

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Mervyn R. Sigurdson  
Field Artilleryman, U. S. Army, World War II

2007

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**Sigurdson, Mervyn R.**, (b.1917), Oral History Interview, 2007.

User copy : 2 sound cassettes (ca. 90 min.)

Master copy : 2 sound cassettes (ca. 90 min.)

Transcript : 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

**Abstract:**

Mervyn R. Sigurdson, a Monroe, Wisconsin native, discusses his military training and World War II service in Germany as a member of Company B, 817<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion. Born in Edmonton (Alberta, Canada), Sigurdson describes his childhood living at a North Dakota cattle ranch, a lumber camp in Winter (Wisconsin), and on his grandfather's farm in Ridgeway (Wisconsin). He recounts working for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and his days planting trees with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). He describes an appendicitis attack, going west to look for work, and getting arrested as a vagrant in Mason City (Iowa). He recalls returning home to a draft notice that ordered him to report for duty at Fort Sheridan. He tells of a young man who was happy to be rated a 4-F at his physical because he didn't have to go to war. Sigurdson then describes his own physical and trip to Fort Sheridan. Sent to Fort Sill (Oklahoma) for eight weeks of basic training, he describes the rules set down by the staff sergeant. He explains the different weapons they were issued for target practice: .45 submachine gun ("Like John Dillinger had."), a 30-06 Enfield rifle, and a Garand M1. He relates a story of being an excellent shot and how he qualified for all three guns. Transferred to Camp Chaffee (Arkansas) outside of Fort Smith, he went through commando training and mentions training under live rifle fire. Moved to Camp Bowie, in the field artillery, Sigurdson describes loading 155 Howitzers ("like a musket of Davy Crocket"), firing them, and driving half-tracks. He talks about where he went with his weekend passes. Sent to Camp Hood outside Fort Worth (Texas), he tells of being transferred from field artillery to Company B, 817 Tank Destroyer Battalion. He recalls that he got a job driving a major and he was also given a .30 carbine and assigned to guard prisoners, who were so dangerous that if you happened to kill one, "They'd give you a carton of cigarettes and transfer you." He went on maneuvers in a small town outside of Nashville (Tennessee) and then on to Camp Phillips (Kansas). Sigurdson tells how he spent six months on a ranch in Langdon (South Dakota) in response to a request for experienced horsemen. When he returned to Camp Campbell in 1942, he received his orders to ship overseas. He briefly describes his journey to Scotland, England, and then Wales before landing in St. Lo (France) and heading to Valenciennes (France). He recalls trading a .38 German pistol for a soldier's .38 French six-shooter. He discusses going to Belgium, crossing the Siegfried Line, and being shelled when they entered Germany. He describes sleeping on a bunch of potatoes in the basement of a burned-out house in Schmidt (Germany). He recounts the constant shelling and seeing dog fights between American and German planes. He recalls a German plane strafing him while he walked along a road and having to dive into a ditch. He relates being in a weapons dump when a German shell struck the building, but it turned out to be a dud. He tells of a

German company of horse-drawn artillery marching into town and surrendering. Sigurdson touches upon the battle of Hurtgen Forest and how it was just as bad as the Battle of the Bulge, but received much less publicity. He says they were loading up GIs “just like cord wood in stake trucks.” He describes being shelled and “bottled up” in the Black Mountains, where a fierce battle ensued and his friend from Milwaukee was struck and killed by a wooden bullet. He tells how he shot a .50 caliber machine gun at a German soldier who then surrendered to him. He describes capturing another German soldier who was about to get the drop on them and would have “wiped us all out.” His sergeant said he’d get a bronze star for his actions, but he never did. He mentions being outside a house facing the Rhine River when a sniper shot a box right out from under his arm and later killed two other soldiers. He comments that it was around this time the war ended and he was sent to Halle (Germany) for occupation duty. Sigurdson then backtracks and explains how he got a minor shrapnel wound on his back during guard duty in Schmidt (Germany), which earned him a Purple Heart he didn’t think he deserved. He says that he returned to the States in 1945 and was discharged at Fort Sheridan.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Sigurdson (b.1917) lived in several places in the West and Midwest before entering the service. During World War II, he served in the Army as a member of Company B, 817<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion. He currently resides in Monroe, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2007.  
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2007.  
Abstraction written by Clint Cargile, 2009.

**Interview Transcript:**

John: Okay. This is John Driscoll, and I'm with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives, and today is March 13, 2007. And this is an oral history interview with Mervyn Sigurdson, a veteran of the United States Army in World War II. And, Mervyn and Paul, thank you both for driving up from Monroe, and coming in for the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?

Mervyn: I was born in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1917, in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies. On March 18th.

John: How did your family get out there?

Mervyn: My mother was born in Sprucedale, Ontario. And her dad decided that he wanted to move west. So they came in a covered wagon. The whole family. They took off for Alberta. And when they got to Alberta, why, I don't know just how long it was. But, anyway, my mother met a Norwegian. He was from Oslo, Norway. And they got acquainted. And he married her. And I was born from their wedlock.

John: Okay.

Mervyn: In Edmonton. And then, I think I was about four years old when my father deserted us. And he left Alberta, and came to the United States. And got a job in Ohio in a lumber camp. And he changed his name. He changed his name from Sigurdson to Kelly. Harold Sigurdson was his original name. And he changed it to Harold Kelly. And then after that, why, my mother started writing pen pals, after he deserted us. And there was a cattle rancher from North Dakota that needed a house keeper. And he had a big ranch. I think she told me that he had ten cowboys working for him.

