

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
BOB REESE
Water Distiller, Navy, World War II.

2000

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Reese, Bob, (1919-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 65 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Bob Reese, an Adams, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service with a Navy water treatment section in the Pacific theater. Reese talks about working as a switchman for the railroad, getting married in 1941, and deferment from military service after his job was declared essential for the war effort. He states he was finally allowed to volunteer for service in 1944, and he attended boot camp at Great Lakes (Illinois). Reese comments on learning combat skills at Camp Russo (California), earning an expert rifleman chip, and water distillation and purification training. He comments on the high amount of chlorine they added to the water. Shipped to the Pacific with the 1067th Detachment, he touches upon seeing the destruction at Eniwetok and participating in a night landing at Samar (Philippines). Reese portrays the types of specialists in his unit and his commanding officer. He talks about establishing a water distillation unit in Samar, using a water tank made by the Cleaver Brooks Company in Milwaukee, cleaning the equipment, supplying the mess hall with water, and eventually setting up limited showers. Reese discusses life in the Philippines, including the dangers of swimming, the quality of the food, foraging food from the jungle and ocean with the help of native Filipinos, and being wary of poisonous snakes. He talks about being treated for a snake bite, getting an impacted wisdom tooth removed, and receiving regular letters from his wife. Reese describes hearing about the atomic bomb and the ship ride to United States. He mentions that a few men from his outfit drowned and committed suicide. He describes befriending a Filipino and exchanging gifts with him, and Reese tells of seeing Hellcat aircraft bomb Mindanao. He states he joined the VFW and reflects on how playing football in high school helped him adapt to training at Camp Russo.

Biographical Sketch:

Reese (b. 1919) worked in the water distillation unit of the Navy in the Philippines. After the war, he briefly returned to his job with the railroad, worked as an agent with American Family Insurance in Middleton (Wisconsin), retired to Las Cruces (New Mexico), worked a few more years at the Bank of Albuquerque, and eventually settled in Prairie du Sac (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000

Transcribed by Elisabeth Bownik, 2010

Corrected by Calvin John Pike, 2011

Corrections typed in by Angelica Engel, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

Jim: This is the 12th of June.

Bob: 12th of June.

Jim: The year 2000. Talking to Bob Reese. Tell me where you're born, Bob.

Bob: I was born in Galena, Illinois. August the 15th, 1919.

Jim: And where'd you grow up?

Bob: I grew up at Adams, Wisconsin.

Jim: And you went to school there, and—

Bob: That's right. My parents moved there, or the family, after—in 1922. I was very young.

Jim: And you—you were born in 1919?

Bob: Yes, that's right.

Jim: And when did you go in the Navy?

Bob: Uh, 1944, in the spring.

Jim: You volunteered?

Bob: Yes, sir.

Jim: What kept you out before '42? At your age, I would—

Bob: Uh, the thing that kept me out was the fact I was in a business that they wouldn't let—release me. I was working on the railroad. They would not let me go.

Jim: What were you doing for the railroads?

Bob: I was a switchman.

Jim: Oh my goodness.

Bob: My father was a conductor on the Northwestern.

Jim: Oh, you came from an old railroad family.

Bob: That's right. And I was going to school up at Eau Claire, and I wanted to be a high school teacher. So, in the summer time, I would work on the railroads, and then when the—in 1941, in June, we got married. I met my wife; we were married. And, of course, then in December the darn war broke out, so I had this railroad history, and so anyplace I went to work they wouldn't—because the railroad would not release me from them, see. And they wouldn't release me until that time.

Jim: You were then essential and they just—that's why—

Bob: Yep.

Jim: You could've stayed doing that the whole war.

Bob: I could've stayed there, but then towards they end they ask us if they released us, and well, I said, "I'll go—I'll volunteer, now I get in," see.

Jim: Right. Was being—the switchman job a difficult one?

Bob: It's dangerous. Because I was working on short trains, like we were switching the industries over in Milwaukee.

Jim: What's the danger—

Bob: And, uh—they were all big war plants, of course, in there, and it's a close confinement and slippery conditions when it's winter time all—every day. And in those days, of course, when the war was on, we worked seven days a week. There was no overtime, and that was our job.

Jim: Going to the Navy was easier—[both laugh] easier for you than what you were doing.

Bob: But—but they would not release us. Just couldn't—you just—you couldn't.

Jim: I understand. So it was sort of a relief to go into the service for you.

Bob: Pardon?

Jim: It was sort of a relief—

Bob: Yeah.

Jim: —for *you* to go.

Bob: Absolutely.

Jim: Didn't have to work so hard.

Bob: No. [Laughs.] That's right.

Jim: They sent you to Great Lakes for your basic? [Great Lakes is the United States Navy's Headquarters Command for training located in North Chicago, Illinois.]

Bob: Yeah, I went to Great Lakes, and there are great lakes. I made a little note here. I think that was a good learning experience, and it—it grouped us together in the companies. We had to get up at five in the morning and be at breakfast at six o'clock, and of course, it was our first education in regimentation and taking orders and—and that sort of stuff.

Jim: Did that bother you because you were older than the average boy there?

Bob: No, it didn't bother me one bit. No, 'cause I played football and all that stuff up at Adams, so it didn't bother me a bit.

Jim: Yeah, 'cause you must've been two or three years older than the average—

Bob: Yeah, I was probably a couple years older. That's right. Yeah. And I was married, with a daughter.

Jim: Also different.

Bob: Yeah, I had a daughter.

Jim: Yeah. So, what—when did you get into some specialty training here when the war—

Bob: After I got out of Great Lakes we got shipped to San Francisco, California. And at San Francisco we were sent to Camp Shoemaker. [Camp Shoemaker was a World War II Naval Reserve and Training Base located near Dublin, California.] That was a camp for reassignment to ship. And then they interviewed us, and that's when I got started to get separated because of—they asked us our education, so forth, because they were training them for gunnery school and that sort of stuff. And when I told them that I had gone to college and I had chemistry—a year of general chemistry and analytical chemistry—he said, "Well, you're going with another group," and they sent us down to Camp Russo, California, and that was a Marine base. And at Camp Russo, California, there's where we learned our combat stick skills. And we got very intensive training. We had to wrestle with each other. We had to learn how to disarm a man who had a gun right up to you; I could still do that. We learned the hard parts about tripping them and hitting them under the chin and all of that sort of thing. That was at Camp Russo.

- Jim: And why did you have that kind of training as a Navy man, rather than—?
- Bob: Well, because I told you, I would have liked to go with the Marines. I—we didn't know where we were gonna go.
- Jim: Wow.
- Bob: Once they got us down there and he found out I was going there, I was going to—well, ultimately, I was going to water distillation and purification. But due to the fact that the job is so broad that we might go with any units, we had to learn all the stuff. So we learned it all. [Laughs.]
- Jim: Okay. But your specialty was dealing with water?
- Bob: Water distillation and purification was the title that we had.
- Jim: How did you—how were you taught that?
- Bob: How was I taught that? Well, they sent us from—after we got done with our combat skills, which, I might say, it was very intensive. They taught us, you know, flip a hand grenade from behind a tree, and all that kind of stuff, protect yourself at all times. And our passwords were all with the letter L, as you know. Japanese have a tough time pronouncing L. Los Angeles or Lullaby, or any of that kind of stuff. And it just taught us the awareness. We had to march sixteen miles with a steel helmet, sixty rounds of ammunition, an M-1 rifle, and—
- Jim: Oh. All of a sudden we've lost our power [long pause for technical issues]. Just a moment now.
- Bob: It's alright.
- Jim: I don't know what happened [very long pause]. Okay, we have to start again. I don't know what—just to be sure.
- Bob: Okay, I said what—
- Jim: Alright, you were born in Illinois but grew up in Adams, Wisconsin?
- Bob: Adams, Wisconsin.
- Jim: And you were born in 1919.
- Bob: That's right.
- Jim: And you went in the military service in—

Bob: '44.

Jim: 1944. After working as a switchman for several years for the Northwestern Railroad, as did your father?

Bob: No, my father was a conductor.

Jim: Your father was conductor.

Bob: Yeah. And my intention was to work on the railroad as much as I could, and then I'd go to school. You know, I had three years of college.

