

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Norman Myhra
U. S. Army, World War II Infantry
2003

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Myhra, Norman, (1925-), Oral History Interview, 2003

User copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 55 min), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 55 min), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

ABSTRACT

The Portage County, Wis. native discusses his World War II service as an infantryman serving with Company B, 7th Regiment, 3rd Division in Italy and France; the account focuses on his experiences during the campaign in France where he was wounded and lost both hands. He touches upon growing up on a Wisconsin farm, experiences in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), being the only one of his four brothers to be drafted, and basic training at Camp Croft (South Carolina). Myhra talks about the fighting at Anzio, police duty in Rome, seeing Winston Churchill, and the debate over which unit should take Berchtesgaden (Germany). Landing in France shortly after D-Day, he describes landing at Cavalier Bay, the hitting a prima-cord which wounded him, and having to walk back to the landing craft because would not come out to the front. Myhra comments on his medical treatment in the mess hall of an LST including initial lack of care because he was mistaken for a German soldier, shipboard operations, and airplane ride to a hospital in the United States. He expresses bitterness toward field medics and navy medical personnel, the lack of information he was given in the hospital, and the failure of the army to provide adequate support upon his discharge. Myhra touches upon his feelings about loosing his hands, difficulty finding work because of his disability and lack of education, and using the GI Bill to study accounting because it was one of few jobs he believed a double amputee could perform. He also comments on membership in many veterans organizations and his appreciation of those who work for veteran benefits.

Biographical Sketch

Myhra (b. February 17, 1925) served with the 3rd Division in the European theater of World War II. He lost both of his hands as a result of wounds sustained during the campaign through France.

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

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

Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

Interview Transcript

- John: This is John Driscoll, and I am a interview volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Today is the 29th of April, 2003. And this is an oral history interview with Norm Myhra, who is a veteran of the United States Army, in World War II. And we are having the interview at Norm's home on Welsby Avenue in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. So, good morning, Norm, and thanks for agreeing to the interview.
- Myhra: Good morning to you.
- John: Thanks. I apologized as we got into this for bring late. I got into town and bumped into all kinds of construction, so Norm has graciously forgiven me for being a half an hour late. Can we start, Norm, with where were you born?
- Myhra: I was born in a country, a little community out here named Amherst, on Highway. My dad came from Norway, and so when he came here, he settled where all the Norwegians were, in Portage County.
- John: When were you born?
- Myhra: Ah, 2-17-25. That is seventy-eight years ago.
- John: Okay. You've got ten on me. Early life?
- Myhra: Oh, I was a farm boy, you know. We worked on a farm. We always had a good crop of rocks out there, you know. My father used to have potatoes. When he was single, he dug them with a six-tined fork, and later on he got a one-row digger with two horses pulling it. We were the ones that got to decide if they were rocks or potatoes. And we picked them.
- John: Ah, education?
- Myhra: No, I didn't get that much of an education. Never was too enthused with school. We had to walk to school. Winter or summer. We never had any snow days, because they didn't plow the roads out in that country. And we went to grade school. Did normal, like most kids, you know. Played ball and skied to school in the winter, and walked in the summer.
- John: So, you were born in 1925. Ah, after school, before the army, what did you do?
- Myhra: Ah, stayed around on the farm, and worked. Later on, as I got a little bit older, closer to eighteen, I got into the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] and then later

on I got into the NYA [National Youth Administration]. They were all federal programs.

John: In the CCC, did you go off to a camp?

Myhra: Yea.

John: Where?

Myhra: Yea, Rib Mountain, here at Wausau.

John: Rib Mountain. Okay.

Myhra: That is the furthest I ever got away from home at that time.

John: Oh, okay.

Myhra: Thirty bucks a month, and fifteen went home.

John: Yea. How long were you in the CCC?

Myhra: I was in there one term, and then I got out of it.

John: Sure.

Myhra: It was getting close to the war, you know.

John: Yea. I am sure you remember Pearl Harbor Day.

Myhra: Oh, yes. I don't remember exactly what I was doing, but I wasn't quite old enough to get into the military. I already had one brother that was in the Navy. He joined in January of that year. He would get out when he was twenty-one, and when he was twenty-one, the war was on, and they said, "You got two choices. You can get out and we will draft you tomorrow." So he signed up for two years, and he got out in '46.

John: Okay. When Pearl Harbor happened, you were about sixteen?

Myhra: Yea. I would have been seventeen come February.

John: February. When, as you were saying, your friends and neighbors were the ones that got you in, the Draft Board. What happened? When you got drafted?

Myhra: I had two older brothers. One was, he got into the Eighth Air Force, and the other one was in the Navy. The second brother of mine from the top, he got in first. And then the next one got in. He was with the Eighth Air Force, in England. And then I am the middle. And then I have another brother that got into the Korean Conflict and one that served on the [unintelligible] when the PT boats came out. There was five of us. And I was the only one that got drafted, and the only one that got wounded, too. I was in the infantry, people got a lot more of that.