John: Wow.

Mervyn: And I don't know. She never did tell me what town they were close to, or anything. But anyway, she went to work for him. And I was only a baby then. So she took care of the house for him, housekeeping. And took care of me. And she said they had a big picture window where they could see out in the corrals where the horses were. And the cowboys were out there breaking broncs, she said. And she said, just about every day she saw some of them cowboys flying in the air, come down, dust themselves off, and climb back into the saddle again. And some of them, she said, were so good that they never even got thrown. They stuck with them until they stopped bucking. I don't know how long she was there. And then she started this pen pal department where they were writing to different people.

And I don't know how she got ahold of my stepfather, but anyway, they started writing. And things got serious. Then she moved from North Dakota down to Ridgeway, and they got married.

John: Here in Wisconsin?

Mervyn: And so they got married. And I was only about five years old, probably, at that time. So I know one time my stepfather told me that I climbed up on the windmill, and I was walking around on the platform on the windmill up there. And my mother looked out and she just about had a fit. She yelled at my stepfather to go up there and get me down. So he climbed the windmill and got me down. So then, after that, why, let's see?

John: How about brothers and sisters?

Mervyn: There was six of them was born after we moved to Ridgeway. And, let's see, where is that family? There we are. There's only two of them left. Or three. There's me, and my youngest brother is living yet. And the sister that is next to my oldest sister. I only have three of them living. Well, anyway, it was fine. There was nine of us altogether. So then my stepfather, he heard about a job in a lumber camp. They wanted lumber jacks up north. So he hitched up the team and wagon, and we drove three hundred miles with the team and wagon up to Winter, Wisconsin. And he got a job in the lumber camp. And I started school there. I was six years old at the time I started school. So I started school, and one of my brothers, Irwin, he was born in Ridgeway. But he was only a baby when we moved up there. So I helped take care of him, and to take care of things around the place. Mother, she was busy, you know. It was wild country up there, John. The timber wolves at night would come up around the house and howl.

John: Oh. Wow.

Mervyn: You could look out any of the windows and see their eyes shine. And he, my stepfather got a job in the lumber camp. He only came home once a week. So there was just me and my mother and my baby Irwin. Well, anyway, we had one milk cow. There was no fences up there at all. My mother had to go up there in the evening and go out in the swamp there, and find that cow. And bring her back to milk. But she wouldn't let a woman milk her at all.

John: Oh, yeah?

Mervyn: No. She had to have a man or a woman in men's clothes. So there was a Swedish lady that lived across the road from us. And she came and she would put on men's clothes and come over and milk the cow, no problem at all. And she was western

branded, and used to the west. Western cattle. When she had a calf, you couldn't get around her. She'd go right for you right away, you know. She had horns, too. Well, then, besides that, when school was out, then I come home and, the weekends, my stepfather would come home. And he'd wash all the bed bugs out of his clothes that he had got in the lumber camps. And then we'd go picking berries. And we'd go picking blackberries, and blueberries. So we'd go out there every weekend, quite a ways away from there. We'd pick berries. One day, well, I was out there picking berries and I heard some grunting. And I looked around and there was a big black bear a little ways away from me, standing on his hind legs. He was picking berries too. Well, I got out of there in a hurry. And so then we went home after that.

John: How about school?

Mervyn: I went three years to a school in Winter. I was nine when we left there. Well, anyway, let's see. What else? Oh, yeah, didn't have much to eat because we lived on fish and turtles. I killed turtles and then mother would make turtle soup.

John: Oh, yeah.

Mervyn: And the fish were so thick in the spring when they come down to spawn that I speared them with a pitch fork. That is when we had plenty of fish to eat. And we didn't save the milk to drink, as far as I know, because I had bread and water. To soak the bread with. Like the prisoners get. So, we were there three years. And my mother got hemlock poisoning from drinking the water. And the doctor came and he said, "You'll have to leave northern Wisconsin. Go back down south. I can't do nothing for you. It will probably get worse." So we moved back down to Ridgeway, down to my grandfather's. His name was Tom Buckingham. And we moved back down there. Then I, they had quite a big family, too. And there was nine of us. In this one big house. So he told us, grandpa told us, you'll have to move out because we can't handle you all here. We had an old machine shed. And we moved down into this machine shed. And it was so cold down there in the wintertime, the snow came in between the boards. Have a layer of snow when you woke up in the morning to shake off the blankets. And we just about froze with the kerosene stove that we had. And so then, in the daytime, I learned how to milk. I was nine years then. I started milking cows by hand. They had a big herd of Guernsey cattle. So I milked cows there in the daytime. So then we didn't have much to eat. And my stepfather, he bought a .410 shotgun. And he gave that to me. And he said, now you can go out and get squirrels and rabbits. Well, with a shotgun, it just tears them to pieces when you hit them. So that don't work. And they cost, for shotgun shells. And I told him, I said, "I got to get a rifle." So I got acquainted with a trapper, a hunter and trapper, about five miles from here. And I went down there and got acquainted with him. I told him I had a shotgun, and I

wanted to get a rifle. So he had a little Hamilton rifle. It just had a latch on it, or a knob on it, and you just put that, a single shot, you just put the shell in. And I traded that off to him for that. But then I was in heaven, because I started shooting squirrels and rabbits. And it was a .22. Which only cost me fifteen cents a box for fifty shells. And I was shooting rabbits and squirrels, keeping us in meat all the time. So, then, after that, why, let's see, I got a job in the WPA. That was worse. And we, farmers had rust in their grain, it was rusting their grain. And they told us that salt would kill them barberry bushes. So we had to carry five pounds of salt on our back, winter and summer, you know. Every time we found a barberry bush, why, we poured salt on it, and that would kill it. We were only walking about ten feet apart, you know. That's where we ran into rattlesnakes.