Jim: Sure.

Bob: Then I'd go back, and the pay was good, and I found out that I had quite a few rights because a lot of people didn't like that kind of work. It was a real rough job, see. Thirteen, fourteen hours a day. So then after I got out of that, and got in, and then I ended up—I told you that we went to San Francisco, and from there, there was about 300 of us left, and we went to Camp Russo. And the way I figured this out after I thought about it, that Camp Russo was a Marine camp for combat training, and they must have took all of us guys who were scheduled to go into all the service in the land, don't you see? See what I mean? Where there was a possibility of fighting on the land, we had to know what we were doing.

Jim: That's why you had the combat training.

Bob: That's right.

Jim: Hand-to-hand and all of that.

Bob: Oh yes, hand-to-hand combat, all of that stuff.

Jim: Knife fighting.

Bob: How to use a knife, everything. I knew all of that. And one of the interesting things about when we got on the line to fire the guns, the lieutenant says, "Where are you from?" I said, "Adams, Wisconsin." "Stand up, get this man's name." So [he] walked down the line, and there was another man there, and he says to him, "Where are you from?" And he says, "Hibbing, Minnesota." And he said, "I knew it." He said, "If we get all you guys from the damn woods up there," he says, "That are used to firing guns we wouldn't have to train you." So I hit ninety-six out of a hundred, and I got expert rifleman, so he said to me—and he gave me a little chip—and he says, "Anytime you wanna come down here and fire on the range," he says, "you got permission to come down." So I like to fire a gun, and I was down there, and I was a darn good shot. I still am to this day.

Jim: Well, I'll be darned.

Bob: I enjoyed that.

Jim: So that was a six weeks course down in Camp Russo?

Bob: Uh huh.

Jim: Something like that?

Bob: Something like that. Yeah, you know, we had to jump over in the water and that stuff with all our clothes on and our pack and all that.

Jim: Now they're gonna teach you something about water distillation.

Bob: Now they're gonna teach you something. So then when we get into there, first thing we gotta know is to make water from the ocean. Make water from the swamp. Make water from any place there is water. If we can't make water from those sources, we dig a hole in the ground next to where there is in the water table, and we come up with what we call "brackish water." You can drink [it], but you might be sick. You probably know what that is. It's got a lot of salt. It has a high saltine content in it. Because the troops move, as a general rule, and this—part of your job might be to move with them. We don't know, so we have to learn all that.

Jim: So what did you do—?

Bob: So—

Jim: What did you do with this water that—?

Bob: We—the water that we took in from the ocean—and we trained this just like we were going to do it overseas—we pulled it right up then on the boats and drew it in, and everything else after we learned [in] the school.

Jim: What'd you do with it?

Bob: These were big evaporating machines, and the water came in, and the water was boiled, and it ran over the water that came in, cooled that water, and then that distilled water went off into a little place. That was the water that we used to drink and to use for the personal troops, see. After we had—

Jim: Like it was just like rainwater—

Bob: Absolutely.

Jim: With no minerals in it.

Bob: No minerals.

Jim: And no taste.

Bob: But we had to put a lot of chlorine in it at first, because of the first—when we first got ashore, the water was put in Lister Bags. Now, Lister Bags are giant canvas bags, and they're held up with stakes and stuff, and that was the way we got our water, because we were—what is Philippines? Is that eleven degrees north of the equator?

Jim: Now, no, don't get to the Philippines too quickly here.

Bob: Oh, I see. Oh, ok. [Laughs.] That's what we learned in [Port] Hueneme, [California], and our training, I must say, was excellent.

Jim: This is outside of San Diego?

Bob: Outside—no, no, this is outside of North Hollywood, California, the best I can explain it.

Jim: Did you—

Bob: 'Cause we were out just a little ways from Port Oxnard, California. That's the water station for—

Jim: Now, this is water from the ocean. Did you deal with other kinds of water?

Bob: Oh, absolutely. We had to go out to swamps and try it. That's done by what we call flocculation.

Jim: Tell me about that.

Bob: It's run through the—well, it's run through these canisters. And you don't make much water out of there, because you gotta carry all these canisters, and the water—

Jim: Canisters filter out all the ingredients you don't want.

Bob: That's right. That's right. And when it comes out, it has to be fairly pure, but we gotta load it down with chlorine again to kill the germs in there, so that the [unintelligible] through—

Jim: That got through the filter.

Bob: That's right, and our main commanding officer has always been a doctor, because we were with headquarters company. And the doctor would take a sample of our water every day, and—now where am I? I'm—

Jim: Well, how did he test that water? Do you know?

Bob: How did they test it?

Jim: Yeah.

Bob: Well he took a—they sent a man down to take a sample of it, and they took it back to the lab.

Jim: You don't know what he did with it.

Bob: No, I don't know what he done with it, no. No, but they'd come back and tell us if we were light on chlorine or how much more we wanted. Put so much more chlorine in it, because—I can't emphasize that enough, because we put that in a lot. The water didn't taste very good when we first made it, because it had a lot of chemicals in it, but we had to put that in.

Jim: Well, the chlorine didn't help the taste at all.

Bob: [Laughs] No, didn't help it at all. But that's necessary, because the doctor used to come down, he tell us, he says, "I want your men to be very aware of the fact that it takes three men to take care of one sick man," and he says, "We don't want any sick men in here." He says, "We want every man available," and—

Jim: So this course didn't take long before you—

Bob: No, no, no. It did not take long. No, no. No, but in the meantime, when we weren't busy there, we had to start—stand guard duty over the ammunition—some of the ammunition dumps. That's why we got the defense medal for—American defense medal, see.

Jim: Sure.

Bob: And that was just like wartime—you know—they had a password and stuff, 'cause we never knew who was coming in there. But we didn't let them get in there, see. That was our job. [Laughs.]

Jim: So what was your next move?

Bob: My next move was to be put on a ship with a whole mess of troops, probably—I don't know—we were on the *USS Cape Perpetua*. Was a troop ship. And down

below the top deck we slept five deep. So I would think there would be about 3,000 troops aboard that—about that.

Jim: What was your rank at that time?

Bob: My rank was Seaman 2nd Class.

Jim: And they sent—where'd the ship go?

Bob: The ship then went to Hawaiian Islands. And we got off at Hawaiian Islands, and they let us stretch for four days. We boarded the ship again, and we started sail toward the Asiatic Pacific. Our first stop was the Marshall Islands. And we stopped there, and we got on barges, and we went ashore at Eniwetok. And Eniwetok had just been secured, and I want to say that there weren't hardly any trees, if anything, left standing. The Navy'd done a fantastic—they bombarded that, they told us, for forty-eight hours straight, night and day. And when the Marines went in there and the Japanese were all in their bunkers, and they told us that they put the flame throwers on there, and that was the end of them. They didn't save any Marines at all. They didn't save anything. Then, after—

Jim: So what would—did you have duty on Eniwetok?

Bob: No, no, no, no. We just had to relax and get stretched out, because the ship, we were all confined on the ship. A lot of guys on there. On the ship, you see, we went—

Jim: You get any beer?

Bob: Pardon?

Jim: Did they give you any beer?

