

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
ELMO PETERSON  
Military Police, US Army, World War II  
2014

OH  
1900

**OH**  
**1900**

**Peterson, Elmo**, (b. 1923). Oral History Interview, 2014.

Approximate length: 1 hour 45 minutes

*Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Abstract:**

In this oral history interview, Blue Mounds, Wisconsin native Elmo Peterson recounts his World War II service as a military policeman with the 788th MP Battalion of the US Army in Iran, his post-war occupation, and his recent Honor Flight. Drafted into the US Army, Peterson discusses his reaction to the Pearl Harbor attack as well as his subsequent basic training at Fort Swift (Texas) and journey overseas. Peterson also outlines his service duties during his tenure in Iran, including law enforcement operations with US troops and local personnel, transferring prisoners between US bases, and encounters with hostile mountain bandits. Likewise, he recalls his off-duty experiences such as hunting, military rations, and a trip to Cairo (Egypt). Peterson reflects on his return home, his occupation as a watch-maker after discharge, and his experiences as part of a recent Honor Flight.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Peterson (b. 1923) served in the US Army with the 788th MP Battalion during World War II. He was involved Iran in the Middle Eastern theater before being discharged in 1946.

**Archivists' Note:**

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Ellen Brooks, 2014.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2016.

Reviewed by Tristan Krause, 2017.

Abstract written by Tristan Krause, 2017.

## Interview Transcript:

### [Beginning of Peterson.OH1900]

Brooks: Today is Friday, March 21, 2014. This is an interview with Elmo Peterson, who served with the 788<sup>th</sup> MP Battalion of the US Army during World War II. The interview is conducted at Mr. Peterson's home in Madison, Wisconsin, and the interviewer is Ellen Brooks. So, Mr. Peterson, if you can just tell me when and where you were born, and a little bit about how you grew up.

Peterson: Well, I was born on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1923, and I was born on a farm south of Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, and so when I got to go to high school, I didn't like the high schools out that way, so I was aiming to come into Madison here to go to high school here, and so I went there and I graduated in 1942. And we were the first graduating class after Pearl Harbor, and in January of '43, I was drafted into the Army. We went down through Camp Grant, Illinois, for the induction and for our assignments and all the clerical work and all to find out how dumb and how smart we were [chuckles], and then we had no way of picking our own—where we wanted to be or what outfit we wanted to be. I wanted to get into the Air Force, and they never made any gestures that I could get in the Air Force, and so I think they needed a certain amount of men, at that time, to make up this 788 MP Battalion, and all of the guys in our outfit were from Wisconsin and Illinois. That was all the draftees from there.

And then when we got through with the Camp Grant, then they shipped us down to Texas and down to Camp Swift, Austin, Texas, and so then we got our training down there, and I think we left in May and went out through New Jersey, Fort Dix in New Jersey, and spent a week or so there. And then they shipped us over to Camp Shanks—which was a very new camp at that time—and that was in New York. And then we got on the ship, which is a ship called the USS *West Point* and we got on there, and on the ferry going down, there was a ship that they had bought from—the United States had bought from France, called the *Normandy*—and they were working on that ship before we went down there. It caught fire while they were working on it. They were going to re-fix it for a troop ship, but when we went by there, I remember that ship, and there it was. There it lay. It was laying in the harbor, on its side, and I can still see that today, and everyone, as the ferry went down the Hudson there, we went by the Statue of Liberty, which was the first time and the last time I saw the Statue of Liberty. And we got to our ship, to the USS *West Point*, which had been an American ship called *America* at that time, and it was a large ship.

[00:05:03]

And we found out that they put nine thousand troops on that particular ship, and we went down. We left July tenth from the harbor and went down, and our first stop was in Rio de Janeiro, in the bay there. But that ship from New York to Rio de Janeiro was ready and really fascinating. We saw humpback whales and spouts shooting up there, and little fish flying along the ship there as we were going along. It was a very interesting part, and when we got down to Rio de Janeiro, we sat in the harbor there for the longest time. I don't know how long it was. It may have been a week, I don't know. And we sat there and watched the cable cars going up to Sugar Loaf there—I don't know if you're familiar with that kind of stuff or not—but it was interesting.

And then finally we left there and went to South Africa, Cape Town, South Africa. Well there I got off the ship. We were on work details. That's why I got off the ship. [chuckles] So we got the ship loaded up, and then we took off. And then our next stop was Bombay, India, which—all of us got off the ship and we went over to a British camp—in fact, there was a British 10<sup>th</sup> Army that we were guests of, and that's where I got my first wound. I guess I was in the dark going to bed, and evidently I had my shaving kit on top of the mattress and I didn't know that, and I got in there, and I felt something in my wrist here. And all of a sudden—I didn't realize it, but I had cut myself. I was cut pretty bad, I guess. Anyway, the next morning I had to go down to the infirmary and have it bandaged up. They couldn't put stitches in because it was too—I don't know why, but they said they couldn't put stitches in it, so all they did was put tape on there and pull it together. And I've still got the scar. I didn't get no medal for that either.

So then we were there—I think we were probably there about three weeks, possibly, waiting for another ship to go up into the gulf, to the Persian Gulf, and we got there on what they called the *City of London*, a ship from England. We went up as far as we could go in the Gulf and got off in Khorramshahr, Iran, and so we were there for maybe two weeks, and then we were deployed to a little detachment of fifteen of us that went up to what we called Dorood, Iran.

Brooks: Dorood? What was that, Dorood, Iran?

Peterson: Dorood. Dorood. Dorood means “two rivers” in Iranian, and there we spent possibly a year there. It was interesting. It was a small camp, very small, in the mountains, and we had it much better there than where we had been deployed from. So then—

**[00:10:11]**

Brooks: What was your role there? What was your assignment? Why were you there?

Peterson: The climate?

Brooks: No, the assignment. Why were you there?