John: Oh, my God.

Mervyn: And we started this in Dodgeville, and we went all through the Bluffs, up to Verona, between us and the Wisconsin River. And there was all kinds of them. Oh, we was killing maybe about ten every day. And then after that, why, oh, we went into this one farmer's place. And he had two little girls. And the first thing I asked him, "Do you have any rattlesnakes on your farm." "No," he said. "Been years since we've seen any." So then we went up - it was in the hog yard - so we went up on top of the hill, and there was a big log laying up there, and there was a rattlesnake laying on top of the log. And I killed that with a stick, and then heard one start to rattle underneath, and I poked him out and killed him. And we took the both of them down there and showed them to the farmer. "My God!" he says. "My two little girls are walking around here every summer in their bare feet." He said, "I didn't know there was a rattlesnake around." And he turned white. He said, "I can't let them out there any more." And let's see, what else happened?

John: Let's move up toward 1940, 1941. What were you doing, say, in 1941? Before the war?

Mervyn: Well, I went into the CCC's.

John: Yep. Okay.

Mervyn: At City Point. And I was there eight months, I think it was. And I worked in the CC's planting trees, and building roads in the swamps.

John: Okay.

Mervyn: And I wasn't very big at that time. They had a grub hoe.

John: Yeah.

Mervyn: It's pointed on one end and then it was flat on the other. So you had to dig the top layer of the soil off, and plant the trees in there, you know.

John: Yeah.

Mervyn: And I planted trees all around the water tower in Wisconsin Rapids. And then, let's see.

John: Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Mervyn: Oh, yes.

John: What were you doing? Tell me about that.

Mervyn: I was in Rockford, working National Lock.

John: Okay.

Mervyn: At that time. And, well, then, before I got in the service, what happened, I was working for a farm. And I got an attack of appendicitis.

John: Oh, man.

Mervyn: And it doubled me over. I didn't know what it was. But I went to the doctor. He told me, "You have to have an operation right away. Your appendix are about ready to burst." So he operated on me in the middle of the night.

John: Oh, my God.

Mervyn: And they were already just about ready to come out on the table. And he told me, "I just saved your life." So he operated on me. Then, after I got over that, I went to work for a farmer. And then I quit him. I didn't like the way I was being treated. So I quit him and I started out west. Me and another kid. He was sixteen. And he told his folks, or told me that his folks said it was all right to go with me. So then when I went out there, why, we got out as far as Mason City, Iowa. I was riding freights and passengers. I was a hobo. We got out there and then, as we got off the tender of one of the passenger trains, him and I were going into a restaurant to eat, a squad car pulled in. There were just one-way streets, you know. Pulled in alongside of me and said, "Good morning. How are you," he said. We said, "We're fine." I think I was twenty-two at the time. And he said, "What are you going to do? Have you had breakfast yet?" And I said, "No. We were just heading for the breakfast table now." Well, I just got off the tender. I was black with coal,



so was the kid. He says, “Well, why don’t you come down and have breakfast with me?” I knew what he was up to. And I thanked him. I said no thanks. “We’ll eat in the restaurant.” He got out of the squad car and he took me with one hand and the kid with the other hand and threw us in the back seat of the squad car. And took us down to the jail. And he put us both in the same cell. And I was there for about three days.

John: Oh, wow.

Mervyn: And one morning I got up, and the kid was gone. I said, “What happened to my buddy?” He said, “His folks came and got him during the night.” And I said, “Why didn’t they get me?” “Well, they were mad at you because you took him with you.” So, anyway, then the chief, he called me into his office, and his lieutenant was in there. And he says, “I’m going to turn you loose.” They thought I was a vagrant. Then they thought I was dodging the draft. So, anyway, there was the lieutenant sitting there. He wasn’t facing him. I said, “You know, Captain, the zoo in Madison has a better place to sleep than I have in this jail.” And the lieutenant, he was there, started laughing, put his hand over his face, so the captain couldn’t see him laughing. He was getting a kick out of that. And the captain’s face got red. I thought he was going to explode. So, finally, he says, “See that road up there on top of the hill?” And I told him yes. He said, “You get up on that road, and I don’t want to see no more of you.” So, as soon as I got back, I got a notice from the draft board to report for duty at Fort Sheridan. So then...

John: When was that?

Mervyn: That was in 1942. Then I got on the bus. I think we had moved to Darlington then. And so we got on the bus and we left for Milwaukee, where I was to have my physical. And there was a kid. We stopped in Milwaukee. There was a kid. He got on and he started crying. I said, “What are you crying about?” He said, “I don’t want to go to war.” And I told him, “Well, you might not even go to war. You might be stationed someplace in the United States and never go overseas.” After we left Milwaukee, he had his physical. Came out smiling. I asked, “What happened?” “Well, I was rated as 4-F. I don’t have to go in the service at all.” I said, “Well, you’re lucky.” So, then, I went in for my physical. A captain examined me. I was wearing a truss. You know, for a rupture. I thought I had a rupture. And he said, “Sigurdson, what are you wearing a truss for?” And I said, “I think I’ve got a rupture.” He checked me all over and said, “No, you don’t have a rupture.” So he took the truss off of me and he said, he checked me all over, and he said, “Well, you are in fine physical condition. You are in 4-A. From here you will be taking the bus to Fort Sheridan.” So then I got on the bus and went to Fort Sheridan, where I was sworn in the service there, in the U. S. Army. Then the captain there in Fort Sheridan, he says, “You’ll be taking the train from here to

Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where you will be taking eight weeks of basic training.” Well, then, we got to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, kind of late in the evening, you know. And the staff sergeant, he came in to where we were all lined up. When we got there from the bus, why, he came out to meet us. He said, “I’m your staff sergeant. You will take your orders from me as long as you are at Fort Sill Basic Training.” So he said, “I’m going to take you down to the barracks and assign you your bunks and everything.” So he took us down to the bunks and, one thing he said, “Now you are in the service. When you are on duty you will be marched to every place you go. You can’t go by yourself. You line up and I’ll march you. Everyplace. Even to the mess hall, and everything.” And so, he came down and put us in the barracks, and I happened to be on the bottom floor. There were two tiers, one on top of the other. “Now,” he said, “you take orders from me from now on. Bed check is at ten o’clock. I’ll be in here to check you. If you are not in bed at ten o’clock, why, you’ll be written up and then you’ll have to take KP duty.” Which is Kitchen Police. So he said, “At five o’clock in the morning, I’ll come in here and wake you up. You make up your bunks and then you will come out and do calisthenics.” I think for an hour. You know, push-ups and all that.

John: Oh, yeah.

Mervyn: And we did that and then he marched us over to the mess hall. And we had breakfast there at the mess hall. And he marched us back to the barracks. “Now the lieutenant is coming in to check your bunks to see they are made up.” So when the lieutenant came - we waited quite a while. Finally the lieutenant opened the door and we all snapped to attention. The sergeant had told us before when an officer comes in, why, snap to attention, and salute him. So we did. He said, “And now I am going to check the bunks for your men and see that they are made up right.” So he checked all the bunks and he came to mine. And he wasn’t satisfied. “Sigurdson,” he said, “your bunk’s not, it doesn’t satisfy me.” So he tore it all up. And he told me to start over. And I made my bunk again. And he threw a quarter on it, and it bounced. “Oh,” he said, “that’s fine. Your bunk is fine. You won’t have to do any KP duty.” So he left, and then they took us out on the parade ground. And, let’s see. What else was there? Oh, yeah, they took us down to the quartermaster where we had to get out working clothes and our uniforms.

John: Yes.

Mervyn: They took us down to the quartermaster there, and there was one guy that was there for your dress clothes.

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

John: Okay, go ahead.

Mervyn: Well, the next day we got up in the morning and did our calisthenics, as usual. All that stuff. Had breakfast, and then we went out. And this sergeant says, "We're going on a ten mile march." And so we went on that march. We were all pretty tired when we got back.

John: Oh, yeah.

Mervyn: Because we hadn't been used to all that walking. When we got back, then the sergeant says, "We're going to march over to the quartermaster and get out weapons." So they marched us over to the quartermaster. Now, you will find this hard to believe, but the first gun they issued us was a .45 submachine gun. Like John Dillinger had. And they issued that to us. And then the next day and they took us out and we fired. And you know by my qualifications how good I was at shooting. Well, anyway, we fired that. And we came back. And I don't know what changed, but anyway, the sergeant came back and said, "You'll be happy, all you men. You'll get rid of them submachine guns." I don't know why. I can't figure it out why they gave us submachine guns. And we fired them there that one day, and that was all we had them. Well, the next day, we turned them in and they issued 30-06 Enfields. You ever see an Enfield? And they issued that. So they told us we were going out on the rifle range. So the next day we went out on the rifle range and there was, they dug a great big deep pit for the guy who was doing the marking. And he had a big metal thing on a big pole, and he's raise that up and wave it back and forth if you missed. So, we fired that. Just one shot at a time. Single shot. And I don't just remember how I did at that. Then the first day. Well, anyway, then they told us to fire rapid fire. So then we fired rapid fire. Then they called us back the next day and had us turn in the Enfields. We were going to get a Garand M1 And they issued us M1's. So then we went out on the rifle range and again the next day. And we would fire one round at a time. And then after we fired the one round, then we got orders from the sergeant, "Now empty the clip." And the guy on my target was waving target back and forth like this. That I had missed them all. So he came back. He got up out of the pit and came over to me and said, "Sigurdson, you are a rotten shot. You missed the whole darn target." "Oh, no," I said, "I never missed that target. Call the lieutenant over." So he called the lieutenant over. And the lieutenant looked at the target for about five minutes, you know. And he started to laugh. And the sergeant said, "What are you laughing about?" "Well," he says, "look here. You see all them ragged holes here? Sigurdson put all them bullets in that one hole." He says, "Oh, my God. I'll have to apologize to you." I just laughed. I said that I knew I didn't miss that. That's what I did. I put that whole clip in that one hole. And then after that, then I qualified on the submachine gun, I qualified on the M1 and on the rifle. I was only a Pfc. at the time. They made me a Pfc. Wait a minute. I take that back. I was only a private at the time. And we weren't allowed a pistol at that time. So then,

anyway, then the next time when we went out, on a march, well, we had to take the rifle on our shoulders. And they weighed about ten or twelve pounds, them M1's.

John: Yeah.

