

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN RETTIG
Officer, Army, World War II
2001

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159

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159**

Rettig, John, (1920-). Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 25 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 25 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 25 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John Rettig, a Logansport, Indiana native, discusses his World War II service as a communications officer with the 926th Signal Battalion attached to the 9th Tactical Air Force. Rettig talks about being drafted out of college, basic training at Camp Crowder (Missouri), assignment to the 82nd Airborne Division, radio repair school and officer candidate school at Fort Monmouth (New Jersey), and radar supply training at Lexington (Kentucky). He touches upon short assignments in Arizona and California. He addresses his trip overseas, role as a PX and mess officer, and work establishing communication facilities at Air Force bases in England. Rettig describes landing at Utah Beach, laying and moving communication wire, and traveling through France. He describes delivering payroll and explains why he had a reputation as a liquor dealer. Rettig touches upon being in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge, having their barracks bombed, crossing the Rhine, and occupying a former SS camp near Marburg (Germany). He briefly mentions being an officer in a Black signal construction battalion. Rettig comments on almost being sent to the Philippines, his discharge, and his subsequent enlistment in the Army Reserves. He mentions attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison to get Masters degrees and his career in campus libraries. He describes duties as unit commander in the active Army Reserve, taking classes for Army historians, assignment to Army Material Command, and retirement from the Reserves.

Biographical Sketch:

Rettig (b.1920) served in World War II as a communications officer with the 926th Signal Battalion which provided communications between the 9th Tactical Air Force headquarters and airfield. He was honorably discharged in 1945 and settled in Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001.

Transcribed by Patrick F. Gould, September 2009.

Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

James: Okay, it's the 4th of December, the year of 2001. Speaking to John Rettig. Where were you born, sir?

John: Logansport, Indiana

James: Logansport. When was that?

John: 8th of May, 1920.

James: And, how did you enter the service after WWII started?

John: I was drafted by the Montgomery County, Indiana draft board.

James: And, where did they send you for basic?

John: Well, they first sent me to Ft. Benjamin Harrison, of course in Indianapolis. And then from there I was sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri for basic training, for I suppose it would have been for about two or three months. I was drafted in---

James: Was this right after 19---the war started or before?

John: I was drafted on the 20th of February.

James: '42?

John: '42. I was in the midst of my senior year at Wabash college and I didn't bother to register for the second half.

James: What were you studying?

John: I was studying speech and English and French and more or less planning to be--
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James: So you didn't realize how valuable this was going to turn out to be?

John: I didn't [laughs].

James: Right. So, were in just a regular infantry unit or did you start to specialize into something?

John: Well, after basic training I was sent to Ft. Monmouth, which is the signal corps training school.

James: Was that choice or no choice?

John: No, I was just sent.

James: Just sent.

John: Yeah, and there I was in about a four-month course for radio repair, I think it was. And, about the end of that I put in an application for OCS [Officer Candidate School]. But, meanwhile, I was shipped out to the 82nd Infantry Division somewhere in Louisiana.

James: This is the end of '42 now?

John: No, this is still August. End of July, August.

James: Oh, six months after---

John: Yeah. Bout six months later. I was picked up, Leesville, or whatever is near Camp Claiborne, I guess. In the casual officer that was to find the 82nd for me. So, we drove around the swamps for about five days looking for them and then he discovered they were back in camp all the time [laughs]. So, I got settled there and about ten days later we woke up and half of us were 82nd Airborne and the other half, 101st Airborne. So, I was an original---

James: Another non-decision by you.

John: Right.

James: It was announced.

John: It was announced, yes. So I was a charter member. And a---

James: Which group did they put you in?

John: In the Signal Company.

James: Inside of which Division?

John: The 82nd Airborne.

James: The 82nd Airborne.

John: Yeah. And as a radio operator, I guess it was. And then they moved the Division Ft. Bragg where it has been ever since. And I was part of the advance guard and so participated in the very first flight, airborne flight of the US Army.

James: First practice flight?

John: Well, it was the first actual flight as a, any kind of a unit.

James: Oh, I see. Where was this?

John: From Louisiana to Ft. Bragg. It's the advance guard to clean up the barracks from whoever was there before, that's what it amounted to. And then about November orders came through that I was to report back to Ft. Monmouth to go to OCS on the first of December.

James: By that time, had you made several jumps?

John: Jumps?

James: No jumps.

