

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
V. G. ROWLEY  
Sergeant, 112th Cavalry Regiment Combat Team, World War II.

1995

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**Rowley, V. G.** [1919-]. Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes [ca. 104 min.]; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes [ca. 104 min.]; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. [1 folder]

**Abstract:**

V.G. Rowley, a Muscoda, Wisconsin, native, discusses his World War II service as a sergeant in the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment Combat Team and his extensive jungle combat experiences. He provides information about his childhood and early life mentioning that his entire family had to go to work during the Depression. Eventually, he learned how to make cheese and received his cheese maker license. He relates that he and another fellow began traveling about the country taking temporary work for cheese makers who wanted a vacation. He got married while working in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and tells how he subsequently got another job starting up cheese factories and moved to Michigan. Rowley tells that he was drafted and went back to Lancaster, Wisconsin. He claims that he entered the service with “a bunch of people who didn’t know what was going on. We were sorry from the day we made the mistake of getting in till the time we got out.” Inducted into service in Milwaukee, he says that his uniform and shoes did not fit. He states that he never really like horses, but found himself in the horse cavalry at Fort Riley, Kansas for his basic training. He elaborates that the men could not figure out why they became troopers as many were from larger cities and hadn’t even seen a horse before their assignment. He explains the difference between “troopers,” or mounted soldiers, and infantry foot soldiers. He also mentions that mispronouncing c-a-v-a-l-r-y [saying c-a-l-v-a-r-y] resulted in severe punishment and gives an example of such [a slow trot while mounted without stirrups]. Rowley further explains riding a horse in a “military manner” and specific training for troopers, including that the horse was always more important than the trooper. However, he says that they didn’t learn anything about combat and he thinks that is what they should have been learning. After his specialized cavalry training, the unit was sent to Fort Brown [Texas] to do border patrol as “the hierarchy” thought that Mexicans were bringing Japanese across the river. Rowley describes his transport ship as “a wreck” and describes the trip to New Britain which took about thirty days as it needed to zigzag to prevent enemy attack and sinking. There, his unit joined the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regimental Combat Team. He describes his first combat experience at the Battle of Cape Gloucester, which he describes as going badly. He portrays his emotions as absolute terror as he had no combat training and didn’t really know how to shoot a rifle. He elaborates on the problems of rain, mud, guns, Japanese attacks at night, supply problems, and logistical difficulties that his unit, E Troop, faced. There for five months, the unit was relieved by the 158<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team and moved on to New Guinea. He relates the story of how the unit was dismounted in New Caledonia by General Walter Krueger. He tells that when he arrived, the regiment was already infantry, but still used cavalry terms for everything—so they were “foot soldiers.” He goes into detail about the combat situations he faced including New Guinea with the

32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, Leyte, and Luzon; elaborating on conditions, strategy, Japanese warfare and tactics. For example, he mentions a Japanese practice of setting their machine guns with a very low field of fire that would “chop off your feet.” Initially issued the old Springfield rifle, Rowley eventually got an M-1 and he speaks highly of it. He tells that some of the men wanted Tommy guns and were issued them, but they were called to combat before they were given ammunition for them. He also tells of a new 240-millimeter cannon—a long rifle—that was set up in the mountains to fire into Manila, which was very effective. Supply problems lessened, food got better, and air support increased towards the end of Leyte; Rowley speak highly of P-51 pilots. Rowley details his food rations throughout his service in the Pacific. He speaks about replacements and says the veterans spoke to them very seriously before combat if they had a chance; specifically about when to fight and when to run, and when to shoot and when to lay still. Rowley also speaks about new officers, who knew everything, and would chew them out for not wearing helmets. He states that they often did not have an officer; the officers didn’t last long and that he was a platoon leader and so were the other noncoms. Rowley also speaks highly of the natives saying they were very loyal to Americans, willing to share, and often would stand guard in the mountains. He also says that his initial terror lessened and he began to live day-to-day; feeling lucky every time he wasn’t killed. He says that the men had a feeling of camaraderie, were “resigned to combat”, and took some pride that they could take this treatment and not cave in. Rowley says there was very little rest, but there was down time and he wrote letters, read, and played a lot of poker. He says that there was a cook who learned how to make alcohol by fermenting coconut milk, but he didn’t drink very much as it was very potent. Sickened himself with Dengue Fever and malaria, Rowley explains that tropical diseases were a serious problem and there was a steady stream of men going into the hospital and then coming out in a couple of days, With enough points to go home, Rowley relates that they were told that everyone was needed for a beach hit in Japan and they were to expect seventy-five to eighty percent casualties. As it turned out, Rowley developed a bad case of yellow jaundice and was in the hospital when the war ended. Arriving in Japan after his unit, Rowley tells of falling asleep on a train, waking to see Japanese caps, and automatically reaching for his gun. He says that some got acquainted with the Japanese, but he had had enough of them and felt apprehensive. He also tells of sleeping late on his cot, and refusing to do close order drills and a full field pack march, claiming that he had done all he was going to do in the mountains. Rowley speaks of the lingering effects of the war for him in terms of malaria and “nerves.” He relates this to his trouble sleeping and going days without sleep. He says he had trouble sleeping even in a rest area because in the back of your mind it’s “more combat, that’s what you have to look forward to—more combat.” He relates that he and his wife were going to buy a little cheese factory, but his doctor advised more outside work so he went to work for the highway department as a survey assistant. Rowley tells of waking in the night and reaching for an imaginary rifle. He says he had a lot of trouble with malaria, too. He says that he was in and out of the hospital for two and a half years and speaks highly of the care he received at the VA hospital in Madison. He earned his bachelor’s degree at the University of Wisconsin in Madison due to Public Law 16 and excellent support from Dean Vincent E. Kivlin of the School of Agriculture. He explains how he was able to buy a home, and his career in quality improvement of cheese products. Rowley joined both the American Legion and

VFW and feels that they helped him get into school and get the pension, but he is not active and prefers the American Legion as he feels the VFW is too formal.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by WDVA Staff, ca. 1996.

Transcription checked and corrected by Channing Welch & Katy Marty, 2008.

Abstract written by Brooke E. Perry Hoseli and Gayle Martinson, 2007 & 2008.

**Transcribed Interview:**

- Mark Van Ells: Today's date is September the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. V. G. Rowley, presently of Monona, Wisconsin, a veteran of the cavalry in World War II. Good afternoon. Thanks for coming in.
- V. G. Rowley: Well, thank you.
- Mark Ells: I appreciate it. Let's start from the top as they say and have you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- V. G. Rowley: Well, I can do that. I was born in the year of 1919 in a little town of Muscoda, Wisconsin located in Grant County. Actually, I was born on a farm which is located five miles south of Muscoda, and I grew to the age of nine at this farm. It belonged to my parents and my uncle. In 1929 my folks, having reached a fairly old age by that time, about 45 or so, decided that they would move from the farm, so they sold the farm. It occurred primarily because my father had gone through a very serious accident. He had lost one arm and some other bad crippling problems. So the farm was sold and we moved to the little town of Blue River, which is about some distance of seven or eight miles from Muscoda. The Depression hit, and those of us who remember the Depression know what I mean when I say it hit! We had to all go to work. My brother and I who was three years older than I, worked out as much as he could. I did whatever chores I could find to do, getting paid very small amounts peanuts, money—a very small amount—maybe a dollar a day at the very most, and sometimes nothing except a little food.
- Mark Van Ells: Just like cutting grass and that sort of thing?
- V.G. Rowley: Mowing lawns, shoveling snow, carrying wood upstairs for people, whatever we could find to do. When I graduated from high school in Blue River, jobs were very, very scarce and I worked out on a farm for awhile. I did some other sort of things, and a fellow I knew had learned the cheese trade. It looked a little bit better than working on a farm. So I went to work for a gentleman learning how to make cheese. After several months, about a year and a half of that way, I got my cheese maker's license. Then another fellow and I decided it would be a good idea to advertise and take a job for cheese makers who hadn't had vacations. A lot of these gentlemen hadn't had a vacation ever in their lives; some of them

had worked for thirty years without any time off. This made out to be a pretty good job for us. We made a little money and besides that we got a lot of experience. I was going with a young lady and we were thinking about getting married, so traveling that much wasn't so good; so I took a job in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in New Holland, Pa., working in a very large cheese plant making American cheese. This was a good job, but it was hard work, and when the opportunity came along as the war was approaching, the opportunity came along for me to go to work for another company. I started helping plants start making cheese—start-up making cheese from the very bottom. I moved to Michigan; was married in Pennsylvania and moved to Michigan, and went to three or four places there to help them start-up their cheese factories. As time went along, I had already registered for the draft in Pennsylvania, and as time went along and there were no longer a lot of my friends around, I decided that I better forget about being a—what's the word? Being a?

Mark Van Ells: An entrepreneur?

V. G. Rowley: Oh, getting a—when you don't want to go into the service.

Mark Van Ells: A deferment.

V. G. Rowley: Deferment, there you go. I decided to forget about a deferment and I went into the service in 1943, May, no, April of '43, and I came back to Wisconsin to do that. Went in through Lancaster, Wisconsin, which is the county seat of Grant County, and joined a bunch of other people who didn't know what was going on; and we were sorry from the day we made the mistake of getting in there until the [laughs] time we got out. I never did like horses very well and wouldn't you know that I ended up in the horse cavalry at Fort Riley, Kansas.

Mark Van Ells: Let's backtrack a little bit. You enlisted from Lancaster and then you, to get inducted you probably had to go to Milwaukee or Rockford—

V. G. Rowley: Right. But I didn't enlist; I was drafted.

Mark Van Ells: Uh-huh.

V. G. Rowley: Yeah, and yes, I had to go to Milwaukee to be inducted into service.

Mark Van Ells: Is that where you got the uniform and the physical and the whole business?

