

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
MARTIN "GENE" SCHRAM  
Clerk, Army, World War II.

2005

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**Schram, Martin E.**, (1925- ). Oral History Interview, 2005.

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

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

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Martin “Gene” E. Schram, a Baileys Harbor, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II Army service in the 51<sup>st</sup> Transportation Group in the Pacific Theater. Schram talks about being drafted at age eighteen and basic training at Indiantown Gap (Pennsylvania) with a port battalion. While home on leave, he states he was in a car accident that fractured his skull, spent two months recovering, and was reassigned as a clerk to the headquarters supply department upon return to the Army. Schram mentions guarding prisoners at Camp Plauche (Louisiana), training for overseas duty at Camp Gordon Johnston (Florida), and shipping to the South Pacific aboard the USS General A. E. Anderson. He speaks of travelling to Manila (Philippines) via Leyte, talking to wounded soldiers in a hospital, and seeing dead Filipino civilians all over town. From his conversations with Filipinos, Schram describes some of the atrocities he heard about Japanese soldiers committing. He recalls noticing a Japanese corpse next to his tent and causing an explosion when he tried to burn the body. Schram details the celebrations on V-J Day, feeling relief that they wouldn’t have to invade Japan, and his homecoming in March of 1946. He states he was lucky not to go into combat and to sleep on a cot every night. Schram discusses getting a military pension and increasing his disability compensation. He talks about his civilian career, raising a family of five, and joining the VFW and American Legion. Schram details his involvement with the Baileys Harbor AmVets drill team, including frequent attendance at funerals and Memorial Day parades, travelling to events around the country, and organizing uniforms. He reflects on his personal growth while in the Army and being the youngest person in the headquarters outfit. Schram talks about seeing a mine in Manila’s harbor, not reporting it because he assumed others had seen it too, and later hearing a ship got sunk by it. He discusses recreational opportunities such as USO shows and bands.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Schram (b.1925) served in the Army from 1943 to 1946. After the war, he became part owner of the *Door County Advocate*, was a monuments salesman, and eventually settled in Sturgeon Bay (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Terry McDonald, 2005

Transcribed by Cheryl Hoover, Wisconsin Court Reporter, 2008

Checked and corrected by Calvin John Pike, 2011

Corrections typed in by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2012

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

**Transcribed Interview:**

Terry: This is an interview with Martin “Gene” Schram, who served with the United States Army Headquarters 51st Transportation Group during World War II. The interview is being conducted at 9:15a.m. at the following address of 3781 Egg Harbor Road, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date: May 7, 2005. And the interviewer is Terry McDonald. And Martin likes to be called by the name of Gene. So, Gene, can you tell us a little bit about when you were born and where you were born at?

Schram: I was born in Baileys Harbor, Wisconsin on April 17, 1925. I graduated from Gibraltar High School in the spring of 1943, let's say about the 1st of June. And on the 12th of July of '43, I was already drafted into the Army.

Terry: Now, why was that? How come you got drafted so quick?

Schram: Well, I guess they needed people.

Terry: How old were you then?

Schram: I was eighteen.

Terry: Eighteen?

Schram: Yeah, eighteen. And they shipped me to Camp Grant; that's near Rockford, Illinois. And they had a receiving station there, and we got our clothes. And there was just one big dining room, I remember, and barracks. And you felt lonesome there already, the barracks. And then they gave us an IQ test and a couple of other tests, short medical inspection, and then that was it.

Terry: Did you go— when you went in, did you go with anybody else from Door County, or did you go by yourself?

Schram: Yeah. There was Glenn Casperson from Sister Bay was with me, and Jerome Place [?]; I think he lives in Illinois. Those two people there, the only ones I knew. But, you know, misery loves company, and you get acquainted with people fast.

Terry: So how much time did you spend at Camp Grant, then?