John: Oh, yea. Drafted and, how did that happen. I assume you got something in the mail?

Myhra: Yea. I worked a little while in Milwaukee, until I got my notice. And then I took off, and got my training.

John: Where did you go?

Myhra: Down to South Carolina, for infantry training.

John: Do you remember where that was?

Myhra: And then I got shipped up to, afterwards, I got shipped up to some place where they leave for Europe. And ended up in North Africa.

John: Do you recall where in South Carolina you went through basic?

Myhra: Well, it was Camp Croft. I think it was, now it is probably mills for cotton down there. That is about where it is. They could probably occupy the whole thing. I know, when you took one step forward, you went back two with that red clay down there. You had to have a windshield washer to keep the sweat out of your eyeballs.

John: Oh, yea. I assume you went in by yourself. You didn't go in, you weren't like in the National Guard outfit? You were all on your own?

Myhra: My closest thing to the military was when I was in the CCC camp. The pay wasn't much better when I got in the army. It was \$50 a month. But I did my job. I was good with a rifle. I had been used to hunting and stuff, you know. And nothing in particular, you know. Like most eighteen year olds, I was single. I didn't have a regular job. I didn't have a car. I didn't have a wife. And so I guess I was available. And I guess I could have got deferred, but I would rather go. Things were getting pretty hot.

John: So, let's see, you would have gone in about when?

- Myhra: I got drafted in, I got to be eighteen in February, of '43, and within in two months, I was already drafted. They didn't wait.
- John: No, in '43, they were--Okay, South Carolina, and then right up and over?
- Myhra: Over to the East Coast in a boat, you know, and then right over to North Africa. The war had already gone through that part of it, over there. Algeria. And it was going on in Sicily. Our outfit was there, too. And then, of course, all of a sudden the boat give us a ride to Naples. At that time, Mount Casino was getting pretty hot over there. And after Casino, we got on a boat and went up to Anzio, for the invasion.
- John: Were you at Casino, Norm?
- Myhra: Yea.
- John: In action, there?
- Myhra: No action there. I got up to it, you know. But it was pretty quiet, you know, for a while there. That is why we went to Anzio. And then when we went to Anzio, of course, I got, they put you in your own unit. And from January to about the end of May, you didn't dare move anyplace. They could see you if you went to the john, you know. You just waited to dark.
- John: I just talked, within the past month or so, with a fellow who was at Anzio. He was in an anti-aircraft unit. That was the same thing, he said. They were just looking down at you.
- Myhra: Different between an infantry unit and anti-aircraft, they were back. If you got five hundred feet behind the foxholes, you were in pretty good shape. I don't know how any of us survived, because, you know, Willy and Joe? Willy says, "The enemy, they were up thar, and we were down thar." And a lot of people died up at Anzio. The Germans, and besides the Americans, there were Canadians, there were British, you name it. They were from all countries, all over.
- John: Norm, to back up just a bit, you mentioned earlier when we were talking, company and regiment. You were in company--?
- Myhra: I was in Third Division, B Company, 7th Regiment. 7th Regiment goes back to 1798. It was organized out east, in New England. And it is still running. I'd never heard of it before, either. It was, and of course, all the lower rank regiments, now brigades, of course. They are all recognized, and they are still there. I got an uncle

that was in some outfit, Blue Ridge Mountains. Whoever heard of that? The only time they were active was, I think, in the Civil War. And I think they were active, of course. That was it.

John: How long were you at Anzio?

Myhra: Well, until it finished. At Anzio, went from January and it ended up around the end of May. I've been told, I don't know, I haven't got the figures, but I have been told, between the casualties, the German side and our side, was about, between wounded and killed, there probably was about fifty thousand people. I haven't seen any figures on that. I follow that pretty close. And it is hard to believe that the people that actually had the biggest casualties in World War II were people that were in the Maritime Service.

John: I wouldn't have thought that.

Myhra: When the ship went down, you usually went with it.

John: Yea, I guess so.

Myhra: It's hard to believe.

John: I spent twenty-six months at sea and I would hate to think of a ship going down because where do you go?

Myhra: It wasn't too far, but it was straight down.

John: After Anzio, you got pulled out of Anzio?

Myhra: Yea. We got, after we got into Rome, we were supposed to be the people who policed the city. Good deal. Because there wasn't any fighting, really, in Rome. When we went in Rome from our area, the first thing I see, I recognize from the bible was this where they threw the people in by the lions.

John: Oh, yea. The Coliseum.