Bob: No, no. No beer. Oh, no, no, no. I didn't get beer for a long, long time. Then [clears throat] we got on the ship again, and we started out all by ourself. We got on the ship after about three or four days on the Marshall Islands. Then they loaded us all up again, and we got on the ship, and we were out, going into the Asiatic Pacific. And we thought we were going all by ourselves, you know, we didn't know what was going on. All of a sudden we woke up in the morning, and there were destroyers around us. Destroyer escorts. Other ships. And that went on for several days until we got close to our destination that we didn't know, and then he told us—they told us that we were going into the Philippines and that they had—the Battle of Leyte was probably just completed, and that we were gonna go follow them in there, but there was a lot of mopping up and stuff like that to do. So we went into the Philippine Islands, and we landed at about—I was stationed out there, and there must have been about fifty-seven ships or sixty ships. There were a whole mess of them all around us, and the destroyer—and I never heard

- of—while we were on board it was interesting to see it on the ocean. I never heard of a ship getting struck with lightning. I don't know whether they do or whether they don't.
- Jim: Oh yes, they do.
- Bob: I didn't know that.
- Jim: Oh yes. My hospital ship got struck with lightning several times.
- Bob: We never—yeah—we never got—but the unique part of it was, you know, if you were on board a ship you could see sixteen miles. That's because of the earth's curvature. And that's as far as you could see, and I'd look outta there, and you could see the whole storm come up. You could see the entire storm, which was very interesting to me, see. And I enjoyed it, because I wanted to be observant of it, see. Then when we landed, about—we were awakened about midnight and they told us to get ready because we were gonna go ashore, and they didn't say whether we were gonna be opposed or not, but we had a steel helmet, sixty rounds of ammunition, an M-1 rifle, and those that had hand grenades had two hand grenades, one on each side, and a forty-five pound pack. And that's the way—we climbed down the rope, side of the ship, into—I don't know whether they were LCTs or—they were big landing craft [LCT—Landing Craft Transport. Amphibious assault ships used for landing tanks or troops on beachheads. Used by US Navy in World War II]. And I did say this, that after it all come to pass, the commanding offers would say to us they wanted absolutely no lights, no smoking. Anybody that was caught smoking, you wish you weren't born. So that was the end of that stuff. No smoking aboard when we were gonna land, 'cause it was dark, see. And they didn't—if there were an enemy in there they don't want us to zero in on us. But there was a guy up on top of me that was working a light. And I noticed him working a light, and I noticed a little flash coming from the shore, which was about, I'd say, maybe a mile and a half out, something like that. And I just assumed—after this was all over with—that he was directing the traffic, and they were what we call rangers, Special Forces, in behind there directing the traffic. That was pretty slick. I never thought of that, you know, till it was all over.
- Jim: Now, your outfit. Was it—how big was the group?
- Bob: Our outfit was about 600 men. Not a very large group.
- Jim: What were you called?
- Bob: We were called a detachment. We were called the 1067th Detachment.
- Jim: Just “detachment?”

Bob: Just “detachment.”

Jim: That’s a nondescript term.

Bob: No, no. I know it is, but every one of us were specialists.

Jim: I understand.

Bob: See?

Jim: That’s a—

Bob: Yeah. So we were detached from a battalion, which could’ve been at 143rd Battalion. That’s where we were in the beginning.

Jim: Well, so “detachment,” then, I’ll turn it around the other way. What did it contain besides you water guys?

Bob: Oh, it contained electricians. It contained specialists who could fix carburetors, could fix armament, could fix cranes, could fix half-ton trucks with fifty caliber machine guns on. All of that stuff that was, I will say, lightly hit, that could be repaired within a period of time and sent back to the front. That’s what we done.

Jim: Was that a—how did that relate to Seabees?

Bob: Well, I suppose that—

Jim: Similar, I suppose.

Bob: Very, very superb. We were just probably all—

Jim: I think the Seabees probably were more in—closer to the action in the original—

Bob: Well, they probably were, and they were construction battalions. We didn’t construct anything, see?

Jim: That’s probably the difference right there.

Bob: Yeah. [Laughs.] See, we didn’t construct anything. We—our outfit was strictly a repair outfit that took the stuff back from the front and sent it right back out there.

Jim: And what rank was the officer that was your head?

Bob: Our commanding officer was Commander Laycock. He was a fine gentleman. He’d spent many years in the jungle. He was with the Standard Oil people, and he had been a jungle man.

Jim: He was a—

Bob: Lieutenant commander.

Jim: Oh, lieutenant—

Bob: Oh, wait a minute. Wait a minute. No, wait a minute. I think he was a commander. A full Navy commander—he was a top commanding officer.

Jim: Right. I would think that he'd be at least that—

Bob: Yeah. Yeah.

Jim: Okay.

Bob: I get confused on that, but he had probably fifteen officers to assist him.

Jim: Fifteen.

Bob: About fifteen. And we had a warrant officer that was over our unit, and the doctor, of course, to whom we were directly responsible to. He would take a sample of our water every day. Well then when we landed ashore—when we came ashore—

Jim: This was at Leyte.

Bob: No, this was at Samar. We come down from—we landed in between Suluan, on the top, and we landed at Calicoan, and I got that on that picture there, and then on the bottom was called the city of Suluan. Small town. And then us, and then Guiuan. Guiuan, Samar was at the top, and then Leyte was up above that, see? That's where the battle was, see.

Jim: And all—everything was pretty secure by this time, and all the forces had moved in with them by the time they arrived.

Bob: It was secure. It was secure with the extent of the fact that you have roving vans. You know, you never knew about those. See, they were guerilla fighters. But I will say that we got great aid and comfort from the Filipinos.

Jim: Yeah, we're gonna get to that.

Bob: Okay.

Jim: Okay, tell me about—assembling your stuff ashore—

Bob: Okay—

Jim: What kind of—put it in cups or tents or—

Bob: They—the big evaporators were about, I'd say maybe eight feet high. They were large, huge machines, as you might say, because they would produce a lot of water. And we had two of them. And they were all hooked up in the LCT, the landing craft tank, because they were all hooked up with a twelve D-6 cap, with a cable on it. So they'd come up, and the cap would run right out, pull the machine right up on the shore, and we'd start right from there. And then they would level it up, and within about four hours we had water coming out of there to beat hell.

Jim: Took you four hours to get the [unintelligible]—

Bob: Something like that. I can't just remember anymore, but I know that—

Jim: Do you recall how much water you could produce once it was—?

Bob: Well, I think this—I don't know what those Lister Bags hold. Maybe 3,000 gallons?

Jim: Something like that—

Bob: Something like that.

Jim: —I guess.

Bob: And the commanding officer says, "I want that full in twelve hours, and I want no excuses." And we said, "Yes, sir." And that's what we done.

Jim: You could fill one then in twelve hours—

Bob: Oh, absolutely. With two units running.

Jim: What would happen to that water in that Lister bag then? What was the next move for—

Bob: Well, the next move in there was to take a sample of it and then—

Jim: Test it.

Bob: —administer the chemicals that were absent because of the fact that it was distilled water.

Jim: Okay, now the Lister Bag is ready for use to who?

Bob: Now it's ready for use. Then a cover went over the top.

Jim: Who did what, then?

Bob: Well, then, after that, the men come down and they got it in containers, and they took it up to the main cabin—

Jim: The GIs came—

Bob: —distributed it all around, don't you see.

Jim: The GIs?

Bob: Yeah, and—

Jim: Soldiers.

Bob: Yeah.

Jim: You had Army soldiers.

Bob: No, no, no, no, no. No, other—other people in our unit.

Jim: Other Navy—

Bob: See, we had a detachment that was in our detachment that were like soldiers—I mean, regular soldiers—but we were all protected.

Jim: I see.

Bob: We had—

Jim: But these guys who came to the—took the water then, were just sailors?

Bob: Yeah, they were sailors—they—we were all Navy.

Jim: And who did they take the water to?

Bob: Well, they took the water to the cook shanty, you know, where they were cooking, and stuff like that, and to the medical tent, and they put it in—

Jim: So we had a regular base there.

Bob: Well, we started to build one. But we didn't have any—we were on the ground to begin with, see?

Jim: Got it. Okay.

Bob: But they didn't take any water until we got someplace to put it, don't you see. And we had to build something over it, because we had to have light stuff. We don't want any lights showing out onto the ocean, if we can help it, at night, see. So they had to have that covered.

Jim: So they had a tank on shore then, that you—

Bob: We had a tank on shore. Yep. And it was a Cleaver Brooks, and they were made in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Jim: I'll be darned.

Bob: Yeah. [Laughs.]

Jim: I don't know what that looks like—regular, small version of a tanker—the tanks we see around small towns?

Bob: Yes—uh—no, no, no. We had to build a—they had a carpenter team come in there, and they built a tank to hold maybe 7,000 gallons of water. We had to put it up in the air, so we had—

Jim: I'm sure you had no [unintelligible]—

Bob: Oh, we put that up there—built it. These people built it for us.

Jim: Right. And that's where the gravity fed cistern—

Bob: This is where after we got done with the Lister Bags, that's where the water went, up in the water tanks, see. And then it was taken—

Jim: So we had metal tanks inside of a wooden structure?