Peterson: Well, we guarded. That wasn't our main job up there. I remember one time while we were there, I had to guard the gate as they'd come into the camp, and they only had one vehicle entrance and exit there, and when we got up in this camp, Camp Gillis was the name of the camp—and we didn't have any commissioned officers over us. The highest there was a buck sergeant at that time, and they finally took one of the officers in the camp there and assigned him to us. Well, every so often we had our own come up to check up on us, I guess. But I was on the gate one time when he come up there, and I saw who it was, and so I just waved him on by, and pretty soon the vehicle stopped and backed up, and Captain McLeod was in there. And he says, "I think you ought to give me a salute." [laughs] So I snapped to attention and gave him a salute, and then he goes, "We get pretty lax about those things when we don't have anybody around us." And so that was my experience, and he was at least nice. I always liked Captain McLeod.

But then we were there, like I said, about a year, and then we went up to—transferred up to Arak, what they called Arak. Soltan Abad was a one, but Arak was a shortened version of the name of the city or the town, and we were there for a while. And I can't remember just how long it was. Then we had a hospital up there, and that was out in the country, in the mountains there, probably it was something like five miles from our camp where they had the hospital, and we'd be assigned to that—so many of us—and we'd stay there for a week, and then not much more happened around that camp there. In fact, that's where we were when we heard that President Roosevelt passed away, and then I think we had done what we had to do up there, and then we were shipped back down to Ahvaz.

It was a hot pot down there. I know one of the fellows remarked—it'll probably be twenty years ago or something, we were talking—and he says, "Yeah." He says, "I knew that we were going to get a hot temperature down there," because he said, "I remember them coming out with a sheet of paper talking about the temperature down there, and on August 23, 1944—I think it was—they hit a temperature of 168 degrees." And of course, it didn't seem that bad, but it was dry heat. But when the wind would shift around, and blow the moist air up there, nothing helped there.

**[00:15:20]**

Brooks: And that was a town you were in? Were you in a town?

Peterson: Ahvaz was a town, and the camp was Camp Lowe. L-o-w-e.

Brooks: Do you know how to spell the town? The name of the town?

Peterson: Ahvaz? I do, but I—[laughs]

Brooks: That's okay. We can look it up.

Peterson: A-h-w-a-z, I think it is. It's not a big word. [laughs]

Brooks: That's okay. We can look it up, too. I just wanted to make sure I was getting it right.

Peterson: Yeah. So we were there—oh, I have to back up a little bit. I have to back up to Camp Gillis again, up to Dorood. There was a fellow in the—I think he was with the supply company, and he stole a big truck, and he took it out and tipped over and smashed it up. So I don't know—they must have had him in the guardhouse, because we were ordered to take him down to Andimeshk. And that was probably about a hundred miles or so south of us. That was down where the desert meets the mountains. And they assigned me to take him down there, and looking back, I can't remember they even gave me a handcuffs or any prevention like that. I don't remember whether I even had sidearm. But anyway, I got him down. He was a nice fellow, and I don't know whatever happened to him. I just took him down there to the provost marshal. That's where he was being sentenced.

Brooks: Do you know why he stole the truck?

Peterson: No, I don't know. He stole it for some reason, and of course there's mountains roads up there. He probably wasn't used to mountain roads, and he tipped it over and smashed it up pretty bad. But anyway, I wanted to inject that into this. But down in Ahvaz, I know at one time I was assigned sidekick for the US Mail, our own—or the Army, you know. And so that's one of the things that I had done down there. And then I also was at the gates, and then we put in some long hours on those gates. So there was—I had heard that we could volunteer for steady KP and that was only about an hour and a half for each meal, and that's all we had to work. So I volunteered for that, and I was a steady KP for some time, and a much better job. [Laughs]

So then of course, that was—actually, that's when the war ended, when we were at Ahvaz, and so then we got a furlough, and we had two places to go. Either place we could—and I can't remember how we selected whether we went there or went to the other one—but I got to go over to Cairo. That was the first time—going over to Cairo—that I ever got on a plane, and the DC-3, they called this one the 47, but it was a DC-3. And that was my

first airplane ride.

**[00:20:32]**

Brooks: How was it?

Peterson: Oh, that was a smooth ride. That was the love of my life. [chuckles] And so I had gone over to Cairo, and I put my stuff in where I was going to be staying, and I thought, “Well, I’ll go down to the PX,” because I was the only one from our outfit that went over to Cairo. And when I walked into PX, come through the door, and the thing, and the chair was just up against the wall, there sat Elmer Goth. He was my best friend in high school. We graduated from high school together, and neither one of us made a move. We just stood there, just stared. We couldn’t believe it, and so then I got together with him quite often. He had been in Arabia as a signal corner man, and he was transferred down to Cairo, and so he was working down there, and we got together quite a bit, but I got to go through the pyramids, the Sphinx. I went to see the Sphinx, and that was excitement. [chuckles] And so then we went back to our place in Iran again, down to Ahvaz, and then they started letting us go.

Brooks: When you were in Cairo, what were you just on leave?

Peterson: Just a vacation.

Brooks: Okay. So you didn’t have to work or anything, just got to sightsee?

Peterson: No, no. We were guests of the US Air Force at that time, and treated like kings. [chuckles] We even went through chow lines that we never went through in our own place. We always had our mess kits with us, and so that was kind of a relief. And then we waited for our points. We had—I can’t remember now how many points I had. It seems to me fifty-something points, I think it was, because the fellows that had been married, they had higher points than we did. And then us little guys, and so—but anyway, when our numbers came up, then we got on the plane and went to Casablanca and Morocco. And I was backlogged there for three weeks, something like that. We thought we’d be home for Christmas, and it didn’t work. So then we left down there in Cairo on December thirty-first, and we got up in the air, and we celebrated the New Year up in the air. And the plane went down to South Africa, and then I think we went down to as far as Dakar. We didn’t land, didn’t stop, and then they swung over and went across over to the Ascension Islands and landed there, and then we took off there the same day and we went over to South America.