Myhra: It's still there today. And they said, if anything moves, shoot. Nobody moved. Two million people. No cars, no people, nobody did nothing. The Germans all pulled up to the Po Valley. They had to be up high so they could get at us. They had flat country all the way up there, see. And it was getting up towards the mountains. And so then we were in Rome for probably about a maybe week or ten days. All of a sudden, wham, Pasquale [?], training for amphibious landing. We did a lot of that down there, landing craft, LCI's [Landing Craft

Infantry], LST's [Landing Ship Tank]. Mostly LCI's. And yet, I don't remember that many being used when we went to France. You know. And when we did go up there to France, and I don't know what day it was. But we got there on the fifteenth, that was the day I got wounded. I should have stayed in Italy. But, you know, there was one guy that I had seen in pictures that I never thought I would ever see in reality. You know, you go, when the ships came out, you went between Corsica and Sardinia. We were on an LST. And I went over the side, you know, on the ropes. And there is a guy coming along on a destroyer, British destroyer, had a cigar about twelve feet long. Winston Churchill.

John: That is great.

Myhra: You wouldn't think, boy, here is a guy that is going to be in the world. Even after our president, you know.

John: That is something.

Myhra: It was interesting if you could see something like that.

John: So, where did you land in the south of France?

Myhra: We landed at a place called the Bay of Cavalier. And that town, at that time, had a hundred and sixty people. Last time I was there it has got six thousand. We would have headed up - - if I hadn't of got wounded at that time, we would have headed up in some of those areas you hear about, the Winter Olympics and stuff. Up towards Austria. And Switzerland. Our outfit went up through there and ended up in a place called Colmar, which is out by where the Common Market has a lot of their stuff. They got this stuff like an airport you have to go through, you know, that thing.

John: Like customs?

Myhra: Yea, yea. I can't remember the name of that big, oh, Strasbourg. Went up through Strasbourg. When you get to Strasbourg, you get out of the water, you are in Germany. Well, the Germans were over there and the big battle, like I say, I was in the hospital at that time. But I was told that the toughest battle the Third I. D. [Infantry Division] had in World War II was up in Colmar. Because that was the bottom of the Battle of the Bulge. That was open all the way from up on the Black Sea all the way down to, down in that area. And we were in towns like Kaiserburg, and a lot of those. They all had a "burg" on them. And that place had been German, French, German, French. And I seen a cemetery over there on one of my visits, you know, the French had a lot of people that were Moslems. And French. Most of the French were the Catholic. Most were Catholics. And here is a

big cemetery on top of a big hill that our army tried to get seven times before they finally conquered it because that was open to Germany for tanks. And I think the town that they came into in France, from when we made our visit there, was, I can't remember the name of the town but it was one of the towns you read about in the bible. And this is where we came into Germany. And it was north of Strasbourg. And, of course, after they went to Germany, I am just telling you what I read in the book because I wasn't there. Then they went down and they finally ended up in some of these places. Down around Austria. Salzburg. And then after that there was one town that everybody wanted to get. They wanted to get Berchtesgaden.

John: That was where Hitler's--

Myhra: So, O'Daniel, who was our commander according to my book, he says to the Seventh Regiment, "Take it, boys." And we took it. And the French were mad at us. Patton was mad at us. The paratroopers said they wanted it. And it really wasn't much doing there. They went in. I've been there. And they looked down the side of those God-darned roads going up, where there was one road. Have you ever been there?

John: No.

Myhra: One road. You go so far and then you pull off to the side, and somebody comes down the other way, and they pull off, and you go up and they go down. And the British went in there with their bombers and really took care of that. But they were all under ground. You didn't hurt anybody. Although Hitler's house got smashed up. But the army of the people in the thirties, from Italy, built that road up to there. Blacktopped it. But them old busses, I tell you, they had the lowest gear to get up there. They was going in the lowest gear all the way to the top. I mean, you looked out, you could see for miles. And I don't think there was much fighting in there. I've heard of people who were driving a Jeep, a sergeant was driving a Jeep and a second lieutenant had a pistol in his holster, and he was leading a whole division of Germans out. They were ready to quit. They didn't want to fight any more. Running out of food. Running out of ammunition. And, you know, that big Autobahn down there. It is funny what you learn on some of this stuff, just traveling over there. That Autobahn down there, in the south, in Bavaria, you know, there was places along the way there was like pull-outs, like that. And they were paved. Trees were cut out. You know what they used that Autobahn for? That was the air strip.

John: Oh, yea. Okay, long straight road, I guess.

Myhra: That was where their air strip was. But they didn't have any fuel. And they were,

oh, two-thirds of all of the army in Germany was like ours, it was draftees. They didn't want any of this. But, I'll tell you. And then, of course, our Third Division, after they got there, they came back and went to Korea. I wasn't with them when they went there, of course. But, hell, they was coming back to Germany. They spent thirty-nine years there in NATO.

John: Going in to the Bay of Cavalier. You got hit going in, I think it said in the paper down there? Tell me about that.

Myhra: Well, you hear a lot of people say that they served in World War II, and they fought enemies. How many really did?

John: Probably not many. I guess, what, one in--one guy up front for like twenty-one guys in the rear?

Myhra: And do you know how many are still living? I am seventy-eight. I am one of the younger guys.

John: Yea. Yea.