John: I had advanced from a 21 dollar private to a 30 dollar private.

James: You were a signal man, but if you were 82nd. Didn't they have any jumps?

John: Oh no, that kind of jump. No. We didn't---

James: No parachute jumping?

John: No, actually you see it's only been a couple of months. And whether they intended to have the signal company jump, I don't think.

James: I see.

John: But I was gone before anything like that came up.

James: So now you are pointed in a different direction.

John: Right.

James: In Monmouth, you say?

John: Back to Monmouth---

James: Virginia?

John: New Jersey.

James: New Jersey. Oh yeah, Ft. Monmouth. Got it.

John: Ft. Monmouth, right outside of New [York??]. Forty minutes by train.

James: Was that a large Camp?

John: Oh yeah. It's the home of the Signal Corps, of course.

James: And how long was OCS?

John: It was three months. So I was commissioned on March 6th or something of that sort.

James: A difficult three months?

John: Not really, no.

James: How much more about the signal, the signals a radio man would need did you learn, ahh, that you had learned before?

John: Little or nothing, I guess. I mean, the OCS was basically officer training.

James: Learn how to [indecipherable]

John: Yeah. And they weren't too concerned about the content. And after that I had a month training in supply, which was down the road in Asbury [??] Park. And they had commandeered the, the pier. Where vacationers usually went, you know. It is sort of like the pier in Atlantic City.

James: Sure

John: And we had classes there and we'd take the train back and forth to Red Bank or Little Silver, where the fort was. And after that then, I put in another month of training in Lexington Signal Depot in Kentucky. And, the theory, we would learn all about supply problems with radar materials. And after that, I was assigned to a air service command at Edwards Air Force Base in Arizona, just outside of Phoenix. They had a signal company, ah unit there, two or three people who did the signal supply for the air base. I was there a couple of months and then I was sent to Blythe, California, which is right on the border up on a cliff above the Colorado River, just across the river into California. This was in July and some nights the temperature would get down to a 100 [laughs]. And then after a month or so there, I was moved into San Bernardino. Same 9th Air Service Command, I guess. And there for a month or so, and apparently they got a call from headquarters to send a certain number of signal officers somewhere. And since I was basically on the West Coast, I was shipped to England. Take the train back across to---

James: Train across the United States

John: Back across the United States and get on the Queen Mary and four days later we were in Scotland.

James: How many of you were in your outfit there going across? A battalion size?

John: Basically,--- I don't know, I was a casual. I wasn't attached to anything.

James: Just a replacement.

John: Replacement, yeah.

James: So you were just on your own, more or less?

John: More or less, yeah. And once we got to Scotland we were sent down to a reception center where we were sent down at Stone and Staffordshire.

James: Now what month and years was this?

John: This was October of '42, ahh '43 yeah, '43 sure '43. And after sitting there for four or five days and nothing happened, I finally went into the office and said to somebody, what am I doing here? And so they shuffled some papers around and discovered that well, this must be you. And they'd mangled my name pretty badly. And so they never could find me, but the serial number must have been the same.

James: So you could still be there.

John: So, I'd still be there probably. So finally, they sent me down to the 926th Signal Battalion. And I arrived there, oh about the 25th or so of October. At the time they were attached to the 8th Air Force. Which, on the first of November, they were moved to the 9th Tactical Air Command. But that five days qualified me for the battle star Air Offensive Europe [laughs].

James: [indecipherable] with the 8th Air Force.

John: With the 8th Air Force.

James: What were your duties now at this point?

John: At this point, once I finally got to the unit, I was assigned to a company and was the administrative officer/mess officer and supply officer.

James: For a company?

John: A company. And also PX officer.

James: So you had to keep track of supplies.

John: I had to, well I had a good sergeant.

James: Oh, I was going to say, we're straying away from the radio here.

John: Right, radio, forget the radio. Never did a thing with the radio, ever, after that.

James: Oh my goodness.

John: So, everything was wasted, but they didn't have anything. The battalion was assigned to the 9th Tactical Air Force and there were five companies; Headquarters, A, B, C, and D. A Company was the headquarters operating company. D Company was the operating company at the other end. And B and C were the line companies. They laid the wire and maintained the wire between the 9th TAC headquarters and their airfields.

James: How many [indecipherable]?