**[00:25:04]**

There we stayed overnight. They had maintenance on the plane because we were riding the 54, a DC-54, and so the next day we got up and we took off, and I don't know where we landed. It was somewhere between South America and the United States, but we stopped there for breakfast, and then from there we went to Miami, Florida. And we were there for thirty-six hours, for how long we were there getting processed, down there, and then we got on a ship—or on a train—and went up to Fort Sheridan in Illinois, and that's where we were discharged from there. And of course, then we had to find our own ways back home again, so from there, but that was my—I left out a few things that I should tell about.

Brooks: Do you mind, can we go back a little bit and fill in some blanks? So can you tell me just a little bit about your family, your parents, and did you have any siblings?

Peterson: Yeah. Yeah, when we were on the farm, things seemed to be going well, but my father was—towards the end of being on the farm, he wouldn't come home for chores, and I was saddled with milking those cows and doing the chores work and that kind of thing, and then in '39 we lost the farm. And that was just at the end of the Depression, and so we moved off the farm. Lo and behold, there was a house for sale right next to my grandmother's up in Blue Mounds, and it was right across the street from the church where we always went, and I can't remember now how much it cost, but I think it was something like \$2,000. It was a nice little house, built out of oak and walnut wood. And then of course, I was in Madison going to school, and I was working at Kennedy Manor in Madison here. I don't know if anybody knows where that is, but it's on the corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Langdon Street, and it's still there yet. Kennedy Manor.

Brooks: What was your job there?

Peterson: Custodian. Not a janitor. In those days—now they call them engineers, now. [laughs] But anyway, I remember getting back to the house in Blue Mounds, the monthly payment on that was \$10 a month, and I don't know how long we had to pay it off, but my dad didn't come up with the money very often. He was working, and he didn't have a real good job, but he had a job, and so I was working part time up there, and so I think I paid most of that \$10 a month to get that paid off. And then I graduated high school, and then as I said, I got into the service in January 1943.

**[00:30:10]**

Brooks: And are you an only child or do you have any siblings?

Peterson: No, I had a sister, but she, at the age of twelve or thirteen, something like



that, she was very athletic, and she was playing kittenball with a group of kids in school, and she was six years older than I was. And so she was waiting to get into the batter's box, and the one ahead of her hit a fly, and threw the bat and ran. And the bat hit my sister in the back of the head and knocked her out. After that, she came down with epileptic seizures for the rest of her life. It was very devastating for my mother especially because she was here. My mother just worshipped her. She was such a very intelligent girl. I said, "I should have been her, and not what—and she should have been me." But it don't work out that way. But that was our family life.

Brooks: Do you remember—can you tell me where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor and how you were feeling?

Peterson: Yes. I heard about it at home. That was on a Sunday, and I was home at Blue Mounds, and I was getting ready to go back to Madison, because I stayed in Madison while I was going to high school. I had a room on Dayton Street just off of a square there.

Brooks: Can you watch your microphone? Your hand's there.

Peterson: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Brooks: No, that's okay.

Peterson: I can remember going up to Kennedy Manor, because they had a beautiful lounge up there and a beautiful radio and a grandfather's clock, and so I sat there and listened to it there. And I thought to myself, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" I didn't know where it was, and so I don't know how long I was there, but anyway the next day we went to school and our POD teacher—which was Problems of Democracy, it was a course—he took all the boys in all his classes and sat us down in the auditorium and talked to us about what possibly could be happening ahead of us, what to expect, and he had such great wisdom for something like this. I don't know what everybody else felt, but I know I sure got a lot out of it. And probably about twenty-five years ago, I think, I saw him up at the hospital—just by accident I saw him up there—and I said to him, I said, "Mr. Marsh, you know, when the war broke out, I thought you were so great the way you took us, all the boys, and talked to us." He said, "Did I?" He didn't remember, but I sure remember. I remember today, and I'm ninety years old.

Brooks: So what were your feelings about potentially being drafted? Were you excited? Were you nervous?

**[00:35:05]**

Peterson: I had no convictions. I guess it didn't bother me one way or the other. I noticed that some of our class that would graduate that spring, some of them went in the service right away and signed up, you know. I had another friend in the class there—Lawrence Poss was his name—and all of a sudden he disappeared. I didn't know what happened to him, and I found out later that he got married and he's celebrating his—what was it—fiftieth anniversary, and I found out that he was still here. And I said, "Gosh, I just got lost without you around, and you disappeared, and I didn't know what ever happened to you." Well, he had signed up, and he was one of those that was in the infantry, and he got caught up in that Battle of the Bulge. He was there, and so I guess he went through hell. And so I know he's been dead now for—it will probably be fifteen years. No, it was longer than that, probably, I'd say, at least fifteen years, so I was glad to see him show up, anyway.

Brooks: Yeah, you lost track of him.

Peterson: Yeah.

Brooks: So can you tell me a little bit more about training, getting trained as an MP, what that experience was like?

Peterson: Well, it was kind of like being in the infantry. I mean, we went on bivouacs a lot of times. I remember this one time, we were on a bivouac and we stayed and didn't go back to the camp, and we pitched our tents, and it was raining. Oh, rain, rain, rain, and we camped in the woods where the ground was sloping so that we had no problem with the water. But one of the companies, Company D I think it was, they were camped in kind of a swell, like a little ravine there. They almost got washed right down. The water was just coming so fast down there. But I remember going in the chow line and getting our food, and before we got back to our pump tents, it was half full of water. [laughs] And then another time I remember going in maneuvers. I jumped in a foxhole. There was a snake in there, and it was a bad one, too. It was one with a big head on it, and boy I scampered out of there in a hurry. [laughs]

Brooks: Was this in Texas?

Peterson: Huh?

Brooks: Were you in Texas?

