

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
KENNETH J. PATTOW  
129<sup>th</sup> Signal Radio Intelligence Company, Army, World War II  
2001

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**Pattow, Kenneth J.**, (1918-2009). Oral History Interview, 2001.

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

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

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

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Kenneth Pattow, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as a code analyst in the 129<sup>th</sup> Radio Intelligence Unit in England, France, and Germany. Pattow mentions his work before the war and attending a lecture about Japan on the day of the Pearl Harbor attack. He speaks of work as a civilian inspector with the United States Ordnance Department before being drafted into the Army at Camp Grant. He talks about basic training and armor school at Aberdeen Proving Grounds (Maryland), recruitment to the Signal Corps due to experience with German language, and attending school for cryptanalytic technicians and traffic analysts at Vint Hill Farms Station (Virginia) where he learned codes and received top secret clearance. Pattow lists his Army classification codes, 6709 and 808. He mentions attending the intelligence school on Weymouth Street (London, England) and becoming part of the 129<sup>th</sup> Signal Radio Intelligence Company. He details their duties intercepting German radio communications, the different levels of code security, range of operation, and sending the “Seminole Report” to headquarters every day using a SIGADA machine. Pattow talks about staying in Dartford (Kent, England), moving around in trucks after crossing the English Channel, attaching to the American 7<sup>th</sup> Army in France, and following them to the Vosges Mountains. Pattow discusses the other groups in his company: direction finding units who triangulated message origins, radio operators, and support people like cooks and wire runners. He claims the company’s biggest achievement was decoding a secret message containing line-of-battle plans for the 10<sup>th</sup> S. S. Panzer Division at Battle of the Bulge. Pattow reflects on having a bad captain who blamed him for getting the company drunk and who was frustrated at not being able to get into the company’s work due to lack of top secret clearance. He explains the code he had with his parents so he could let them know where he was in letters. Pattow details his attendance for a term at St. Andrews University (Scotland) after the war and talks about using the GI Bill for night school, getting married, and becoming a personnel director and consultant.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001

Transcribed by Katy Marty, 2008.

Corrected by Channing Welch, 2008.

Corrected by Katy Marty, 2008.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2009.

## **Interview Transcription:**

JIM: It's off, ok. All right. Talking to Ken Pattow and it's the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2001. Where were you born sir?

KEN: Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

JIM: When was that?

KEN: May 23, 1918.

JIM: And what were you doing when World War started in America in December '41?

KEN: I was working for Nash Kelvinator Corporation in Milwaukee.

JIM: So how did that strike you, Pearl Harbor? Was that a sudden experience for you or not?

KEN: I was at a lecture series at Shorewood High School that day and we had the- the topic was Japan.

JIM: Hold it. How old? Get things squared away here. Yes, you're at - start over. This is on December 7 you were telling me.

KEN: We went to a lecture series at Shorewood High School and the topic was Japan and it was kind of interesting because the speaker was aghast that Japan would start a war and that they had no facilities to last and the war would be over in less than six months.

JIM: I think that was the general view. That's what I thought.

KEN: That's what the general view was and that's the same thing that we all thought. Of course being in Milwaukee there were a number of who had been in National Guard companies and who had went down to Mississippi or wherever for training. I remember all that.

JIM: So you waited to be drafted or -?

KEN: I waited to be drafted. I had a high number. 1957 was my number, and so consequently the job at Nash Kelvinator was terminated. They did go into making Sikorsky flying boats later on. However, I took a job at the United States Ordnance Department as a civilian inspector. I had worked prior to Nash Kelvinator I had been at Ampco Metal and I had taken metallurgy and I went to the University of Wisconsin Extension division in

Milwaukee for a number of nights school while I was working. I'd had the equivalent of about two years of college so consequently I got a job with the ordnance department and that kept me working with them. I traveled around quite a bit. I was stationed in Oshkosh for a number of months and worked the whole Fox River Valley as an inspector in a variety of businesses. Then in August of '43 I went into the Army. I went to --

JIM: Fort Sheridan?

KEN: Camp Grant.

JIM: Camp Grant.