Myhra: Well, we went in. I forgot to tell you that, when we got down to Pasquale, down there by Naples, they were looking for people to become members of the Battle Patrol, Seventh Infantry. Each one had, Seventh, Fifteenth, Thirtieth. So I volunteered. I had never done that before, never done it since. So, we had about a hundred and fifty volunteers. They came from all the different companies, the rifle companies, from the Seventh Infantry. Hundred and fifty people, approximately. Weapons, we had as much fire power as a battalion. We had, everything was doubled and tripled. Sixty millimeter mortars, BARs, rifle grenades, bazookas. Everybody, it was all beefed up, you know. And when we went in, of course, our unit, there was a hundred and fifty in it. We had the honor of clearing the beach for the regiment. And I don't know how I ended as leading the damned squad. I wasn't a squad leader. It was either get hit by artillery, because when they started dropping them on you, then they start bringing it up, you know.

John: Yea.

Myhra: So I was going after a big pillbox and all of a sudden, at that time it was a rifle grenade, and I had a whole bag, musette, full of rifle grenades, anti-tank, personnel. The worst one was the phosphorus one. Boy, you get hit with that, it would burn a hole right through you. And I am going up there and all of a sudden, walking pretty damned fast, and all of a sudden, bang, I got it. What did I hit? I hit some stuff called prima-cord.

John: Oh, yea.

Myhra: You ever hit that? You ever see that?

John: Yea.

Myhra: You ever see what power it's got?

John: Tremendous, I know that.

Myhra: That's five thousand feet a second.

John: Yea.

Myhra: You can wrap it around a gun barrel, on one of the Navy's battle wagons, it will cut it right off. That's what I hit. If I didn't have my rifle on me, you wouldn't be sitting there. I'd have been planted. But, I never knew about that stuff. But it was used primarily to, if you are going to get attacked and you don't know if you can survive, you are in a forest or in mountains, all you have to do is wrap it around trees, wrap it around bridges, if you find out you can hold. And there is a fuse on it. You can go out, pull the fuse out, and it's camouflaged, like clothes line. And I've had people tell me how I got wounded. I picked it up, bull shit! I didn't pick up. If you are loaded with a musette bag filled with all those explosives, you got an M-1 with a launcher on the end, and a rifle grenade, how are you going to pick that up?

John: Yea, sure.

Myhra: It was about waist high. And when that explosion took place, all I had left was threads. There was nothing there. I don't know what happened to the rifle. They never had made me sign for it. But, if I didn't have that rifle, I wouldn't be here. I got a few other things, in the hip. My hands are actually off at the wrist, you see. I got. This one was badly smashed.

John: Okay.

Myhra: There is no way you could have saved them. Even today, you'd never be able to. And so, I had to figure out how to get the hell back, so I started walking back. I met a few of the guys. I got guys still living that remembered when I came. One lives out in New Hampshire. One lives in Nappanee, Indiana. Different people will tell you how you got wounded. Even my mother. She gave them the wrong date. They had a book around here. A guy wrote it after the war. It's called *Town 25*. The township we came from. And our county, our story. And she told them

the wrong date that I got wounded. And I challenged him about that. He says, "Well, your mother ought to know!" I said, "Malcomb." In fact, Malcomb Russell lives at King right now. He's in the nineties.

John: Okay. Sure.

Myhra: He's a regular book writer. Used to live in Rothschild. And he says, "Well, your mother ought to know!" I says, "My mother wasn't there."

John: She wasn't there.

Myhra: But you always got that, you know.

John: Well, you showed me earlier the telegram, downstairs, that said you were slightly wounded. Man, that's--

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Myhra: And like I said before, I walked back about a mile, to get some help. And my medic wouldn't come out of the ditch to help me. And I don't know how, well, I could care less. I said, "I hope you son of a bitch get killed." And he did. And I have a guy in the screener [?] that hates the sight of me because he was a medic. And I have said that, and it was in the public. And he says, "You're a liar." I says, "You were at Metz, up in France. I was at the Bay of Cavalier, down in the south." I says, "I know what the hell happened down there. I don't know what happened up in Metz." But, anyway, what I was getting at, you have a lot of people that will tell you, in your life, you know. So, after I got back, the only thing I could get for aid was an LST that came in, in the next shift.

John: The next wave?

Myhra: And, you know, we went in at eight o'clock. And the next one was at nine, the next wave. Mine was the first wave. And I seen the battleship Wisconsin shooting them big old sixteens. In fact, a guy in this town, used to be a doctor. He's dead now. He always wanted to talk about that invasion, but he was the chief medical officer on a navy ship. What the hell does he know about that.

John: He's out there, with a clean bed and good food.

Myhra: And then, so they seen what happened to me, and they, of course, the musette bag was all off, and no weapon at all. And, it is funny, when that thing went off, I was probably one of the first of the people that got wounded because when I hit that prima-cord, it was hooked up. I was told this. I don't know. But it was hooked up to a whole field, the whole thing blew. And we came in this way, and they thought we were coming in that way. If we had come in the way they thought, all our guys

would have got killed there. And so, you know, but I never got off my feet. I walked a mile.

