife was an employee in the state income tax division and she found that a year or two before I had been late in filing my income tax return. Income tax practice was a big thing with me—it was a big part of my practice because people had to file returns and I was effective in getting refunds for them, and so I was jammed with work. We would regularly, both my secretary and I, worked until 7:00 in the morning following the deadline when we would rush down to the post office and drop all of the completed returns in the post, in the mail. The postmaster and I, who was Lucey's brother-in-law, had an arrangement whereby when he came in at 8:00, or 7:30, to open the mailbox anything that was in was stamped for the previous day. I knew the year that I was late in filing that I wouldn't have tax to pay, and I didn't. I did file late. I did pay a late filing penalty. And the service officer's wife had this leaked to the press. And so there was a *Capitol Times* editorial criticizing me for, you know, in essence criticizing Nelson for it. It never went any further than that. When that fellow retired he asked me to be the speaker at his retirement, and I did, and I was happy to. For the most part, the service officers were good friends, became good friends. We managed to get legislation that increased the established standards for their operation and it provided a subsidy if they met those standards. They were always afraid that they were going to come under state control. I told them repeatedly, I don't want control over the service officers. I want uniform service to veterans around the state but if you are an employee of the department, whether I'm the boss or not, you're going to feel beholden to me and you're going to ease up in representing your client so you remain independent. And we did, then, increase the amount that was paid to them several times as I remember. The relationship when I went out was good. I think the relationship is good now. I think that the CVSOs feel that Maurer did everything that he could to properly serve the veterans of the state. And I think they feel that the present secretary is too, is doing too.

Mark: And one last area I wanted to make sure I cover, was the return of the Vietnam veterans. This happened during your tenure. I'm interested to know your perspective on them. What sort of new programs did you try, for example the WISVET program? What were the problems in serving the Vietnam veterans? And how well do you think you did?

Moses: Of course the people coming out of Vietnam started dribbling out in '67, '68. There weren't very many out in those early years but they kept dribbling out and we weren't seeing them. We were aware that they were coming out. We were aware because, among other things, we were the only state that had been able to save the DD 214s that the federal Veterans Administration was going to destroy. We had already accumulated large numbers of them but in a two year fight with the federal VA we finally succeeded in getting them turned over to us. It formed the core file for establishing eligibility. And when the disastrous fire in St. Louis destroying large numbers of records there, we were the only state that was able to say, "Come to us. We have copies." and we

were providing certified copies to them. Well, let's see. I got off on one of my tangents.

Mark: So the Vietnam vets weren't coming in.

Moses: They were not coming in. We knew that they were coming back but they weren't coming in for benefits. We checked; we knew they weren't coming to the federal VA, and so we tried to establish what was happening. I had, as my executive assistant, a man, a Vietnam veteran who had been, one of the early Vietnam veterans, who'd been a member of the board under, an appointee of Lucey's. We decided that it was the increasing hostility at home that was preventing these people from identifying as veterans. They weren't wearing uniforms, they weren't going to college because it might be found that they had been veterans, they met with "baby killer" epithets, that sort of thing. In 1969, at one of Knowles' cabinet meetings, educational cabinet meetings, he asked me if I had anything that should be brought to his attention and I said, yes, we were frankly very concerned that Vietnam veterans were not coming forward. He said, "Why is that?" Well, I went through the litany and I said, I said they're not coming into college either. I said I think it's because, unlike the period right after World War II, colleges aren't hungry for new students, aren't doing what is necessary to attract them to college. Well, the university president then was Harrington, 6 feet 5 I think, and a very impressive guy, very sharp guy, very able administrator, and he rose to his feet in righteous anger and he said, "We're doing everything we can." I said, "No, no, Gene, you're not. It's not the same as it was when I came out of the service." And I said, "Something has got to be done to bring these young veterans who are as in much in need of help as any group ever was to bring them in to where there is help already provided." I said, "If Mohammed won't come to the mountain, the mountain is going to have to go to Mohammed." And Governor Knowles said, "Well, John, isn't that a project that you can get the American Legion to take on?" And I said, "No, it's much broader than that, Governor." And that dropped it. But then as the new legislature came in we started pushing for an outreach program. Hiring Vietnam veterans to go out and find Vietnam veterans, to dig them out from under wherever they were hiding, and help them. Lucey had thrown a sop to veterans by providing in his first budget, I think it was \$1.7 million for assistance to Vietnam veterans but there was nothing indicated as to how it should be spent. So I, while relations were still fairly cordial, I got approval to apply that to starting an outreach counseling service. We eventually had 43 Vietnam veterans, not picked for style but picked because they were bleeding. We had guys on the street, in sandals, and wearing beads, with long hair and beards. But we had a group of highly motivated Vietnam veterans who believed in the work they were doing, and with these DD 214s coming in to us, we were able to get names and addresses out to the people in the field. It was, I think, it was the only statewide outreach program in the country. There were university systems that had

outreach aimed at bringing people into the university system but this was the only total assistance program that was put out. And it was a good one.