KEN: Yeah, and I had made arrangements with the ordnance department to spend my basic and technical training at Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Aberdeen, Maryland. I was there from August until December. My basic training was there and then the technical training was in Armor School. In December of '43 we were interviewed. There were a few of us who were interviewed by a lieutenant from the Signal Corps and he was looking for recruits. We had no idea what he was talking about but we got interviewed and I had taken two years of German in high school and I also came from a German family. I think that that was one of the reasons that I was then transferred in December of '43 to Vint Hills Farms station in Warrenton, Virginia. Vint Hills Farm station is the world's largest receiving and sending stations. There are, I was there twenty years ago, the field in front of the buildings there is still full of telephone poles with all kinds of lines. All the Washington emissary, all the messages from Washington to all the emissaries around the world are sent and received at Vint Hills Farms station. There they had a school for cryptanalytic technicians and traffic analysts. That's what I became. I have an 808 which was a traffic analyst. and a 6709 which is a German traffic analyst I have those two. Those are my two codes and I got those after six months of training there --

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JIM: What type of training and equipment there?

KEN: All - the training that we got was all on codes. We learned the basic.

JIM: Did you understand German code?

KEN: Well, we got involved with that after a couple of months. First off all, they taught us all the Mayfair systems, different squares and how to encode and decode messages, and that was our primary basic training. And that was a very high secure camp. We also at that time were, received top secret clearance for all the work that we were going to do and we were doing and so we did learn German code. However, we shipped out, there were twenty-four of us that shipped out in, well we moved from

Warrenton, Virginia up to Sea Girt, New Jersey but we were in preparation for overseas movement and then we went to London and that was in July of '44 and we went to a school in London on Weymouth Street which was the top English intelligence school. There we learned what the Germans were doing now, at that time, all the different codes, all the different things that they were doing. Then in August of '44 we were sent to Dartford Kent, England to a girl's school that was vacated and was used by the United States Army. There we hooked up with the remnants or the makings of the 129<sup>th</sup> Signal Radio Intelligence Company and the 129<sup>th</sup> Signal Radio Intelligence Company was made up of about 125 men. We had three direction finding units and they were about six or eight people in each group. We had twenty radio intercept operators and we had twenty-four in the intelligence group.

JIM: Your purpose was to keep in contact with the underground people in Europe?

KEN: Our primary message, direction was having to take intercept radio communications from Germany into their different divisions.

JIM: How did this tie you in with the Enigma machine?

KEN: The Enigma machine we weren't— we were apprised of it, but we never worked with it or used it at all.

JIM: The Brits didn't share that with you?

KEN: No –

JIM: Do you have –

KEN: Yes, I understand that you do and I've seen 'em, and I want to let you know and everyone else, in getting top secret clearance I wouldn't have been able to talk (laughs) today like I am because of all the things I signed as far as explaining to anybody what we were doing, how we were assigned to anything. By the same token I have nothing to give to you because we were not able to take from the Hudson, which we worked, any paper or anything out of that hut that we were working on. All our reports and all that stayed right there.

JIM: I imagine.

KEN: And so the equipment that we had, that we worked with mostly in the operations having to do - I'm getting a little ahead of my story here. Let me back off.

JIM: Good.

KEN: We stayed at Dartford Kent England 'cause we were intercepting German messages and information right in England because we were about eighteen miles south and west of London and we had our direction finding units on the coast and we had our radio out on the coast near, all along the southern coast of England and then they would send those messages back to us. We would try to interpret them as far as what the messages were and then we would send those back to headquarters in London because we were part of Headquarters troops.

JIM: Who did the analysis of the messages you received?

KEN: We did. There were twenty-four of us. Eight on a shift. We were on twenty-four hours a day.

JIM: You put the German into English.

KEN: Yeah, we had to transcribe that and get the language back into German and then decide, if we could, as to what the message was about. Now there were, the, we would and sometimes we would be successful to be able to understand what the use of codes that we had and understand what they're doin'. In most cases the higher the level of organization that was sending the higher the more secure type of sending that they had. The lesser, the plain talk, then the reverse language, reverse plain talk, that kind of thing, those were pretty easy and most of those were from companies when they were under attack. They would break radio silence and they would break radio security by comin' on. "Achtung, Achtung! Wir haben—die (freundliche??) sind hier." we would get that message and that wouldn't be encoded or anything else we would get direct messages. Anyway, every day at the end of the day our codename was "Seminole". We would put out the "Seminole Report". That "Seminole Report" was then sent out to another, we were all in trucks with cabs, huts, in the trucks --

JIM: You weren't in an enclosure?

KEN: Oh no, no.

JIM: Because you had to move?

KEN: We had to move.

JIM: Depending upon what?

KEN: Depending on where the Army was. Where the war was. We kept moving on.

JIM: But you were still in England.