John: That is amazing.

Myhra: And when they got me on that LST, they put me on a stretcher, and bundled me all up, and I laid there practically all day. They thought I was a German prisoner. Near the end of the day, they found out. Now, you are saying, why didn't I bleed to death? That explosion was so powerful that it pulled my arms all up. And I didn't bleed as much as I should have.

John: You know, that is, I wouldn't--

Myhra: That is what happened. And then they got me in. I had two operations on the, on an LST your table that they do all the medical stuff on, that is the officer's mess.

John: Yea. Hang on, let me turn this over.

[End of Side 1 of Tape A.]

John: Yea, I don't recall a sick bay on it. They used the mess hall.

Myhra: An LST. I was lucky. We had a medical, a doctor. He had his basic education from Presbyterian Medical Center, in New York. And we had a pharmacist's mate. We were on an LST now. There was a hell of a lot of people on there, especially trucks and sailors and stuff. Not a lot of armament. We did have a three-inch, and a five, I think, and a bunch of forties and twenties. And they went on in, and they dropped the damned thing right on the shore, you know. And the pharmacist's mate, he also was a Navy nurse. And he was a pharmacist's mate. And they, we went from there. We had two operations that first day. And anything I did have, shit, it got thrown out. I didn't get to take anything back between what them Army medics took away from me. Later on, they would go through your stuff, you know. They are a bunch of thieves. You know. And now they are talking about this stuff in Iraq. Hell, they were doing that, for Christ's sake, they were doing it to us. I don't know who did it. It was done long after I was down, from there to Italy. The LST went back to Naples. And I remember those doctors, the doctor and the pharmacist's mate come to see me. And then they told me, privately, "You know, you weren't supposed to survive." Well, I didn't know that. So, since that time, when I visit him out in, well, he came here to the Appleton Post Crescent, he was in charge of the advertising for the outfit.

John: This was the doctor?

Myhra: The pharmacist's mate. He came from, I think, Montana, or California, somewhere. And the doctor ended up going back to Sloan's Hospital in New York. Female plumbing. And ended up at Ipswich, Massachusetts. I went to visit him, about ten years later, after I got wounded. I almost killed him.

John: Yea. What was his reaction?

Myhra: I almost killed him. He thought I'd died. He must have told his wife about me, because she knew all about me. And what kind of a doctor was he? He had friend that was a veterinarian, and they had a cat there, was expecting kittens. And it couldn't give the kittens. He and that veterinarian worked all night, to deliver them cats.

John: Oh, yea?

Myhra: There was only one. And while we were there, big tom cat. He wouldn't come in the same door as Ma. They had nothing to do with one another. And since then, his wife died from cancer, and he decided to go to a smaller community. But both of those guys, they claimed that I should have never survived. And I'm around and they are both dead.

John: That is amazing.

Myhra: Well, I was born on a farm.

John: Well, they grow them tough in Wisconsin.

Myhra: And where I went to school, there was not one girl in school that was fat, none. No guys, either. Boy, they worked the hell out of you at home. You know. But anyway, it was interesting. And I think his wife still lives over here in Appleton. I haven't seen her in a long time. He had six daughters.

John: So, you got back to Naples then? On the LST? And then what?

Myhra: And then I had some more operations. I had some more, you know, fine tune, I guess, the limbs. And then from there, I flew from Naples to Oran, to Casablanca, to the Azores, to Greenland, and to New York. What the hell is the name of it? There was a big air base there in New York. And then in May, the seventh, I got out. The next year, the following year.

John: Okay.

Myhra: I was there about eight, nine months.

John: Okay. You were wounded on the landing date?

Myhra: Fifteenth of August. I probably was headed back home about the first part of September. Percy Jones, over at Battle Creek, Michigan. And I was told between Kellogg Sanatorium, where people thought they were sick, and Fort Custer, which was a regular military camp, and there was an annex out at the lake. They tell me there was about five thousand patients over there at that time. All of us, they had parts off, a finger, or a toe. The worst I seen was, and they were all our age. Was a young guy, he had got permission to get in. He wasn't eighteen yet. He got trained and he went over there and he got hit. His knee was knocked out. He didn't have a knee. One arm was off here, and one arm was off here. And you know, these young people, they think they got something.

John: So, then, Norm, when you realized you had lost your hands, what was going on inside you?

Myhra: Well, if our airplane would have dropped from Naples to Battle Creek, Michigan, I don't think I would have done any crying. You know, you had to figure, all right. Let's take, for instance, in your own case, now, you said you are about ten years younger than me?

John: Yea. I'm sixty-seven.

Myhra: I wasn't quite twenty years old yet. What would you have done?

John: I don't know.

Myhra: No education. Two hands missing. And I don't think a lot of people understand that. Because, and I say people, they say, "Oh, you were in World War II?" "Okay." "Did you have it pretty rough?" "Oh, we had it really rough?" "Did you lose a lot of people?" "We had one guy broke his leg playing baseball. How did your team do?" I says, "We didn't have a ball team." But he didn't know what I was saying, did he?