Schram: Well, I was only there a few days, and then they shipped us by rail to Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. And I remember they took us— although I can't remember which big lake there is around in New York, but they took us all the way around that lake because the barracks weren't empty for us. And then they shipped the guys out, and when we got there, then there was a place for us to stay. And then we started basic training. And basic training, I didn't

particularly care for the group I got into. I had no choice. It was a port battalion, and I never heard of a port battalion. I knew about ships getting loaded and unloaded. But then I found out later on that port battalions were very important because like in the invasion of Normandy, they had to load and unload ships. They unload ammunition and all of the supplies and put 'em on other ships and get 'em in. And then in many cases they'd take wounded back to the bigger ships.

Terry: So while you were at Indiantown Gap, then, you described the barracks. What was the barracks like? Were they fairly comfortable living [inaudible]

Schram: Oh, yeah. They were like barracks. You know, like gosh, most of us kids came out of the Depression, of course. I lived on a farm, and some people called us rich because you had enough food and clothes, you know. That's about all it amounted to. But then I'll go on about Indiantown Gap. After basic training, let's see; that was about in September. I got a leave of absence. And I was in a car accident while I was home, and I had my skull fractured. So I stayed out of the Army for about two months. I went through the Red Cross, or my parents did, and explained the situation. In about the end of November, I'll say, I went back to the Army. I didn't feel I was ready to do a lot of work or anything. And I had friends writing me from Boston staging area. They were getting ready to go overseas. And they missed me and all that stuff. But like I said, I wasn't particularly fond of that outfit I was in. So I went down to headquarters and I told— explained my predicament and they says, “Oh, you're going to be fine. You're going to be fine. We've got a place for you, because you can type about thirty or thirty-five words a minute. And we're going to need you.” And so there I went.

Terry: You became a clerk of some sort, then, huh?

Schram: Yeah. And then I was in the supply department. And then about— I stayed at Indiantown Gap until about June. And on the day of the invasion, the 7th of June, I believe it was, I was home on leave, and that was the day of the invasion.

And this is just a cute little story I'll tell you. I got back— then I went to New Orleans; that's where I was supposed to go to, a camp named Plauche. It was just on the outskirts of New Orleans. And when I got off of the train I saw a guy, and I hollered at him. Can you imagine all these GIs running around, and I see this guy and I hollered at him. And he come over to me.

Oh, he says, “You got the wrong guy; that's my brother that was with you.” Like a needle in a haystack. And he said his brother got hurt really bad in the invasion. He had learned that already.

Terry: Wow.

- Schram: So we didn't do much there just some easy training, guarding prisoners with no ammunition in there.
- Terry: They had to put prisoners of war there already?
- Schram: No. No. These were guys that were screwed up. Most of them were on their way out with— they call that a “blue discharge.” [a type of discharge for those deemed unfit for military service for psychiatric reasons and thus ineligible for any benefits.] And then from Louisiana they shipped us to Camp Gordon Johnston, Florida, which is about seventy miles west of Tallahassee. And there they— it was supposed to train you for overseas duty, because they didn't have any plumbing or stuff like that. And that only happened to us for a few days, because our unit had thirteen enlisted men and four officers in it and by golly, if they didn't find us some plumbing. So we stayed there a couple of months. I think it got to be Hallow Eve [phonetic] in between. And we got to— about December of '43 we were shipped to California for service overseas and then to the South Pacific. And first of all, the first time I got off the ship, it was in late May. And there was shooting all over and that, but we were safe.
- Terry: What kind of ship did they take you across on?
- Schram: It was called the General A. E. Anderson. I still remember that. And we traveled all by ourselves. [Inaudible.] There were Jap subs in there. They didn't seem to worry because they said we were doing about 15 knots. And it took us about two weeks to get over there. Gosh. We had about five thousand people aboard, EMs, [enlisted men] and I don't know how many officers. And then— so we spent a little time— we didn't really do anything in Leyte because — I understand that later on our destination was supposed to be Manila where they were going to take care of the port there. And they unloaded supplies. And I think that I didn't pay much attention to what the guys did in the office, because I was in the supply department. And we had an awful lot of men to draw for. And I think that they just had a record of all the stuff that was being unloaded. Let's see. Anyway, when we left Leyte we went up to Lingayen Gulf, and there was a lot of shooting there. And then down to Manila, which was maybe sixty / seventy miles south. I remember we stopped in one hospital where a lot of the guys— they were all wounded guys and, oh, gosh, how glad they were to see us, that we were on our feet and just came from the States, so they could learn a little bit.
- Terry: Because they weren't getting much news as far as what was taking place.
- Schram: No. One guy was so happy because— he told me, “I got shot in the stomach and they took my appendix out right away, so I won't have to worry about that.” Little things. He told me how useless the carbines were. And I know;