KEN: At that time, when the war was strictly on the beaches at Omaha and at Saint-Lo and that, but when the German Army moved back and we moved in --

JIM: Did you cross over Channel?

KEN: Then in October of '44 we crossed the Channel and we landed at Omaha Beach, our 125 people.

JIM: And then you were in trucks.

KEN: Then we were in trucks.

JIM: O.K. I think I've got it now.

KEN: And then we moved to a town called Plaine-de-Walsch and we were always someone and I think it was the captain and his group that would foresee about setting us up. But in just a few places we were there long enough to set up within a hotel room or a vacant place but otherwise we were always working out of trucks.

JIM: Okay, but hold it now before I get further. How long was your range? I mean you were intercepting traffic from how far, 100 miles or less?

KEN: All over. We, in all of the twenty-four of us who were cryptanalytic technicians and traffic analysts, had stamped on all our military papers that this soldier should not be put in position to be captured by the enemy because of the top secret stuff that we had. So we were always behind the group that --

JIM: I'm trying to figure out how far behind.

KEN: It would vary and we waited until there was a definite movement and then we would move whenever, and then when the fronts would stabilize then we stabilized. But we were, our direction finding units would go out from our place. They got out, they were out more into the, we were in the war zones and that, but we were never in any position we could hear sometimes artillery and things like that but for the most part and as far as the war was concerned one of our huts, we call 'em huts, that was on a truck was the order of battle at Dijon and we had a map that filled a whole wall and on that map we had all the companies. The German outfits all identified and the lower echelon was the ones that we had worked with and we knew where they were and what they were doing.

JIM: You still haven't answered my question.

KEN: Yeah.

JIM: What was your range? I mean how far behind were you? You were looking out at what, a fifty mile diameter or what was your radius? This is why I can't picture this.

KEN: Yeah, if real frankly, it's very difficult. There was no definite thing. Because when we got over into France we became part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group. The 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group was the French 1<sup>st</sup> Army and the American 7<sup>th</sup> Army. General Patch was head of the 7th Army. We were the southern part of the European front.

JIM: Right.

KEN: And we were all -- and so we wound up in towns. We moved in towns like Contrexe'v, Hoselbourg, France and then we moved over into Heidelberg. Then we moved into, we were up on the Philosophenweg at Heidelberg and a place called Weiserstein. Then we were in the Vosges Mountains in the winter of '45. Then we followed the 7<sup>th</sup> Army. We wound up at the end of the war in Augsburg, Germany in a "*pension*" so we, it, with the direction finding units being way out ten, fifteen, twenty miles closer to sending the information back to us and the radio operators being out from where we were. We were spread out so I would like to say twenty-five miles, but I have no idea that that is --

JIM: Direction finding units. What were those?

KEN: Three, there were three groups and we would set them up to triangle whenever we --

JIM: What would one look like? That's what I want to know. Two guys, three guys?

KEN: Yeah, about three --

JIM: In a jeep or on a --

KEN: Yeah, they had a truck. There was a truck, and they had the units set up so that they could set up their equipment and we, knowing --

JIM: Wait a minute. Don't go so fast. What about this equipment. What kind of equipment?



KEN: I don't know. All I can --

JIM: A radio receiver or ---

KEN: Yeah, it was a direction finding unit. Whatever, I'm sorry I'm not a technical guy. I can't tell you what it was--

JIM: Well--

KEN: --but we were in communication with them.

JIM: I understand that. Where would they send whatever this direction, this one, three or these three points sent back, where would they send that information?

KEN: Back to us and we would try to then --

JIM: Triangulate.

KEN: Then we would try to figure out exactly from what they told us where this message that we got was coming from.

JIM: I'm with you right now. Right.

KEN: Yeah, oaky.

JIM: Was there someone between them and you? Some other group you mentioned.

KEN: The radio operators.

JIM: Who were they?

KEN: Those were the ones --

JIM: The guys that were in the --

KEN: Those were the ones who were listening to the radio, the German radios.

JIM: Were they with these direction finder people or were they separate?

KEN: They were separate. They operated individually from them but they too were in communication with them.

JIM: Excuse me. Were they attached to their particular unit? They were part of a particular forward unit?

KEN: Oh, no. Yeah, they were --

JIM: Or was that separate?

KEN: No, they were, this was the whole 129th Signal Radio Intelligence Company.

JIM: I know, but I'm trying to determine if this was all part of an independent group. The radio people.

KEN: Oh yeah.

JIM: Okay.