Peterson: That was in Texas. Yeah, all our training was in Texas, Camp Swift, Texas. That was a big camp. They also had some prisoners of war down there, too. I think it was that they had German prisoners down there. I don't think they had any Japanese, because Japanese prisoners were very rare. They

fought to the death.

**[00:40:00]**

I can't think of anything more about that. But we had classes, you know, for—in fact, I've got some notes in one of my little notebooks there on MP maneuvers and that type of thing.

Brooks: Was it difficult? Did you think training was hard?

Peterson: Oh no, no. In fact, I kind of enjoyed it. We were young and full of vim and vigor and ready to go. I always felt, though, that a little guy like me that had gotten into the MPs, that didn't quite make sense. [laughs] But that wasn't my problem, I guess.

Brooks: So while you were getting ready to be deployed, did you know where you were going to be sent?

Peterson: No. No, there was a fellow who always thought he knew what was going on. I can remember this one time when we were in Iran, in Dorood, and he met somebody that we were going to be moving at such and such a time. Well, as it turned out, he had seen the orders, but he got the worst part of it, because they changed the orders. [laughs] He was one of my best buddies, too, but he's gone now, too. I had two good buddies that we buddied around ever since we got into the Army, and I kept in touch with them all those years, and the second one was down in Illinois, and he died a year and a half ago, or two. I feel bad about that, but you know, I guess that's part of life that you have to expect. It's just a matter of when.

Brooks: Well when you were in Dorood, you had an outfit about fifteen, right?

Peterson: Well, we had fifteen men there, but—I don't know if I should say this or not—but anyway, there were two of them that didn't seem to amount to too much, and in fact both of those—when we were down in Bombay, India, they stayed behind because on account of some problems they had, physical problems, probably. When they did show up, they were so loused up that they had to have them deloused, and then there was an order that came out. After you've been overseas so long, you get an automatic PFC, because otherwise we wouldn't get any ratings at all, you know, because we had—nobody was dropping out or anything. Like, once we had one sergeant that dropped out, I think, because he was having marital problems at home, but anyway, they didn't get the PFCs, and so they were transferred out of our outfit, went into the Air Corps, and we kind of caught strike of them for a while. And the first time they called our way, or they wrote us, they were both in the Air Force, and they both had corporal stripes on. And then it wasn't long before they had stars and sergeant

stripes on. So I don't know, probably technology or techno-stripes and that.

[00:45:02]

Of course, that isn't what I was in the Army for. I was in the Army to help the—now something comes to mind that I have to tell you. You know, before they made that invasion, that D-Day, they were looking for volunteers for paratroopers, so three of us guys in the camp said, "Ah, this is a good way of doing something for our country." Because we didn't think we were doing anything for our country sitting there, trying to keep the poor GIs out of the towns that they weren't supposed to be in. And so we went down to headquarters down there and we said we wanted to volunteer for the paratroopers. And they looked at us and said, "Now, we can't let you go." We said, "Why not?" "Well, we need you here." And that's all they would tell us. They wouldn't let us go. But you know, if we had gotten our own wish, I wouldn't be here today because the paratroopers, they were just massacred. So I guess the gods were on our side at that time.

Brooks: So, most people know a lot about the war in Europe and the war in the Pacific, but people don't know a lot about the campaign in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, so can you tell me a little bit more about what you were doing there and what all those camps were set up for, and things like that?

Peterson: Well, the only thing I can say that we were there for was just to guard our property and keep the peace between the civilians and the Army. I'll have to tell you another story about—you don't mind, do you?

Brooks: No, not at all. Please.

Peterson: Well, on one of my tours of duty, we—it was a small town, and they had some house of ill repute there, and we had to guard that. So this one time, I was alone. I don't know how come I was alone. So much of the time we had a partner with us, but anyway, I knew there was somebody in the back—because you know, they built those buildings over there, and they built, like, a wall, and then you put buildings in the inside, so you had a courthouse, a courtroom in there, and so I knew there was somebody in the back there because there was only one door that went into the courthouse, or courtyard. So I looked around, and went around the back. They had a privy in back, in the corner back there, and so I shined my flashlight in the privy—you know, they had those straddle trenches in there—and they had a sack of sugar. When they saw me, the sugar ran down into the trench, and that really got me. It shouldn't have, because I could have suffered for that because they were fellows from the kitchen, but I decided it didn't make much difference to me. They dumped, I think,

a twenty-five-pound sack of sugar that they had in there, that they were going to trade for services. But you know, they were the only ones that I ever turned in, and I don't know what ever happened to them. That's something I wish I'd have known, or remembered a little bit more about it, but I can't. I took them up there, and I think that was the last I saw of them. But nothing happened to me.

**[00:50:20]**

Brooks: So, and these were—everybody in your outfit, they're all Midwestern boys still, Wisconsin or Illinois?

Peterson: Yeah. When we went into service, we were all from Wisconsin and Illinois, and our non-coms all came from the east, and our commission officers came from the east, yeah. They had them waiting down there for us, ready to put the whip to us. [laughs]

Brooks: But you stuck together with the Illinois and Wisconsin guys throughout your whole service?

Peterson: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah, we never—once in a while, we'd get replacements, but we were always together. But you know, once we got over there in Iran, I don't know who arranged it, but anyway, from our company, we were the only fifteen guys—it ended up to be thirteen, actually—but we were the only ones that we saw each other for a year. Then we got back to our company—no, it wasn't that company either. It was our—no, we didn't get back to our company until we went down to Ahvaz. But the platoon, I think, the rest of our platoon was up in Arak, and then we all got shipped back down to Ahvaz. I'm just wondering whether I should say anything about those two sergeants we had.

Brooks: They were gay?

Peterson: How'd you know?

Brooks: It's on the sheet that you—the list of stories you might want to tell me, and it says, “The two gay sergeants in the barracks.” You can tell it if you want. There's nothing wrong with it.