John: Ahhh, well there were quite a few. They were scattered all over southern and eastern England. We had people from as far west as, beyond Salisbury to in the west to Colchester and Norfolk. So, that was most C Company over there and so, we hardly ever saw anybody from C Company.

James: You had a mess hall to operate?

John: Well, we were at Aldermaston which was a little village between Reading and Newbury in England. Just about 40 miles west of London. As we'd say, one hour by train, three hours by telephone [laughs]. But we just moved around that area, three or four places. Originally the battalion headquarters was in this manor house, which was called Aldermaston House. And some of us lived in stables and a lot in the tents around there. And we were right next to what they called Aldermaston Park which was actually an airfield where there was a bunch of gliders training. So, one day, I had to fill out an accident report for one of our trucks. It had a collision. Come to the place where the other place had to put a glider [laughs]. It was a little unusual.

James: I would say.

John: And one place in that neighborhood we moved to, we kept moving around, I've forgotten, don't know why, but every couple of weeks or months we'd move someplace else. One was in the field right next to the Roman ruins of Silchester, which were in that neighborhood. You probably never heard of that.

James: [indecipherable]

John: Yeah. But, this one was called Silchester. They're camps.

James: [indecipherable]

John: Yeah, but this was a Roman ruin from about three or four hundred or less. And we were in the next field. So, I started with D company and ended up with B Company. As I say we moved around and finally we were down in the new forest. This was in May of '44 and things naturally got pretty busy and we prepared to go to France. So, June 6th we went out to watch the planes fly over and a couple of days later we got orders to report to South Hampton and get on the boat. Well, we did that in about the, I forget what date it was, probably around the 12th or 13th of June. We got on the boat in the evening, went out and dropped anchor off South Hampton and would you believe we sat there five days, cause there had been a big storm come out of the Atlantic and the water was too rough to sail across the channel. So, I got across the Atlantic faster than I got across the channel [laughs]. But finally we came ashore on Utah Beach and occupied a field near Carentan, along the road to Cherbourg. And basically we stayed there quite awhile.

James: In Carentan? [??]

John: Yeah. Not in, but it was out in the wilderness.

James: Was there an airbase there?

John: No, no. This was the construction company type so we didn't need the airbase. We traveled and did that. Next field over there was an artillery unit and they were pretty noisy of course. They had quite a celebration on the 4th of July. Lots of noise. And then we moved out of there and after the breakout I had one platoon, construction platoon, just north of St Lo and we were laying wire at various places to different airfields. I had this operating platoon because I think the regular lieutenant had gotten leave to go back to England or something. But then, we just moved basically place to place and ah--.

James: Did you have a lot of gear you were responsible for to bring along?

John: Well, most of the trucks were full of wire and cable and that sort of thing. Yeah.

James: Radio receivers and senders?

John: Well, B & C Company didn't deal in those. A & D had the radio material and the repeaters. We were strictly the construction and maintenance of the ground lines. And ah---

James: You were [indecipherable] army road, on the side of the road?

John: Ah, usually, yeah.

James: Didn't you have to worry about tanks coming up?

John: It got to be a problem sometimes, but we patrolled the lines regularly and if it would go out, we would know pretty fast. And as the Armies moved and the airfields moved, of course, the cable that we'd laid, we'd have to pick up and move somewhere else.

James: Oh, you didn't just leave it?

John: Oh no. We'd pick it up and move it and reuse it. It was in fairly short supply because it is expensive stuff.

James: Yes it is.

John: These cables tend, some of them had ten pairs wire and some had four pair. And, there was a time we had, I think it was April of '44 when I had to take the payroll to the company. We had one group of people on the Atlantic near Grand Camp, on the Atlantic coast.

James: April of '44?

John: April of '44. We still had people back there on the Atlantic coast.

James: I thought you arrived after D-Day?

John: Yes

James: Which was on '44.

John: '44

James: See that puts us---

John: Well, I've jumped ahead a ways here.

James: Must have been April '45

John: Just an example of how badly we were spread.

James: Oh, I see

John: On this particular payday, I had to pay people on the Atlantic coast and also in North Germany around Paterhorn. So---

James: How'd you manage that?

John: Ash, it was a long jeep ride.

James: I guess so. How did you protect the money?

John: I kept it in a bag.

James: You just assumed that nobody was---

John: Nobody knew what I had. And I also had the PX rations too. I think I probably sold the first candy and cigarettes in Versailles.