KEN: Just like --

JIM: How many of them?

KEN: Twenty. Twenty radios.

JIM: They worked there together. Now, when they're out there, how many, they broke up into how many? Mean one radio, two radios and how far apart and so forth?

KEN: That I don't know, but for the most part --

JIM: They wouldn't have you in the same spot would they?

KEN: No, but they were all within trucks. They were all, because they had a lot of equipment. They were all mounted. They were all mobile.

JIM: You mean the radio equipment.

KEN: The radio equipment was all mobile.

JIM: Right. But you were in a truck and you had equipment too.

KEN: Yes, we -- no, no the only (laughs) equipment we had was paper and pencil.

JIM: And a map.

KEN: And the map. And then we had a book *Call Signs and Frequencies* that was captured from the German troops and we had a copy of that and that book gave every call sign and every frequency that was ever used. Of

course every German unit would change call signs and frequencies every day and sometimes it would change every hour. Sometimes it would change every ten hours and they would change from page 1 to page 100. There were about 500 pages in there and being methodical like they were they would go from one page and then we would figure out where they were going once they --

JIM: [unintelligible]

KEN: Yes, once they set a pattern we could tell the direction finding units and the radio operators where their signal was going to come from, what signals they were going to use, and what call signs they were going to use. And that was always great when we could do that.

JIM: Excuse me.

KEN: Yup.

JIM: When you picked up that German message, who interpreted that into English?

KEN: We did.

JIM: You did.

KEN: That would then come back to that they would, the radio operator would just get the message, send it back to us. Then we would interpret it, change it into and try to decide what the message was. And depending on what the message was and real frankly, we weren't, a lot of them were undecipherable or we couldn't do anything with them. But the ones that we did, if we weren't too sure about the message, you know, we'd say "probable" or "possible". Now all, we made a "Seminole Report" every day. Then we had another hut where we had what we called a SIGADA machine and that SIGADA machine.

JIM: Spell that.

KEN: S-I-G-A-D-A

JIM: Sig – is there one word --

KEN: And "ADA", yeah "ADA" machine and the machine is about as long as this table and it was set to send messages back to headquarters. Then they would send our report that we made called the "Seminole Report" back to headquarters. At headquarters they would get that report and two other

reports from similar outfits like ours. Two American reports, but they were in different armies that they were following.

JIM: I see.

KEN: But because of the proximity a number of the messages and call signs frequencies and all that would be --

JIM: Well, if you had several groups each of them twenty-five miles behind the lines they needed several of these units like yours.

KEN: Oh, yeah, and the English had a company just like ours and, real frankly, the next day we would get from headquarters sent back to us through the SIGADA machine and then we would get a copy of that and then we would look at all the messages that we had received and how we interpreted them and how if the other ones had the same messages. I went to a school where we used our hands (laughs) so --

JIM: So you got a report back on how your message was received in other words.

KEN: Oh, yeah. As to whether it --

JIM: Then you read that and burned it?

KEN: Yeah, everything was. Nothing was ever taken out of our place.

JIM: I mean then you burned the message?

KEN: Well, the lieutenant in charge of communications, that was his job and we frankly, we didn't as far as files were concerned --

JIM: So, you didn't worry about it? How accurate your reports were?

KEN: Oh, yeah, we prided ourselves in that but --

JIM: That's the way you could tell that you were doing a good job was when you got the file back from headquarters.

KEN: Yeah, that the other ones interpreted the same way we did and that --

JIM: That they agreed.

KEN: Yeah.

JIM: OK how long would it take you to get a message from your radio man out in the field to you to the headquarters? When could he have that?

KEN: That would all be within the day.

JIM: A whole day?

KEN: Yeah, well, when the radio messages came in, the ones who were out in the field would send them back to the radios that were in our group and then they would --

JIM: Somebody would type that German message and somebody would change it to English.

KEN: Yeah. See. all the messages came in what we call five grams. Each message --

JIM: In what?

KEN: In five grams. The messages would come in like "BCDAA", "XYZBA". These are how the messages would come in.

JIM: I understand that.

KEN: Always five. We would then, this is what the code, this is the most standard code that was used and depending on the unit, how big a company it was and where it was, the security of way that message was sent, some would be just over radio, some would be recorded and then sent very quickly and if you weren't in on the call sign and frequency, if you missed that message. Now, ours from our SIGADA machine they took our whole "Seminole Report", recorded it and then they would send it back to headquarters at a certain time, at a certain frequency, at a certain [unintelligible] and they would speed up the message being sent so that the message would take just a few seconds and then it would be received at headquarters. Then they would receive that and then slow it down and then take it out and print it and that.