Bob: Um—[pause]—I think they did. They had some way to secure it so it wouldn't leak, you know. And then they would test it all the time to see, and then it had to be perfectly clean, you know. We had to be very—

Jim: Had to keep a cover on it.

Bob: Pardon?

Jim: You had to keep a—

Bob: Oh, it had a cover on it. Oh yeah—

Jim: Had to keep birds and bugs away.

Bob: Oh, absolutely. [Laughs.] Absolutely. All the bugs.

Jim: Yeah.

Bob: Then, as the cap became built up and each unit got to be defined, there was Headquarters Company A, B, C, and D. I think that was all that was to our outfit. And we all had our special work, and we worked twenty-four hours a day. We never stopped making water, and we put a barrel—took a barrel—fifty gallon drum barrel and cut a hole in the side of it, and they attached about a two-inch hose to that. And then on the bottom of that barrel they put some rocks on there to hold it down, and they put some [unintelligible] things like this on the side, and they drove stakes down to hold it because of the tide. The tide would come in, you know, and if a rain come in, and it would whip that around, see. And then we'd have—we wouldn't be able to do it. But we had to pump water. When we needed it, we had to pump it. Every day we had to go out and clean off the top of that. They had a screen on it, and the kelp and stuff would get on there. And we had to clean that off, and you never, never could go into the ocean without your boots on. You'd always go in just all dressed up, and you'd walk right out in the water, because of the coral. The coral would cut the pieces out of your feet.

Jim: And why did you go into the water?

Bob: Well, we had to clean the—

Jim: These tanks?

Bob: See that our intake was clean.

Jim: I see.

Bob: Maybe we had to do that maybe twice a day. If we—we always watched the flow of water coming in, and if it was down or something, then we would know that some—

Jim: You had a continuous system, then.

Bob: Oh yeah. Twenty-four—

Jim: Bringing saltwater in from the ocean, right?

Bob: Oh, absolutely. All the time.

Jim: Was there a motor driven pump, or something—

Bob: Yeah, we had a Wisconsin engine, made in Milwaukee [both laugh].

Jim: Wisconsin tank, Wisconsin—

Bob: A four cylinder Wisconsin engine done our pumping for us, see? Isn't that interesting?

Jim: Yeah.

Bob: And I want to say right now that during the entire period that we were over there, during the war, the only people, the civilians, that I ever seen came to visit us were two representatives from the Cleaver Brook company in Milwaukee. And they would dress them up in greens like we were, you know. And they came out there, and interestingly, they asked all of us what was the trouble with them. Did we have any trouble with them? And I thought that was quite wonderful.

Jim: Cleaver—

Bob: Cleaver Brooks. Men right from the plant.

Jim: They made those tanks.

Bob: Troubleshoot. They flew them clear over into the Philippines to see how the water distillers were working. And that was interesting. And they came with the commanding officer—

Jim: But that's not—not a company that I'm familiar with at all.

Bob: Oh. Well, it's Cleaver Brooks, and it is in Milwaukee.

Jim: It still there?

Bob: I think it is, yeah. And they came with the commanding officer and the doctor and all his aids, you know—

Jim: Sure, and they would show it off.

Bob: And they inspected it, and they wanted to know if we were having any trouble, and we said, "No. It's working perfectly. We done just exactly—"

Jim: Is that electric-driven?

Bob: No, it was driven by—by oil. Oil. Not electric.

Jim: Oh.

Bob: Yeah. Oil burner.

Jim: Had an oil burner.

Bob: Yep. And then about every so long—I'm just guessing now, I don't know—about every ten days, I would say, we had to knock one down and take the coils out, because they would lime up, see? And then we had to put them in a barrel full of hydrochloric acid and water. We knew how to mix that stuff.

Jim: Hydrochloric?

Bob: Yeah.

Jim: Rather than acetic?

Bob: Well, I don't know. Whatever it was—

Jim: No, you don't [unintelligible]—

Bob: Might've been—it was in a big jug—might've been acetic acid.

Jim: Well, that's what you use in your coffee makers.

Bob: Well, anyway, that took the—whatever it was—they sent—

Jim: If it was hydrochloric acid, it would eat the machine.

Bob: Well I—no, no—these were copper.

Jim: Well, would—

Bob: That would've—that would take the copper, wouldn't it?

Jim: Yeah.

Bob: And eat it, yeah.

Jim: It's hydrochloric acid—

Bob: Probably acetic acid, yeah.

Jim: Doesn't have to be very strong to take the coffee—

Bob: No. We didn't have to—'cause it would only stay in there probably—oh, I'd say three, four hours. That was all it did.

Jim: Doesn't have to be very acid to get rid of that.

Bob: No, no. Then we'd wash it off, put it back in the thing, and it was ready to go. We'd break that, and then we'd wait till the other one to go down, and then we'd clean that one. That's the way we kept them clean, keep them operating. Because they never stopped all the time we were there. Running all the time.

Jim: So you never had too much water?

Bob: No, not that I know of, because the commanding officer finally put up showers for the men.

Jim: That's what I'm saying. That was what I was gonna get to next.

Bob: And they put in a—see, we were such a small unit, that they had the water piped right into the—what do we call that? Where we make our food—the KP.

Jim: Kitchen.

Bob: Oh yeah. So they had a faucet in there, see.

Jim: Oh, that's wonderful.

Bob: So that was—

Jim: And you had showers eventually?

Bob: Eventually we had showers, but they were very limited, you know. They limited the showers that we used.

Jim: They didn't want you to use too much water?

Bob: No, they don't want you abuse it, so you had to get—

Jim: Get wet, soap up, and then wash off.

Bob: Oh yeah.

Jim: They didn't want you to wash up in the ocean.

Bob: No, no. Never take a bath in the ocean. No, no, that's stuff you have to have salt soap, and—and the ocean is all full of dirty stuff and crap, you know. You don't—I don't go into that ocean. No swimming, or none of that stuff.

Jim: Nobody wanted to do that.

[End of Tape One, Side A]

Bob: No, no, no, no. Because it's coral, and the coral is very, very sharp, and you gotta go in there with your boots on. And besides, the ocean is full of squid at certain times, and there's some pretty big squid out there. Some of them, I've seen them six or seven feet long, you know, and them tentacles. And you don't know what they'll do. One guy got hit with them, and it pulled the blood right out—

Jim: It bit him?

Bob: Well, it didn't bite him. It throws those tentacles around him, and it pulls the blood right through the surface of the skin. It got them suction cups on them, see?

Jim: Yep.

Bob: And it'll drown them, or whatever it'll do to them. I don't know. [Laughs.] I don't want nothing to do with them [both laugh]. So there's nothing to do with the ocean. It rained out there, like the way we had a tremendous cloudburst here in Wisconsin. That would be the way it would rain. They called them squalls. And they'd come and they'd go, and anybody that's been out in that area knows that's why the country is so lush. That's why you got all that stuff. It'd rain all the time. So if you're out there—at night say, at seven o'clock, and it started to rain, the first thing you do is rip off all your clothes and go out and get a bar of soap and take a shower. It rained hard enough. It was fantastic water, soft.

Jim: Sure.

Bob: [laughs]

Jim: Soft water.

Bob: That's exactly what we done. [Laughs.]

Jim: How was your food?

Bob: Our food was not very tasty, but they made a remark about that. The commanding officer talked to us one time, and he says, "The food probably doesn't taste so well. It's all designed to last out here in the jungle." And, you know, like, powdered eggs and powdered milk and powdered potatoes and bully beef—our beef all came from Australia. But it was good for you. It was good, nourishing food. It didn't bother me at all. I didn't have no trouble.

Jim: Never got anything from the United States? Anything fresh?

Bob: No, no, no, no. Nothing like that.

Jim: No ships came with anything?

Bob: No. No, we got nothing like that until I got oranges and stuff from—my wife sent them, and my aunt, and—

Jim: Any fruits from the trees in the jungle?