- V. G. Rowley: The uniform didn't fit—yeah [laughs]; got shoes that were either too big or too small. They were always size too big or too small. From there went down to a camp in Northern Illinois, and then from—
- Mark Van Ells: Camp Grant, by some chance?
- V. G. Rowley: Camp Grant, right, and from there to Fort Riley, Kansas.
- Mark Van Ells: So it's when you got to Fort Riley that you began your basic training?
- V. G. Rowley: Yes.
- Mark Van Ells: Now, as we had been discussing earlier, you ended up in the horse cavalry.
- V. G. Rowley: Right.
- Mark Van Ells: Which is quite unusual. Why don't you tell me a little bit about what sort of basic training you did for that.
- V. G. Rowley: Well, when we first got to Fort Riley we had about three or four weeks of just plain training—learning how to march, manual of arms, firing on the range, and the usual things that take place. Then we were assigned to a troop of cavalrymen who were also being trained. In the cavalry the troop is the same or equivalent to a company in the infantry. They call them troopers when they are in the cavalry; they don't call them soldiers. Another thing we found out early in our training is you don't say "calvary", you say "cavalry". If you say "calvary" you were severely punished.
- Mark Van Ells: In what way were you punished?
- V. G. Rowley: A severe punishment meant, for example, that you were given a command of a slow trot, mounted and then you dropped, commanded to drop your stirrups, and you sat on that horse and pounded the saddle without any stirrups until you were pretty red. Then, once in a while, they would give you a little relief, but it was tough. That was one of the punishments that a person got if he wasn't learning properly. It was a quick way to learn. There was nothing to do but learn how to ride a horse in the military manner. It was kind of fun in a way after we learned how to ride, but at the time it was miserable. Another thing that was kind of interesting about that: the horses were lined up in a stable and we

marched in, in an uncertain order. There was nothing arranged. So you never knew which horse you were going to stop behind and you got any kind of horse that happened to be in front of you [laughs] which was really an experience too?

Mark Van Ells: Why was that? Because they all had different personalities, I take it?

V. G. Rowley: All had different personalities. To learn to ride in a military manner is another experience. It's all done by the numbers. The command of mount and dismount, and to ride a horse, to sit a horse and to post and drop your stirrups, and all of the other commands that go along had to be learned; and we had to learn, for example, also to be sure and tighten the girth up on the horse; and then you wait a second or two and let the horse get his breath. Then you have to tighten it up again. Otherwise the saddle will turn right around on the horse. So a few people had a little trouble with that.

Mark Van Ells: Now, this is interesting to me. I mean, this is the era of Nazi blitzkrieg and all that sort of thing. What was the mission of the horse cavalry supposed to be? What were you told it was, anyway?

V. G. Rowley: Well, we really weren't told much. We knew that there was a cavalry regiment in Texas that was National Guard and that they were mounted and that they were headed for overseas. We naturally thought that as long as we were mounted we'd be joining them, and that was the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regimental Combat team. As we went long in our training in the cavalry we did various things, night problems, whatever you what to call it; simulated jungle; whatever there was, they tried to teach us—

Mark Van Ells: On a horse.

V. G. Rowley: On a horse always mounted. One thing we learned was that the horse is more important than the person. If a horse was hungry, you fed the horse. No matter how hungry you were, the horse ate first. We made long patrols of thirty, forty miles on horseback, and after you got there first thing you had to do was take care of the animal. Then you took care of yourself, if you had time before you had to get up in the morning. [laughs] That's true, too! I would characterize my military training as interesting and hard, but I learned how to ride a horse and I learned some things that were of good interest to me, but I didn't learn much of anything about combat and that's what I should have really been learning—what we should have been taught more of, I think, during those times.



- Mark Van Ells: As for the people selected for the cavalry, is there a typical cavalryman? I mean, it was supposed to be an elite unit at the time? Or did you just get thrown into it the same way you got thrown into some other sort of things?
- V. G. Rowley: Same way. We talked about that a lot. There was no rhyme nor reason to us, anyhow, as to why a person was selected. We had people in my outfit that were training at the same time from big cities that had never seen horses. I had seen horses, but I hadn't seen very much of them. These people that were trained that sent there had a little more trouble learning but they made good cavalymen too! Before we got through we were all about equal and we tried hard. Everybody worked hard at it. There was no goofing off because the punishment was too severer to goof off.
- Mark Van Ells: Now, in terms of educational level and regional distinctions were there any that you could make out? I mean, were there, for example, a lot of Southerners, or East Coast people, or was it a pretty good mix? How did all these people get along in basic training?
- V. G. Rowley: Well, there was no animosity that I know of as far as the people were concerned. We all got along pretty well. We thought a lot of one another. We gave one another tips on things that we had picked up that would be helpful as we went along. For example, if I saw someone doing something that he was getting called down for and I knew how it should be done properly, I would tell him. I became an assistant squad leader, not because I knew much, but because I happened to be a little older than some of the other guys. That gave me a little additional responsibility. I also knew from my past experience of work that you had to listen, and I learned how to listen when I was a youngster. I paid very close attention to what they said because I didn't want to get bucked off a horse like some of these guys did. So I watched pretty carefully and learned and then I would try to relate that to the people who were also learning.
- Mark Van Ells: So, after basic training then you went where? To Texas was it?
- V. G. Rowley: Yeah, we didn't call that part basic training. What we had as basic training was the first four weeks, I think, at Fort Riley. Then, after that it was specialized cavalry training they called it. That's what they called it, and when we finished there we had a short furlough, I think it was six days. Then we were sent down to Fort Brown, Texas, which is located in the southernmost tip of Texas.

- Mark Van Ells: By Brownsville?
- V. G. Rowley: Brownsville, the town of Brownsville. We were there, I think, five weeks. We did some riding and we did some border patrol along the river. It...so it happened that the hierarchy thought that the Mexicans were bringing the Japanese across the river and they looked quite a bit alike. There wasn't anything like that going on actually that I ever saw, but that is what they were afraid of. Apparently, at that time Mexico hadn't gone to war against Japan.
- Mark Van Ells: Now, what sort of uniform are you wearing? I mean when I think of the cavalryman I think of the "Montana peak" camp.
- V. G. Rowley: That's exactly what we—
- Mark Van Ells: That's what you were wearing.
- V. G. Rowley: A campaign hat and boots and breaches and spurs. We got spurs after we finished our basic training. I should have brought my picture; I got a picture at home [??]
- Mark Van Ells: So, after Texas, then, how long did it take for you to get overseas?
- V. G. Rowley: I've gotta think about it a little bit. I think we went out to California and I believe it was Pittsburgh about the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, early in November.
- Mark Van Ells: In '43?
- V. G. Rowley: '43, yes, '43. We weren't there very long until we boarded a real old wreck of a ship. It was top speed of about eleven knots and started the long journey for the South Pacific—and it was long. We were on board ship about a month. We stopped at Hawaii. They had to get some kind of oil or something for it, and we stayed there a couple of days, but we didn't get off. We stayed on the ship. Then we took off from there. I don't remember the name of the ship. I know we weren't escorted, although we saw some submarines once in a while—but there was no escort for us. We traveled on our own. As a consequence, bearing in mind, of course, that that this was during wartime and there were a lot of ships being sunk both in the Atlantic and the Pacific, as a consequence the ships did a lot of zigzagging. It took a lot longer to get there than it normally would take. I think it was about 30 or 31 days before we got to New Guinea, Finch Haven, New Guinea. At that time the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was getting ready to make its

beachhead, its initial beachhead at Arawe, no Aitape, New Britain, yes, Aitape, New Britain. Shall I just briefly describe what—

Mark Van Ells: Yeah, please go ahead.

V. G. Rowley: That looks like New Britain is an island, pretty good-sized island, in fact, it's not nearly as big as New Guinea but it's adjacent to New Guinea; and the Marines had already landed on New Guinea and they had also landed at Guadalcanal and were having a hard time of it. The thought apparently was—as well as we could find out—was that if we could land in New Britain there was a peninsula called Cape Merkus. It is shaped a lot like a boot. It looks a lot like a miniature Italy and apparently the thinking was we would land there. Our outfit would land there on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, and then Cape Gloucester, which was a strong point of Japanese soldiers, would be drawn down that way thinking that's where the major assault was going to take place. Then the Marines were supposed to land at Cape Gloucester on Christmas Day. I might just tell you a little bit about that experience. I wasn't there on D-Day, but I heard all about it from my friends after we got there. We got there shortly after D-Day, the 15<sup>th</sup> of December. The mistake was made that—two or three mistakes were made. One was that they put one of the troops—A troop out of the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron—was supposed to land in rubber boats. They were paddling along shore and the moon came out and they were practically eliminated. I don't remember exactly how many people were saved out of that troop, but it couldn't have been more than 15 or 20. I think they lost about 80 people, not necessarily all killed-in-action, but there were a lot of them that were wounded and were picked up by destroyers. We were landing on the other side of the foot of the boot. We came in without too much opposition. We were told there would be no opposition but we ran into quite a bit then. We went on up the island about a mile. I think they got up the island about a mile and dug in, but it was a very harrowing experience for those people who made the initial beachhead there. Then, of course, the Japanese did come down and that's when the replacements like myself were brought in, and then we stayed on New Britain for five months under combat conditions.

Mark Van Ells: So, this was your first combat experience then?

V. G. Rowley: It was my first combat experience and I wished it would be my last [laughs] because I didn't hardly know how to shoot a rifle.

