

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
HERBERT M. SMITH
Lieutenant Colonel, Army, World War II
1999

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Smith, Herbert M., (1903-2005). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 75 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 75 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 75 min.); ½ inch, color.

Abstract

Smith, a Neillsville, Wis. native, discusses his career military service with the Wisconsin National Guard including his World War II experiences as a member of the 126th Infantry, 32nd Division in New Guinea. He touches upon his National Guard service prior to World War II including drilling in Neillsville and summer camp at Camp Douglas. Stationed in Australia, Smith discusses interactions with Australians, dislike of American soldiers by the “Aussie home guard,” and the appreciation of Australian civilians. He provides insight into military politics when discussing his transfer from the 128th Infantry to the 126th Infantry. Smith mentions that the military training soldiers receive as inadequate saying “there isn’t training anywhere that is ever adequate.” He talks about marching across New Guinea through the jungles on the Kappa Kappa and Kokoda trails telling of the use of native carriers, medical care on the trail, muddy and cold conditions, effects of damp conditions on weapons and ammunition, dropping and sharing supplies to lighten the weight of military packs, food on the trail, and attempts to set up targets for the Air Force to drop food. Arriving at Buna, he mentions attacking at night, problems assaulting the Japanese who had been fortifying Buna for months, lack of artillery, and being wounded. Smith describes the expectation that the 126th would follow the Japanese immediately after ending their march across New Guinea. Smith comments that the men he lead were “lucky to be alive.” Smith touches upon the medical care he received, retiring from the service as a Lieutenant Colonel, suffering from malaria, and returning to Neillsville where he worked for the telephone company.

Biographical Sketch

Smith (1903-2005) was a member of the Wisconsin National Guard for twenty four years. He retired from service as a Lieutenant Colonel.

Interviewed by James F. McIntosh, 1999.

Transcribed by Cathy Cox, 2007

Transcription edited by Abigail Norderhaug, 2007

The audio used for this transcription was recorded from the video interview. Preliminary conversation before the start of the interview was not transcribed. Mr. Smith stutters, and that has been edited.

Interview Transcript

James: Now sir, where were you born?

Smith: I was born here in Neillsville.

James: Oh, my goodness! And that was in 19-what?

Smith: It was nineteen three [1903].

James: Nineteen three.

Smith: May 9th.

James: And when did you enter the service?

Smith: November—I think 26th—

James: The exact date. What year?

Smith: Oh! That was 19—that was 1919.

James: 1919. Now what—1919 the war was just over. How did you happen to go in the service after the end of the war?

Smith: Because I wasn't old enough to get in it any sooner but—

James: You had planned to be a career military officer?

Smith: No, no—no. I was in the National Guard.

James: National Guard. And they hadn't been deactivated from the war yet.

Smith: Oh yes they had! They had already reorganized.

James: I see.

Smith: It was—in this reorganization, this company was founded here again. This is an old—an old military town.

James: Oh it is military?

Smith: Yes.

James: Is there any reason for that?

Smith: Well, I suppose they were all hunters. And as long as they hunted, they—it goes back to the Sherman Yards. Which was the—in the Civil War time.

James: Well how did they maintain this area along the Wisconsin—

Smith: The Iron Brigade.

James: Oh yes. I knew about them.

Smith: Yes.

James: During the Fifteenth Army of Sherman, then.

Smith: What! I wouldn't know that much about it. I—

James: I do.

Smith: I do know that it—

James: Right. So where were you stationed in 1919?

Smith: Ah, right *here*. There was a company *here*.

James: I see. So you were just a local trainee—

Smith: It was the local National Guard Company.

James: I see. And that—in other words you went to meetings on a regular basis and had a summer encampment—

Smith: Yeah.

James: --and that sort of thing?

Smith: Yeah.

James: Did you get any basic training at that time?

Smith: Oh, yeah. Sure. You'd get the regular basic training.

James: Was that done locally or did they send you to a camp somewhere?

Smith: No, there were Company officers here.

James: I see. So all your training was local then. (clock begins chiming)

Smith: Yeah. Well, all except at the summer camp.