John: No.

Myhra: Okay. And even people now that are considered Iraq veterans, a good share of them never got there yet. And then, of course, they give you a little money and throw you out. But when I went to some special place in Milwaukee to check for veterans with severe disability, the first thing they said was, "What are we going to do with you?" I said, "I don't know. You are the experts, not me." I was there, I was in that hospital between Naples and Battle Creek nine months, and they never told you nothing. I didn't even know I was going to get any money when I got out.

John: That is amazing.

Myhra: And so I got out, and tried to do as best I could, you know. I ended up doing some sales work, and advertising. I am probably the only double amputee that ever took the census in 1950.

John: Oh, did you?

Myhra: Yea. I don't know how I did that. I did some things. I can tell you how to do some stuff that I had never done.

John: Okay. That is amazing, but, yea, I can understand.

Myhra: Well, my wife was pretty handy about that stuff. And we do most of our own stuff. In fact, I am working on a cupboard out there we're going to put in the basement, because we don't know where else, we should throw it out. But we got to put screws in from the bottom to hold the top on, and yet there is about this much space that you have to be. So I just went out and ripped a couple of boards, and put them in there. Now, how do you get that on there? Well, we glue it. Glue it together, drill holes, and once you get it in the basement, then we put the top on with some screws from the bottom. That will do it. And so, that is the type of furniture we brought up from the north at our place at St. Germain. People that own that, you are old enough to remember the Olson Rug Company.

John: No.

Myhra: Chicago. You get the old carpeting in your clothes, you send it in, you get a new carpet.

John: Oh, yea?

Myhra: The guy was very well to do. And what did he do? Before he died, he busted up his little resort for his help. Boy, were they had all free stuff in the summer. You know. That lake I am on, if you want a lot, it's \$200,000, plus. Just for the lot, if you can find one. He left a half a mile of shore line on Little St. Germain, where all the resorts are, to the Eagle River Library. It wasn't developed yet, you know. Can you imagine a half a mile of shore line? Because he was a wealthy man. I met a lot of people in my life that I probably never would have met otherwise. Like the presidents. I never met that guy, I gave you that thing about Gunsmoke. I met a few generals and all.

John: Jim Arness.

- Myhra: I still keep in contact with some of them, you know. And, so, now I got a guy in Texas that was a medic in one of our units, and a Jeep run over a god-darned mine and blew the thing all to hell. And he lost a leg. He went on to be a very skilled surgeon in the female plumbing area. Still living, but I think he is in a rest home now. And you meet a lot of these people that, you know, you read about and what it the name of this guy who was so active in the Marines? He was the head of the Marines not long ago. I don't think he is living any more. Maybe he is. I met him at a Vets of Foreign Wars a couple of years ago down at Milwaukee.
- John: The Commandant?
- Myhra: I don't know much about the Marines. I think our Army infantry did anything they did. Only a lot more of it. My division, you know, was credited with six invasions. And it also had through World War I, II, and Korean War, over fifty Congressional Medals.
- John: That is tremendous.
- Myhra: This guy the other day, he was telling me, he says, "Why don't we have something for guys like you that lost legs and eyes and hands and everything?" I says, "I don't know." I wasn't up in that. I couldn't figure that out.
- John: You said that nobody told you anything. How about any kind of rehab, or help. You were all on your own?
- Myhra: They didn't know what to do.
- John: They didn't know what to do.
- Myhra: They did tell me about one guy that got hit through the rear. That he couldn't control, and he had to go to the john. They figured out one thing for him. He became a designer and a painter of bathrooms. There he was. He was right there. Shut the door. But they never done that. I took tech school in Milwaukee about two and a half years, but most of your people, even today, that are out to get rehabilitation, they don't have any blind eyes, they don't have any limbs missing, arms, legs. And it's different. In fact, they don't have that many amputees in the system. There's supposed to be, the last time I inquired a few years ago, there were five hundred double amputees in the United States military. But there were at least over ten thousand. The Japanese had a stick mine. Ever hear about that?
- John: Oh, yea.