- Mark Van Ells: So, what's—You're a little older than 19, but still you're a fairly young man. What goes through your mind at a time like this?
- V. G. Rowley: Terror! Absolute terror! I think it's chaos because the chaos came because we weren't prepared for it. I think if we would have been mentally prepared and told—and I'm speaking for the outfit now—if they would have been told what they were going to meet it would have been much better. But, apparently, the information was very bad and they had no good way of learning exactly what they were facing. I think that's the big problem. So when they landed there they really ran into a lot of trouble. In combat you have what is called the MLR and OPLR. The MLR is a main-line-of-resistance and the OPLR is the outpost-line-of-resistance. They were supposed to setup an MLR across this cape, which was only about four miles maybe at the farthest. They couldn't get established. I think it took them about four days to get an MLR established on that cape.
- Mark Van Ells: What was the problem? Was it supply, or intelligence, or?
- V. G. Rowley: Supplies were very, very critical and short. They weren't prepared with ammunition enough. They weren't prepared with heavy artillery. They did have a lot of big ships that pulled in and bombarded the Cape with lots of shells that the Japanese were dug in, in caves. They just didn't want to give—they wouldn't give up, and you had to get them out because they would come out at night, and really it was a very harassing situation. Then they also would send over their bombers and we didn't have much air support at that time. We did have a battery of 155 artillery that came along with us. They did a good job. But we did not have any anti—aircraft guns and we really needed those. Then we had a hospital, a field hospital was set up, but when I got there the field hospital was practically wiped out. They had run over it twice and had been driven back, but it was just a big mess, to say the least.
- Mark Van Ells: And this took about five weeks you said to secure that peninsula?
- V. G. Rowley: Oh, it took longer than that. It took about five months. I think, well, it wasn't combat all that five months; it was a holding action more than anything else, and then the 158<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team Infantry came in and relieved us. We went from there down to New Guinea.
- Mark Van Ells: Now, there are no horses I assume?
- V. G. Rowley: No horses. That's another story.

Mark Van Ells: What happened to the horses?

V. G. Rowley: Okay, the outfit, the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regimental Combat Team, which went overseas initially, went early in 1942. The Japanese had gotten down as far as Australia, just north of Australia, on New Guinea. They had actually shelled the north coast of Australia. General MacArthur, the story I'm told, is that General MacArthur felt quite sure that the Japanese were going to land in Australia somewhere. He had no idea where. Nobody knew where. So they sent the cavalry unit that was taken over there and another outfit, another regiment, down to an island jus off the coast of Australia. Island of New Caledonia, which was under French control, and they were thee without horses because horses were coming on another ship; and the ship that the horses were, was sunk—so they didn't have horses right away. But then the Australians lined up, rounded up a bunch of what we call remounts, which means horses that had been broken but had bee running free. They had to break these horses. I didn't get in on any of that. Very thankful [laughs] for that. But they did break the horses and they were all set for combat on horseback. General Krueger who had the 8<sup>th</sup>—no, had the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, I guess it was—General Krueger decided it wouldn't be a good idea to send horses into the jungle because they were getting a disease that affected their hooves. I don't know the name of it. Besides that the feed and all the other problems. I should say this: the cavalry had a rather strange way of combat which dated back to the Indian Wars. A squad was about eight people, whereas an infantry squad is twelve. One-fourth of those eight people did nothing but hold horses when they were in combat. If they were dismounted and in combat you lost 25% of your fighting force. That didn't sound like a very good idea to General Krueger either when he needed all the help he could get. So the outfit was dismounted in New Caledonia.

Mark Van Ells: And it just turned into?

V. G. Rowley: Infantry, well, they were turned into foot soldiers, not infantry. They didn't like the word infantry.

Mark Van Ells: And that's the situation when you got there?

V. G. Rowley: That's the situation. They were dismounted, but they used the cavalry terms, always used the cavalry terms.

Mark Van Ells: Now back to New Britain. Were the jungle environment and the weather a factor in the battle at all? How did you and other troops adjust to that?

V. G. Rowley: Well, when we got there I don't remember that it was raining. It rained all the time when we were in Finch Haven. Waiting to get there. I don't remember that it rained right after we got there, but when we advanced up the peninsula and the outfit—I was in E Troop and E Troop took the initiative on what they called a patrol-in-force, in other words, the idea was to move up the peninsula and set up a line so that the Japanese couldn't break through. It started raining, of course, just as soon as we started doing that. We had mud and all kinds of problems with weapons, you know, getting things going, but we had to move up this peninsula because the Japanese were coming in at night. They needed a hospital on the other end of the island. They wanted to get some anti-aircraft guns in there but the anti-aircraft unit refused to land until it was flying a—his job was to seek out places where they could fire their heavy weapons from the big guns. So he would fly over real low and we would ask him to drop some incendiary weapons, bombs, hand grenades, and all kinds of things down on them. That helped us a little bit. He was a brave young guy. He got to be a good friend of mine.

Mark Van Ells: So, after this battle on New Britain, you said you went to New Guinea?

V. G. Rowley: Went to New Guinea.

Mark Van Ells: Now, was this sort of a rest period, or did you go right back into combat?

V. G. Rowley: Well, it was supposed to be a rest period. We were supposed to have an indefinite rest and we went down into this area close to the river Driniumor [near Aitape]. The idea was that there would be no combat there but we were there two weeks and the loaded us up again and away we went up the Driniumor River; and the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division, Wisconsin 32<sup>nd</sup> and another division was getting shelled and shot-up pretty badly. It wasn't the whole divisions, parts of those divisions. We were given the job of anchoring one end of the line. I must give you a little background there. There was a complete Japanese army. I think they thought—they talked about 30,000 people at Wewak, which is across the mountains but not very far. MacArthur had decided that we'd bypass Wewak to bypass that stronghold and go in just a little north of that. That's where the infantry was stationed, set-up. That is where we joined them. Then the Japanese came over the mountains and they attacked us day and night. For I don't know how long, two or three—well, maybe as much as a week, not all in one place, but

hitting the line at different places—trying to break through and get to the coast. Afterwards the information that was gathered indicated that they had the idea that if they could break through our lines and get to the coast that they could get picked up, gathered together and brought back up north of there to another place on New Guinea and would be able to fight better there. They'd have their forces concentrated.

Mark Van Ells: So what eventually happened? What was your experience?

V. G. Rowley: Just let me go back to New Britain for a second here. After we had secured New Britain, our part of New Britain, the Marines came down and we had caught the Japanese in a pinchers movement. They had moved then further in another direction. I think it would be east, to the coast. They had been loaded unto their ships. Some of them were and some of them weren't. They didn't have them all, of course, but as many as they could, and they were taken over to Wewak in New Guinea. So they, the Japanese had increased their force power in New Guinea by quite a bit right where we were. So when we got through with New Guinea, which took quite a while, we had to be replaced by some more combat troops. Then, in the meantime, the powers to be, General Douglas MacArthur and [Gen. Robert L.] Eichelberger and [Gen. Alexander M.] Patch, and General [Walter] Krueger had decided that they would leapfrog over some islands and make a landing on Leyte. The Marines operated under the Navy and they, of course, were already making waves and moving in on some of these smaller islands. They were taking those islands back. Our next mission was Leyte in the Philippines, Leyte Island. That followed some outfit landed at Mindoro and they ran into very light opposition there. Apparently they felt that Leyte would be all right for us to go to next.

Mark Van Ells: And how was it?

V. G. Rowley: It was terrible! It rained every day I was there, every day and they had—you wouldn't believe the chaos that resulted from that.

Mark Van Ells: From the rain itself?

V. G. Rowley: Rain, it was just awful.

Mark Van Ells: In combination with combat operations?

V. G. Rowley: Combination with combat. We made a beachhead but it was the number 2 beachhead. The beachhead above us had already been

established. But the troops who were landed there were being pushed back toward what was known as the Ormoe Valley. We landed at the mouth of the Ormoe River and were to try to stymie the surge of Japanese that were coming down from the north, which we did. We were successful doing in spite of all the heavy storms. We carried ammunition by the tons up through the mountains and it was just really [??] A lot of the fellows thought we were going to get driven off from Leyte. I think General Douglas MacArthur was even sorry that he made the decision before we got through there. But the Japanese were having a lot of troubles too, and when we would find—we had a very, very, few prisoners; but when we did have a prisoner, someone would walk in and want something to eat. Of course, he would eat with us. We would find out as much as possible. The headquarters would find out as much as possible, and we were learning they were having a great deal of problems with illnesses and lack of food, lack of ammunition and mobility just like we had. They weren't any different than we were. You know, they couldn't move if we couldn't move, but we were on the offense and we had to move. They were stationed so they could stay there until they ran out of groceries, which they did.

Mark Van Ells: Eventually, yeah.

V. G. Rowley: That's right, they did.

Mark Van Ells: I suppose we should just talk about the Luzon campaign, and then we'll go back and cover some other issues.

V. G. Rowley: All right.

Mark Van Ells: Just describe this briefly for me.

V. G. Rowley: Luzon.

Mark Van Ells: Uh-huh

V. G. Rowley: All right, Luzon was a different ball game altogether. By that time we had built our strength up. My platoon had about—we had about 30 people, I think, in my platoon when we left Leyte and landed in Luzon. We landed at Lingayen Gulf, which is about, I think, about 80 or 90 miles from the outskirts of Manila. We were to anchor another right flank for General Krueger, but that was a myth because we hadn't anymore than gotten there until they moved us up into the mountains. We were on patrol duty,



extensive patrol duty and combat control. Not only reconnaissance patrol, but combat control.

Mark Van Ells:

What is the distinction?

V. G. Rowley:

The distinction between the two: reconnaissance is a small patrol, maybe four or five at the most; and you are on an information-gathering mission, not combat but information. Of course, if you have to fight, you have to fight, but it was such a small amount. But we would move fast and maybe go out one day and stay a day, observing and back the next day. As compared to combat patrol—combat enforces, probably, a platoon of 30 or more; and most of the time it was a whole troop would make a push. At one time it was a whole regiment made a push; incidental[ly,] they were driven back and we had to retreat to back to where we had started from. So that is the big difference.