Bob: Oh, that's another thing. The stuff that's good to eat—we had a guide to the Western Pacific, and I made a foolish mistake by losing it. I wish to gosh I'd had it, because it told us what to eat and all the things, and I remember a lot of it, because we had to read it all before going over there, see, so we know what to do. And, for example, if you catch fish, and you boil them, and the meat turns green, that's poison. That's an indication of poison. Don't touch it. And they told us what plants to eat and what food we could eat, and one of the things was a coconut tree. We could eat coconuts, of course. In the coconut tree, the lower limb as it comes out, you cut that off, get some and cut that off, and that's what they call "millionaire's salad." You chop that all up, take it—it peels off like a rhubarb. The skin comes off from them.

Jim: You mean the new limb of the tree.

Bob: Yeah. And they ate that. You could eat that if you wanted to. But they wouldn't let you go up and skin all the trees off, you know. But after the war, they did treat us. They got a whole bunch of natives to go up there and get that stuff, and they made a salad out of it for us [laughs] so that you'd know what it was like.

Jim: Did you eat the coconuts?

Bob: Oh, yeah—there's another thing. Now, the coconuts, when they're green, they make a wonderful physic if a guy ever got bound up. We found that out right away. Whatever it is in there, because your bowels would move, I mean—and you know, sometimes that would take place with men, is—if you're all human beings. But yes, we did. We ate the coconuts. But you have to know when to get them, and we didn't get them. We got the natives to go up, or else we'd take our rifles and shoot them down.

Jim: But they knew when they were ready to be—

Bob: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And a lot of them would fall, so—

Jim: You had to drink the coconut milk and all that.

Bob: Yeah. Yeah, we had our knives. We had our big, sharp knives and these bolo knives work fine for that, and you just hit that stuff, and it's a real coarse material on there—probably an inch and a half thick—and you pull that off. And then there's three eyes up in there. And usually one of those is soft, and you take your

jackknife and you peel that right off and then you can drain it all off. Then if you hit it, you break it. You dig the coconut milk out first.

Jim: Right.

Bob: And then, incidentally, those gol' darn guys, those natives, make what they call "tuba" out of that stuff. [Laughs.]

Jim: That'll set you free, won't it?

Bob: [Laughs] Oh, jeez. I don't monkey with that stuff.

Jim: It was pretty strong.

Bob: Well, not only that, but it was—the way they made it, with all the materials—the bugs and flies and crap in there, you know—

Jim: Oh my.

Bob: It just wasn't safe, you know. Just—I didn't want it anyway. [Laughs.]

Jim: Okay.

Bob: I never was very much of a drinker.

Jim: So, how about mangoes? Did you have mangoes?

Bob: I think they did. I never got into—

Jim: Papaya fruit?

Bob: No, you can't—well, we could go into town after the war, more or less, and get that stuff, but I never—

Jim: They didn't have any around where you were stationed.

Bob: Well, you know, we were told not to eat the native food, see, because it's not—

Jim: You weren't sure.

Bob: Yeah. They weren't sure, and not to monkey with it. When you see them, how they make their food, if they catch a fish and they put it on the roof there, and all the grease and stuff runs down. After it's dried out enough, they take rice, and I've got pictures of them where they pound the rice, and that gets in there like a flour. And they take pieces of that fish, and they put it in there, and then they went and they make fish cakes out of it. And it doesn't even smell good, but I

imagine if you were ever cut off and you had to eat it, well, you'd eat it. But I never would—I never would eat it.

Jim: But you did—you said you did go fishing in your own way.

Bob: In our own way we went—

Jim: How did that go? Tell me about that.

Bob: Well, we could go fishing either with a line out there, you could go out there with a line, and it was strange, because you'd get some fish that come in, and you know you have no place to put them. You're standing probably in about hip deep in water, and some of them, when they hit the light they would change colors, and some of them got big teeth on them, like a dog, and, you know, they're all different strange stuff down in there. So some of the guys got hand grenades, went out, threw the hand grenades over the ocean shelf table, which drops off of the—the ocean table goes out, maybe, 300 yards, and then it goes down into a slump, then first but you get, maybe you go down fifteen, twenty feet, and it gradually keeps going down. They pull the pin on the hand grenade and throw it down there, and you'll get fish come up. But we never went out there and done that without having natives with us, because—

Jim: They could take and pick out the good—

Bob: They'd take them all, and they fish that they—the fish that were poison, they'd take them, too. Because they'd chop them up and they'd put them by their banana trees. That's another thing we had. We had a lot of bananas out there, and the—

Jim: You ate those.

Bob: Oh, we ate those all the time. We had them hanging in our tent most the time. But the bananas are small. They were only about—oh, I—stunted, you know—about five inches long.

Jim: But they tasted the same.

Bob: Oh, they tasted pretty good. Yeah, you know, and they had pigs out there, and the pigs were only about a foot and a half high, and maybe about two and a half feet. They were real small pigs. And they had chickens, and the cockfighting, you know, is great in that particular area of the world, and they had a lot of that stuff.

Jim: Did you eat chicken?

Bob: No, I—no, I didn't eat—we didn't eat any of it.

Jim: Your cook didn't pick any of [unintelligible]—

- Bob: No, I didn't eat any other stuff, because of the fact that our job was very important, and they made that—don't experiment with nothing, because—
- Jim: I thought maybe the cook in the camp would—
- Bob: Oh, no, no, no, no. No. No, we had beef that came in five pound tins. All our beef came from—
- Jim: That was already cooked.
- Bob: —Australia.
- Jim: Yeah.
- Bob: And they fixed it all different ways. But I tell you, they called it bully beef. I liked that. That was good beef. I didn't mind it at all.
- Jim: The mutton was what most people—
- Bob: Oh yeah, we got mutton, too. We got a lot of—
- Jim: Most the guys I knew—
- Bob: No, we didn't like that.
- Jim: —they wouldn't eat the mutton.
- Bob: Well—
- Jim: They threw it overboard.
- Bob: Yeah. Well, we got mutton there, too, but not much of it. We got a lot of bully beef.
- Jim: Well, you were lucky.
- Bob: Yeah, we were lucky. You're darn right.
- Jim: 'Cause nobody likes the mutton.
- Bob: No. As a matter of fact, I think my whole experience was very fortunate that I could have a chance to study the whole thing. There are twenty-two varieties—I remember that—twenty-two varieties of poison snakes. Now, that doesn't mean that they're deadly snakes, but they're poison, and they'll affect you, see.

Jim: If you eat them.

Bob: Well, you don't eat them. I mean, just if they bite you, see.

Jim: Oh.

Bob: So if you go monkeying around out in the jungle, you never put your hands over your head, pull on any limbs or anything like that, because—

Jim: That limb might be a snake?

Bob: Well, they got a tree viper out there that's real bad.

Jim: Oh.

Bob: And the only good thing about the tree vipers is that they have a small head, and they got to have a lot of little trouble to bite you, don't you see. But you didn't go out in the jungle. We put a mosquito net around tight—our mosquito net—

Jim: What would you be in the jungle for at all?

Bob: Well, just to see it, after the war! You know—hell, I wanted to get back in the jungle and see what it was like back there. [Laughs.] We had troops that were back in there all the time, but I wanted to go back there and see what was going on, see. And know what they had to put up with, because the people that were actually guarding the whole outfit back there were regular men, and they had M1 rifles and hand grenades and that sort of thing, but the thing that impressed me was you can't see over twenty or thirty feet. You know—

Jim: It's too dense.

Bob: Yeah, and that's too dense, and they have to watch out for trip wires, because, well, we used them ourself. Trip wires—put a hand grenade on a tree and string the little wire about six inches off the ground, and—

Jim: On your perimeter.

Bob: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. That kept people away from us, see.

Jim: Tell me about the natives there. How did you deal with them?

Bob: The natives—we had a very receptive time, because they were very, very happy to see the Americans come in there. They had been treated something terrible, something that has not been known to historians, how bad the Japanese really were.

Jim: The way they treated the—

Bob: Right.

Jim: —the Filipinos.

Bob: That's right. The way they treated the Filipinos. I heard Natolio Salameda—this man that I befriended—told me that they would come right into the church—there was a big church at Guiuan, Samar—they would come right in there and take the women out of there, and they would never see them again. Or they would come over to their areas and pick up their pigs and stuff and then they'd give them that Japanese money which you and I know had nothing behind it. It was just a way of stealing. And they were very, very cruel to those Filipinos, so they created a born enemy. And it was a good enemy for our side, because they lived there, and they knew the darn jungle! [Laughs.] They knew it better than the Japs did, see.