Mervyn: So when we got back, we were exhausted. And there was a lot of rattlesnakes around there. And one weekend, I went into Lawton. That was the town closest to Fort Sill. On the weekends, I'd go into Lawton whenever I got a pass. And I was talking to, they had an Osage Indian reservation outside of Lawton. And I got talking to one of the Indians there, you know. And he said, "Did you ever come over to Medicine Park?" And I told him no. "Well," he said, "we got a beautiful part there. You ought to go over there when you get a pass." The next weekend, I got a pass, and I hitchhiked over there. Military vehicles weren't going over there. As far as Lawton. They took me to Lawton, and I hitchhiked, probably fifteen miles to the park. And I am a horseman, and, in fact, that is another thing. I had been riding horses ever since I was twelve years old. And every time we would go to the camp, I would always find out where they had horses, and I could ride them. Anyway, we got to Medicine Park. And then I saw this riding stable. So I went over there and the cowboys was over there with the horses. I asked them, I said, "How can I get a horse to ride?" "Well," he said, "you can rent them." So I rented a horse and I rode for, I don't know, for three hours around there. And I came back and then I was talking to the superintendent of the park. "You want to be careful," he said, "when you are walking around here. There are diamond backs in the park. I killed one this morning." And that diamond back is a rattlesnake that is about, well, they grow to seven or eight feet long.

John: Yeah.

Mervyn: And they are monsters, because I've seen them. But, anyway, I thanked him and I didn't see any myself that time, anyway. And there was people out in the park. They were having picnics. They didn't seem to be bothered by this. And then I came back, after our basic training was over, why, then we left there. I went to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas.

John: Okay.

Mervyn: And that was outside of Fort Smith. And then we went on to live rifle fire.

John: Oh, yes.

Mervyn: And machine gun, both. The machine guns were anchored so they fired at a certain height. We had to lay under them on our stomachs and crawl.

John: Scare the hell out of you.

Mervyn: You didn't dare raise your head very high because you'd get riddled. So we went through that. And they called that commando training. And we had to go through a large culvert, one of the steel culverts. And then they had a big wall, and we had to climb up over that wall and jump on the other side, and jump in the creek. I couldn't swim, so they had a sergeant for anybody who couldn't swim to pull you out. I don't know just how long we were in Fort Smith. Not too long, I guess. Well, I got ahead of myself. One time when we were at Fort Smith, in the barracks, about ten o'clock at night, there was a terrible storm there. And we were in the barracks, and the sergeant was in there with us. And there was one joker who was always pulling tricks all the time. So this one night it was terrible, thunder and lightning, pouring down rain. And he's always say, "'Ten-Hut!'" And everybody would jump to their feet and salute. And there was no officer in the place, and he thought that was smart. Well, this one night it happened. This lieutenant came in. We didn't know it. Nobody saluted him or anything. And he says, "What's the matter, sergeant? Don't these men recognize an officer when he comes in?" And he apologized to him. "Now," he said, "just for that you are going to send all your men on that obstacle course." We had to go on the obstacle course. What was it? About eleven o'clock at night. And then they wanted to know who it was that did it. Well, we didn't squeal on him, or nothing. If we had, then we probably would have got out of it. But, anyway, we left Fort Chaffee. We went to Camp Bowie. That is where we run into the diamond backs. They were pretty thick in the sand fields there. Outside of Camp Bowie. So we were in Camp Bowie for quite a little while. And we had half-tracks, because we were still in the field artillery. And we had 155 howitzers. And they were so big, them shells were so big it took two men to put them on the tray. And you loaded them like a musket of Davy Crocket. You would put the powder in first, and tamp that with a big pole in the barrel. And then after that the projectile. You'd get the two men up there and they'd put the projectile in field artillery piece. The 155 howitzer. You had to dig a big trench there where the trail, what the gun sat on. We would dig a big trench because the recoil from that gun would just throw it right in the air. And sometimes we wouldn't dig it quite deep enough and threw us all in the air from the recoil. That gun jumped right out of the ground. And the projectiles were so slow, you could see them in the air. And we fired them until we left the field artillery. And then when we left Camp Chaffee, and went to Camp Bowie, we had a half-track to pull them with. And that was like a big Caterpillar. It had Caterpillar tracks on it. And we had to take training to drive that too. So we took the training to drive that half track. And then after we left there, then we went to Camp Hood. So then we went to Camp Hood in Texas. Fort Worth was about thirty miles out of Camp Hood. So when I'd get a pass, I used to hitchhike into Fort Worth. And I went in there quite a few times. And this one time, why, I was coming back. And three girls in a car

come along, and picked me up. And asked me where I was going. I told them I was going back to camp. They wanted to know where it was. So they took me back to camp, which was very nice of them.

John: Sure was.

Mervyn: Wasn't easy hitchhiking at that time. Well, anyway.

John: You were still in the field artillery then?

Mervyn: I was still in the field artillery. Well, then during Camp Hood, then they transferred us over to the tank destroyers. And they gave us a company. We were Company B, 817 Tank Destroyer Battalion. And then we had regular tanks. And they had a ninety millimeter gun on it. And their big gun. And their small machine gun was a .50 caliber, and that had a 360 traverse. You could turn it all around. And I never drove the tank or nothing. They put me in a weapons carrier, and I had a .50 caliber machine gun on that. Besides the .30 caliber. And then they took my Garand away from me and gave me a .30 caliber carbine. It was only about that long. It had a clip, one had fifteen in it, the other was thirty. And because I couldn't carry a pistol, why, that took the place of the pistol. So it weighs about two or three pounds, I guess. Real light. So I carried that, it was my hand gun. So, anyway, what I was going to say, while I was in Fort Sill, why, they killed a big diamond back on the mess hall steps. He was laying on the steps there. You know, at night, they would come down where it was cool and they'd lay there until it got hot. And then they would get out of there and go in their hole. And they lived in the holes with prairie dogs.

John: Oh, wow.