Peterson: Well, I was naïve. I didn't know what this was all about, you know? And of course, they both stayed together all the time. I mean, that wasn't unusual, but anyway, when they got up—I remember, I wasn't up there at the time, but this was when we were still in Dorood, and this was up in Arak was where they went, the rest of our squad. And I guess the one fellow, they caught, trying to make off with some fellow that had gotten drunk, and he was after him. I don't know why. I have no idea, but that's

what I was told. And they said that when the one that they caught was going to be sent back to the United States, they said that the other one that was one of the other sergeants was on the pier—or where the train stops, there, the railroad depot—and when the train left, he cried like a baby, they said. I mean, I shouldn't be saying that, but I guess that's the facts.

Brooks: What you heard, right? That was what you heard? That was the story you heard?

Peterson: Yeah, that's what they told me.

Brooks: Do you want to take a look at this? I don't know if your friend Nelson who contacted me was the one who wrote these out, but these were just some—this was, like, a list. So I don't know if you want to take a look at some of this stuff?

**[00:55:02]**

Peterson: Well, I've got a little list here.

Brooks: I mean, I think we're doing great. I just wanted to see if this jogs your memory about anything else you wanted to mention. I kind of crossed out some of the stuff we'd already talked about, but if there's more stories in there.

Peterson: Oh yeah, well they might be interested in this house of ill repute.

Brooks: Yeah, isn't that what you were talking about with the guy who stole the sugar, right?

Peterson: Well not—that was a different one. I mean, it was the same—

Brooks: Same house?

Peterson: —the same house, but—

Brooks: Different story.

Peterson: —just a different, yeah. But oh yeah, this gazelle. That brings me back. Well, myself and another fellow, we were making our rounds, and so we stopped in this house of ill repute, and so they were—Mama and Papa were in the hall, I say the meeting hall maybe, and the office, and Mama was laying on the floor with a pipe in her mouth, and Papa was there feeding opium in it and holding it over a lamp of some sort. That opium was getting hot and sort of started smoking, and they had a gazelle and a fox, and they had them addicted to that opium.

Brooks: Addicted to it?

Peterson: Yeah.

Brooks: Were they pets?

Peterson: Well, yeah, they were kind of pets of theirs, uh-huh. And of course this fellow and I, we were sitting there watching this, and boy I tell you, I was thinking maybe we were getting a little of that too because when we left, I started seeing colorful things, and I never even thought about something like that, you know, would happen. But that was the end of that. But that was real interesting, with the smoking that opium.

Here's another one here. This fellow from Danville, Illinois, [inaudible] I think he was in the card, and so evidently he was working alone. Maybe it was in the daytime, I don't know, but anyway, this old dog was always coming out and barking at him, and he tried to shoo it away, and it wouldn't go and wouldn't go. So, I suppose he was kind of nipping at him too. I don't know, and so he whips a pistol out and bang, shot him in kind of his neck in here like this. Of course, I never saw this, but this is what Raymond[??] was telling me. So in other words, to cover up the use of that bullet, he made up a little story about it, and he took something—I don't know what it was—but he punched little holes in his trouser down there, and then he kind of scratched up his flesh a little bit, and he came back up to the camp and he said, "I had to shoot that dog," because he bit him. So, you know what happened to him then? He got shipped off over to the hospital. He was over there for, I don't know, three weeks.

**[01:00:05]**

They had to give him all those shots that they give, because they didn't have the dog. So then when he came back to work, he started doing duty again, and [laughs] he was walking the same territory that he had. Here this little dog came out of that house and was barking at him yet, and this time he had a stiff neck.

Brooks: The dog lived?

Peterson: The dog was still alive, yeah.

Brooks: That must have been annoying for him.

Peterson: Must have been what?

Brooks: Annoying, after he went through all that.

Peterson: Well, I think so. Yeah. Yeah, he's got—our air conditioner over there, too. We had improvised our air conditioner. In fact, I've got a picture of it. In fact, I made up a DVD on this, so if you think you want that, you can have that. But it shows—on that DVD, it shows my good friend, or good buddy, was up on the ladder up there, and they had a fifty-gallon barrel up there on the stilts, and over the window, they had just like a little box with no top or end to it—top or bottom I should say. And they had chicken wire on both sides, and stuffed with desert grass in there, and on top they had a little trough with holes punched in there, and then they had a little valve up there in that barrel, and they opened up the valve, and that water would trickle down through the desert grass. And then inside the barracks, they had a fan inside sucking in the cool air as it would come over the desert grass. And that really helped, you know, but not if it got humid, though. Humid, nothing would help that. But that's how we had our air conditioner in there.

Brooks: And who came up with that? Who put that together?

Peterson: You know, I don't know. I don't know whether it was—so this was in Ahvaz, Camp Lowe, and who done it? I have no idea. But we maintained it, you know. Yeah, we used to do a lot of hunting over there. I can remember Sergeant Ginchilli [??], he was from New York, and he was—he liked to go hunting with us guys, and all we had was rifles, you know. So we were walking along the creek and he'd come around in a place where a whole bunch of ducks were nesting there, and when they saw us come around there they'd fly all over. A lot of ducks at once, you know, in a big flock, and Ginchilli, bang, bang, bang, bang, like that. And nothing dropped. He was so enraged that he said, "You'd think I would have hit one of those up there."

Brooks: What else did you do for downtime and to entertain yourselves?

**[01:04:55]**

Peterson: Well, I didn't do anything. Some of the guys, they were big gamblers. Actually I was a banker for a couple of guys. They were getting these games, and they'd win, and instead of losing that money back in the game, they'd come to me, and I was supposed to hold that money for them. They said, "Don't you give that to me. If I ask you for it, I don't want you to do that." So I was a banker. That was my big job.

Brooks: And why did they trust you with it?

Peterson: They knew I didn't gamble. [laughs]



Brooks: Were you able to write letters home and get things from home?