Jim: So they were of help to you?

Bob: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, they were of help. Our unit had two scouts, so we ran into any trouble or anything like—this guy happened to have a snake come around. One of our guys got bit with a snake at night. It come crawling into the outfit from someplace, and it happened to be a jungle blue racer. But it was about as big around as your fist and had a pretty good head on it.

Jim: Oh my.

Bob: And it bit him in the calf of the leg, and he screamed, and we didn't know what the hell's going on. We went and got our hand grenades and everything else to see what and who was out there—and there was a snake, but they're not poison, but the part of it that's bad is the fact that their mouths are infectious.

Jim: They're dirty. They're dirty.

Bob: They're dirty, see, and they're infectious, so they had to take him right into sick bay and clean that all out. He had a lot—his name was Gerald [unintelligible] from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He was eighteen years and really a nice guy. [Laughs.] But he went out to go to the latrines, see, and—

Jim: But you say you got bit by something, too.

Bob: I got bit over here. That was about the second day I was on the ground. Yeah, I cut it open. My hand all swoll up. I couldn't move my arm, and the colonel—was the Marine colonel—cut it open. He said, "Whatever bit you was awful." He said, "You didn't see it?" I said, "I didn't see anything, sir. Not a thing." And after that healed up (it was just about a week later) I got an awful pain in my ear, so I had to go back there. And I went back, and then he looked in my ear and he

says, “Nothing matter with your ear, sir. Let me see your mouth.” I open my mouth. He says, “You got something in your mouth. I’m gonna send you down to Commander Sherman,” and he was the dentist there. And that was an interesting experience, because he had a tent there with a lot of boxes and stuff like that. He had all his instruments in a little container there with the disinfectant in it, and they had a big light that the corpsman held for him, see, because our electricity wasn’t in there as yet. And he says, “Son, you’ve got an impacted wisdom tooth that’s gotta come out right now.” So he took the wisdom tooth out, and when it was all over and done with, I went back to see him, and I says, “You know, I’m gonna always remember you, because that was the slickest job I’ve ever seen in my life under such adverse conditions!” Sitting there like this with a guy holding a light [laughs], and he’s in your mouth, and I never felt a thing. He got the nerve just right, and he paralyzed it just right, cut it open, he went around with the knife, pulled it out, started to loosen it up, got it out, out it came, pulled it out, and he says, “Pack this. Gives you any trouble, come on back.” And he says, “That’s all there is to it.” He says, “Couple days, you can go back to duty.” So I did.

Jim: Yeah.

Bob: But I just always think of those things, to think of the adverse conditions that those men had to work with. Because it wasn’t like—like the United States at all. They’re sitting on boxes, and the doctors out there had never seen any of that stuff. Through the time out there, I got some stuff on the bottom of my feet that looked like raspberry seeds. And they got hard, and they got sore, and the bottom of my feet got sore, and I went into him, and they didn’t know what they were, but what they done was right. They put five percent solution of salicylic acid and alcohol, and they put that on there with a little thing, and he says, “You do that every night. Or when you take a shower, put that on.” And I got curious one night, and I took my knife—had a real sharp knife like I always do—and I picked one of them open. I wanted to see what it was in, and it was a hard little encasement of blood, and I don’t know whatever caused that, but it reminded me of raspberry seeds, and that left, see. And when I got back to the States—

Jim: Did you have trouble getting mail over there?

Bob: No. I got—

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Bob: I think I got—my wife—one of the reasons I’m so addicted to my wife—and as we been married sixty years in June—is the fact that she wrote to me twice a week. Never failed. And, of course, I had a little daughter, too, you know, so—

Jim: That’s right.

Bob: That was—she was—

Jim: How long were you at this place in the Philippines?

Bob: Pardon?

Jim: How long were you there in the Philippines?

Bob: We left the Philippines on December the 24th, 1945. I never forget the day that the bomb was dropped. I was going up to chow, and some of the guys started hollering, and shore batteries started to go off, you know, see, and I says, "What's going on?" He says, "The war's over. We dropped a big bomb on them, and it blew up a whole—killed a lot of people, see?" And of course, you know, there's so much scuttlebutt going around in a [unintelligible], you take it with a grain of salt, but then when we found it out, it was really just relaxing as heck, because then we knew. And, interesting to say, they started the military program then. They blew taps—I mean, they blew reveille. And the guy that was blowing reveille on the trumpet, he blew Saint Louis Blues. [Laughs.]

Jim: [Laughs.]

Bob: [Laughs] and the commanding officer come by—I never—because I was right on the ocean, see. We weren't too far from headquarters company, see, and he says, "Who's that guy blowing the Saint Louis Blues?" And he says, well, he said, "Sir, the war's over," he said. "Well," he says, "This is a military outfit," he says. He says, "I know, but God, give him a little break." And he says, "Okay, let him blow it." [Laughs.] He didn't say any more about that then, see.

Jim: Oh, that's cute.

Bob: Yeah.

Jim: So then you say that you left in December.

Bob: We left on 24th of December, and we went up the coast of Japan, and—

Jim: Did you pack up all your gear or did you leave it there for the Filipinos?

Bob: No, all our gear—as far as I know, there were new replacements coming in. I don't know what they ever done with that, see.

Jim: They hadn't given up the base—

Bob: No, no. They had not given up the base—

Jim: Okay—

Bob: —so I don't know whatever became of that stuff.

Jim: Did all six of the—

Bob: We turned it over to the guys that came in, you know. They were new water distillers and stuff, and they come in, they knew what to do. And then we left.

Jim: All 600 of you left at the same time.

Bob: No, no, no, no, no. We left piecemeal. They left according to your—according to your time—

Jim: [Unintelligible] points.

Bob: —overseas. That's right. Yeah.

Jim: So, where did you go?

Bob: Yeah, and then we went into the ship, and the commanding officer of the ship talked to us, gave us a well-done. He says, "We've got a wonderful dinner planned for you." And we had a wonderful dinner, and we went up the coast of Japan, and it was kind of a dangerous trip in a way, because there were a lot of floating mines out in there at that time. And so they had spotters all over the front of the ship there, and they'd spot them, and I only remember having to back off twice. And they backed off, I would say—I'm just guessing now—I'd say it'd be about 1,000 yards. And they'd blow them up. We'd hit them with twenty calibers, fifty caliber machine guns, and finally they'd blow up, and we'd be on our way. Then we came up on the top, and we went—took us eighteen days to go from the Philippines back to Seattle. And I'd say about halfway through when we were up there we ran into a terrible storm. And we tipped water with our port, starboard side, and we pitched and we rolled. Anybody in the Navy knows what that is. And so when guys tell me they're going out on a little boat in the Pacific, I says, "Well, I got news for you." [Laughs.] I saw those waves up there. They looked to me **[tape stops briefly]**—sandwiches. And we had to stand up to eat. But we didn't mind that. We were all on our—

Jim: It was so crowded, you mean then.

Bob: Well, yeah. And not only that, but we were all going home. We're all in a good mood, see. And we—one of the guys down in the galley come up, he was from Madison, Wisconsin, and he says, "Come on down about two o'clock in the morning. I'll fix you a steak," he says. "And we got some fresh milk." And we hadn't had fresh milk in a long time, see. So that was kind of fun. Then we first saw land, and the United States at about 3 a.m. in the morning, and of course, the ship went wild, and everybody come up top side, and we had to have order restored, you know. [Both laugh.] We're still a military outfit [unintelligible] the

numbers. So then we got ashore, and we were extremely well treated. I can't say enough. The food was there at the mess hall. Anytime of the day or night, anytime we wanted something to eat we could have it. And the medics gave us a good going-over. All our teeth were fixed before we left there, and we were all examined, I suppose that was from claims, too, from the federal government, you know.

Jim: I see. Yeah. And no one got seriously ill in your group while you were there in the Philippines?

Bob: Um—we lost—a couple of guys hung themselves. I remember that.

Jim: Oh really? Depression?