Mervyn: And for some reason or other, they never bit the prairie dogs. And they lived in there with an owl. An owl and the diamond backs and the prairie dogs all lived in the same hole. I found that out when I was in Camp Bowie. Well, anyway, let's see now. Then we were tanks, after that. They never taught me anything about driving a tank. And then I got a job, in the meantime, driving a major around in a Jeep. And I was driving him around quite a bit in Camp Hood. And then they wanted somebody guarding prisoners in the prison stockade. So the captain called me in one day and said. "I see by your qualifications you are a crack shot. We need a good man to guard the prisoners in the stockade." So they picked me for that. And I had that .30 caliber. And I had quite a few German prisoners as well as American prisoners. And American prisoners did everything from murder, rape, everything, you know. All the way down. So they were dangerous. So if you happened to kill a prisoner, they'd give you a carton of cigarettes and transfer you out of the outfit to another outfit.

John: I never figured out the carton of cigarettes.

Mervyn: Yeah. So, anyway, I got all the American prisoners together and I said, “Men, I’m going to tell you something.” And not only that, but you had to take their place until they were captured. In other words, you had to be the prisoner to take their place. Which is hard to believe, too. Well, anyway, I called the men all together and I said, “Men, you are in here for very serious crimes and I don’t want to serve your time. I am a crack shot. Don’t any of you ever try to get away because I will blow you down. I mean it, too. Whoever tries to get away from me.” And they took me at my word, and I never had any trouble with them. I let them know right away that I won’t serve your time. So, anyway, and from there, I went to Tennessee, outside of Nashville. A small town there. We were there for a little while there, on maneuvers there in Tennessee. And I went down. I was going to watch the Grand Ole Opry one night. And I got there and they were just closed up. So I missed it. And I saw the governor’s mansion there in Nashville. And then we went out in the country. And I was driving a Jeep at the time. When I was off duty, I could take the Jeep and go wherever I wanted. So we went way out to Bradyville, which was way out in the mountains, about thirty miles out of Nashville. And we went out there and went around sight-seeing. And there was a family out there, and we went down there. They were getting ready for dinner. So they looked like they were pretty poor. So we didn’t want to eat dinner there. So we thanked them and told them that we already had dinner. And they begged us to come and eat. They said we don’t have much but you are welcome to eat with us. So we did. Because we didn’t want to make them feel bad. Well, anyway, the old lady sitting there in front of the wood box. She was chewing and chewing. I thought she was chewing gum. She was chewing tobacco. And she spit this big wad of tobacco in the wood box. I couldn’t hardly keep from laughing. And so then we came back, and from there we went to Camp Phillips, Kansas. Anyway, we left there and we went to Camp Phillips, Kansas. So we were in Camp Phillips for a little while. I can’t tell you the exact time I was anyplace.

John: That’s all right.

Mervyn: I was doing kitchen duty there one day, and the window was open. During the summertime. And our colonel was kind of a dandy. He wore pink slacks and thought he was really something. And he was outside the window. And our full colonel came along. He gave him a salute. And I was standing right by the window, and he said to Colonel Sensrud, he said. Wait a minute. Yeah. He was a full colonel and the other was a lieutenant colonel. He was one notch above him. He says, “Colonel, haven’t you ever learned the way to salute? Or, correctly? Let’s see you salute ten times.” I was standing by the window and I cracked up. I imagine how humiliating that was. So, anyway, once he left, and then we went to

Camp Campbell. And we were in Camp Campbell for a while. And then the ranchers in North Dakota, they put out an ad, and I guess it was all over. They wanted men that were horsemen to come out and work there during the daytime, and then come back to the camp at night. So we took this convoy and we went all the way from Camp Phillips, to Langdon, North Dakota, which was eighteen miles from the Canadian border. Saskatchewan. And then we were there for a while. Went around the town. We were in the fairgrounds, in the cattle barns, and we were in sleeping bags there in the cattle barns. And to the rancher came to town that night and he saw soldiers. And he saw some of the men that were down there in a tavern. I wasn't drinking at that time. But, anyway, I was drinking pop, or something. Anyway, he came in and he says, "Any of you men know anything about horses?" Nobody said anything but me. I said, "I was raised around horses and I count myself a pretty good rider." He said, "You're the man I want. I need someone out at the ranch to take care of the horses. I got a grain and a horse ranch." So he talked to my commanding officer and he said that was all right.

**[End of Side B of Tape 1.]**

John: Okay, go ahead.

Mervyn: Well, I went out to the ranch. We were about six months there in Langdon, North Dakota.

John: Were you training, when you were working the ranch?

Mervyn: No, we weren't doing any training at all.

John: I'll be darned.

Mervyn: We were just over there for a time. And I was out there every day. And they'd take me out there and I'd take care of the horses and everything. And when the grain came time, his grain field was so big that all he did was move the thresher machine from one corner of the grain field to the other. And I was shocking grain during that time. And the lady rancher's wife would come out about two o'clock and bring us out a lunch. And in the afternoon. Then I was driving a team and wagons. Somebody else was loading the wagon. And they had one soldier there. And another came out. And he was taking care of the horses. So he drove the horses too close to the belt. You know, the thresher tore the tail off of that horse. And that was the end of his trip out there. He didn't come out anymore. There was quite a distance between a threshing machine and the tractor. So, anyway, we got through that, and we went down to Camp Campbell. And we were down there for not very long, and then we got orders to ship overseas.



John: When was that?

Mervyn: That was still in 1942.

John: '42. Okay.