James: Right. Where was—that's what I was going—where was your summer camp encampment?

Smith: That was at Camp Douglas.

James: That's always been there. When I was a kid I used to go up there and—during the summer, with the National Guard, and help—play orderly as a high school student, with the National Guard there at Camp Douglas. Interesting. Very good. So anyway, that went on in—you stayed right in and then all of a sudden World War II came.

Smith: That's right.

James: How soon did they activate your Guard unit?

Smith: We were activated on October 15th, 1940.

James: Activated—October, 1940. And then where did you go?

Smith: We went down to Camp Beauregard. Louisiana.

James: Louisiana.

Smith: And then they put up a new camp right next to it. Camp Livingston. Beauregard was only meant for one regiment. And when you squeeze in the whole 32nd—

James: (chuckles) It didn't fit.

Smith: Luckily, our regiment had the senior Colonel, so we got to pick.

James: Very good. Now what was your rank at that time?

Smith: I was a Major.

James: You were a Major. When the war started.

Smith: I was Regimental S4.

James: S4. Right. Ok. So you stayed down there and—and when did they move you out? In '42 I think that your 32nd went to _____(??). Australia, wasn't it?

Smith: Early '42. We went up to Fort Devens, with the idea that they were going to ship us to Ireland. And then all ____ (??) we got the orders and we're going to go the other way.

James: Did they have summer uniforms for you?

Smith: We went down there in the wintertime.

James: Oh that's right. Yeah. That's right, when you got down there it was winter. So you took a ship to Australia.

Smith: Yeah.

James: The whole division go? In that one ship, or would they come over in pieces?

Smith: Oh, no. There were eight ships in the convoy as I recall. We lost our engineers. They were sent overseas to Europe before we went to Fort Devens. So they substituted the engineers from Massachusetts.

(Pause-no one speaking)

James: '42 you got to Australia.

Smith: Yeah.

James: October?

Smith: No, we got there in *May*.

James: May.

Smith: The end of May.

James: May of '42. Your book says you moved up to Port Moresby from there.

Smith: Oh yes. Yeah. Mm hmm.

James: Do you recall about when that time was? Six months later?

Smith: Must have been around September. I'm not sure, I—

James: In the fall sometime.

Smith: Yeah. Maybe it was a little earlier because uh—yeah, it must have been either in July or else August.

James: Now was it a lot of training of your battalion then? At Port Moresby, or was some of that done elsewhere?

Smith: Well, we trained in Australia. And then we got up into Port Moresby. In Australia we were in Camp Sandy Creek, which was about 30 miles inland from Adelaide. And it was all rural. Oh, there was a small town there but it was mostly rural, and then this area was almost all owned by the government. So there was ample training room.

James: Did the Australians train with you at that time?

Smith: No.

James: Completely separate.

Smith: Yeah.

James: How'd you get along with them?

Smith: The Aussies? Well I didn't have any trouble with 'em, but I do know that they—that this—this Aussie home guard didn't like us. We had money and they didn't have money. We turned up with the source of life, and—

James: Just like England. (chuckles) They didn't like the American boys over there either.

Smith: But the Aussie troops were over the—in—

James: Africa.

Smith: _____(??) (unintelligible – interviewer said “Africa” at the same time) at that time.

James: They were in Africa, right.

Smith: Yeah.

James: So you could entertain their girlfriends, you see, and I'm sure that made a lot of resentment.

Smith: Yeah, without a doubt.

James: Did you fraternize very much with the people in Australia? The civilians? Were they more friendly?

Smith: Oh-hh. They would kill ya with kindness.

James: Oh really?

Smith: Oh yes.

James: Then they felt that you were protecting them against the Japanese.

Smith: Without a doubt. Without a doubt. Oh, they were—they were so nice.

James: Invite you over to dinner and that sort of thing?

Smith: Oh yes. I was entertained in their homes.

James: Good. That's very nice.

Smith: Yeah. They were very kind.

James: Did their life seem a lot different than ours?

Smith: I wouldn't say so. Well, they had their customs and they had—and of course we had our customs. And uh—but there was no conflict. There was—everything went like that. They had learned considerable—probably too much—from our movies. (chuckling) They thought that everybody was a millionaire, and uh—

James: All glamorous like Hollywood.