Mark: Now, this is the WISVET program.

Moses: That was the WISVET program.

Mark: And how effective was it did you gauge? Did you have it gauged?

Moses: We were never able to come up with any measurement but everybody who worked in it felt that it was highly effective, that they had case after case after case where they would come in and tell us about something that had come to their attention. They'd gone out and they'd been able to get problems taken care of. I remember in Milwaukee, because there was a lot of suspicion among the blacks, the inner-city, I had finally told the black veterans' group, the ...

Mark: NABVETS?

Moses: National Association of Black Veterans - that I was going to hire, initially, seven outreach workers to work the city of Milwaukee, that I would let them do the appointing for me, and they did. Tom Wynn was the guru, he was in the assistant registrar, I think, in the admissions area, of recruiting blacks. Tom—do you know him?

Mark: I'm trying to get Tom in here to do an interview.

Moses: Oh, great. Tom is a tremendously talented --

Mark: I've met Tom. I like him a lot.

Moses: Tremendously talented. And his wife is, she's a very talented woman. And Tom did great work for the black group. Tom can be as urbane and articulate as any speaker I know. He can bring tears to your eyes. He can also be "gutter nigger" when he chooses to. And I remember the first meeting, the second meeting, I had with him. The first one I had with his whole group, the National Association of Black Veterans, including my first meeting with Bob Cocroft, was in Milwaukee in Tom's office. I was late for the meeting because there was a snow storm and I had had an appointment at the VA and had trouble getting a cab and I came in and here are, I think there were eight people, sitting in this small room. There wasn't a smile on a face, no offer of greeting. They were hostile, they were hostile [chuckles]. And Tom took over. And he worked me over the coals. And I told him what I was going to do, and how I felt about it, and we parted with the agreement that they would appoint but they were going to maintain their reserve. And they did. But I

named Cocroft as the supervisor for that particular group and they were in on the initial training and we expanded further, and expanded, and Cocroft became my executive assistant, a good man, a real good man.

Mark: He's still upstairs.

Moses: Still upstairs.

Mark: This program, a lot of people who later played prominent roles in the Veterans Affairs got their start.

Moses: That's right.

Mark: I think of Ted Fetting who I suspect was the assistant --

Moses: Ted Fetting helped me form the --

[END OF TAPE 3, SIDE A]

Moses: and who had gone on to be very successful.

Mark: Is this something you've discussed with these people?

Moses: It was discussed with some of them and they all agree we've got to do it. It's just that we haven't gotten started.

Mark: That's interesting. I know I just flipped the tape over but those are all the questions that I have. You've elaborated much more than I could have possibly have hoped. Is there anything you'd like to add? Something you think I've forgotten?

Moses: No. The programs I'm proud of are continuing and I'm glad for that. I think they serve a great need in Wisconsin, not only for the veteran but for the state as a whole. During periods, for example, after the direct loan program got going when mortgage money generally became tight and our rate was very low, we were doing fully a fourth of all of the single-family home loans that were being made by all lenders, all over the state. That included federal government, that included savings and loan associations and banks. We were the factor that kept real estate moving during those years. We had a multi-million dollar effect far beyond the dollars that went out in initial loans because when you make possible a home loan it's a little like throwing a pebble into a pool. There's the impact where the pebble went in but the ripples spread out and when we made a loan it usually meant that it made possible the sale of the property that was ahead of us. In other words, the guy who was selling his property couldn't sell until somebody beyond him could

get the money to buy. And so, for each one of the loans we made, we were satisfied we were making possible three and four other loans along the line. Most realtors accepted that and will acknowledge it today. Most of the private lenders accepted it—some did not but most did. There were those private lenders who felt we were competing with them. One of the biggest of them said, “Well, we do lose an occasional loan to the state program but for every loan we lose, you make possible four more.” or something to that effect. It was a good program and it remains a good program for the state. And the other programs, too. I’m proud of the way the Veterans Home at King has developed because it, probably there would have been changes made but they would have been very, very slow had there not been that initial impetus that started the motion, that got things moving. It was not easy because the basis for getting the first nursing care buildings approved up there was the legislation, the federal legislation that provided matching funds for nursing home construction. When we first started the thrust I got approval for the long-range study that came in with the long-range plan a year later that was approved, but there was no federal program at that time. It was being considered and I got the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs to go on record in favor of it and to push the legislation. As a result it became law at the national level and we were able to capitalize on it. So it worked both ways and it’s made possible the tremendous development since. We had private hospital consultants, twice, come in, for different reasons. National consultants, national reputations who after spending time at the Home told us that, in their judgment, they felt we had one of the top half-dozen nursing homes of all types in the nation. And the VA has regularly told us that they feel we’ve got the best state veterans nursing home in the country. So, it’s a proud program and one that has served a very real need for the state.

Mark: Okay. Thanks for coming in.

Moses: Yeah, you bet. **[End of Interview]**