- Myhra: They were pissed off, they just got over and it blew a leg off. But most of the people that are amputee arm, are one.
- John: Yea.
- Myhra: The guy right over here, he came from Ashland, he got hit by a tree burst. He was in the Seventh Division, up in the Battle of the Bulge. And I am sure he has missed a lot of opportunities, too, because of the fact that he only has one arm. Good thing he's got the elbows. Without the elbows, you are in trouble. We have a guy in Mosinee that was in Viet Nam, his legs are off right at the crotch. But it hasn't been that bad a life. The wife is pretty good. We don't have any children. We raised a lot of other people's. But I guess a lot of them, and I don't know why people who are veterans, are they jealous or envious of one another. I don't know why. I don't believe them. I can build a better house here, and a better one up there, and still have money left. I am satisfied here. It ain't the greatest. My yard goes way to the rear.
- John: Okay, it looks well tended.
- Myhra: I'll get the garden in. She will get some flowers in.
- John: Got a nice shed out here.
- Myhra: Oh, yea, I got my equipment in there. I used to have three houses. They told me to get rid of them. I got rid of one. It had a two hundred foot squared lot in town. And it's a hell of a thing when you are living in a god-darned house that would probably bring \$135,000 in town, and I got one up north that would bring in over \$300,000. That is my vacation home. But I use it year round. I go there. I like it up there.
- John: Beautiful country.
- Myhra: And we've got people up in that area that are building houses that are worth much more than the ones that I have. Mine is paid for. Now we have a guy right in this town that he has got a house he built cost him half a million dollars. He's trying to sell it for \$400,000 but he isn't having much luck. Now, if you have a house that you built for half a million bucks, I'll buy my own. I don't need yours.
- John: You know, that's a good point. Why pay me for mine when you can go build what you want for the same amount.
- Myhra: Yea. So he said, well, you ought to sell this and move up there and you will get a write-off at that after your private [?]. But I said "No, my interests are here." And

up in that area, unless you run snow mobiles night and day or like to drink cocktails night and day, what else is there to do?

John: Yea, there is not a lot going on up there. I remember once I was up there, I can't tell you the hotel, but it was a meeting of all the prison wardens in the state, which was an unusual meeting.

Myhra: I used to know a prison warden by the name of Burke, at Waupun.

John: Yea. I know him.

Myhra: I have a niece, my brother, he was in the Air Force. He was one of the guys that got shipped from England over to Russia to work with them. You probably read about that?

John: No.

Myhra: They couldn't quite get far enough with those bombers and make your return trip, so they decided to negotiate something with the Russians where they would, he came in from down in the southern part of there where all them people are drilling the oil now. And it didn't work out too good. And, you know, they were one of the countries that had quite a few women involved in combat. That and the Israelites. And England, mostly like driving ambulances and stuff. And you couldn't go into town at night. They would have a regular war with themselves. All their Lend-Lease. I would say if them Russians would pay back our debt for Lend-Lease with compound interest, we wouldn't have a national debt, would we? And he had got five girls. All went to college. Mostly at Eau Claire and Oshkosh, you name them. But the middle one, they never paid much attention to her. She used to get straight A's in everything. She went on and got her master's up at Stout, and then she went over to Battle Creek, where I was in the hospital. That was long after that. She went for social services. She didn't like being that far away from Iola. So she came back here and went down there to Fox Lake, and she worked as an assistant warden.

John: The prison there?

Myhra: Yea. And when Oshkosh came up for a warden, she was the first woman in the state of Wisconsin to head up a man's prison, the biggest prison in the state. She had over twenty-one hundred people in there.

John: Yea. I know her.

Myhra: Smith. Nancy Smith.

John: Okay. Prior to that, she spent some time, I first met her at Kettle Moraine. She wasn't a warden back then. She was finance, or something. Yea.

Myhra: No, it isn't Nancy. Nancy is the one that teaches at Neillsville. Her name is Smith. And the one that teaches over in Neillsville, her husband's name is Smith. He's the band director, and she is one of the teachers in the music department. And the older one, she ended up as a big thing in home economics in Redwing, Minnesota. But that one that they never paid no attention to, she is the one that got to be warden over there. Her husband didn't amount to a hell of a lot but she sure did. She's pretty good.

John: Going back to your thing, Norm. You had the GI Bill when you came out. Did you ever use it?

Myhra: Yea, I used about part of two years of it. That is about it. I took up all kinds of stuff relating to accounting, and I took up cost accounting. I really didn't like that. But my problem is, I had to take up what I could do. And if there is a thousand jobs thrown on the table, you probably could do around five hundred of them when you were young. I could probably do two.

John: I see. Okay.

Myhra: So I did what I could. And then I ended up after sales and working in the census. That was a short time. And doing other things, got into politics, and got to be a legislator for six years. And I got active in the political system, and when this came up, I was the guy that got picked. I had twenty years up here.

John: As what?

Myhra: Postmaster. And don't miss that. I've never taken a job back that I had before. If they made me Postmaster General of the state, I'd say the hell with you. I been retired now, it will be eighteen years in July, July 3. I don't miss that. I was on our veterans board down there for eleven years, you know. Got thrown off as chairman and when the Democrats got control of it again, we threw them off and I got back as chairman. So, but people don't understand that. It's like playing baseball. You win this game and I win the next one. We were just luckier than them. There is a lot of people, we got that. That's the problem we got right now in the 24th. There was something today on television about this big thing that Lassa was supposed to be shit on. And a lot of us figured that she probably was involved herself. We don't know.

John: Yea, you don't.

Myhra: They changed the judges today. They threw it to a different judge.

John: Oh, did they? I didn't know that.