JIM: When you got those letters and that code, it was your job to turn those letters into English words?

KEN: Right.

JIM: And the English words are what you sent back to headquarters.

KEN: Oh, yeah. What, nothing was sent, and then of course as you know it's always the frequency patterns and that and of course a lot of the [unintelligible] deal, they never, there was no frequency.

JIM: Did they change frequency often?

KEN: The Germans?

JIM: Well, when you send reports back.

KEN: Oh, yeah. Our frequencies and call signs were all changed all the time, too.

JIM: Right. So when you got that in English, then you would send it back in code.

KEN: Right.

JIM: Nothing written.

KEN: No. Oh, no.

JIM: Never.

KEN: I think when we were in Dartford and London was eighteen miles away, I think we trucked that back into London, the whole report.

JIM: But you tried to have nothing on paper if you could avoid it when got to continental Europe.

KEN: Oh, yeah. Oh nothing.

JIM: Is that correct?

KEN: That's true.

JIM: Okay. I'm a slow learner here.

KEN: That's from the 129<sup>th</sup> Signal Radio Intelligence Company.

JIM: I understand you have a lot --

KEN: Yeah. Everything and our boss was ETOUSA in the headquarters. ETOUSA, European Theater Headquarters of Troops.

JIM: Oh, I didn't know that acronym.

KEN: Yeah. That's what we call 'em, ETOUSA.

JIM: Where was he?

KEN: That was, they were (laughs), that was --

JIM: Sounds like a man.

KEN: Yeah, it was --

JIM: Where was he?

KEN: They were in, well, they moved too from London into Paris.

JIM: Oh, Paris.

KEN: Yeah.

JIM: Paris was then was really the intelligence headquarters for the --

KEN: After they moved out of London, right.

JIM: I understand. Okay. Well, I'm learning more. I'm a slow learner. I apologize for asking so many questions.

KEN: No, no, no, no, I-- we're talking about a complicated subject here.

JIM: I believe it.

KEN: (laughs)

JIM: You've got me confused. Good. Well, that's--

KEN: I don't mean to.

JIM: No, I know you don't. It's not your problem, it's mine. O.K., so as you move along you get word one day that "We're moving up" and everybody grabs their stuff and starts going?

KEN: We kind of knew that because of the order of battle deal and it always looked we had, that being a top secret place too, but we had the ability to go in there and then we would understand that hey, this is what's moving on and this is what's going to happen.

JIM: So your orders were that if the Germans came crashing over you, you all took a little pill and killed yourself.

KEN: No (laugh), we only moved back once while we were there.

JIM: Really.

KEN: Yeah. That was at the Battle of the Bulge and we –

JIM: But you were down with the 7<sup>th</sup> Army. What are you doing up there?

KEN: The biggest thing -

JIM: Come on! (laughs)

KEN: The biggest thing that the 129th Signal Radio Intelligence Company ever did, a fella by the name of Milton Berman, a New York boy. Because of a duplicate message sent over by their top secret message, he had worked out the line of battle that the 10<sup>th</sup> S. Panzer Division was going to take and at the Battle of the Bulge the 10<sup>th</sup> S. Panzer Division was going to come down and encircle us. You know like going from Beloit to Janesville to Madison. Whatever those towns were at the time. And that message, when he interpreted that, that went right to the headquarters and that resulted in an air force bombing that whole structure, that whole 10<sup>th</sup> S. Panzer Division and they never got on our, into our territory to do what Hitler had planned to do by encircling the whole Army, all of us. And that was the biggest thing. He received a bronze star for that.

JIM: Okay. Now, you said you were in trucks, right?

KEN: Right.

JIM: Your particular outfit, was that a company?

KEN: 129<sup>th</sup> Signal Radio Intelligence Company. We had –

JIM: How many men?

KEN: 125.

JIM: And how many trucks?

KEN: I don't know. We had a bunch of 'em.

JIM: Twenty, thirty?



KEN: Yeah, I got to be a truck driver after a while because then I'd rather sit **[end of tape 1, side 1]** and drive the truck than sit in the back when we went rumbling around.

JIM: And then when the truck would be filled with - you said a map primarily. It didn't have a lot of radio equipment in it?