Peterson: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah, in fact, I've got some here somewhere. I don't know where they are.

Brooks: How were your parents feeling about you being abroad?

Peterson: Well, I guess what you had to do, you had to do, you know? You do what you said. You do what you're supposed to be doing. I know we had it a lot easier than a lot of the guys did. I know my cousin, he was the oldest one of our cousins, and he was in that over in Okinawa, and he got injured on one of the islands over there. But you know, we said we didn't have a shooting war, actually, over there. In fact, we had two instances when we were here, and just before we come over there, they had an ambulance that was sitting in the drive there that had been shot up. They said that the mountain bandits over there would come down to the road and lay there, and wait for trucks to come by, and then they'd shoot the trucks, or any vehicle. And what they were looking for mostly was blankets and that type of thing, you know. And I know this one quartermaster where they furnished our frozen meat and that type of thing. This one fellow was riding. He was riding, and they had the driver driving from his outfit, and as they come along, that's what happened to them, and they got shot. He got shot. It was in his leg that he got shot, but that's the extent of our combat, so to speak. Another incident, when they had that Tehran Conference.

Brooks: The what?

Peterson: The Tehran Concert—Conference.

Brooks: Conference. Tehran Conference. Okay.

Peterson: They had—we weren't up there, but this is what we had heard—that there was a saboteur that had parachuted up into Tehran, and I guess they caught him. They caught him right away, but he was going to assassinate the three powers up there: Truman—no, not Truman—Roosevelt and Stalin and England. What was his name?

Brooks: Churchill?

Peterson: Churchill, Churchill, yeah. Yeah. But he didn't get very far. But they were on the ball up there. It may have been one of the MP company that done that, too, that went up there.

**[01:10:01]**

I don't know who was stationed up there, because we were never stationed up there, but after we got over there, everybody started going their own way, and I never saw the rest of the company, except our company, when we were sent back. But Company A went their way, Company C went their way, and Company D. I used to go to their reunions when they had them down in Janesville, and I used to go down there for that, for the Company D. In fact, the fellow that got me to go down there was Charlie Howell. He worked for the veteran's museum up there. He was a guard up there.

Brooks: So when you, your injury with your shaving kit, was that the only time you got injured?

Peterson: [laughs] Yeah, that was the only time I got seriously injured. [laughs]

Brooks: A couple other scrapes and bruises, maybe?

Peterson: Yeah, but I didn't get no Pearl Harbor—Purple Heart, though.

Brooks: No. Not for that, I guess. They don't give those out for everything.

Peterson: No.

Brooks: They don't give those things out for everything.

Peterson: I've got to change the battery.

Brooks: Okay. Let me pause.

Peterson: Yeah, I almost got shot a few times over there by our sergeants. This is funny. I said, you know, about the ducks, and a big flock, and they shoot those. He's the one that shouldn't go hunting at all with him, because I can remember we were walking through, like, an oasis up there, and a very thicket, and there was a black fox that come running across there. And all of sudden, bang, bang, bang! And I can see the bullets landing right in front of me there, and I said, "Oh my God. I think I'd better quit this." But I used to go—you know, I wasn't thinking properly when I was—at times. Once, once I went hunting by myself because nobody else was available to go hunting, and I got up. I wanted to get some wild hogs. They had a lot of hogs over there. So I went up and was trying to—and I heard them. I heard them grunting, but I couldn't come up with them. But you know, there I was, up in the mountains up there, all alone, up where those bandits up there. Crazy. Foolish. You know, that's what youth does.

Brooks: Yeah. You were young. So besides the houses of ill repute and the people smoking opium, did you interact with the locals at all?

Peterson: No. No, only through our own—with the guardhouse up there.

Brooks: So what were your impressions of Iran in general?

Peterson: Well, I'm glad I saw it, but I sure wouldn't want to live there, I know that. They have all those open sewers, and the pictures don't send off any scent. So, you don't smell it.

Brooks: So when you made your way back home, how were you feeling when you were getting discharged?

Peterson: Well, I guess I was feeling okay and happy.

Brooks: Did you have any thoughts on what was next for you?

Peterson: No. I know when I was discharged, they wanted to try and talk me into signing up again, you know, but I probably should have. I don't know. Although I never felt the way other people feel about us. I never realized that we could be heroes and not know it. Did you see *The War*—any of *The War*—Ken Burns, *The War*?

**[01:15:31]**

Brooks: I don't think I've seen any of it. I know it.

Peterson: Well, there's one episode, and I think it's the sixth episode, that Raymond Leopold was telling on there and showing the prisoners. They were taking these prisoners and he said, "At this battle, we took about eighteen or nineteen prisoners," and he said, "A young fellow came to me with accent free," he said. He said, "Where are you from?" he asked Leopold, and Leopold said, "From the Northeast." He said, "From the United States." He said, "Where in the United States?" Leopold says, "From the Northeast part of the United States." He said, "What part of East?" and he said, "Here, son, I'm from Waterbury, Connecticut." And this prisoner said, "Oh yes, where the Mad River and the Naugatuck run together, there." And Leopold said he was just horrified, just run cold in the blood. And he said that he—Leopold said, "Well how did you know that?" He said, "Well, I was in training for the administration." And Leopold says, "The administration in what?" "For the territories." He said, "If you're Hitler—" Leopold said, "Here's Hitler, already got the European in the grasp, and he's already thinking he's going to have the United States too." And after I heard that, I started thinking about what we'd done, and it was all teamwork. And it made sense to me then. If we hadn't have been there, we could be under Hitler, you know? And so I'm glad that I went. I was part of the war effort.

Brooks: So what was next for you then, after you got discharged? Did you go to school or use the GI Bill at all?

Peterson: I signed up for the GI Bill. I took up watchmaking, and that was a four year course, on the job training. And I had to be indentured, and I had to go—they had classes about once a month, and they would come here to Madison. The instructor would come here to Madison and have that class, and in those days Wisconsin was licensed. They had a license for watchmakers, and of course I got mine after four years, and of course I had to—when I wanted to write for the examination, I had to go to Milwaukee, and they had the thing down there.