Mark Van Ells:

And what you're doing there is probing for weaknesses in the line? Or I suppose it's information-gathering too, but it's a different kind?

V. G. Rowley::

Well, it's not exactly probing. That, of course, but the big thing was to re-take the island. We would try, I think, the big mission—I wasn't told too much—I just did what somebody said to do, like everybody else did, but, as far as I could see, the main thrust was to establish some kind of a perimeter. Then, once you established a perimeter, bring up heavy weapons and bring up some mobility so you could spread out from there and bring in more people. But if the perimeter couldn't be established, then of course you had to make a haste retreat back to where you started from and figure out something else. We were driven back once, only once that I remember. We lost a lot of good people. I've got names of people here. Some of them were good friends of mine. It was terrible that way.

Mark Van Ells:

Of these campaigns that you describe, which—is there one that you'd characterize as worse than the others, or more difficult? If so, why would that be?

V. G. Rowley:

Well, more difficult, I think Luzon would be the most difficult one. In as much as it was so heavily fortified, and so it was difficult. We didn't have quite as much rain there I don't think. The jungle wasn't quite—although there was a lot of jungle fighting, it wasn't nothing like New Guinea. New Guinea was all jungle. You know you could cut yourself a real nice path going someplace and you'd come back maybe three or four days later and it was all overgrown.

The Japanese had a bad habit of cutting a field of fire very low. If you didn't get down and look you wouldn't see it. They'd set up their machine guns at this low level and chop off your feet: cut you right off. We ran into that once and I know the Marines into it and I know the 32<sup>nd</sup> did. So I know it wasn't just us that had that problem. Then, of course, they were great for tying people up in trees and letting them stay up there as sharpshooters. They had long-barreled rifles which gave them much better vision to fire. They didn't have very good eyes, apparently, but they could shoot pretty good with those long-barreled rifles. I might just say a word about our weapons.

Mark Van Ells: Okay.

V. G. Rowley: We initially had what was called the 03 Rifle. The 03, that's the date it was developed.

Mark Van Ells: The old Springfield. That goes back to World War I and maybe further—must go further back than that even! Anyway, that's what we had initially. Then we got an excellent weapon in the M1 Ground. That was just a beautiful, beautiful weapon. If you can call a weapon beautiful, that was it. I had one that was issued to me shortly after I got to New Britain, and I used it all the way through New Guinea and into Leyte although the supply officers kept after me all the time to turn it in. But it was, you know, with a weapon like that, it's like people. You get sort of used to it. You know just how to adjust the sight even if it gets real loose and plugged up with mud, you dig the mud out of it, throw it down with a finger and clean it out a little bit and put in another clip. If it fires, it's very effective. They were a very effective weapon. The Japanese were completely caught off-guard with that gun. It was operated by gas chamber. You never had to; you could just pull the trigger, release it, and pull again. Whereas, compared to the 03 you had to operate the hold, which made it—it was a good—very good.

Mark Van Ells: I was kind of heading in that direction anyway. I was going to ask you if the supply problems and that sort of thing that you had experienced on New Britain had been alleviated by the time you got to Luzon? Did the war machine, as they say, did it function more effectively?

V. G. Rowley: Right.

Mark Van Ells: Were you able to get more supplies, more food and that sort of thing? Or did that stay a problem throughout [??]

V. G. Rowley: No, it didn't, even toward the end of Leyte. You see—the military forces were converging from the Hawaiian Islands. Was that east? I guess, and we were converging from the south and, of course, as you converge you bring in all kinds of fancy things: better food, bigger weapons, more air power. The Navy came in more often. They landed troops where we wouldn't have been able to get to otherwise. So it was much more sophisticated. We had excellent air cover, and later on in Leyte, although the weather was so bad there, that a lot of times they couldn't fly. But, in Luzon, we had excellent air cover and if we needed support we could call for it and usually get it. P-51s, the pilots of the P-51 planes, I can't say enough for those young kids. Boy, I've seen 'em come up that valley—I can see 'em yet. You'd look right down on the top of them. They were so low and they would come through, drop their bombs, come back around, strafe. It was just a miracle that they could survive 'cause, you know, they were just kids, very well trained and good boys. One of the big problems we had in Luzon was that the Japanese—first of all, let me say that we were set-up on the mountains, not—I don't know how far, but maybe ten, twelve miles from Manila. Then, the division that was fighting mostly in Manila was running out of steam. So they called us to come in there and the Japanese had retreated to a Chinese cemetery, where they had huge stones and caves where the people were buried down there and the Japanese had gotten in there. It was considered unethical, to say the least, to throw any hand grenades in there, so we had very little recourse to get them out except maybe flamethrowers. We didn't have near enough of those so it was kind of a waiting game around that cemetery until they moved out of there. Finally, of course, they didn't have anything to eat and they had to come out. I think as many as them could escape back up into the mountains, but that was a little different kind of combat than most of us ever thought we'd encounter.

Mark Van Ells: I guess.

V. G. Rowley: [laughs]

Mark Van Ells: That's interesting that you decided not to throw grenades into those graves.

V. G. Rowley: We didn't decide it. We were told not to.

Mark Van Ells: Well, but someone had made that decision.

- V. G. Rowley: Oh yeah. Well, they didn't want to desecrate the graves because it would have been a very serious matter with not only the Filipinos, but the Chinese would have taken a very dim view of that, you know. The Japanese had done their share of desecration. There's no question about that. But we didn't.
- Mark Van Ells: Does the experience of combat, the physical and emotional experience, does it get any easier as time goes on? I mean, as you go into another battle do you say, "I'm used to this," or do you remain terror-struck?
- V. G. Rowley: It's not so much terror anymore. The first engagement was terror, I would call it that. After that you sort of live from day to day. When somebody gets hit bad or is killed close to you, you think, "Well, missed me this time. Maybe I am a little luckier than I thought I'd be." I've had the weeds clipped off over the top of my head many, many times, left flat on the ground and pinned down, couldn't move. We would get some artillery in and loosen it up or somebody would play brave boy and go up and throw some hand grenades into a machine gun nest and then we could move. I might just mention we talked about weapons. A new, I think it was a new, weapon that had never been used anywhere else before. It was 240-millimeter cannon. It was a long rifle. That was set up in the mountains and they would soar over our heads into Manila. You'd have to see the City of Manila to appreciate this, but some of those buildings were three or four feet thick, of solid rock; just almost impregnable. These big shells, where we were sitting on the mountain, we could almost see the damage. We could see where the shells had hit and we could hear the whoosh, whoosh, whoosh as it went over our heads; see where the shells would land and burst. Some of those huge buildings--beautiful, big old buildings were just blown to bits, just to dust, to get the Japanese out. They were not going to give up. They never wanted to give up. They were a tough bunch of guys; there was no question about that. It was hard going.
- Mark Van Ells: Let's move onto some other topics. I'm interested in the topic of disease. The South Pacific was a very disease—it's an area full of disease; malaria, and dengue fever, and various kinds of trench foot. Describe how that affected your unit.
- V. G. Rowley: Well, that was a serious problem, of course. I hadn't been on New Britain very long, I think about two months, and I got dengue fever and was taken to the field hospital. But we were so short of people

that they only kept you in there like overnight. Doused you up good with antibiotics—give you your rifle back—out you went.

Mark Van Ells:

So what sort of symptoms you get?

V. G. Rowley:

Well, with dengue, well, it's like malaria. I had malaria also, so I know what they are. With Dengue, except, you get very, very weak and it's a matter of not having any appetite; and, of course, when you are in combat with that sort of an experience it's pretty scary. Malaria fever: when I did get malaria fever it was later on, and we had some medication which was excellent. I got into the hospital in a hurry and got taken care of and stayed in there about three or four days. But there was just a steady stream of people coming into the hospital and out, you know, like a revolving door. They were in there for a few days and out. There was just so much of it. Then—

Mark Van Ells:

No, go ahead.

V. G. Rowley:

Okay. When—well, I'm this would be something that'd come a little later, perhaps after the war was over, or just as it was winding down.

Mark Van Ells:

Okay.

V. G. Rowley:

Do you want to hear about that?

Mark Van Ells:

Sure, why not.

V. G. Rowley:

Okay. We were in Luzon I think about five months, four or five months, and most of that was combat. Of course, a lot of us had developed—we had lots of points. You get points for being married and points for this and points for that and combat experiences. I think I had about a hundred points and I had about the most of anybody in our troop I think by that time. There were replacements coming in replacing the older guys all along. After, in Leyte and after Leyte through Luzon there were replacements coming in real well. So as we were winding down in Luzon, all of us who had a lot of points thought we were going to go home. In fact, were given the idea that we would go home as soon as the campaign was over. Then when we got back into a rehabilitation area they had fallout of everybody. We got the word from our troop commander that nobody was going home. We were all going to Japan, and we were going to make a beachhead hit in Japan about Thanksgiving time. Ended up it would have been—they— [??] be that, but they would have that they made it earlier than that.

Every one of us would be combat-readied. Our squads would be built up to be ten percent above normal strength and all new weapons, all new equipment, everything brand new. Each troop was given where they were to land, and that would have been a real mess! We heard and we were told and drummed into us that we would probably expect 75 to 80 percent casualties. Everything would have to be destroyed, anything that walked—men, women, children, dogs, cats, whatever—destroyed. If we did get on shore we would be lucky, to put it mildly. Another fellow and I decided we would go into Manila. By this time it was secure and they had an USO set up. So we went to Manila and I hadn't had any ice cream since I left home so I ate about ten cups of caribou milk ice cream. In the bottom of the last one I looked and it had about [laughs] half-an-inch of I think it was cow manure.

Mark Van Ells: Yeah.

V. G. Rowley: I'm not real sure, but it was sure dirt anyway. So, as a consequence, before I got out of there I developed yellow jaundice, and I really had it bad. So I was put in the hospital when the war ended. Which [laughs] I wanted to get out of there in the worst way, but then I had to wait for transportation to Japan because our outfit had already gone to Japan. They went into Japan on D-Day—the first, well, the first outfits to land. So I got to Japan after the war ended.