James: Oh

John: We finally got out of the ground, oh, it must have been September or October of '44. We took over a hotel in the center of St Quentin in France.

James: Is that the picture?

John: No, no, that's in Belgium, which had been used by the Germans.

James: The hotel in France?

John: Yes, St. Quentin. And it was nice getting nicer accommodations. Everybody liked hotel and everything.

James: Did they fix it up?

John: They had taken care of themselves. Two, two big rooms on the ground floor were full of empty champagne bottles. And I discovered that the champagne people in Rheims, which was 30 or 40 miles away, were hard up for bottles, so we filled up a half track with empty champagne bottles, drove down to the winery, exchanged two empties for a full one. [laughs].

James: Two for one was the deal?

John: Two for one was the deal. I sold them for a dollar a bottle in the PX. I had quite a history for being a liquor dealer [laughs].

James: I guess so.

John: In England, I operated a pub where we would get the beer from the ahhh—

James: From, in the PX?

- John: Yeah. And in the evening we had this one Quonset hut set aside as the pub and we'd sell beer and what not.
- James: Was that beer from the United States?
- John: Oh no, it was English.
- James: It was beer?
- John: English ale or something. And then all though France I'd pick up all sorts, kinds of wine, Germany wine.
- James: [indecipherable]
- John: Once after we, in June, in Germany after the war was over, we, ah, I went out to get some kegs of beer at the local brewery and offered them some of our money, you know the ah---
- James: Script?
- John: The script. Well, they didn't want that. Okay, we go to the town hall. They give us a handful of German money and so we went back and gave them the kind of money they wanted and took our beer.
- James: Didn't get the word?
- John: No, well, that's what they wanted so that's what we gave them. But, our group basically followed the First Army and the 9th Tactical Air Force was the air support for the troops. And we supplied the communication between the 9th TAC and the air fields.
- James: As they moved.
- John: As they moved and they kept moving, naturally, all across Northern France, Belgium.
- James: Tell me about laying the wire. How, tell me about the process. How many trucks did you use? How many guys and so on?
- John: Actually, that's actually a little out of my line.
- James: Oh.
- John: We had an awful lot of people from AT&T. Ma Bell people.
- James: They did the actual---

John: They did the work, yeah. And our sergeants were all Bell people. Basically, the cable comes in a big drum and a wheel put on the back of the truck and it pays it out, and they—250 ft reel—and then they plug it together and hang it up or do whatever.

James: Sometimes they put it on the side of the road and sometimes they hung it. Is that how it went?

John: Yeah, whatever is the most feasible. Once we took a shortcut and ran it straight across a river instead of going about six miles out of the way to a bridge. And ahhh, but most of the time I was only with that unit for part of the company for three or four weeks.

James: I see

John: So, I never told them what to do. They knew what they were doing.

James: It was their business.

John: It was their business. They didn't need me.

James: Amateurs helping.

John: Right. And then about November I think---

James: Hold on just a moment. See what's transpired here. The light went off.

John: Oh, we ran out of tape, maybe.

James: I don't know.

John: Well, the red light's back.

James: I don't know. It's on again. [indecipherable] Here we go.

John: Like I say, we simply followed the First Army.

James: Sure

John: And ahh---

James: Into Germany.

John: Into Germany. First into Belgium. There's a school there.

James: Sure.

John: Which is in a place called Theux. That's about five miles from Spa in Belgium. You may not know where Spa is, but you have probably heard of it.

James: I know. Everybody knows about Spa.

John: Yeah. And sometimes in the evening I would take a bicycle and drive down. Lots of casinos and that sort of thing.

James: Right.

John: It was a vacation resort. And I think the First Army had its headquarters there.

James: Ideal.

John: Everything was fine. We occupied a school. Schools were very popular.

James: For a barracks?

John: For a barracks. Yes. I don't know what the students did, but school was out and we were in. And until December, of course. And so the middle of December comes the German attack. And---

James: And you were in Spa at the time? Or just---

John: Well, just north of Spa and in effect, the north edge of the "Bulge" was maybe ten miles below us.

James: And you were just north of the "Bulge."

John: Yes.

James: Okay. I'm glad I positioned you.

John: And somebody sort of panicked and decided that most of those units, the First Army, the signal battalion should move into Liege for safety. So, we did. And would you believe that on the 28th of December, the building that we were housed in was hit by a buzz bomb.