**[01:20:01]**

We were living next door here when I went down there, and I went down in a fierce snowstorm. I can remember I had to stop the car two or three times because it wouldn't—the door was freezing up and the carburetor wouldn't allow the leakings[??] to come back so I could control the speed of it, but anyway, I went there the first day. That was a practical and oral, and then one day we had to make a staff, a balance staff, for the watch, and also a stem. With the stem, we didn't have to worry about running it, but the staff we did. We had to fix that up, and so it took two days to get through with the examination. I think my score was around ninety-five or ninety-seven, something like that, so it wasn't too bad. And I still do that. I don't do much in mechanicals anymore, but mostly in courts and that. See I will work at Hoobie [??] time center, and it's a matter of getting out there is where I have the problem now. When there was Himdale[??] there was no problem getting back and forth, but the bus situation out there in Middletown is no good. It's very far.

Brooks: That's unfortunate. Did you have any type of homecoming party or gathering, something like that?

Peterson: Uh-uh. Nope. The parties that we had was the eighth of October of 2011, when I had that honor flight. That was a surprise.

Brooks: Can you tell me about that?

Peterson: Well, in fact, Bob Burn[??] was the fellow that went. He and I went together. I mean, we were a pair, you know, and we got out to Truax early in the morning, and I think around eight or nine in the morning, the plane took off, and we went right down to—I don't know what field it is, what airport it was, but anyway it was in Washington, DC. And we were treated like kings. I think it was after that that I started realizing that we could be heroes, even for our own selves, you know? And so they had—there were

four buses waiting for us. In fact, I got—Audra Stenson[??] was her name, was one of my guardians, and Bob had Judy, and then those two girls, they were guardians in Washington, and they had gone to college together. They were roommates here, so that was kind of a—in fact, I hear from Susan, Susan Stenson. So those four buses were waiting for us, and they took us off around to, in fact, we went to the World War II memorial, and there we got to see Senator Dole and his wife. His wife is a senator also, and she was there too, and I got to talk to both of them.

**[01:25:15]**

And of course, Dole, he's gotten into better shape. I don't know if you know of him or know him or not, but he's a wonderful fellow, and his wife is also, and so then we got through, and then of course, the thing we had to remark about was Kilroy was here. Every place we went, Kilroy was here. [chuckles]

Brooks: Wasn't that—that was a Vietnam thing, wasn't it?

Peterson: No.

Brooks: Oh, that was a World War II thing?

Peterson: World War II, oh yeah.

Brooks: Okay. I don't know why—

Peterson: No matter where we went, Kilroy was here. [laughs] And they've got it engraved right in the granite in the—you've probably seen it.

Brooks: Yeah, can you explain it, though, a little bit, for the people who—

Peterson: Well, here it is. Here it is, a little guy lined like this here, and then he's hanging over. He's got his nose over there, and then they've got it marked "Kilroy was here."

Brooks: And that would be seen on walls and stuff, and people would draw that.

Peterson: Well, most of the time you just see it in writing, "Kilroy was here." Yeah, uh-huh. Mostly in the bathrooms.

Brooks: Do you know where that came from?

Peterson: I don't know.

Brooks: I don't know either. I've never really looked into it. So they had that

different places where you went, they had Kilroy?

Peterson: Yep, yep. No matter where you went, you always saw that when you had GIs around there somewhere. And yeah, and then we went to the Vietnam—no, no. We went to Iwo Jima memorial there, and that's where we had our group picture taken, in front of that. And then we went down to Arlington. Oh, that was so—it was just—you just can't explain what the reaction I had on that. That was so great, and then, where did we go from there? I forgot now where we went from there.

Brooks: Did you see the Korean War memorial?

Peterson: Oh yeah, we went down to Vietnam and the Korean War, uh-huh. And then the memorial—or the Lincoln Memorial. Yeah, all three of them. Although Bob and I, we wanted to walk, but the last three places, we stopped these three places for one, and they got us off there, and they said, "Well, we're going to put you in wheelchairs because if we don't do that, we'll never make it, because there will be three places you have to go to." And we got to the Korean War, but I don't think we got to see the Vietnam War. We saw the Lincoln Memorial, but I have emotions about the Korean War because my cousin was in that, Bob Murray, out in Mount Horeb. And he had signed up for the trip, because you have to wait, you know, so long, because they were taking the Korean War veterans now, and as long as there's no—World War II still has priority on that, but anyway, he lost his wife in November, and then in February he died. I feel so bad that he couldn't have gone there.

**[01:30:22]**

Brooks: It's not an easy time for, you know, most World War II veterans and even Korean War veterans. Everybody's getting older, and it's unfortunate that way.

Peterson: Yep, well, time waits for no man.

Brooks: Definitely not, no, and that's why we try to talk to everyone we can and sit down and hear everybody's stories, and you never know.

Peterson: Yep. So, you want me to talk about that rug?

Brooks: Sure, let's talk. So you have a rug here. What are you going to tell me about it?

Peterson: Yeah, I've never used it really, but I usually have it rolled up, but Nelson, he went out and got it and brought it in here, and he wanted you to see that too. You know, can I get that picture there?

Brooks: Yeah. Let me take this off. I think what I'll do is take a picture of the rug.

Peterson: Yeah.

Brooks: Here you go. So I'll take a picture of the rug before we're done, and then this is a photograph.

Peterson: This is where they're making rugs. This is in Dorood, or at Dorood area, and you see the shanty that they made there? It was pretty hard to see how they're making the rug there, but I'm almost certain that that's where that came from because that's where I bought the rug, is at the gates at the camp. And the gates were just across the river on track from the train—from the town.

Brooks: So who took this photograph?

Peterson: I think I did.