Bob: Oh yeah. Well, I talked to Lieutenant Blanchard. He was a high school principal when he was back in the States, and he was from Laconia, New Hampshire. And he told me, he says, "You know"—I asked him what the—'cause I had studied psychology. You know, I had a general psychology and abnormal psychology when at college. And I says, "What is the average that can't stand this?" And he said, "Well we don't know, but it's about one in ten." And he says, "It just gets to them." And then, couple of—

Jim: But they were in your outfit?

Bob: Yeah, they were in our outfit.

Jim: Yeah, they didn't have—what kind of pressures were they under?

Bob: There wasn't much pressure in—but I think it was monotonous more than anything else—

Jim: Just to get away from the whole—

Bob: We had to do the same thing twenty-four hours a day, you know, keep going. There were no Sundays off or nothing. And then a couple of guys drowned out there, but I think that was because of the fact that they went too far out and got caught in a riptide.

Jim: They didn't have any—any beer for you guys?

Bob: Any what?

Jim: Beer?

Bob: Oh. Yeah, they had beer—yes, that was after the war was over. We had beer, and we had what they call Alpen Brau. That was made in St. Louis. And we had a certain place that we had to drink it, and you couldn't—

Jim: Outdoors?

Bob: Outdoors. Yep. And then we found out that some of those guys had been stashing beer in the jungle [laughs] so that we could buy it from them, see. Well it wasn't that much, you know, but they just sold it to us for a couple of bucks just for the risk. So then we'd buy it, and we'd have it in our tent, you know—

Jim: Oh, that was—

Bob: And that was—and then the commanding officer, he wasn't tough on it. I think he knew about it, you know.

Jim: Well, it's pretty loose by that time.

Bob: Yeah. But he did—he couldn't, you know, just condone everything. He couldn't let us go wild, you know. Like he always used to say, "We're a military outfit." And that's it, see. [Laughs.]

Jim: Well that was a good experience, then.

Bob: It was. It was a very good experience.

Jim: You learned a lot.

Bob: I had—I met a lot of wonderful men.

Jim: You keep in contact with any of those folks?

Bob: Umm—no. I never did, because I always watched for our reunion, but the 143rd Battalion was next to us, but—oh, say, on the way over, there was one guy on the ship from the 54th Battalion that had come over from Italy—from Africa. And his name was Wood. He was from Adams, Wisconsin. And he had stashed some beer away on the ship, and so we went up top side and we drank the beer. But when we landed I don't know where he went. I never saw him again.

Jim: So you don't—

Bob: I never knew where he went, no.

Jim: You said you were in contact with the Philippine native? That [unintelligible]—

Bob: Yeah, that one man named Natolio Salameda that was a—he made me a beautiful bolo knife, says—got “Victory 1945,” made me one for my desk. And he gave me another one that they use, and these people were very, very clever. It’s a very, very sharp knife.

Jim: Yes.

Bob: I had written to him, and then he answered my letter, see.

Jim: What did you send him in return for the knife?

Bob: Well, you know, I didn’t—so much what I sent him—it’s what I done for him when we were over there, see.

Jim: Oh. What was that?

Bob: You know, well, he had—his wife had a baby, and he complained that there was a lot of bugs and stuff on the baby, and I says, “Well, now, I’m not supposed to do this, but,” I says, “I’ll give you a mosquito net.” And I says, “Put the baby in a hammock, and tie the mosquito net and then tie it underneath.” And I says, “Then I’ll give you some spray here that we have, and you spray the child so that it don’t get infection.” Because he said that he never forgot that. And then when he come over, you know, if he come over, and my wife and my aunt were sending me cookies and stuff, I’d give him some cookies and give him an—I give him an orange one time, and he wanted to eat the peelings! [Laughs.] He didn’t know, see? I don’t think he ever had an orange. [Laughs.] So that was kinda interesting.

Jim: Very.

Bob: But he’d got—he had gone to Santo Tomas University, and he was living on the island of Divinabo, which was about, I don’t know, twenty-five, thirty miles out. You couldn’t see it from where we were. And he came in an outrigger with two other guerilla fighters, and I think what they were doing was reporting just where the Japanese were, see? Now, the Japanese were down in Mindanao, and they landed in Mindanao, but there’s a strange thing about Mindanao—they never went in over a mile, because the Mindanaoans down there were barbaric, back to the civilization—

Jim: So they [unintelligible]—

Bob: Yeah, they didn’t give a damn who was there, see? They didn’t care whether it was Americans or Jap, they don’t want nobody in there, and they used blow guns in there, and they’d kill the Japs. They killed anybody in there, so the Japanese never did conquer that island. As much as they wanted to put something on it, they never did. And they eventually abandoned the island, and when they

abandoned the island, it was before the war was over, and they came up to our shore, and I was watching them with binoculars, and they never had a chance, because the Hellcats come out of some place, and the first Hellcat come down—and I never forget that—with their machine guns wide open, and he's driving him away from whatever they were firing [Hellcat was a nickname for the F6F Hellcat carrier-based fighter aircraft (plane) used by the US Navy in WWII]. And the next guy'd come in with about a 250 to a 500 pound bomb, and he'd let it go, and I—they blew them all to pieces. They never got out. And they were out, I would say, maybe, two miles out, something like that. They'd try to hug the shoreline, see. And I think they got caught. They started in the morning. Mindanao is quite a trip, you know, up there. I think they got caught out there. So. That was what happened to them.

Jim: Yeah.

Bob: And then we doubled our guard. That was one thing we did. We put men all along the guard and all along the coast.

Jim: Did you stand guard duty there?

Bob: No, no. No, I was strictly a water distiller. No. The only time we stood guard duty was when we first landed. We all had to take our turn.

Jim: I see.

Bob: Yeah. [Clears throat.] But then after we got our job, that's where we—that's what I done.

Jim: And after you got home did you use your G.I. Bill?

Bob: No, I did not. No, I did not. I went back on the—I found myself having a lot of rights on the railroad, so I went back, and I worked at the railroad a little while, and then I thought, "Geez, I don't want to do this all my life." So, I had an opportunity to get in with the American Family Insurance company. And I was the third agent that they hired.

Jim: Oh my goodness.

Bob: And so it was a very lucrative job. I really loved it, and I had my own office, and—

Jim: Where did you—where did you settle there?

Bob: Uh, settle in Middleton?

Jim: No, where did you go? In the American Family [unintelligible]?

Bob: Oh, I went to American Family in 1958. I think it was about—

Jim: Right, but where did you go to work, then?

Bob: About 1958.

Jim: Where?

Bob: Oh, at Madison.

Jim: Oh, I see. You stayed right there.

Bob: No, no, no.

Jim: You didn't have—

Bob: I [unintelligible] for Madison. I didn't want to stay—they wouldn't—Chuck Webster complained that that was his territory, so they made me go to Middleton.

Jim: Chuck was a good friend of mine.

Bob: Oh yeah, I know. Chuck, yeah. So we didn't care about that, see. And I went to Middleton, and I bought my own office, and I eventually ended up with a really beautiful office and everything, and I worked there until 1983, at which time I retired, and I sold my home, and I moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico. And we moved in there, and it was a beautiful city. My wife fell in love with it, and I liked it, so we decided to build a home. I got a contractor, and within a month I had a home going. That was in 1982. Then I come back, and the home was all built, and I lived there for thirteen or fourteen years. So I didn't have much to do there, so I passed my state board, and I went to work at the Bank of Albuquerque.

Jim: Oh.

Bob: See? I was a general agent then, see?

Jim: Oh my.

Bob: [Laughs.] So I worked there until the bank went broke, and of course you know the history of all the savings and loans going broke. And my job lasted about, oh, three years, and I was sorry that it did, and then I joined the SCORE, you know, I told you. [SCORE is the non-profit organization that provides face-to-face business counseling, mentoring, and training for persons who are starting a small business.]

Jim: Yes.

Bob: I didn't have much to do, and I never was a great drinker or running around bars and stuff like that, but anyway, there was a guy down there who was a retired druggist, and he says, "Come on over." He says, "You might be interested in stones." And I thought, "Well, stones. I don't know nothing about that." But I became fantastically interested in stones—

Jim: A rock hound.