Mervyn: Then we took the train from Camp Campbell to Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts. I am trying to think of the name of the town, but I can't think of it. And that is where we boarded the ship We boarded the ship from Massachusetts. And we landed in the Bay of Firth, in the corner of Scotland. And we went into Scotland. We were in Glasgow. In a corner of Scotland. And we went into Scotland, we were in Glasgow, Scotland for, I don't know how long. A few days. And then we went from there to England and we were in Manchester, England a little while And the Red Cross came out and brought coffee and donuts out to us. Let's see. From there we went to Chepsto, Wales. And we were there in Wales for a little while. And I went to town, and fooled around. And, at that time, they weren't checking you for guns or anything. So while, well, I take it back. This is backwards. Anyway, I got ahold of a gun. So then I went to the leather maker, you know, the shoemaker. Had him make a holster for my pistol. A shoulder holster. So then I put that under my shirt.

John: What kind of a pistol?

Mervyn: It was a .38 German pistol that I got ahold of. And I don't know how. I traded someway and got ahold of it someway. Had the shoulder holster made. And we were in Chepsto, Wales, for a while. Then we left Chepsto, Wales, and then we headed for France. And we went across the Channel. And, of course, at that time, we had tanks. Some of us were riding in the same troop ships that had the tanks with them. We landed in St. Lo, France. It was still smoking then. And there were snipers in there yet. We didn't run into any Germans at that time. So we went into St. Lo and we went to Valenciennes, France. That was a pretty good sized city. And then we were there for a little while. There was a cowboy and I that were together all the time. He was from Nevada. Had a .38 French six-shooter that I liked awful well. And I had an awful time but I finally talked him out of it. I traded that German pistol for his .38 revolver. A .39 revolver with a six inch barrel. Oh, I was in heaven over that. So I got that. So then we left Valenciennes and we started heading for Germany. We went into Luxembourg, no, Belgium. And we were in Belgium for a while. And then we kept on and we might have crossed the Siegfried Line. They had big cement barricade across there. And the tanks busted that down. And we went through that. We hadn't run into any Germans yet. At that time. So then we headed for Germany then. And it was night when we crossed the French line into Germany. And I guess the Germans knew we were coming because they were sending up flares. And we got orders to freeze

in our tracks. All the vehicles stopped and everything. Never moved a muscle until the flares went out. And then they started shelling the devil out of us. But they didn't do us any damage at that time, anyway. And we got into this town of Schmidt. It was a little town. It was on the Ruhr River. And then I was in a burned out house. Everybody had left because that building had been blown up by the Americans, you know. And I was in the basement, sleeping in a sleeping bag on a bunch of potatoes.

John: Comfortable.

Mervyn: They were comfortable. And they were shelling the devil out of us. In the daytime we didn't dare to raise our head from the ground. We had to stay on the ground all the time because they were shelling us with the big 240 millimeter gun that was on rails. From Cologne, I think it was. It recoiled so bad it just ran back on the tracks. Well, they shelled the devil out of us with that every day. Finally, the Air Force got it and blew that to pieces. Oh, a lot of times I saw dog fights between Americans and Germans in the air. And one time I seen a German Messerschmidt, ME 109, their fast fighter plane. One of them would come down, and then another time an American plane would come. I could even hear machine gun fire above the sound of the airplanes as well. And they weren't way too high up, either. And sometimes when I was walking along, you'd be walking along the road there in the daytime, why, they shelled me too. They strafed me. I threw myself in the ditch. It was like a sewing machine, the machine gun, you know. All the way up that ditch where I was laying. They didn't hit me at all. And let's see. Oh, yeah, then they kept shelling all the time. And I went in this place where they had a weapons dump. I thought if they hit me, I won't know any more about it. And one night a big shell, I heard it whistling coming over. And I thought, this is it. But it was a dud. It hit the building where I was at, all right, but it was a dud. I was so happy when I got out of there. Went to this other town. I can't think of the name of it. And we were in there in the daytime. Lieutenant was with us. We heard a lot of tramping feet and we wondered what was going on. Well, a German company come around the corner. They didn't have their artillery. It wasn't mechanized. It was horse-drawn artillery. The first I noticed of it was a dead horse along the road. And I was wondering about that. And then I found out they had horse-drawn artillery. They had the blacksmith and everything, horse-shoers. They came up and gave themselves up.

John: Oh, wow.

Mervyn: The whole company. They gave themselves up to the lieutenant. Well, he didn't know what to do with them so he sent them back to headquarters. But while we were there. You would be a week in battle and then they would sent you back to the back lines for a rest-up for a weekend. So, anyway, well, you heard so much

about the Battle of the Bulge.

John: Oh, yeah.

Mervyn: Well, we were just across the German line in the battle of the Hurtgen Forest. And that was the same, but we didn't get any publicity about the Hurtgen Forest at all. Because all anybody ever said was that Battle of the Bulge. But it was a terrible battle in the battle of the Hurtgen Forest. We lost a lot of men and the artillery was so bad they cut all the trees down there. They'd blow them down with German artillery. And there were so many GI's, they were loading them up just like cord wood in stake trucks and hauling them out. That was a terrible battle. And there was a town across there. I can't remember the name, but we had to cross the river. The Ruhr River. We took that five times in a row before we finally captured it. But we'd take it, and they'd take it, and we'd take it. We took it five times before we finally got it. And then they gave up. A lot of them escaped as soon as they found out we were going to take over the town. And we had quite a battle there in that town.

John: You were doing what? What were you doing? What was your job?