I had one. I couldn't hit anything with the darn thing. He says you could hit a Jap seven times and they'll keep running at you. But he says one round from an M1 and he says he was down. And they were telling us their experiences. And then when we got down to Manila, everything looked nice until we got down there. And see, the Japs had just gone through ahead of us, and there were so many dead people. They were in the alleys. They were laying all over the churches. They would fill them with people and throw grenades in and gasoline and kill them that way.

Terry: The civilians?

Schram: Yeah, the civilians. And I didn't see any— a couple of Americans got killed close to me. But, oh, the Japanese were just— the Pasig River was just— had so many Japs in it just floating there. And you know how after a few days you got flies and maggots. And you'd go around; everything stunk. And then I remember they took our guns away from us. They said we won't need them anymore. The next day a bulldozer was trying to clear an area up. He uncovered a little piece of metal hole. And a Jap got out and killed himself with a grenade.

Terry: He was hidden underneath?

Schram: Hidden underneath and, well, I suppose he was scared as hell. He knew how the Japanese treated the Americans, and so he held the grenade to his chest. And then this story: The sergeant with me, it was really— there was a dead Jap right next to where we had a tent. And it stunk so bad, so he said, "Come on. Let's get a couple of these burlap sacks and throw on them and a five-gallon can of gas." And it was burning kind of nicely and, you know, like I was— I was still eighteen, no, I was nineteen then. And I picked up a grenade that didn't go off. And I threw that grenade, and I tossed it nice. And a little Filipino kid run up and said, "Man, Joe, can you ever throw that far." And I thought, "I'll show you how far I can throw it." And I went one, two, three steps, and I heard a great big bang. And I thought, "Did that grenade go off?" And it was that Jap. They had a— he had an explosive under him. It had to be more than a grenade, because all that was left of him was— I saw part of his leg and hip hanging up in a tree. And I probably would've been killed if I wouldn't have went that one, two, three. And the sergeant who was with me, he had Japanese in his eyes and his ears and his mouth, you know, and he was wiping himself off.

Terry: That was pretty close.

Schram: Yeah. Just kind of dumb things that happened, but that's how people got killed, too, you know. And I never fired a shot in anger. I went up to the front a few times. I had a cousin that was up there and that sort of thing. It was a unit from Wisconsin that was up there, and I remember some of the

names yet. And so then it got to be— the war was over. We were so happy. Everybody was shooting up in the air. But then we weren't getting sent home, and I can understand that. I read in the paper today where somebody didn't get home until '46 April, and I think I got home in March of '46. But I imagine the big problem with the government is what are we going to do with all these men when we get 'em home. Where are they going to get a job, and that sort of thing. So I didn't leave Manila until February of '46, and I got home in March. They sent me home on a hospital ship. It was kind of nice because we had a lot of coke and ice cream. We played sheephead all the way back.

Terry: Now, when you were— can you just tell us a little bit about when the war ended, how you found out how the war ended, and the reaction of the soldiers?

Schram: I guess there was an announcement. There was an announcement that they had dropped the bombs, and the Japanese, you know, surrendered. And then everybody was shooting their guns. See, the harbor was just full of ships. And they were all shooting their guns in the area. So I had a— the building I was sleeping in had a kind of a cement— cement buildings. So instead of going to my bed, I laid down on the floor down on the corner. I thought I'd have a little better chance if some of that shrapnel starts coming back at us. And, of course, everybody is celebrating, especially, you know, that in the supply department we had so many winter blankets and so many winter uniforms. Those were for all of the poor guys who were going to get killed when they invaded Japan.

Terry: Because they were— that's why you were there. They were preparing for the invasion.