KEN: Well, it had all our things. When we lived in the Vosges mountains we had lived in tents, sixteen man squad tents. These were not pyramidal (??), these were long tents. So we had all our tents and all our equipment. And the breakdown of the 129<sup>th</sup> Signal Radio Intelligence Company was about 125. We had twenty-four fellas in the cryptanalytic section and about twenty-four radio operators, twenty-four in the direction finding unit and then we had fifty in the support group and that included wire runners. Wire runners (laughs) were always putting things up and -

JIM: Who would you connect to?

KEN: Our own. To direction finding units radio operators and ourselves.

JIM: You connected them with land lines?

KEN: In some places, yeah.

JIM: Well, they weren't very far in front of you then.

KEN: Well, no they did what they were supposed to do and where they put 'em all I don't know because when you drove around Europe at that time during the war you saw a lot of wire lines all along the roads. Then we had own electric generators and we had fellows who operated along all electrical.

JIM: What did you do about food?

KEN: Food, we had our cooks and our truck drivers and all that. Then we had eight officers in our group.

JIM: But you did have cooks and you had hot food.

KEN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Even in the mountains, in the Vosges Mountains, we ate in tents there.

JIM: Moving around like this, did you have trouble getting mail?

KEN: No. We had APO numbers and we always were in pretty good shape in that because again we were not on the front lines. We were back.

JIM: I understand. Did your group stay together throughout your thirty months in Europe?

KEN: When we formed in August then we stayed together until right after the war and then people went home according to the amount of points that they had.

JIM: I understand that. Did you keep track of any of these people?

KEN: Just one right now, Gene Thornton who is, worked with what I did and he's in Charleston, South Carolina. The other fellows that I have had contact with: Howard Packard, let's see who else. Milt Pershansky (Coshansky??), Herb Refell (Rahphel??). We either lost them or they passed away. This was mostly, in the whole area there is only one person who was in our company from Wisconsin that was Lt. Bernstein, Bensicle, and he, Bernheim pardon me, Lt. Bernheim. He's a lawyer in Milwaukee.

JIM: So did you join any veteran's organizations?

KEN: Oh, yeah.

JIM: Did this group ever meet?

KEN: Never. Never, and we were never a cohesive group. We're all pretty independent operators -

JIM: Oh, really.

KEN: In what we did. The radio operators, they're by themselves and we were by ourselves.

JIM: You didn't talk --

KEN: Oh, we talked, but I mean there was no joint thing. And we had the world's worst captain and he was never a fella to unite any --

JIM: Not a good old boy?

KEN: No, we had two factions, him and the company.

JIM: What was your rating?

KEN: I was - I started as a PFC, got to be a T 4.

JIM: T4.

KEN: And then I got busted at the end of the war and I got down to private and then --

JIM: You got busted.

KEN: Yeah, then after a month later --

JIM: Did you talk nasty to your commanding officer?

KEN: Well, the commanding officer as you can feel, he didn't care for me. No, it was kind of an interesting thing. The war was over and we were stationed back at Bensheim, off the Birchstrasse, and we had a Yunta (??) store. Yeah. (laughs).

JIM: So your personal remembrances, I mentioned how the war came up.

KEN: Yeah, O. K. We had, we got into a, we were stationed there at a castle and this castle was used by the Germans to have for their unwed mothers. And when we took over of course everybody was gone. And I was on clean up crew, and part of the castle on the long side we found, when we cleaned it all up we found a great big wooden box, big as this desk here, full of wine bottles and so we brought that out and had that set in the company area there and the fellas all picked it up and so the Captain accused me of getting the company drunk.

JIM: It was all your fault?

KEN: It was all my fault.

JIM: You had to force them to drink all this?

KEN: No, I didn't have to force anybody and I was the guy, I was the Sergeant in charge but we had a Lieutenant who was in charge of the thing, and I told the captain I was in charge. Anyway, he wanted to give me a court martial, but --

JIM: I don't think he really did. He wouldn't of come out of that very well.

KEN: No, he wouldn't of and I was so - the war was ended and the fear of the Lord was in me. Then I, he - I, what is it -- he asked me if I wanted to have a, if I just lose my rating. Of course he and I -- he was not cleared for top secret stuff so we never let him in any of our things that we were doin' and 'cause legally he couldn't get in and he was unhappy with that.

JIM: By cleared you mean he didn't understand the codes. Is that what the --

KEN: Well, he wasn't cleared for top secret.

JIM: What's that mean?

KEN: He could not handle top secret information.

JIM: Because?

KEN: He was not cleared for it.