Mervyn: We were just about like infantry. Well, then after that, we were in the Black Forest. And it was in the Hartz Mountains. And we were going down this mountain, and the Germans opened up on us. And they knocked out the first vehicle and then they knocked out the other one. And they had us bottled up. See, we couldn't move. The officer in charge, he said to get out of the vehicles right away. He said, "They'll wipe us out." The Germans were all around us in the forest. So we got out of our vehicles and we had a big battle. We were shooting back and forth. I don't know how many I killed, or anything. The battle was going on so much. There was this county road going through there. Anyway, there was my buddy from Milwaukee. I can't remember his name. He was with me and all at once I looked up and blood was running down his belt buckle. "My God," I said, "you got it in the stomach." So I hollered and told the lieutenant that a man was shot. So he took him down to the first aid but he was shot with a wooden bullet and it just splintered through all his intestines, so he only lived two or three days.

John: Oh, God.

Mervyn: He died. And so, I was in the weapons carrier at that time. With a .50 caliber machine gun on it. And I spied a German. He was laying right in this narrow creek bed with a machine pistol in his hand. I opened on him and I just about drowned him with water. I didn't kill him. He jumped and dropped his machine pistol and shouted, "Nicht schiessen."

John: Don't shoot.

Mervyn: In German, yeah. And he got up. And I took him prisoner. And then we got out of our vehicles again and we were walking by a summer resort. And it was filled with women, German women. And we got up to that summer resort, just a squad of us. And just a staff sergeant in charge of us. And this road that runs right by the summer resort. With a big, high bank on it. And we got up there and all the soldiers were looking at these German fraulines, you know. We forgot they were Germans. And so I was watching, you know. And I had this machine pistol with me. So although I was watching that bank. And I seen a German climbing up over the bank. He had a machine pistol in his hand. As soon as he got up on the bank, why, he started going like this with the pistol. He'd have wiped us out, you know. And I beat him to it. When he saw that I had the drop on him, he dropped his gun and said, "Nicht schiessen." And I ran up there and took his pistol from him. It hadn't even been fired. It still had Cosmoline in the barrel. So I had two guns then. And I took that and I went down and I reamed the sergeant out. "What the devil is the matter with you, Sergeant? Don't you realize you are in Germany. If it hadn't been for me, he'd have wiped us all out." He said, "I'm going to put you in for a Bronze Star, Sigurdson." Well, he never did. I don't know what happened. I never saw it. Anyway, let's see. Then we were, we went from there to, oh, something else I forgot to tell you. In Germany, we were on this side of the Rhine River and one of the guys wanted to go down and see the Rhine. What the Rhine River looked like. And it wasn't very far from where we were at. And I heard a couple shots. And here they came back carrying one of the soldiers. Sniper shot him in the hip. That was the end of his fights. Then we were billeted in a building right on the edge of the Rhine River and there was a big plate glass window facing the river. You could see across the river. Then we had out grub in a tank just a few yards away from there. One day I went up there to get some grub, and I got a box. And I started back. And that sniper on the other side opened up and just pulverized that box right under my arm. I dropped that. I was running a zig-zag. I got to the house and I told them I just about got it. That sniper, he no doubt had a telescope on him. And he killed two of our men as they walked by the window there at night. He killed them right in their tracks.

John: Wow.

Mervyn: Then from there, where did we go? Oh, yeah, we went from there. And it was pretty soon that the war with Germany was over. Oh, then we went on occupation duty. We went to the city of Halle. Pretty good sized city. And we went there, and we were doing occupation duty. Drive up and down the street and run the Germans in. They had a curfew at ten o'clock. If they weren't in their houses, why, wherever they were living, then we had to put them in there, or take them to jail. So, anyway, we were doing that. Well, I had that job. And I was billeted in a

big hotel.

John: Oh, wow. Hard duty.

Mervyn: There was quite a few of us in there. And we didn't have nothing much to do. We'd just go out and walk around. We weren't marching. Nothing like that. The war was over and we were just on occupation duty.

John: Let me ask. Where did you get the Purple Heart?

Mervyn: Oh, that is what I forgot. That was in Schmidt. What happened, first, I was walking in the moonshine one night and I looked over my shoulder. And I saw somebody walking. And I kept looking. It wasn't a German, it was an American. Happened to be the colonel. He thought he was going to sneak up on me. He figured I was not, I was pulling guard. I let him get right up pretty close and then I whipped around with that six-shooter and had that right on his stomach. "Ooh," he said, "don't shoot! Don't shoot! I'm a colonel." I said, "You're lucky you said something. I was ready to let you have it in the stomach." So he went and told the captain about it, and the captain said, "You were lucky. Sigurdson said he heard a swish of leather and you were lucky that time because when he heard that swish of leather, you had a gun on you." And so then, I was out there one day and an artillery shell came over. And I had a big heavy overcoat on. And this shrapnel went through the overcoat and just grazed my back. It didn't do much. Just grazed me. And they were going to send me down, back to the hospital. I said, "I've only got a scratch. I don't want any Purple Heart. It ain't worth it. I didn't get wounded." They said, "You're wounded. You've got a cut there on your back." So they took me down to the doctor and put tape on it. And gave me the Purple Heart. That is how I got the Purple Heart.

John: You were very fortunate. How much closer? How much deeper? You would have been in trouble. We're getting toward the end of this. When did you come back from Europe?

Mervyn: I came back in 1945.

John: Okay. And then were you discharged quick?

Mervyn: Right after I came back, why, I was discharged at Fort Sheridan. Or I was inducted.

John: Okay. I'm going to cut it here. We're almost down to the end of the tape. Let me shut this off.

**[End of Interview]**