Mark Van Ells: I'll come back to some of the lingering effects of disease later. Where there many actual deaths because of the disease? If you look at the Civil War, I mean, there were more deaths due to disease than actual combat. I know that's not the case in World War II, but—

V. G. Rowley: No, I really can't say that there were. I think they— In the service I don't know of anyone who died from disease in the service. Now, there probably were, but not to my knowledge. But, of course, we paid dearly for it after we got home. I had special problems with my nerves because I had gone hours and hours and days without sleep. I'm not the only one. I mean lots of people did it, but I had trouble sleeping. I had trouble sleeping when we would get into a rest area because I was so keyed up. Of course in the back of your mind all time is more combat. If you've got nothing to look forward to, more combat. So I think that's the major problem that I had when I came out of the service. I wasn't wounded to any serious extent. I did have a crease in the back of my head. I never did get a Purple Heart because I didn't report it. But it wasn't serious and the medic cut the hair off, put a plaster

over it. I didn't even leave the forward area. I did have a very serious time with malaria and nerve problems when I came out. My wife and I were all set to buy a little cheese factory which was probably a good thing we didn't do. But we were talking about it, but then the doctor thought I better not do that. It would be too much inside. So I went to work for the highway department as a surveyor assistant. I got a lot of fresh air.

Mark Van Ells: Do you think that helped?

V. G. Rowley: Well, I think it helped some, but I ended up here at the Veterans Administration in Madison. They said I should go to college. I had been out of high school for nine years, didn't learn too much [laughs] from that little school that I was in before. So it was a little difficult especially in and out of the hospital the first two and a half years, an awful lot I was in and out of the hospital, but they were very good to me—I could not say enough about the quality of care that the veterans got. I think they just were excellent. I had no complaints. I went under Public Law 16, which was the disability act. I got a pension which was very good, and my wife and I lived pretty good on that considering the times and in and out of the hospital a lot, of course. Then, we had a youngster. A baby, our first one in 1947 after I had been home for awhile.

Mark Van Ells: Well, I'll come back to some of those topics later.

V.G. Rowley: Okay.

Mark Van Ells: Because I am interested in the post-war experiences as well as the military. When you were overseas and you weren't in combat did you get much free time or down time in a rest area or something? If so, what did you do?

V. G. Rowley: I'll tell you we had very little down time. It wasn't in the most forward area but usually it was in a forward area so to speak, where you were available at a moment's notice practically. Give you an example: we were in an area like that in New Guinea. They decided that we should have—that they should issue us new weapons, and some of the guys wanted Tommy guns because they were in good—so-called good for narrow recess action where there was a lot of brush. I didn't want one. I liked my M1, but some of our people wanted Tommy guns so they offered—they were given Tommy guns but before some of them got the ammunition for the Tommy guns they were called out. So they had a gun without ammunition. [laughs] We were sent out on a miserable mission and a lot of these fellows—well, not a lot, but three or four of these

guys had Tommy guns [laughs] and they couldn't shoot the darn things. So they had to borrow. Well, one guy got a rifle from a corpse and another fellow borrowed one. It was just a chaotic mess. You know, they issued the guns [laughs] and no ammunition. It's like giving you a hand grenade and pulling the pin before you get it.

Mark Van Ells: Doesn't make a lot of sense sometimes.

V. G. Rowley: Don't make much sense, no. But we moved quick like that without any warning; see talk about rest, no there was not very much because we didn't have enough people early, of course, to do that.

Mark Van Ells: When you did have spare time what did you do to occupy that? You mentioned you would write home.

V. G. Rowley: Write letters and read if you could find something to read, lay around, a lot of poker. There were a lot of guys that played poker. I wasn't a poker player but a lot of them did. I did a lot of reading, and just loafing and tried to stay in shape so that I could be ready for another one when it came.

Mark Van Ells: Did you have access to alcohol at all?

V. G. Rowley: No, not really. We had a guy who was a cook. One of the cooks who learned how to make alcohol by fermenting coconut milk. [laughs]. I never drank much, but I don't drink hardly any, but boy, it was potent, I guess. These guys got pretty sick on that stuff. But no, we didn't, we had very little beer. One time in—this wasn't alcohol, but one time when we were set up on the line in New Guinea—sorry, in Luzon—word came that the Red Cross had set up an ice cream station down on the coast. Everybody was supposed to go down and stand in line and take turns you know. You didn't dare leave your position—  
[Tape interruption ca. 15 seconds]

Mark Van Ells: Okay, so as we left off, you left off you didn't get any ice cream.

V. G. Rowley: We didn't get any ice cream. None of our people did. I know some did from another part. The Navy and the ones that were set up. There was an engineering outfit down there and some others that were set up on the coast got the ice cream. They didn't have enough to go around for the combat people.

Mark Van Ells: Well, that brings up the issue: frontline versus rear echelon soldiers. You read from time to time in the military literature



about how there is some kind of tension between the two. As a frontline soldier fighting, did you have any sort of—?

V. G. Rowley: No, I don't think so because we never knew when we'd have to depend on them. When we'd get on board ship to go some place it was usually with the Navy or Merchant Marine and they had good food on there. We liked that part. I never felt—I always felt kind of like, well, you're lucky to get it, good for you. I was just not quite that lucky this time. Maybe my luck will come later.

Mark Van Ells: So there is no talk in the barracks or whatever about the boys in the back with the beer and the broads or was the—

V. G. Rowley: No, I never heard much—

Mark Van Ells: Just wasn't a topic of conversation—a

V. G. Rowley: I never heard much of that. Our people were resigned, I might say, I guess that's the best way to say it, to combat. They were kind of proud of their—you know, that they could take this kind of treatment and not cave in. Some of them caved in but those that didn't were pretty proud. I went to a 112<sup>th</sup>, only went to one, 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry reunion at Dallas, and, gee, there's a close, very close relationship with those fellows yet. Some of them are pretty decrepit. They can't walk; some of them can't walk very well. They've had strokes and they can't see. My old platoon sergeant was a terrific guy. He was a big strong man, Texan. He thought that the Yankees didn't know anything and the Texans had all the answers, but he was a good man, a very good combat soldier. He's had strokes and he can't talk and when he saw me, tears ran down his cheeks, you know, and he had his hand out, shake hands. It was pretty sad. I decided I didn't want to go to any more of them because it was just too depressing. So I would say there was a feeling of camaraderie that was established in our outfit, now I'm speaking of. I can't speak for anybody else.

Mark Van Ells: That's all I can ask.

V. G. Rowley: Yes. That was just pretty loyal to ourselves and if we got some help from somebody, thank God, and if we didn't we had to do it for ourselves. That's about the way you put it, I guess. Our food situation, I might say a word about that.

Mark Van Ells: Sure.

V. G. Rowley: Early in the, early in the war, in the '40's, '43, early in '43, throughout '43 and early into '44, was pretty bad. Rations were very simplistic. When you got something good it wasn't very good. They thought it was good when they gave it to you, you know. A lot of dehydrated eggs and dehydrated milk—dehydrated this and dehydrated that. You got awful sick of it. We had one kind of ration called C1, I think it was C1, and it came in a big case, pretty, pretty bad, I tell you. [23] You ate that, you were very, very hungry. It was beans, and not very good beans, and it had a can of meat that was mostly mutton or goat. It came from Australia, stuff that really Americans aren't used to, you know. Rations were bad. Well then, as we went on up the line and got into Leyte, rations improved, and then when we got into Luzon, very good rations. We had K1, K rations which was a little box, looked a little like a cracker jack box, dimensions of about 8 to 9 inches and about 4 or 5 inches wide and an inch and about a half thick. They were sealed in heavy wax. You'd get one for breakfast, lunch and dinner. There were different foods in there. You got tired of those, too, but there were such things as hard chocolate and a fruit bar, and coffee. Always had cigarettes. They never—I think the cigarette people knew how to take care of the soldiers—for good, because we always had cigarettes. But the rations got better as we went up the line. Then in Luzon, where we were set up, it was impossible to get rations up to us by car, by truck, so they delivered rations by plane. They would fly over and there'd be somebody up there push the boxes out. They were in heavy. I think it was wood, if I remember right, but it might have been cardboard cartons. Sometimes they would rupture but most of the time the rations were in pretty good shape. Then we would have to go down and get them. Sometimes the Japanese would get to them before we did, but usually [laughs]. We could beat them there.

Mark Van Ells: What about sleeping accommodations?

V. G. Rowley: Accommodations?

Mark Van Ells: Did you have like a tent? Or did you sleep out doors?

V. G. Rowley: In combat you mean?

Mark Van Ells: Oh, in combat and when you weren't in combat.