Smith: Yeah. Yeah. But that didn't really cut much ice, after it was discovered that—

James: You're ordinary people too. (chuckles)

Smith: Yeah.

James: So your job was with supply?

Smith: No—in early 19—no, wait a minute—in late '41, I got transferred to the 126th Infantry. Did you ever know Colonel Hale?

James: No.

Smith: You're lucky. Colonel Holden commanded the 128th. He was a gentleman—all the way through. And then he—he became over-age in grade. And for some reason, they put Colonel Hale, from the 127, over the 128. And Colonel Hale

didn't like me. I was home on leave and I got a telegram—come right back to camp. Well, I thought maybe something was going on. I got back to camp and it was a transfer order to the 126. (chuckling)

James: This was when you were in _____(??).

Smith: Yes. Yes.

James: Ok.

Smith: So I went to Fort Devens to the 126. And I was a Battalion Executive Officer.

James: Your regiment was how big at 126th? A thousand?

Smith: Oh, no, it was more than that. We had received many draftees by that time.

James: Well you had to train them.

Smith: Oh yeah. Yeah. But they were all nice. They were very anxious to learn. And these National Guard men fit them right in like this and made 'em feel at home.

James: Did you feel that the training you had in the National Guard, you know, when somebody's going to war, was adequate or did you have a lot left to learn there?

Smith: There isn't *any* training *anywhere* that ever is adequate.

James: Ok. For a particular job, right. Everybody has to learn on the job?

Smith: Well, there are certain jobs that are the same all the way through. But the infantrymen, every location is always a little different. Now you can have an overall plan, but you have to figure out what to do with it. So, *any* training isn't adequate because everything keeps on changing with you.

James: When did you find out that you're going to end up in the bush? Charging up and down the—in the mountains, jungles? Or was that planned right from the start?

Smith: No, no. No, no. When we got to Port Moresby the Aussies had the control of all transportation other than organizational units or—I mean motor vehicles. So, the army(??) didn't have an awful lot of hint of getting. And the Japs pretty well controlled the air. So they'd send these luggers out and they'd sink 'em. So they had these troops at Port Moresby poured into the Buna area, which was about a hundred miles in a line. And the only way to get 'em there was to hike 'em over the mountains. So they chose one battalion to pioneer that trail. And they were going to (clock begins chiming) hike the whole corps over the mountains. Well that didn't work out. When we got to—into New Guinea, I was on Regimental duty to inspect these Aussie supply [units] to see what they had and also how

much we could get. And I thought it was just a temporary job. Well, it didn't turn out that way. There was a truck head up at Kapa Kapa and—which was at the start of the Kapa Kapa Trail—I mean Track, they called it Track. And, when I was put in charge of this truck head, I didn't have any—

James: (chuckles) Didn't have any territory like that in Neillsville, huh?

Smith: I didn't have *anybody*. So, they chose the 2nd Battalion 126, 'cause I had the _____(?). But that was _____(?). These companies left, one every day—there were six companies—no, five companies. And there—and then the _____(?) headquarters, they left with this last company. They were out two days, and Colonel Geerds, supposedly, had a heart attack.

James: I remember reading that in your book.

Smith: Yeah. He was an older man. And he had chosen an _____(?) who had been the Regimental _____(?) Officer. Can you imagine?

James: Must have been a friend.

Smith: So, I was notified next day that I would take over. So, they had a doctor who also had to take the Colonel back to civilization, and also two staff officers. So I was running up there and I had another doctor with me. But there was an Aussie Captain up at Kapa Kapa who was—who had a _____(?) to take carriers, 'cause you couldn't use any vehicles.

James: So how many of those carriers did your group have?

Smith: Well, (chuckles) sometimes we had enough of them and sometimes we didn't have enough. They were—

James: _____(?) there what—about thirty of them?

Smith: Well, in New Guinea there was an organization called the Australian New Guinea—ANGAU—Australian New Guinea [Administrative Unit]. It was a semi-military organization that—

James: Hired these natives?