James: Oh my goodness. How lucky you---

John: How lucky can we get? Yeah. And we, I think we had 3 or 4, maybe 5 or 6 men killed and about 50 wounded in the process. It was a situation almost like New York. It just basically destroyed the building. About a three- or four-story

building. A lot of us got a lot of glass cuts on our hands. Never did report to the aid station. Too busy. Missed a chance---

James: Where were you when that thing hit?

John: I was on the ground floor I think. This was about 2:00 o'clock in the morning.

James: That woke you up.

John: It woke us up. Dumped everybody out on the floor and so forth.

James: Did you have any idea when it happened?

John: Oh, we knew right away.

James: The reports that [indecipherable]

John: Oh, they'd been going-- We, while we were in our previous place as I say, they were constantly going over.

James: Oh, I see.

John: It was the main pathway into Liege and Antwerp. You see they were going for Liege and Antwerp because of the port city. And, so then we moved to a little suburb to the north of Liege, and another school. And one afternoon several of us were looking out the window and we were watching, another buzz bomb come across. We could see it and could hear it coming. And then all of the sudden, it goes quiet. When the motor shuts off you know it's---

James: It's coming.

John: ---going to glide into something. And there we were looking right out the window looking at it and it was looking at us like it's going to come in the window. Right in the window. But it apparently started its glide a little too soon and it ended up hitting a slag heap just on the other side of the river.

James: Ahead of you?

John: Ahead, just ahead of us. So we dodged that one. And then after that we moved back to the original place in Theux. And then after the west side of the Rhine was cleared, we moved to a city just south of Cologne called Bruehl and occupied a school house there. And continued on our work and within a few weeks we crossed the Rhine and into a, the hills above the city called Marburg [??]. And there we occupied an old SS Camp above the city. And so we were still nicely protected and everything. And after that, things, it's a little hard to--

we spent some time in Erlangen, where there was an airfield, and ahhh, err castle. And finally, finished up in Weimar.

James: At the end of the war?

John: At the end of the war. Yeah.

James: So, when the end of the war came, did they move you out right away or did you stay in?---

John: We stayed there awhile and obviously, they didn't know what to do with us. They, everybody got their point totals, you know.

James: Sure

John: And most of us were 90 or 100 points. And I guess---

James: Plenty of points?

John: Plenty of points. We didn't even need the ones from a purple heart which several of us could have gotten if we'd wanted it.

James: From shattering glass?

John: Shattering glass. If you report to the aid station you get your name taken down. And I guess all those got purple hearts. So, they finally broke up the battalion and I was assigned to a black battalion of signal construction, where everybody was black except the officers. And then gradually, people were reassigned and given a couple of weeks leave here and there.

James: [indecipherable]?

John: Yeah, we'd move around various places in Germany, I'm not real sure where anymore.

James: Sure. And how was it dealing with the black soldiers? Okay? Did it go well?

John: No problems, no.

James: Okay, and then---

John: And finally they decided a certain number of us would go the Philippines. So back to France to one of the staging areas we go for a couple of weeks indoctrination. And then---

James: Was that again, that your choice?

John: Oh no, we were just assigned.

James: It was announced?

John: Yeah, sure. And so finally, we get the trucks packed up and start out. We're literally on the road to Marseille, half way there from the camp we get called back, the war is over. Otherwise, we would have been in Manila. And so, some of us were sort of recycled through occupation troops and various things and god knows what all and finally, I ended up getting back to, the port of embarkation about the first part of December.

James: You mean, at Le Harve?

John: Yeah

James: Lucky Strike?

John: Lucky Strike. And came home on the Argentina and must have gotten home probably early December because---

James: Of '45?

John: Of '45, yeah. And I was discharged from active duty yeah.

James: From where, Sheridan?

John: From Sheridan, yeah. Oh well actually, it was, they had another camp just south of Indianapolis. I forget what they call it, but it's closed now. And so I got relieved from active duty and stayed in the reserve.

James: You were married during any of this time, or were you still single?

John: No, no, still single.

James: Were you corresponding with your folks on a regular basis?

John: Pretty much, yeah.

James: Did you encounter the Salvation Army or the Red Cross very often in your travels in Europe?

John: Ah, occasionally, yeah, but---

James: Generally, the food was not a problem for you. You had a good mess hall and always had an adequate amount of food?