Myhra: It will be in the paper, right on the front page today. And, but when I was in Madison, in my days, we had Esther Lockhart, from up at Horicon, and then we had the former speaker's widow from down, one of the towns south of Madison. Blanchard. They were the only two. But I was lucky, I supported Doyle all the way. A lot of people don't like what he is doing but, if you were down there, how would you do it?

John: They are short on money.

Myhra: That's what they wanted. I think what everybody did was they are always talking about cutting down the speeding cars so they increased the horsepower. It don't work, does it?

John: No.

Myhra: I think he will do rather well. I knew his father when he was the federal judge. I never knew his mother. She was one of the first legislators, woman legislators. But I've seen a lot of them come and go. A lot of them judges, and all. One of my better friends in Madison when I was down there was Frank Nicollet. Abbotsford. He could have been, they claim Lucey got the 32nd [Division] to be sent out to Fort Lewis in, I think it was in 1991? Oh, it was earlier than that.

John: Berlin crisis. When they sent the troops to Germany, they sent the 32nd to Washington.

Myhra: Out there. That is where our division started out in World War II. In Washington. And they picked them because he was the judge advocate in the 32nd Division, and they claimed that Lucey probably maneuvered that so he could get him out of the way. There is a lot of that crap, you know. But, you know, it's interesting. I mean, I have a lot of people, even when I was the postmaster, they'd come and see me. You know, you have to be real careful about donations, or stuff. But my wife had her own checkbook. And people we did see, it was like we had this meeting over here in Waupaca the other day. I forget how many people came up and shook hands, you know. And the guys that were standing with me, "How do you get along with them people?" You know, you work with them, you know. And each time I go north, I stop by my friend up there and check to see how he is doing. I guess he is improving. He tells me, she tells me, I don't know, they wanted to put him in a hospice but he wouldn't go for it. But, you look at the guy, he looks real

good, but he just isn't doing that well. But, I don't know. I'll be glad when I get sick to kick the bucket, you know.

John: Norm, I notice you are very much into the division organization. How about the other vets organizations, the VFW or the Legion?

Myhra: I'm a fifty-six year member of the American Legion. I been in the Vets of Foreign Wars since April of '45. I'm a life member of all of them except the Legion. I couldn't afford the \$500 when I was young. So now I guess it ain't as much because I'm older. I'm active in the Purple Heart, the Army-Navy Union, Anzio Beachhead Association, and then the 3rd Infantry Division Society, and the 7th Regimental Society, the Purple Heart. I guess I'm in about everything. The Polish Legion, and I'm Norwegian. But I am more active in Commander of the Vets of Foreign Wars. I think there is only two outfits that are big enough that can do a lot of good for vets, I think it is the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The only thing is with the American Legion, I don't know. Christ, you know a lot of the other people in the veterans stuff, like Teddy Duckworth down there in Mauston. Thirty years he's been a service officer in that town. When I need something really special, when I go to see him, when he picks up that God-damned phone, he doesn't ask, he tells them. "This is it! This is a veteran! He's not someone spent the time in the God-damned barracks cleaning the God-damned floors!" He says, "He fought the war!" When he gets on that phone, they move. I got a phone I needed to get repaired. They gave me one from the VA. I couldn't get any action at all. I sent it to him and everything, when he got through with them, three days later there was a new one sitting in my house. Because I have a problem with hearing. See, when I got wounded, I lost most of my high pitch. And that brain damage, the hearing. Hearing aid is no good for me. I can't use a telephone, the hearing aid. But I got one here, I'll show you. And this is good, because when I got that thing going, and when I had a problem with it. [Pause to go look at phone.] So, what did you end up with? Were you an engineer, or something?

John: No, in college, I was a chemist, and I haven't seen a test tube or a petri dish since I got out.

Myhra: You didn't blow up any buildings, did you?

John: No, no. Not that bad. But, when I went into the service, I got into electronics school, so I was a radio tech and a radioman.

Myhra: But, you see, as an infantryman, not only for me but for the other ones, we didn't learn any skills. If I followed up what I learned how to do, I'd be in jail.

- John: You learned how to shoot people.
- Myhra: How straight you could shoot and how long you could live. That's probably why the old 3rd is so successful. They don't have a lot of masters and doctors degrees in that.
- John: No, basically kids. The most effective fighting weapon in the world, an American kid with a rifle. Yea.
- Myhra: But I did see Churchill, and I met a lot of people that became high up in this business. I remember Proxmire when he was just an ordinary guy, and Willy Hanson, and Gaylord Nelson. I served under Gaylord Nelson, John Reynolds, and the third one was, what the hell is his name? From up in, the Republican. He wasn't too bad a guy. Ended up on the Board of Regents. I think that Reynolds is dead, and Nelson is still going. But isn't it funny how he grew up? He had a new stone made, and it's up in Fair Lakes. When he dies, that is where he goes. He's getting up there. He was the other day, he was on television and they wanted to know who he was. Nobody knew who he was. And the guy said, "Haven't you ever heard of Earth Day?"

[End of Interview.]