V. G. Rowley: In combat nothing, you slept wherever you could. Sometimes you didn't even have a tent.

- Mark Van Ells: Is it possible to even sleep in combat? I mean I have seen photographs of like a guy fighting and someone sleeping, but you don't know if he is really sleeping or not.
- V. G. Rowley:: No, really not much sleep. I slept very, very little in combat. Like I told you, most of us we slept very little, not just me. If you were on guard, of course, you didn't sleep and if you were in a four-man hole or a position with four people; one guy had to stay awake all the time so you didn't—every two hours you'd change. You didn't hardly get to sleep, if you were going to sleep, until you'd be wakened up. Then in the daytime, when your turn came you were on patrol. Otherwise you had your weapon to take care of and you had to keep the place fairly neat. Always had some kind of a detail that has to be taken care of. I got the detail of taking the wounded back to the hospitals a few times. You would take a small patrol and that was the best duty you could get because then when you got there you had a night without any worries in the hospital, and stay over night and then go back to combat the next day. I did get that a few times in Luzon. That was the best thing. We had a couple of prisoners we took back. One was a colonel, a Japanese colonel.
- Mark Van Ells: Replacements, as you mentioned, you were one yourself and then as time went on you got more and more replacements. Now, when you study the Vietnam War one of the big problems, that a lot of military people and historians identify, is the fact that there was this constant rotation of soldiers and they couldn't build unit cohesion. Now I realize World War II is a little bit different, but there was the replacement system and new people did have to come in as casualties increased. I'm wondering how the new people got along and what you old veterans thought of them?
- V. G. Rowley: Well, replacements, I have to go by the different places that we were located, because they were in different places. When we got through—I being a replacement in New Britain, several of us came in there at the same time, and they had pretty well filled up their outfit by that time to where they wanted it when we left there. Then, in New Guinea, the problem was that we didn't get any replacements. We had depleted our ranks. Then we would put two squads together and make one. Even two platoons were put together to make one. We had at one time, I think, a platoon was down. We had two platoons put together and we only had twenty people where there should have been almost twice that many. All at once then we did start getting some replacements. There was no problem with them that I can think of. I think once in a while you'd get some officer, some second lieutenant from the States,

who thought he knew how to win the war in twenty-four hours. "I'm going to put a BL, an MLR, line here and I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that with the weapons that I have." It was usually a joke. Then he would be real herd-bound in the fact he wanted you to wear a helmet. We couldn't wear helmets very well because in the jungle a helmet would be rattling against the brush and it would drop down over your eyes. You couldn't see anything. It was heavy. So very few of us wore helmets in combat in our outfit.

Mark Van Ells:

Did you wear a hat or did you wear anything at all?

V. G. Rowley:

Just a cap, a regular old GI cap. We'd reissue helmets but we'd usually leave them and forget about them. Well then some second lieutenant would come in and he'd chew us out because we didn't have our helmets on you know. Well, then he'd find out before he was there [laughs] very long that a helmet was not necessary. It was not a part of the equipment that we needed. It was just things like that. Once in a while we would get a noncom in from the states who had done nothing but train, well they came from Fort Raleigh, done nothing but train horse cavalrymen in the States. Didn't know the first thing about combat, but they would be tech sergeants, for example with the rocker [??]. They would come into the platoon and they would want to take over and we would have to put them in their place. But that didn't happen very often. Generally speaking we had excellent people.

Mark Van Ells:

Well, like when a new guy comes in and it's his first combat experience—

V. G. Rowley:

Yeah.

Mark Van Ells:

I mean, isn't—

V. G. Rowley:

It's tough.

Mark Van Ells:

I would imagine there is a little wariness among you veterans, too, that perhaps he's not going to be able to.

V. G. Rowley:

That's true, that we had, and we'd talk to them, pretty seriously about that.

Mark Van Ells:

Before you went into combat?

V. G. Rowley:

Well, if he came in while we were in combat we would talk to him pretty seriously about it. By nightfall he would know quite a bit

because we'd probably be shot at a few times. We lost a few people because they didn't listen to the old veterans. You know if they'd listen to us—we didn't know all the answers, don't get me wrong, but from experience we knew when it was smart to fight and when it was smart to run. Whether the officer of the day—well, that's another thing. I didn't have very often, I didn't have an officer. Most of the time I was platoon leader myself and so were the other noncoms because the officers didn't really last very long. They were very, very expendable. When we would get a new guy in there he would learn just like we did that you didn't always do things the way it sounded like it would be the "military way". You would probably, you know, if you get shot at it probably wouldn't be a good idea to just lay still and act like you are dead and see what the enemy was going to do. Rather than take a machine gun and start rattling the thing away and causing some Jap someplace else to shoot at you from some other angle. You know you had to be a little careful about things like that. *We* learned it very fast. *I* learned it very fast down in New Britain, I know that. I learned a lesson down there. It stood me in good stead when I got into combat in other areas.

Mark Van Ells: I've just got one last question about the South Pacific and then we will move onto occupations and postwar experiences. That involves contact with the native peoples of the South Pacific. Did you have much contact, say with the Filipinos or the people of New Guinea? If so, how would you characterize them?

V. G. Rowley: Yes, we did. We had a lot of contact with the natives in New Britain and New Guinea. They, of course, have a culture all of their own. Some of them had so—we were told the reputation of being headhunters. Never bothered us. They were very loyal to the Americans, and if we were going to—There were times when we would go some kind of a force platoon by platoon. The natives would go along with us, and they'd carry all of our packs, climb the mountains, little kids go up the mountainsides, and the mothers and the old people and everybody would go with us. Then they would set up a perimeter around us and they would even guard, stand guard all night. We would stand guard also, but they would stand guard outside of our perimeter, and they really were so happy that we were there. Now, you understand what we are talking about here is a very primitive people. Most of them didn't have any clothes, didn't wear any clothes. They were barefooted, had things in their lips, spears through their lips. Some of them had spears through their nose.

Mark Van Ells: Must have been quite a sight for a kid from Muscoda.

- V. G. Rowley: Oh yes, it was a sight, but I didn't think too much about it because they were friendly. I'm looking for some friends. They were a friendly people and good to us. They would share with you. They didn't have much food, but what little they had they would share with us if we wanted to eat it. I didn't eat any of it, but I didn't know what it was, but they were always willing to share and they spoke what they call "pigeon English", hard to understand, but they would make their point. That was good. We had good times with those people. They always had a leader. "Lului" I think was what they usually called their leader in New Guinea. I don't remember what their leader was in the other places, but now in the Philippines, of course, these people were more or less culturally like we are except they were extremely poor, and a lot of them were practically starving. So when we landed there one of the big things that had to be done was to take care of the population, not by us but by a separate group that came in altogether different. Ships were loaded and unloaded for them. And very loyal to us too. Although there were some what they were called Marcapeelies [??] who were loyal to the Japanese. When the Filipinos would catch one of them, boy, they would make them pay dearly. It was kind of sad to see or hear about, but it happened all the time. Nearly everyday there for awhile there would be something like that happen. No, we didn't have any trouble with any of the natives. I thought that they were very, very good people.
- Mark Van Ells: In fact, helpful to operations. In the Philippines—as you mentioned, it was more of a modernized country—
- V. G. Rowley: Except up in the hills. The Moros weren't. They didn't like the Americans. The Moros were communist, I think. Weren't they?
- Mark Van Ells: They don't seem to like anybody.
- V. G. Rowley: They don't care much for anybody except themselves. But we ran into some Moros a couple times and it was just like fighting the Japanese. They started after us with modern weapons, boy, I don't know where they got them, but they had plenty of ammunition. It was a little tough there for awhile, not very long. They ran.
- Mark Van Ells: But were there Filipino allies? I mean, was there an organized Filipino army that was assisting you—
- V. G. Rowley: Yeah, I think there had been before the war and during—early in the war but they had lost. The ones that we ran into had lost much if any semblance of organization because they were so decimated

throughout the mountains, and of course times were very, very difficult for them too. So we didn't really have too much to do with the Filipino army as such. We had heard about them. The Filipino scouts, of course, were historically a very brave people and a lot of them were lost in Cabanatuan and Corregidor. Those that weren't lost escaped to the mountains. Some Americans were in the mountains, but didn't have much to do with them. I think on one patrol we ran into some Filipinos up in the mountains, organized Filipinos. I think there was a platoon.

Mark Van Ells: When V-J Day happened you were in the hospital as you mentioned, but you eventually did hook up with your unit again in Japan.

V. G. Rowley: Later.

Mark Van Ells: Yeah. Why don't you describe—First of all I'd be interested to know what you thought of Japan before you went there—Japan and Japanese. You had been fighting the Japanese for all these years. I'm interested in what you expected to see, and what you found.

V. G. Rowley: Well, I expected to see—well I had heard about the devastation and I had heard about the problem, you know the way Hiroshima and Nagasaki were wiped off the face of the earth. I had heard about how our B-29's had firebombed the cities, but I had no idea what it would look like. When I went up there I carried a rifle with me. They had given me a rifle and I kept it with me all the way up there. We landed and I can remember this real well. We were put on a train and their seats on the train run horizontal with the car, just like church pews. Pretty hard sitting. Well, I got on there and there were quite a few Americans also on there. I laid down, went to sleep, and when I woke up I saw nothing but Japanese caps, peak caps. Of course the first natural inclination was to go for the rifle. I was about half asleep. I had some MP's that pinned my arms back immediately and told me that that was not the polite thing to do. [laughs] They weren't shooting at 'em anymore. We weren't supposed to shoot them.

Mark Van Ells: Did you expect like resistance?

V. G. Rowley: Caught off guard. No, I didn't expect resistance.

Mark Van Ells: I mean in general.

V.G. Rowley: I didn't know what to expect, you know. But it wasn't any problem, but the thing that really, really was outstanding as far as I was concerned, was absolute total devastation mile after mile after mile. If you were going through a city, nothing but smokestacks standing.

Mark Van Ells: Now, you were based where?

V. G. Rowley: You know, I wish I could tell you. I don't know the name of the town, but it wasn't very far out of Tokyo. It was close to the coast, and I can't tell you where it was. I was only there for about four weeks I guess. I don't know. I didn't get acquainted with the Japanese people. I'd had enough of them, and I didn't really want to associate with them. Most of us didn't. Some of the younger fellows that had joined the outfit did, and they had developed some friends over there. Nothing wrong with that either, but I didn't hob-knob with them.

Mark Van Ells: And so then you got your discharge then. You came back to the States in December?

V. G. Rowley: I got back to the States in December, and I got my discharge in January, but let's see, there was another thing that happened to me over there I guess that I was going to tell you about.

Mark Van Ells: In Japan?

V. G. Rowley: Yeah. Well, can't think of it now. Oh yeah, well, when I got there all the old guys had gone home, see.

Mark Van Ells: In your unit you mean?