- John: Yeah. I had one of the world's best mess sergeants so the mess hall was no problem. I had a wonderful supply sergeant. No problems there.
- James: Boy, you were living.
- John: Every time the mess sergeant would go pick up rations he'd take something for the boys. Nobody liked the apples they gave us, so he'd bake up a big pan of apple pie and take it to the warehouse. And they'd give anything [indecipherable] [laughs].
- James: But they did?
- John: Oh, they loved it.
- James: Well that was a great opportunity again. As good as the champagne---
- John: Yeah. And occasionally we'd supplement our rations of, we had people in Castle and Weimar and they would travel back and forth and occasionally there would be a little venison appear on the menu. And when people drive the distance, you know.
- James: Did you have German beer on a regular basis or you had no problem? The brewery started up?
- John: Oh, they kept busy. It was not problem for them.
- James: When the war was over they were still operating?
- John: Yeah.
- James: I wondered about that.
- John: Yeah. Like I say, we paid them with the kind of money that they wanted and---
- James: I didn't know whether the brewery had been closed you see.
- John: I don't think so. The one we used was in Apolda which was outside of, east of Weimar.
- James: Did you have much contact with German civilians?
- John: Very little.
- James: There was no need, you mean?

John: No. I mean the biggest problem was while we were walking down the road near our camp outside of Castle were almost run down by a jeep, but it was being driven by some Russians who had apparently gotten it somewhere.

James: I don't think [indecipherable] Russians.

John: No, it was pretty scary for a minute. They were a little unusual.

James: The training that you got, really was not related to what you ended up doing. You more or less had to learn on the job, is that right?

John: Pretty much. [indecipherable] you gotta expect that, I mean, you can't devise a training program for something, that basically, nobody had experienced anyway.

James: Right, so you finally filled a need as it turned out anyway.

John: Oh sure.

James: Did you use that skill when you returned to civilian life?

John: Not really, no.

James: Did you have an urge to run a tavern or [indecipherable]?

John: No, no. I never did like beer anyway. So, I guess I was the ideal barkeep. I always had to wash the bottles. There was always a crock behind the stove at home and I had to wash the bottles and I sort of lost my taste for beer that way. [laughs]

James: Home brewed?

John: Home brewed. Yeah.

James: Now, when you got out of service, did you go back to [indecipherable]?

John: No, I ended up going to Prairie du Chien for a winter where I tried operating a photo studio and taught in the high school there for a year.

James: Taught what?

John: I taught English and speech.

James: Usually what you learned in college.

John: Yeah.

- James: You were on that track to be a teacher anyway, is that correct?
- John: Yeah. I didn't finish my senior year, but fortunately I had piled up enough credits where I had 120 or whatever, so they gave me my degree without having to go back.
- James: [indecipherable] That means you done a lot.
- John: Yeah. But then I went, after that year I moved to Madison to enroll at the University.
- James: In the masters program?
- John: Yeah, in the speech department. As we say, got educated at Waubash and came to Wisconsin to get the wallpaper. [laughs]
- James: So, did you, you got a masters and did you get a Ph.D. also?
- John: I got a masters in speech. I got a masters in library science and I did a lot of course work and was on the verge of starting a thesis in speech. I had enough course work done, but meanwhile, I started working in the library.
- James: Which library?
- John: Well, in the university library, which at the time was in the historical building.
- James: Yeah, I know.
- John: We watched them build the memorial library out the window. Took pictures of the collapsed building. As I observed the faculty, etc, I kept saying, I don't want to live like these people. So, what I did, I went ahead and got a, I applied, well there was an opening for a professional librarian 1 job. So, I went to the library and talked to someone. And they said, well go take the exam and if you pass we'll give you the job and you go to library school. Course, what you are supposed to do is go to library school and then take the job.
- James: I bet that was [indecipherable]
- John: Yeah, so I passed and they gave me the job and I went to school for about three years and got the degree.
- James: Another degree?
- John: The library degree. Yeah. The masters degree there. They changed that.

James: And where did you put that to work?

John: Well, I stayed in the library the rest of my life.

James: At the university?

John: Yeah.

James: You stayed there until you retired?

John: Yeah.

James: How many years did you put in there?

John: Oh, anywhere close to forty years I guess, so I started close to, you remember the big quonset hut?

James: Oh sure.

John: I think I started working there. That was the reserve book room.

James: I see.

John: I worked there as a student for a year or so. Twenty-five cents an hour I guess. Which was what I was getting before the war, student work at college.