Schram: That's right. And people— I mean, you have some of these weak people just like we have in this country, like you shouldn't punish people for what they do. Well, as far as I was concerned, if it saved one American life, the bombs were worth it. Because then, you know, you heard all those stories from people. I remember a guy telling me— this was a Filipino. He says, “The day I cried is”— “the Japanese were coming, and here was a pregnant woman crossing the street. And the Japanese soldier ran out, and he ripped her with his bayonet; ripped her open and the baby fell out.” And he says, “That was the day I cried, you know.” And another one told me about— he was part Spanish, and he said his brother was more white than the Filipinos and looked more like an American. And he said they went on— a Japanese says, “We need a detail of twenty people to work detail.” He says they never came back. They killed them all. And that was his brother that they killed. I remember that guy's name was Mo Green [?] because he was writing a book, and he was such a good writer. So anyway, as far as I was concerned, I was lucky. I didn't have to go into combat. Just about every night I had a cot or

something to sleep on. But had I been ordered to go into combat or be an infantryman, it wouldn't have mattered to me, because I wasn't married. You know, something about that when you get to that age, you really don't care about your life. You know, you do what you gotta do.

Terry: When you got out, when you got back to the States, can you tell us about your discharge? Did they leave you go right away or did you come back to Wisconsin?

Schram: No. I came back. We got into— probably San Francisco, and they give us a big steak dinner. In about two days, they had us on a train heading back across the country. And that went pretty quick because, like, they had one big central car and they cooked on that and the guys got their meals. And then I came into— oh, gosh, out by La Crosse. Don't think there's any other camp there. And anyway, we got there, and then I had— being I had the skull fracture and I had my eye cut quite a bit, and I felt that— I never received any treatment to speak of from the Army, that I was sort of abused by the things I had to do. So I went to apply for a pension. And I went there and I— jeez, they gave us \$350 bucks. Back in 1943, who ever saw \$350, you know? That was so much, you know. That would probably be more like \$6,000 today. And I thought, I'm not going to wait here three days. I want to get home. So the guy who was talking, he says, "Tell me what happened to you." And up on the corner of my thing he wrote all that down quick, and then I went. And then sometime later I applied for a discharge, and I got ten percent. And little did I know, I went for years with ten percent. I could've got thirty, because then later on I went down and complained, and they gave me thirty. And now that I'm eighty— when I was seventy-nine years old I went down and had them check me, and they finally increased my compensation to one hundred percent. So I get my pills for free and stuff like that. And it's a nice pension [inaudible].

Terry: So when you got out of the service then, what did you do when you got out in '46?

Schram: Well, in '46 I went to college for a year. I got a lot of bad habits in the Service, and I figured college wasn't for me. And then I got married. And then I went to technical school for a year because I did have a background, and I went to work for a newspaper. I knew quite a bit about it. And so I went to school to be a linotype operator. They said linotype operators were going to be very rich, although that wasn't quite true. [Terry laughs] But then the boss where I worked he--I could talk to people, that sort of thing. And he asked me to come to the advertising department, so I did. One thing led to another. Once in between I went down to *Green Bay Press-Gazette*. And they took blood out of my arm. They wanted to hire me. I was sort of unhappy. Then the boss let me get stock in the company, and so I became a part owner of the *Advocate*. And then I retired. I took my money and I ran.



And then I sold monuments for a guy in Two Rivers. He asked me if I'd do that. And I enjoyed that very much, and it gave me a little— gave me a little extra money. That was the thing. And so, then, now, you know— gosh. When you get to be seventy years and you don't feel like crawling up a truck or you can't run anymore, that sort of thing. But I, you know, we raised five children. Two died along the way. They both were college graduates. And we didn't have a lot of money for— you can say recreational money, but we always had enough to pay our bills. And what more can you ask for out of life? We got a fairly nice house, I should say. And I have a good wife.

Terry: So when you got out then— at that time there was a lot of veterans organizations that sprouted up. Did you join any organizations?