Smith: Yeah. And also—

James: Trained 'em?

Smith: Yeah.

James: Oh my goodness. You mean taught them the use of weapons too?

Smith: Oh no. No, no. They were just carriers.

James: Right, just carriers. Would they speak—had they learned how to speak the native language or did the natives speak some English?

Smith: Well, they had several different languages. One of those, which they pushed, was called Motu. The only words that I can remember was the *kaikai*, which was food.

James: That's a good one to remember.

Smith: Oh yes. And also there were the Indians who had gone to these church schools, with the Church of England where they were taught English—how to read also. This Aussie captain that I mentioned, Captain Kelly, said that "I'm going to give you the Aussie sergeant who knows how to handle natives." And I picked him up and he had a _____(??) orderly who had been a house boy, who knew English. And he'd also cook.

James: Perfect.

Smith: (chuckles) So, Romee was—he was one of us.

James: What was the man's—what was the native's name?

Smith: It was Romee.

James: Romee?

Smith: When I—

James: Pleasant man? Pleasant young man?

Smith: Oh yeah, very much so. He—I'll tell you, we treated him just like one of us.

James: Sure. I would think you'd have to. He was very valuable.

Smith: Very much so! And he got along very nicely.

James: The natives that you encountered on your trip over the mountains though, were very, very primitive, is that what I understood from your book?

Smith: Right. Very.

James: I mean some of them had never seen a white man before I'll bet.

Smith: Well that I wouldn't know. But they didn't have—they were only a couple of generations from being headhunters. So you can imagine. And up there in the mountains, two tablespoons of salt was a day's wages.

James: That's *it*?

Smith: That was a day's wages. Two tablespoons of salt.

James: What did they generally eat?

Smith: Well, they would have these little gardens scattered around. And then they would move from this garden to this garden to this garden to this garden. And each one had their vegetables. And they also had pigs.

James: They ate the pigs?

[The end of Tape One Side A and beginning of Side B is fairly garbled—there is a blank space at this point and the next sentence has no relation to the previous sentence. Side B finally settles down at the discussion about pigs. The intervening junk on both sides has been deleted from this transcription.]

[End of Tape One Side A]

Smith: Yeah. Yeah.

James: Was there one source of meat? No chickens?

Smith: I didn't see any chickens.

James: Fish?

Smith: Well no, no, because there weren't any fish up there in the mountains.

James: I didn't know whether the streams had any fish in.

Smith: Well, I think they're too cold to have any fish in them.

James: Oh, I see.

Smith: Often this trail was up a creek. There was always trouble going over all these mountains.

James: But the water in those streams in the mountains was it very cold?

Smith: Yeah.

James: Did you drink it? Could you drink it, or was it—

Smith: Oh, yeah.

James: It was safe to drink.

Smith: Well that's all—

James: You had no choice.

Smith: Didn't have any choice. But uh—

James: So you lugged all of your food in then, as you went. _____(??) (unintelligible)

Smith: Well, no. The Air Force was supposed to make drops. We put the panels out. But these villages would probably cover only five acres, maybe ten acres, with all around jungle, and if you weren't right over—

James: You'd never see it.

Smith: --they wouldn't see the panels.

James: How tall are those trees around those villages(??). Two, three hundred or more, or less?

Smith: Oh no, they're probably a hundred feet at the most.

James: I see.

Smith: Well, I'm not a good judge of that.

James: Oh, ok.

Smith: That's worse than big trees.

James: So the type of food they brought—they sent down by airlift was K-rations, C-rations?

Smith: Usually C-rations. Didn't have any K-rations there. And there was rice. And that's about all. But these villages were up on top of a hill, with these very steep(??) sides. And they come over with these airplanes and then they started kicking out, kicking out, kicking out, kicking out. We didn't get much.

James: I was going to say if they missed the spot then that's gone.

Smith: Yeah. So we told them to just to use eight(??) and then drop on the panels. And apparently it finally caught on that that was how to do it.

James: These panels that you put up, were they cloth panels?

Smith: Yeah.

James: Colored cloth panels or white or—

Smith: Well the—ours were white.