JIM: We're going around in circles.

KEN: Yeah, we're going around in circles. To be cleared for top secret stuff you have to pass an FBI examination. You have to be --

JIM: You didn't tell me about getting zeroed in by the FBI. When did they do that?

KEN: Well, they did it with us when we were at Vint Hills Farms state station.

JIM: Ah, ha. They want to know about your maternal grandmother and whether she was a spy or not. (laughs)

KEN: Everybody. Yeah. Being from Milwaukee and the German --

JIM: You have to be very careful? That's where the Bund was.

KEN: Yeah. That's where the Bund was.

JIM: And the food.

KEN: They were looking at me at that time.

JIM: Very carefully. Well, you speak German. I'm sure they vetted you right to the limit.

KEN: Jawohl!

JIM: I'm sure they did, yeah.

KEN: But, no, I'm one of the most patriotic guys around.

JIM: I'm sure. Did you, did they give your unit a unit citation?

KEN: No.

JIM: Wonderful. You guys worked hard I would think you would get something.

KEN: Yeah, the only thing that we got was on our Theater of Operations, the European War, we had four battle stars. We were in four different campaigns as we moved along.

JIM: Sure.

KEN: And so that helped with the amount of points. So I had 59 points so at the end of the war I volunteered to go for training within civilian agencies. Those whose college was interrupted by the war had a chance to sign up for this, and so I did and I was assigned to St. Andrews University in St. Andrews, Scotland.

JIM: Oh, that was wonderful.

KEN: Yeah, and I attended the Martinmas term as a Begent. I had figured out that I would be able to get home from England by Christmas and that we were at Southampton waiting to be shipped out and they shipped home the 84<sup>th</sup> division instead of us at Christmas time and so I didn't get back until Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>.

JIM: Were you married?

KEN: No.

JIM: Still single.

KEN: Yeah.

JIM: Did your folks know where you were all the time?

KEN: Yes. We had a code.

JIM: Boy, you're full of codes. (laughs)

KEN: The first, in my in any letter to them, whenever I said "Dearest" we used the second and third letter of each of the first three or four letters that were where I was at, like Dartford. I'd get words that "D", "darling" and things like that. So I set that up so that they knew, but we moved around an awful lot, but we kept a good conversation with them, v-mail and all that. When I got to Scotland then I had the opportunity to call home and (laughs) you got on a waiting list and I finally got through at nine in the morning our time but it was two in the morning at home. Got my dad out of bed and he

says, “Hey do you know what time it is?” And I say, “Pa, I haven’t talked to you in 20 months. Yet you sound the same.”

JIM: (laughing) Well, some things never change right?

KEN: Yeah, then when I had to send home for golf balls and golf tees my mother knew that the war was over.

JIM: (Laughing)

KEN: That’s a true story.

JIM: I believe it. You played at St. Andrews?

KEN: Yeah. Everyday. Fifty cents to play –

JIM: Boy, were you spoiled. Fifty cents?

KEN: Yeah, a half a crown.

JIM: Fifty cents. I can imagine what the green fees are there now.

KEN: Yeah, around a 100, 125 dollars or so.

JIM: Although people I’ve talked with say it’s not a very good course.

KEN: No, it’s not.

JIM: Yeah, it’s flat and hard.

KEN: Yeah, it is.

JIM: Yeah, right I’ve been through Scotland, I’ve done that.

KEN: Yeah.

JIM: Okay.

KEN: I have good friends in England, and that was one of the reason I wanted to go back there. I’m still in contact with these friends I’ve made in Dartford Kent, England. They’ve come to visit us; we’ve come to visit them. My kids all corresponded with theirs –

Jim: Hey, that’s wonderful.

KEN: We still have a mutual admiration society and I'm for the Queen. I'm an anglophile. (laughs)

JIM: (laughs) I am too. I've been to Europe eight times, and I'm as interested in English history as I am in American history.

KEN: Yeah.

JIM: But I won't trouble you with that. Anyway, when you got home did you use your GI Bill?

KEN: Yes, to go to night school mostly and I could never use it to buy a house. I got married - when I got out in February, and I got married in September of '46 and happily married ever since. And so I never completed my education as far as college education is concerned. But I got in, I got some, I had some pretty good jobs.

JIM: So what did you end up doing?

KEN: I was a personnel director and I worked for the recent.

JIM: In Fort?

KEN: Yeah, no I worked at first at Ampco Metal and back in those days we had employment managers. (laughs) Now they're Human Resource Directors.