Brooks: And do you know the people in it? Did you talk to them at all?

Peterson: Oh no. Uh-uh. No. No, they're Persian or Iranian or whatever you want to call them.

Brooks: So when you wanted to buy the rug, how did you communicate?

Peterson: Well, I don't know, but they were selling them at the side entrance there. I know we went down there, and I can't remember whether, you know, they liked to bargain. And so I can't remember whether I gave them their price or what it was, but anyway, I traded, and you know, I never smoked. And so I gave five cartons of cigarettes for that rug, and I always say, you know, I've got the rug. Where are the cigarettes? [laughs]

Brooks: That's true. That's very true. That's a lot of cigarettes, though, isn't it? Five cartons? It's a lot?

Peterson: Five cartons? Well, I don't know. To us—to me, it wasn't much at all because what did a carton of cigarettes cost back in those days? I don't know. Some of those were Red Cross cartons.

Brooks: I was going to say, were they cigarettes you had to buy?

Peterson: Oh, some of them I bought, yeah. Because we had an allotment, I think, for that. In fact, sometimes I'd get the cigarettes and then I'd—because I liked orange juice and that type of thing, and I'd trade my rations for cigarettes for some orange juice. So we'd trade back and forth, but that's a

story that I've got on that rug there. That's a good remembrance of where I was at that time.

Brooks: It's in really good shape.

Peterson: Yeah, it should be because it's never been used. Now, I never noticed these things on the ends here.

**[01:35:02]**

Brooks: Those tassels?

Peterson: Yeah, they're red there on both sides. I never noticed that before until now, recently.

Brooks: Yeah. It's very colorful. Did you have any plans for it? Were you thinking you'd give it to someone or just keep it?

Peterson: No, just that I had a Persian rug. [laughs] Yep.

Brooks: So just to kind of wrap up your story, was there anything about your service that was really surprising to you, that was unexpected?

Peterson: Well, I don't think there's anything I didn't expect—well, I suppose there are things that happened that I didn't expect, but I don't know what it would be. I know I used to—well, when we were in New York, Camp Shanks, we were in the prison over there, guarding the prison for a while, which didn't last very long because the ship—we had to get down to the ship by such and such a time, but in the meantime they kept us busy. It kept us in practice, I guess. I don't know.

Brooks: Were those prisoners, were they prisoners of war that you were guarding?

Peterson: No, no, no. They were just our own prisoners. We had some bad apples. Oh, another thing I wanted to say is about our K-rations. You know, we were issued K-rations before we got on the boat—or boat. [laughs] Ship—and when we were—we were on the ship, and when we went down for a meal, we would stand, go through the chow line, and then they had long tables, no chairs, and you stood there and ate while you were having your breakfast. So I guess when I said something about bad apples, there's always a bad apple, there was a few of them that stole K-rations, and I don't think there was any of us that got out of there without having somebody steal your rations—our rations. And so they had sent out an order that all those who don't have their K-rations, we're going to court martial them. Well, there wasn't anybody that had K-rations left. Somebody stole their K-rations, and who it was, nobody knows. But



anyway, we had a few bad apples in our bushel.

Brooks: I think that happens everywhere.

Peterson: Oh, it probably does. Yeah, uh-huh.

Brooks: Well, is there anything else, anything I didn't ask about that you think you kind of want to mention?

Peterson: I don't think so.

Brooks: Anything to sum up?

Peterson: Well there was one that I didn't say, talk about, which I didn't appreciate very much. I don't know whose idea it was, but I guess they were talking about so many dogs at Dorood there, and somebody got the idea of going and hunting them down. And I remember my buddy from Illinois, he had a Thompson machine gun.

**[01:40:00]**

And I mean, he was issued to him, and so he was one of them. And who else? And I can't remember. I know the sergeant came in on the job too. He was trying to stop it, and all he had to do was follow dead dogs to know where they were. And whoever had got that idea, I don't know, but I know I was down there, but I was not part of them. And to this day I'll never know. I'll never know who really was responsible for it, to do something like that. But it happened, and you can't undo what's been done, you know.

Brooks: Well anything else to kind of sum up? Any closing statements?

Peterson: Well, I'm glad that I done it, and I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience I had, but I wouldn't want to do it again. And although I didn't have a bad life when I was in the service, so I just feel so bad for those people that did have done all the fighting, you might say. So I guess somebody has to do it.

Brooks: Okay. I think you're right. Somebody has to do it. So I want to say thank you for sitting down with me and for the interview, and for your service.

Peterson: Oh, thank you for coming.

Brooks: No problem. I'm going to turn this off now.

Peterson: Bandar Shahpur here.

Brooks: Oh, Bandar Shahpur?

Peterson: Bandar Shahpur. Yeah, they had those foot contests. I wasn't there, but—

Brooks: What is it?

Peterson: —my buddy, my buddy was down there, and they'd take those sea ration cans, and they'd hold them under their elbow like this, and whoever filled that up the first would be the winner.

Brooks: Filled it up with sweat?

Peterson: Sweat.

Brooks: Yikes. Because it was so hot?

Peterson: It was so hot, yeah. Hot and humid, and that was a hellhole down there, Bandar Shahpur.

Brooks: So this is a publication that you get?

Peterson: No, that's the one I got from the organization. That was a nationwide organization, and anybody that served in the Persian Gulf command.

Brooks: I've got one of these. Great.

Peterson: What's that?

Brooks: I said anyone who's—you said anyone who served got one of these.

Peterson: Well, no. Anybody that belonged to the organization, yeah. And they had to be service connected to Iran.

Brooks: Right. That's neat. All right. So I'm going to have you sign a legal release, if you don't mind, and then I can take down Bob's information.

Peterson: Yeah.

Brooks: So if you want to read the front, I don't know if it's—you know, some people want to read what they're signing. Other people don't care.

Peterson: It don't make any difference to me.

**[End of Peterson.OH1900][End of interview]**