Schram: The first one, let's see, I lived up in Baileys Harbor, and a man was starting a VFW post up there. So I joined that. And then I joined the Legion because of a person I worked with whose dad was a commander. But then the next commander, I didn't like the way he conducted meetings. I remember some guy started to talk and he says, "On your feet when you talk to me." And that was the last meeting I went to. I thought, I don't want to go to a place like that. Jeez. He might have been an officer in the service, but he wasn't, you know. And so the AmVets started a drill team, and, gee, I liked that. I didn't join AmVets until 1955. I was thirty years old. And so, gosh, I lived AmVets. I didn't miss a meeting for years. I probably went to over a hundred military funerals because we had our drill team and we were so used to it. And I went to thirty consecutive Memorial Days. And then after that, I kind of let it go, you know. And then I was the commander of the year in 1960, commander of the State of Wisconsin. But, you know, the reason I got to be the commander of the state of Wisconsin is that year we went to President— it was in '61, President Kennedy's inaugural. And so I rode in on the heels of that. If we wouldn't have done that, I probably wouldn't have been commander of the year. And I did put a monthly paper out for two years, you know. I would mail it to some, but to save postage, I'd hand-deliver it to some lodges. And that's because you were young and full of pep that you did all that stuff.

Terry: Can you tell us just a little bit about the drill team, what you guys did, how it operated a little bit?

Schram: Yeah. Well, see, I can't remember. They said Donald Olson started it. But then later on, by the time I started it, Bob Wilson was the commander. And if you knew— you'd have to know Bob Wilson to see what a person he is, you know. He could walk around like General MacArthur, you know, and put on. And we practiced and practiced. And at first we dyed our uniforms blue. But if you went through a rain, your T-shirt was blue the next day, you know. So then finally we got a little more money, and we bought policemen's uniforms. We had no problem then. And we had boots, and we made those fancy white

laces, and then they zipped on the side so you didn't have to untie 'em. And the first year we were at Sheboygan, and I'm sure that the Marinette drill team was just as good as ours. But the only thing is that they had black and brown shoes on and we wore a uniform, and I heard the judges discussing that. So we were the state champions of Wisconsin. Well, then following that, the American Legion had us go down to their convention in Milwaukee and marched for them once. They gave us all honorary memberships. And, well, then from there on, you know, we were in President Kennedy, the first time we were in Philadelphia. There's a big picture up at the courthouse of us guys. I think we had a dozen people marching. And then after Philadelphia, gosh I don't know, we were over in Grand Rapids. We were at Detroit.

Terry: How did you pay for all those trips?

Schram: Sold tickets and stuff. We were in St. Louis; we were in Miami. You just go on and on. Yeah. We'd go around, and somebody would sell us a beef real cheap, and then we'd raffle the quarters off. See, a lot of people supported this. I remember Roy Smith. His son is an attorney in town now. But Roy had a dealership. And we got ready to go someplace and he came aboard the bus. And he walked over to Chet Groger [?] and, "Here, Chet," he says, "Treat the guys," and he give 'em \$100, and \$100 was a lot of money at that time. And so that's how, you know. And we had, well see, our Veterans Service Officer was Larry Kenny, and Larry took charge of the finances. He would be calling on Peterson Builders and places like that, "Can I get some money?"

Terry: So that was quite an experience you had, go all over the country and representing and marching in the parades?

Schram: It was a fun thing. And like I said, with five kids. Jeez. It costs you money. You'd have to have fifty / sixty / seventy dollars sometimes to go on these trips. And I know my wife gave up a lot of things so I could do that, because she wanted me to.

Terry: So that— I know that you're still active somewhat with the VFW groups now.

Schram: You know, I haven't been going to meetings, but I go to the funerals. No. I've only got an AmVet hat, and I belong to the Legion too. I've got an AmVet hat and VFW hat. That's all I've got. Sometimes if there's an AmVet thing on I just go with my hat on. And it's as good as being in uniform, I figure.

Terry: Looking back now about your military, you know, as a young man, what do you think of your military experience during the war?