Yeah. All the people that had points, gone. So I thought, boy, I got it made now. I'm gonna just sack out on the cot and do whatever I want to. It wasn't very long until I was taking a little nap about 9:00 o'clock in the morning and somebody jabbed me with a rifle and said, "Don't you know that we're having close order drill this morning and goin' on a full field pack march?" "No, I don't know that." "Well, we are and you've gotta fall out and get ready to go." It happened to be that he was a first sergeant who had been in my platoon and carried a BAR rifle for me. He had gone up pretty fast. I said, "I'm not going to do that." "Well, then we've gotta send you over to squadron headquarters and have you court-martialed." I don't think he said court-martialed, but disciplined, I guess, is what he said. So they took me over there, and they balled me out, you know, properly as I stood at attention



which didn't bother me. Then he said, "Now I'm going to tell you that you don't have to worry about it. You go back and we will get you a jeep and a driver and you can drive around if you want to and look at some of the scenery." I said, "Well, I don't care about that, but if you wish for me to do that, I will." But I never did. I just stayed pretty close to the area. I had a little apprehension about those people.

Mark Van Ells: The Japanese, you mean

V. G. Rowley: Yeah. You know this war hadn't been over very long, and we had a—I don't know if you've heard about this, but there was a fantastically huge explosion. You ever hear about it?

Mark Van Ells: I don't think so.

V. G. Rowley: Well, what happened—the story that came to me was that somebody was driving a truck loaded with ammunition. It got away from him going down the mountainside. He jumped out, and it ran into a munitions dump of Japanese ammunition that had been piled up, accumulated, and it was an explosion like an atomic bomb. People remembered that, [laughs] of course. When I got there they were all telling me about it. They didn't know what had caused it at that time; they thought maybe the Japanese had caused the thing. So I had a little apprehension about getting out among these people. After all, I shot a few of them, shot at them before that. Why would I want to go out now and hob-knob with them? I know I didn't really feel that close to these people, and they didn't feel too close to me I'm sure because I didn't treat them with the greatest of respect. You know, to me they were the enemy. Maybe it's not right to be that way, but I couldn't help that. That's the way I felt about it. I'd lost a lot of good friends. Our little town of Blue River lost close friends. They were all acquaintances of mine. The first known Wisconsin casualty came from Blue River.

Mark Van Ells: I didn't know that.

V. G. Rowley: Bobby Shattuck. His dad had the drug store, and he was the only child they had. His father died during the war. He got on drugs, as I understand it, and his mother lived to be an old lady. This little side story here, my wife and I were in Hawaii [tape interruption, ca. 4 sec. when tape resumes, repeats from "During the war..."] and I made up my mind that when I got to the Punchbowl I was going to find Bob's grave. We did, and I took a picture of it; when I came back I went down to Boscobel with it and gave it to his

mother. She was very thankful. She lost her mind as a consequence of this tragedy. But we lost a lot of good people from our town. I mean eight from a small town is unusual.

Mark Van Ells: That is an awful lot.

V. G. Rowley: Yeah, and they were all either in school or just ahead of me or just in back.

Mark Van Ells: I bet it was hard to let go of that sort of—those feelings.

V. G. Rowley: Yeah, you can't, you know, you don't forget that right away. I have now. I mean my company that I worked for did a lot of business with the Japanese. It don't look anything now like it did then!

Mark Van Ells: For sure!

V. G. Rowley: They were *very* industrious. How they rebuilt that country as rapidly—of course they had good help from us, but still you'd have to see that to believe it.

Mark Van Ells: Okay. Postwar experiences, you came back then in late '45, got your final discharge then in 1946.

V. G. Rowley: Yeah, January.

Mark Van Ells: You were, pardon my math, you were about 25 years old or so, married—

V. G. Rowley: At that time?

Mark Van Ells: Yeah, and you need to get your life back on track. What are your priorities when you got out of the service? What did you want to do and how did you go about getting things back on track?

V.G. Rowley: Well, yeah, my wife who passed away in 1958 said, "Our first order of business is your health." So she had worked at Oscar Mayer's while I was overseas and saved a little money. Of course, I was kind of frugal too, and I sent money home. We had a little money put away. It wouldn't be anything now, but at that time it was some, and so she said, "Well, I want you to get your health back. Then you should go to school."

Mark Van Ells: What exactly were your health problems? As we discussed before, you mean malaria?

- V.G. Rowley: Malaria, I had a lot of malaria problems, but the big thing was lack of sleep. Lots of times I would wake up in the middle of the night and out of the bed reaching for a rifle. My poor wife, I don't know how she put up with me, to be honest about it. But I outgrew that and outgrew the malaria, and by the time I was about a second semester junior at the university here I was pretty good. I had a few chills once in awhile. I'd go over to the hospital, and walked in, and they knew who I was, and they would give me a bed. The doctors would come in and treat me, and I would rest up awhile and out I'd go.
- Mark Van Ells: You sought medical treatment for this then, right after the war?
- V.G. Rowley: Oh, yeah.
- Mark Van Ells:P When you got back.
- V.G. Rowley: Yeah. I had a paper from Fort McCoy, or Camp McCoy at that time, and it gave me certain privileges as far as medication is concerned.
- Mark Van Ells: I tell you they were the most wonderful, I can't describe it enough. I just want to see. I don't know if there's anything on here about my illness or not I overlooked but, you can't describe it because, well, just to give you an example, whenever I needed medical attention in Richland Center or Muscoda or wherever it was, the doctors were just great. When I came down here I was coming from Milwaukee when I stopped in Madison at the veterans Administration. I happened to run into a guy there from Muscoda who I knew. He was working there, and he had been in the Marines. We played basketball together when we were kids on the same—oh, no, we played against one another, in high school—that's right, but we played basketball together, and baseball. So he said, "Gees, Viv you look terrible!" He says, "I think you ought to be under a doctors care" and he says "You better go over to see the doctor." I said, "Well, what I'm thinking about is going to school." I said, "I have to make a living and I don't know just how I'm going to do that." Well, he says, "Why don't you go down and see Dean Kivlin at the University?" He said, "He is very good. He's in the Ag School and he's very good and he'll help you out." He said, "I've sent people down there and he takes good care of them." So I went down and I was thinking maybe I would go to a short course, something like that, see. But the ol' dean wouldn't hear of that. He said: "No, no, no. You gotta go four years. That's the only way." I told him, "Boy, I been out of high school nine years and learn much when I was there. [laughs] I said, "That's

going to be a big drag.” He said, “Well, no. I tell you what,” he says, “If you need a tutor,” he says, “You get a tutor.” He says, “You’re going to be put in for Public Law 16,” and, he says, “you’ll be getting that pay and it’s a lot more than they get if they’re just going under the GI Bill because you’ll get your pension.” They gave me 80% disability, I think it was at that time, or 70%—70% or 80%, one of the two. It’s—who am I to argue with him if that’s what they wanted to do, you know, any old port in the storm. So I went home and I told my wife, and she was just ecstatic that I would be going to college. So, let’s see now. That was during the summer of ’46; ’49. Not ’49. ’46. So then I went to work. In the interim I’d had kind of a job. I got to work for the highway department. I took an examination and got on the outside work carrying the tape and doing the menial jobs that anybody who don’t know anything about engineering would do [laughs]. But it was good for me because I was outside, see, And I could sit down once in awhile. While the rest of them were doing some work I’d sit down and stayed in condition. Then that fall of ’46 is when I started the university. Then I went through the summer sessions, and I got out at the end of the summer session in ’49.

Mark Van Ells: Do you think that you would have gone to college had it not been for the Public Law 16?

V.G. Rowley: I doubt it. I don’t think so because I had a pretty good standing in the cheese industry by that time. I had run a big crew. I’d been manager of a bug crew of workers and unskilled workers, which is pretty tough. Then, I had also worked for a big company, Beatrice Foods, and they promised me a job when I came back if I wanted to take it. So I doubt it very much if I would have.

Mark Van Ells: So, when it came to making a living that wasn’t necessarily the issue, although I’m sure the college degree helped your prospects.

V.G. Rowley: I think the thing mostly what I expected to get when I started was just a reprieve long enough to become healthy. Then as time went on and I saw that, you know, so many people were going to school and the job market was going to be pretty tight. Maybe I better stay and not drop out like I kind of thought I would a few times. [laughs] Get with the chemistry courses is a little discouraging, you know. [laughs] So I stuck it out. It was tough. I worked awful hard. I’ve put in a lot [End of Side B, Tape 1. ca. 45 min.] of library hours on chemistry experiments, especially biochemistry and some of those courses that were very foreign to me; but, like I say, I think there just couldn’t be better. I was treated, just, so good. By the time I was a first semester senior, I had very few

attacks, kept getting less and less. By the time, then, as I approached graduation, the end of the semester, you get a paper and you fill it out if you want to be reinstated. The pension had dropped some. I've forgotten now. I think it went down to 20% disability, which was fine. I had no argument with that. I decided I didn't need any more help. I kind of liked to find out if I couldn't run this on my own like I used to. So I just didn't—I told them I didn't want to file for any renewal. They thought that was something special that somebody would take that attitude, but I never did file for anything else.

Mark Van Ells: And did you need it? You're—obviously you are here today and everything, but did you continue to have a couple of attacks?

V.G. Rowley: Yeah, I've had chills when nobody else would have chills. I remember one time I had been out of school for three, four, five years, and I had a little problem. I went to the doctor and he questioned me and I said, well, I had malaria. "Well," he says, "You've got malaria now." So then he took a smear out of a finger, you know, and they look at it to see if there's any bugs, live organisms, and he found some. I think I've had sometimes since then, but nothing—

Mark Van Ells: Nothing prohibiting your—

V.G. Rowley: Nothing that kept me from making a normal livelihood. We got along fine. It was a blessing that I did go to school. As a consequence, I have done very well. The Lord has been very good to me. That is the only way I can say it. He has blessed me in many ways. I lost my wife, but I did remarry and I got another good wife. She had two children and I had two children and she had lost her first husband so we put the two families together. We had setbacks sure, but nothing that we couldn't handle.