James: Have you kept in contact with the folks that are in [indecipherable]?

John: Yeah, they have annual reunions which I have been going to.

James: The 926th

John: The 926, yeah. Actually, we had one here. We met in the Park Hotel, or whatever they called it. And, they were real happy to be there and we had our picture taken on the Capitol steps.

James: How nice. It sounds like an active group.

John: It is. It's running out. I had a call, it must have been Saturday morning from California. He says, my grandfather was in the 926th and I hear you have copies of the history. And, ah yes, I have and so forth and so he ordered a copy and I haven't gotten his check, but I'll send him his copy. That's the one that is already on deposit here and in the historical library. I deposited a copy there too.

James: Did you get married?

John: Yeah. I got married in 1952.

James: 52, well, you didn't rush into it.

John: No, it took awhile.

James: [laughs] Finally somebody settled you down.

John: I guess so.

James: You raise a family?

John: We have a son and a daughter. And as I say, I stayed in the reserve.

James: Was that the active reserve?

John: Oh yeah.

James: So that meant that---

John: Two weeks in the summer

James: In the summer. [indecipherable]?

John: Usually, well, the first years, we'd go up to Camp McCoy. During the year---

James: String some wire around Toma [Wisconsin]?

John: Oh no, nothing like that. This was just a miscellaneous lot of class work. And during the year we'd get our weekly or whatever meeting on Parks Street and then over by Truax.

James: This was one night a week?

John: I think, probably, maybe one or two a month because we had to stack up 50 points a year, you know. You'd get 15 points for being alive and you could get 15 points more on two week active duty. Which means you had to put in, show up about twenty nights during the year. We had some geniuses in the state adjutant general's office --

[break in tape]

John: And so apparently in some places, they state or whoever the employer was, would only pay them for the actual five days working of the two weeks, ten days. But, these boys, who were also going to school, prepared a ruling that you get fifteen days pay. [laughs].

James: Good.

John: And so, we all took advantage of that and so, we would, well there were a lot of times, we'd just go up to Camp McCoy for two weeks and then I got assigned to a historical team. Which was two officers and a couple of enlisted men.

James: What was your rank by then.

John: I was still a first lieutenant. But, I was the unit commander by that time. And, we did our usual meeting and one time they advertised a school for army historians, a two week session at the Pentagon. So I signed up and went. And would you believe on this particular two week period in 1950, we were there when the Korean War started. [laughs]. We all wondered if we were going home or not, naturally. It was interesting to see the confusion.

James: Your unit didn't get called up for Korea?

John: No, no. Watched the activity in the Pentagon. Lieutenant General rushing down to buy a paper to find out what was happening [laughs]. But then after awhile, I had to find something else. And I ended up, getting what they called a "mobilization designation." You're familiar with that?

James: No

John: Well, the various offices, basically Army headquarters have space for somebody who will come and go to work at the office in case of a general mobilization. And you qualify for a two week tour every year. And then you have to find something else to do, but we still go to the USAR school if you want to. And some, lot of us graduated to teaching the courses. And so, well you could find another two weeks somewhere. I think one summer, I ended up going about six weeks so I got the two military leave and four weeks vacation without costing me anything.

James: Excellent

John: But I got an assignment in the Army Material Command which was the supply arm, of course, and gradually worked my way up to various offices.

James: So, how long did you stay in the reserves?

John: All my life, basically. [laughs] I retired, I guess about age 59 and a half or something.

James: That was the requirement?

John: Well, you were going to retire when you were sixty, whether you wanted to or not. Yeah.

James: Would you say your experience in the Army was very rewarding?

John: I never really assessed it much in that respect. It was interesting at times.

James: Boring at times?

John: Boring at times. Interesting at times, yeah.

James: Well you made some good friends I'm sure.

John: Yeah.

James: Okay sir, I can't think of anything else to ask you. That more or less completes your tour here. And I appreciate---

John: Do you people have any interest here in a Overlord footlocker?

James: I don't know, they have a lot of footlockers and I don't know if they have one of those, probably not.

John: Yeah, it's still got all of the original markings and everything.

James: They like things with the original markings, the people who collect things.

John: And I'm sure there are some papers and orders and various pay. I haven't been into it in thirty or forty years. I think, if I still have it, the Columbus Day menu is in there. And like I say, I've got some other--

[End of Interview]