- Schram: Well, you know, if it wouldn't have been for that, I would have never really got anyplace. And the thing is you got mixed in with people from all over the country, and you learn to get along. I never had anybody that I really disliked, you know. There were a couple of people I would just— oh, I mean, I know how— I didn't know who the guy was, but when we were down in Florida, I saw him going through everybody's pockets about four o'clock in the morning. But he wasn't going to go through mine, because it didn't do him any good. I always put my billfold inside of my pillow case. Somebody says, "Hey, I had \$8.00 stolen, I had \$8.00 stolen." Well, I knew who the guy was. But I wasn't going to squeal, because he was such a big sucker he would have— he would have killed me if he had the chance. I thought better off just to keep your mouth shut.
- Terry: Did you meet anybody that you kept in touch with when you were in the Service for— after you got out?
- Schram: No, I haven't. I had a few letters from people. See, I was the youngest person in the outfit, and the next one was probably— the next youngest was four years older than me. Because it was headquarters detachment, you know, they had all more older people and some of the tech sergeants and that, they were— well, gosh. One real good friend, he was 30. He was a teacher. Tom Dawkins. He was the guy that I told you about that when that Jap blew up. And then we had— the guy in charge of the motor pool, and my supply sergeant. He was about thirty-seven. He was a tech sergeant, and I was a T4, and that's how— and then, and you know what a caste system it is. So you get in, and after awhile all at once the guys who had "rockers," for staff sergeants up, we're all going to sleep together. [rockers is WWII slang for the curved stripes underneath the chevrons on Army sergeants, which denote their rank.] And the officers sleep together. And then I was— being a T4, I was with the peons, all the guys. But maybe most of these guys had the stripes. They were a little older men, and maybe it was nicer for them to be together, you know, than with the kids.
- Terry: Did your outfit ever have any reunions that you were aware of or anything?
- Schram: No because, jeez, there were only thirteen / fourteen, yeah, about fifteen of us. I wish they would have. I had a sheet with all of their addresses on it. In those days you didn't have copy machines. And be darned somehow or another it got lost, and so that was it. And I got a couple of letters from people and I responded. But I should have asked them for a copy of their list, but I didn't think of that.
- Terry: Okay. Anything else you want to mention about your military experience?
- Schram: No. That's all. I appreciate your coming over, Terry. And like I said, I wasn't a big factor in it, but I suppose I filled a little cog someplace in the

wheel, you know. One thing I didn't do, I remember, I was down by the shore before the boats all come in to— I mean by the docks in South Harbor in the Philippines, and I saw a big mine with, you know, those prongs sticking out the side of it. But, jeez, there were Navy officers walking around. And I thought, “Well, here's a squirty little guy like me, and those guys gotta know that's there.” And son of a gun, a few days later a ship pulled in and got sunk on that mine. I hope nobody got killed on it, you know.

Terry: Really?

Schram: Some dumb thing. It was just— gosh, couldn't have been like from here to the middle of my living room, just out about twenty feet or so. And I could see it, and you figure somebody would have reported it.

Terry: Did you ever run into anybody from Sturgeon Bay when you were overseas?

Schram: Let me think. I don't think so, uh-uh, nobody from Door County, either.

Terry: Okay, Gene. Well, I appreciate it.

Schram: The guys that I was with while I was in the Philippines and down all those places, it seemed when they emptied out a camp, they shipped them all in one direction. And so when we got over to Manila, there were a lot of guys that I knew from back at the other camps. But I was never close to anybody. I was never a buddy to anybody other than our own unit. I never grabbed onto a guy and says, “Hey,” you know.

Terry: Was there any USO shows or anything like that?

Schram: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Terry: Any big name stars that you recall that maybe were just starting out?

Schram: Yeah. You know, I can't remember 'em, you know, those shows, but we'd go to 'em. And then you had movies all the time, and that was good. And, yeah— and there was some bands that come over and stuff like that. I remember one all-girls band. Oh, that was real nice. But then you've got these ignorant guys sitting up there who were blowing up condoms and throwing 'em down all the time, you know. [laughs]

Terry: Yeah.

Schram: I was trying to think of one play I didn't care for. It was a musical. It was real nice, but it was real nice. *Oklahoma*. Yeah. It was put on very well, but I wasn't that crazy about it. So that's about all I've got to report, Terry, that I can—

Terry:       Okay, Gene.

**[End of Interview]**