Bob: Well, I got to be a rock hound, see? [Laughs.] And then I got to—he says, "You can make yourself a lot of money." So I started in with skulls. There's one in my office in there.

Jim: Where'd you find the skulls?

Bob: Oh, I have to buy those. I have a contract with the Beefalo Program, and they're in Montana, where they're cross-breeding buffalo with Whitefish cattle.

Jim: Let me see if I can get that on the camera. Yeah. There we go. Now that's a—you buy the skull, and then you—

Bob: No, I have a—I tell them just exactly what I want. They have to be twenty-four inches across the tip of the horns, twenty-one inches down the face, twelve inches across the cross between the eyes. And it's got—it can't have any breaks in the skull. In other words, the animal could not have been shot or beaten with a heavy club, and all the teeth have to be in, otherwise I won't buy them. 'Cause they run me about 200 dollars raw.

Jim: And what do you do with them when you get them, now?

Bob: Well, first thing I do is disinfect them.

Jim: Mm-hmm.

Bob: And then I take out the—there's two blood outlets. One beside each eye and one under the jaw. I have to fill those in to make it all level. And then I got my design all ready. The caps come off. Those horns on there, those are just caps that go on the real horn.

Jim: Oh, I see.

Bob: And you don't put those on until you're finished with the decorating. And then I start to decorate it, and you either use a full stone or a decoration, but no two skulls are—have to be the same. Every time you make a skull it's gotta be different. Because of the fact that it would destroy the value of it if you built them all the same, see?

Jim: Oh, I see.

Bob: Who'd want to buy them, you know? See?

Jim: Right.

Bob: So I had a lady come down just a while ago and bought the one I had hanging there for 350 bucks. I made it for—I don't make a lot of money on them anymore, but the most exotic skull that I have ever heard of was sold at Tucson, Arizona, sold for 125,000.

Jim: Why?

Bob: Well, because it had Persian turquoise, and it was done with all the stones were bezelled [derived from the jeweler's word "bezel"] in silver, and it took the guy at least eight months to build it. Every stone.

Jim: It was embedded in—tell me that again. What'd he do?

Bob: It was—he had Persian turquoise, which is tremendously expensive. You sell it by the carat. And then each stone was bezelled. That means it was set in silver. See?

Jim: I see.

Bob: And it was held in silver. Well now, that silver piece got the stone in it. Now, that's gotta be put on the skull, see?

Jim: Right.

Bob: And it's gotta fit in there, because if you'll pay that kind of money, you want it just to be perfect, don't you see?

Jim: Yeah.

Bob: [Laughs.]

Jim: Yeah, that's really attractive.

Bob: And then I got one in the other room there that I done for a lady. Her husband was a colonel, and he was a friend of mine from SCORE program, and, see, I was in the insurance business there. So she called me and said that she was backed into with a car while driving in the mall and that her knee was injured, and so we went through that, and they offered her 5,000 dollars, and I says, "Well, I won't tell you to tell them [**End of Tape One, Side B**] go to hell, but I will tell you that we

won't accept any offer like that whatsoever. I'll take you to an attorney in El Paso, and we'll get a fair appraisal of this whole thing."

Jim: Right.

Bob: So, I said, "The main thing that I'm after—I've been in the insurance business, and I know how to settle these—is residual. That's the main thing. I don't want you to have to be paid 25,000 dollars and then have to spend that to heal your knee up because it's full of arthritis or something. You didn't cause that. They caused that." So, she says, "That's gonna be kind of tough." I said, "Well, hang tight, then, and we'll sue them for 150,000 then, and we'll get it." So it all came down to where they paid her 37,000. They gave her seven years residual on her knee, which I thought was pretty good. Because, you know—

Jim: Sure.

Bob: It just goes to show—but I was involved in this all the time. And she says, "What can I pay?" And I say, "You can't pay me nothing, 'cause I'm licensed up in the state of New Mexico. We can't take any money from anybody. That's my job, to help you. You're my customer." So then my business started to go, you know, and I had a pretty good business when I left down there.

Jim: Why'd you leave?

Bob: Well, the bank went broke.

Jim: Well, that's a good reason right there.

Bob: Yeah. And then I still had this business, and I had a business making bolo ties. I'll show you all that. I can't tell you what happened on record of it, but I can tell you after this is over with how I worked it, see. [Both laugh.]

Jim: Yeah, don't incriminate yourself.

Bob: No, no, no, no. But there's a way, you know, because you have to have a license out there from the state if you sell anything, and then they want to collect the sales tax and all that stuff.

Jim: Tell me, did you join any veterans' organizations?

Bob: Oh, yes. I belonged to the Veterans of Foreign Wars immediately.

Jim: Mm-hmm.

Bob: Soon as I come back. And I belonged to the Veterans of Foreign Wars down in New Mexico. And they got a very interesting hut down there. You go about fifty

feet underground. And interesting as it may be, the New Mexican veterans suffered more than most any other state. I just read in there where there were about 1,900 New Mexicans in Bataan when they surrendered, and only nine of them come out alive. So that shows you what the percentage was. And I'll give you a statistic. It's quite well documented by this doctor that I told you about. When the Germans took prisoners, they only lost about four out of a hundred. When the Japanese took prisoners, they lost thirty-nine out of a hundred.

Jim: I know about the [unintelligible]—

Bob: So you know the—so you know all of those.

Jim: Oh yeah.

Bob: You know how cruel then.

Jim: Oh, I know all about that.

Bob: Ah [sighs].

Jim: They—what was I gonna say? Well, lost my thought there. Okay, I can't think of anything further we missed talking about.

Bob: Well, let's see. Umm. When I got back, most of the skin come off of my hand. I couldn't go to work for about a month.

Jim: It peeled.

Bob: It peeled all off. I don't know what made that [happen]. But I went out to the VA, and they says, "Well, we don't know what that is." He says to me—I never forget—he says, "It's like Heinz 57 Varieties. We got so much of this stuff coming in, and we don't know what it is." But he says, "Why don't you just keep it with—get some good salve and keep it, and it won't come back." And that was all. So that never bothered me.

Jim: Oh, I know what I wanted to say. I don't want to put this on the—I'll turn the tape off. The group that really got—took it in the shorts—in the Bataan Death March was that paint company in Janesville.

Bob: The what? Oh, the Janesville?

Jim: The Janesville paint company. That whole company was there in the [unintelligible].

Bob: Oh, I didn't know that.

Jim: There were 1,200 men, and—

Bob: They all lost their lives?

Jim: Well, there's, I mean, like, twenty or thirty of them.

Bob: Well, I have a picture in there that—I played on the first championship football team that Adams Friendship ever had [Adams Friendship is a high school and school district located in Adams, WI].

Jim: Oh, yeah?

Bob: And Glenn Darron was our coach, and he's ninety-one years old, and I go to see him—every year I go up to see him. I'm going up in August to see him.

Jim: Still going.

Bob: And he's got both his legs off at the knees. He had that vein disease, you know, where they—and his mind is just sharp as a—and he says, “You know, when you guys came up, you were all big and tough kids.” We have no face masks on, you know, in 1935. And he says, “And you guys were good. You know, the reason I hollered at you—” I says, “Yeah, I know. You were a—Glenn, the only people that were tougher than you in my life were the damn Marines down at Camp Russo.” And he loved that. [Laughs.]

Jim: Oh! That pleased him.

Bob: Yeah, that pleased him. But he says, “You know—” He used to tell us when we were—knew we were close to winning a championship in the last two games, and he says, “I want you guys to run up in the fourth quarter, run up to the line, clap your hands, get down, smile, laugh, do a lot of chatter, and you're gonna be so goddang tired you'll want to just drop in your tracks, but don't let on. Don't give them any hint at all. Hit them harder than ever.” [Laughs.] But he was—you know, you stop and think about that, but part of that training went with me into the service.

Jim: Oh, I'm sure it did.

Bob: It did.

Jim: Yeah, I'm sure it did.

Bob: I was used to taking orders, and I had—if I made a mistake, we had to run around the grinder or do so many pushups when I played football, see?

Jim: Right.

Bob: And you make a mistake out there, well, it's the same thing. Can't. They don't tolerate that, see?

Jim: Exactly. **[End of Interview]**