JIM: Right.

KEN: Then I got to be Personnel Director of James Manufacturing Company in Fort Atkinson.

JIM: Oh.

KEN: In 1954 I moved there. I moved my family --

JIM: I don't know what they do.

KEN: They make farm and barn equipment. They still do. They're called with J-Star now. And then we changed managements three times and so I then went to work for the National Foundry Association out of Chicago and I became a labor relations and a governmental affairs expert and consultant for 500 foundries throughout the United States.

JIM: Well, that's an important job.

KEN: Yes, it was and I sure enjoyed it, enjoyed all the traveling that I (unintelligible)

JIM: You raised how many kids?

KEN: Three, three daughters. Two live in Fort. One is a nurse, one is involved with medical records and the other daughter is out in Sacramento.

JIM: Um - hmm. That's nice.

KEN: And they all – frankly, one of the reasons I moved to Fort Atkinson was for the education deal. I lived in Milwaukee and I have always wanted to move outside of Milwaukee. We had a summer home on Little Cedar Lake which is near West Bend and I always wanted to move in and get a job in West Bend, live in West Bend. But that didn't materialize, but Fort Atkinson did, and fifty miles from Milwaukee. My brother lives in Milwaukee. I'm still --

JIM: Oh, that's right.

KEN: In contact there. So one of the main reasons was for a job (laughs) but for the family to grow up within that system.

JIM: Did the FBI ever talk to you after the war?

KEN: No.

JIM: Didn't ask you to come back and come into the agency and do some work for them?

KEN: No, well we didn't work - we didn't work for the FBI. We --

JIM: Why, I know that, but they know about you and --

KEN: Oh yes, they did.

JIM: I wondered because of your German background whether you might have something of interest that they might want to use.

KEN: Real frankly, real frankly at the end of the war in August I had two classifications. I mentioned to you that 6709 which is a German traffic analyst and then 808 which is a cryptanalytic technician, those were part of ten that were frozen. If you had any of those ten you could not get out of the Army at that time and I had two and even with my fifty-nine points I wasn't able, wouldn't have been able to get out and when the Korean War started I thought I thought (laughs), I--



JIM: [unintelligible]

KEN: Cause we can learn, we knew code and we knew all that and I thought, oh  
—

JIM: But you weren't in the reserves.

KEN: But I wasn't in the reserves. When I got discharged, I got discharged. I, frankly, was not a great soldier.

JIM: What do you mean you weren't a good soldier?

KEN: Well, that was --

JIM: You didn't get along with that one guy. [unintelligible] doesn't mean you weren't a good soldier.

KEN: (Laughing) No I, no, I was a good soldier. The biggest thing that helped me out as a soldier I was on a drill team with the De Molays and I knew how to do all the drilling.

JIM: You're a Mason?

KEN: Yes, sir. And I knew how to do all the drill work. And I always wound up as a guide on, for all the deal, because when they'd see me do about faces and that they'd say, "Where'd you learn that?" and I told them that so I always had good deals in basic training camps.

JIM: Yeah, I spent two years in ROTC before the war --

KEN: Oh. Oh.

JIM: But it didn't help me at all in my Navy career.

KEN: No, yeh. Well --

JIM: Couldn't use it in Inchon at all [unintelligible] ask me to march. (Both laugh) O.K. I can't think of anything else to ask you.

KEN: No, I --

JIM: Did you forget to tell me something?

KEN: No, I think I got everything all squared away. And I think you got - No, I got it all in. Thank you.

JIM: Thank you. That was a nice interview. Thank you.

KEN: You got me thinking there, too, about distances and setups and that. They were so variable that --

JIM: It's just that's it's important for me to understand. If you're close enough to the war your reactions are different than if you're way back, and that's [unintelligible] wanted to know how much of your existence was deprived by being there, you know, whether you worried about people wandering into your camp and shooting you or your being overrun by a tank company or any of those things. That's what I was concerned with.

KEN: Well, we were - the biggest, one of the other two things along that line. The biggest thing of world war that I saw was when we were in London, I can tell you about that, we had buzz bombs and we had these V-2's, those flying telephone poles. We learned how to live with that stuff. Boy if we were in a room like this and a buzz bomb came over and then it'd all of the sudden stop we'd be in the basement as fast as we could. And then one of the other times when I was in France, during the Battle of the Bulge, we were at a point we're about a --

**[Tape 1, side 2 ends abruptly. End of interview.]**