Mark Van Ells: I've just got a couple of questions about benefit programs and then I want to move on to some reunions and veterans organizations. Those questions may or may not even apply to you. Public Law 16 you got a little more than the regular GI Bill soldiers did.

V.G. Rowley: Yeah, we did. How did that work?

Mark Van Ells: A little extra.

V.G. Rowley: You got a base that was more than \$75.00 a month which was what the regular GI was getting. Then we got the pension, whatever that was, in addition to that.

Mark Van Ells: Did you find that this covered your school expenses completely?

V.G. Rowley: Oh, yeah, sure. They paid for everything, you know, books, lab fees. You didn't get any grocery money except for that, but everything—tuition, everything was paid, everything. All you had to do was sign the paper, and they'd take care of it for you. Then I had this to contend with. I was going to live out at Badger Ordnance, you know where that is?

Mark Van Ells: Right.

V.G. Rowley: Most, all the GI's were going out there. The doctor said, "No," he said, "You've gotta be here in Madison under a doctor's care." "Well," I said, "Gee, I can't find a place here." I said, "Everything is too expensive and I don't know how I am going to do that exactly." He said, "You better plan on it even if your wife had to go live with her folks." So I didn't want that to happen, neither did she, so we heard about a little house that was for sale off South Park Street and Oak. A realtor had it and he was an old World War I veteran, you know, really a charmer, dandy fellow. He says, "I can get that house for you \$4500.00, and, he said, "You don't have to made much down payment, being a veteran like you are," and, he said, "Your payment will be low," and he said, "I think you should buy it." So we went out and looked at it and it really was kind of a—it was a nice location, and all these houses were alike. They were built by a socialist during the Thirties and very cheaply put up. No basements, space heaters, four rooms, nice lots though. We had a nice lot, and it wasn't bad, and so, boy, \$4500.00, that was pretty cheap even then. So we bought it, and my payments were \$25.00 a month.

Mark Van Ells: Now, to finance that did you use any sort of GI benefits?

V.G. Rowley: Oh yeah. Oh no, I did not. I didn't use my GI benefit then, that's right. I forgot, but because we had enough money to pay down and the thing that they were doing for you then was guaranteeing a loan. I didn't need anybody to guarantee my loan. I had money to pay down to get a loan from Anchor, so I got that. They only required like 15% or some low amount, you know. Here again they were good for veterans. They were trying hard to accommodate us. So we lived there until I graduated, and then we moved into an apartment for awhile until we could find a better house. We sold it and we made about [laughs] \$2000.00 on it I think after we had lived there for three and a half year or whatever it was. So that was kind of nice. We made about \$2000.00, I think.

- Mark Van Ells: Which is 50% of what you paid for it.
- V.G. Rowley: Yeah.
- Mark Van Ells: Not bad.
- V.G. Rowley: Not bad. Especially it was junk anyway. [laughs] Still standing, incidentally.
- Mark Van Ells: It is still out there?
- V.G. Rowley: There's still people living in it, or they were the last time we went by.
- Mark Van Ells: So, you graduated. When it came time to make a living, did you have trouble finding work?
- V.G. Rowley: No, not really. I'll explain what happened. Our guys that were graduating about my time, some of them had graduated, of course, in May—most of them graduated in May. They were getting pretty good jobs. One fellow got a job, \$5000.00 a year and everybody thought that was just absolutely wonderful you know. I have a little concerned, so I came up here to the Capitol and went into see some people there that I had heard about.
- Mark Van Ells: In the veteran's office?
- V.G. Rowley: Yeah, in the veteran's office, yes. They said, "Well, with your experience, no problem. What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I would like to get into plant work, but I don't know if I can hack that just yet. I suppose I should get something else." The Department of Agriculture had started a program during the war working with the USDA in quality improvement. They had a milk sanitarian on the road, and they were looking for another one. Boy, was made to order for me, just exactly what I needed and what I wanted because I was always quality conscious because in business. So I went over to see Mr. Button, Milton Button, at the Department of Agriculture. He was the Director and he says, "I think you got the job, but, he says, "You've got to take the examination." There had been two fellows who had worked on a mobile lab for the Department. They had priority over me, but they weren't veterans. One of them was a veteran but the other one wasn't. So those were my competition, but I had ten points automatically.

- Mark Van Ells: Veterans points you mean?
- V.G. Rowley: Veterans Points, ten being—
- Mark Van Ells: Disabled.
- V.G. Rowley: Disabled, partially disabled. So I got the job, and they were friends of mine. Well, they still are. I know one of ‘em lives in Baraboo and we often kid one another about that. That was a good job. It didn’t pay a lot, but it was enough for us to get along on. I worked for the Department of Agriculture until 1955, and I had set up different kinds programs for quality improvement. How much of this you want to hear?
- Mark Van Ells: Just a nutshell.
- V.G. Rowley: Nutshell. A disease called bacteriophage was affecting the starters used in making cheese and a lot of the cheese plants were really in a tremendous amount of trouble. I was working with these cheese plants trying to find ways to combat this problem and we tried many different things. I found out that Department, the Beltsville Maryland Research, had developed a product that would stop bacteriophage by tying up the calcium in the starter milk. So we investigated that and after a horrendous amount of experimenting to make it work and trying different things we came out with a new starter media which was very successful for the company. That was with Marshall. Marshall came out with that, and that’s how we got off the ground really. They were having this trouble before that. I went to work for Marshall in 1955 and stayed until 12 years ago, 1984,—29 years.
- Mark Van Ells: I’ve just got one last area that I want to cover and that involves some Veterans organizations and reunions and that sort of thing. When you first got out of the service did you join any sort of organizations?
- V.G. Rowley: I forgot to mention that. This fellow who was from Muscoda at the Veterans Affairs said, “You know the VFW is doing a fantastic job for us,” and he says, “You better join.” He had [laughs] a paper there and I filled it out right there. I forgot to mention that, and I’ve been a member of the VFW, not since then, I dropped it for a while, while I was in school. But I’m a lifetime member of the VFW and American Legion now.
- Mark Van Ells: So, you joined these groups fairly early after the war?



- V.G. Rowley: Right.
- Mark Van Ells: Were you sort of an active member?
- V.G. Rowley: Not really.
- Mark Van Ells: Were you involved in the offices and the meetings and that sort of thing?
- V.G. Rowley: No, I have not been. I don't know if I should be this frank with you on this—
- Mark Van Ells: It's completely up to you, I'm interested in—you don't have to name names if you don't want to, but I am just interested in why you joined and what it is you get out of it.
- V.G. Rowley: Well, I joined because it was suggested to me by Dick Komurka that I do that. I think they helped get me into school and get the pension. I am sure they did because I'm sure that they were written to and they said that I was a member and you know whatever else. But, after school, after I joined, when I rejoined, which is, oh, fifteen years ago, I guess, about that anyway. I started going to meetings and I don't go for this "comrade". This is off the record.
- Mark Van Ells: They call someone "comrade".
- V.G. Rowley: Well, you're "comrade this" and "comrade that," and I don't care for that.
- Mark Van Ells: This is the VFW—
- V.G. Rowley: Yeah, and American Legion has their protocol that they follow, too, you know. It's nothing—and I like the American Legion a little better in some ways, but I don't—I belong to the one in Muscoda. I joined that [laughs] for a strange reason, and I don't get up there to their meetings, but I pay my membership there. But I did join the VFW on a lifetime basis. I don't mean to say they aren't good. I know they do some wonderful things. We've gone over and helped put poppies on the graves and like that, put flowers, yeah, poppies.
- Mark Van Ells: So it's the formality type things?
- V.G. Rowley: It is the formality that I don't really care for. I shouldn't criticize it because I know that they do wonderful things.

- Mark Van Ells: I'm not sure you did criticize them, necessarily.
- V.G. Rowley: I hope not. I don't mean to criticize.
- Mark Van Ells: Now, when it comes to reunions, you mentioned you went to one and one only. Why don't you cover that again? Describe how you found out about it, when t his was, what possessed you to go to it in the first place.
- V.G. Rowley: Well, I first found out about it when a fellow who was in my platoon called me from Michigan, Jackson, Michigan. This was about 1952 I would guess. He called and said he was going down to Dallas to the reunion, wanted me to go too. But I wasn't in any position at that time to go, and then I forgot about it until I got to reading, saw in the VFW magazine that they have these reunions in there. It's all there, and I thought, "Gee, maybe I'll take a trip down there." So, yeah, I think it was right after I retired I went down there, about 1985 or something like that. I was *amazed*. I thought, how could these people look like that, you know? [laughs] I can't hardly believe it! How decrepit they were, but then some of them weren't, of course, but you don't expect it you know. I didn't expect it, caught off guard.
- Mark Van Ells: And you haven't been back since?
- V.G. Rowley: No.
- Mark Van Ells: So through this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, these 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in the last few years you haven't been?
- V.G. Rowley: I would have liked to have gone, go in a way. In another way I talked myself out of it.
- Mark Van Ells: Those are all the questions that I have. Is there anything you'd like to add? Something you think we've missed at all.
- V.G. Rowley: Oh, I don't think so. I think you've done a very good, comprehensive job of asking questions. I think we've covered everything on your sheets, too, huh?
- Mark Van Ells: I think so. I always try— [??]
- V.G. Rowley: I think you did. I can't think of anything else.
- Mark Van Ells: Well, thanks for coming in.

V.G. Rowley:       Okay.

Mark Van Ells:       I absolutely appreciate it.

**[End of Interview]**  
**Tape 2, Side A**

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