James: Each panel was what, about six feet in diameter or—

Smith: Well—

James: --or six by six or what? Roughly.

Smith: Oh they were probably ten feet long and probably four feet wide.

James: So how many of these would you scatter out there?

Smith: Well, you'd put out enough so you hope that they'd see it.

James: Would that have meant what, about a dozen of them or something?

Smith: No, no. There wouldn't be that many.

James: Oh, I see. Well that area then of maybe about thirty feet in diameter is what they had to hit.

Smith: No! They had to hit within this five or ten *acres*. But when you have a hundred miles of this jungle, that's a pretty small target.

James: Yeah it is. It surely is. It surely is.

Smith: Very small.

James: Well so you got probably one out of six of the drops or-- (clock starts chiming)

Smith: Well—I didn't keep count.

James: Oh. How did you keep track of the Air Force? Were you in constant radio contact with them?

Smith: We were—no. We were in contact with the Regiment. The Regiment.

James: Back in Port Moresby?

Smith: Yeah.

James: And the Regiment contacted the—the Air Force.

Smith: Yeah.

James: Any Japanese attack you when you were at that point?

Smith: No.

James: As you climbed up the mountain and then down the other side, you never saw any Japanese? No hostile natives? All the natives were reasonably friendly?

Smith: Well, these natives, when they heard there was an army coming they moved to one of these other—

James: How big was your group climbing up the mountain and down the other side? To get over to Buna?

Smith: That was twelve hundred men.

James: Twelve hundred men. And you had a physician or—one or two?

Smith: We had a portable hospital. With four doctors—with four *surgeons*, who were capable of operating on any part of the body.

James: Did they—what did they—they were set up in tents?

Smith: Oh yeah. Yeah. But there was a lot of this equipment that they couldn't carry.

James: Right. They had to bring some sterilizing equipment—they were just boiling water and use that for steam sterilization I'm sure. Right.

Smith: Yeah.

James: Very good. So everything was carried though by these—by the natives.

Smith: By the individual, and the carriers.

James: No horses?

Smith: No.

James: No burros.

Smith: No.

James: One fellow I interviewed was in Burma. They used burros in Burma.

Smith: Yeah but this—understand we were on just a narrow path—like this.

James: Three feet wide?

Smith: It was always mud.

James: Never dried out?

Smith: No.

James: Dark all the time, or _____(??) sun?

Smith: No. I had a camera with me, but it wasn't—

James: Fast enough?

Smith: It wasn't fast enough.

James: For the dark.

Smith: Well that—remember that was over fifty years ago.

James: Right.

Smith: Your film speed—

James: Was pretty slow.

Smith: --was awfully slow. And also lenses were awfully slow.

James: Yes. Right. _____(??)

Smith: So—

James: _____(??) (unintelligible sentences – from interviewer and Smith)
So, did you lose weight on this diet of Air Force drops and so forth?

Smith: After I was wounded and after I went in the hospital they got me up on the scales and I weighed a hundred and thirty-five pounds.

James: And your _____(??) how much did you weigh?

Smith: Well, I weighed about a hundred sixty-five. And in the army I was up around two hundred.

James: Good. All that good food down in Louisiana. (chuckles) Tell me about getting wounded. How did that happen?

Smith: Well it wasn't on purpose. (all chuckle) We—I don't know how to tell you this really, but there on our front there were two infantry battalions, and they were both of them 2nd Battalions. They were both commanded by a Herbert Smith.

James: Yes, I remember reading that in the book. It's really bizarre.

Smith: Yeah. Well, I got the choice assignment because the other Herb Smith, he didn't have any plan to attack Buna. And I did.

James: You were—excuse me, before you start, how far were you away now from your objective here? You were right where you wanted in the front of the pack or where you just a little ways from there?

Smith: Very, very close.

James: Ok.

Smith: And we had a night attack to start with. And we overran a Jap headquarters. We got code books and maps and diaries and cigarettes and whisky and food.

James: Terrific.

Smith: And we couldn't get through the Jap lines. They had been there since June. This was the end of November, so they had had ample time to build these pillboxes which we couldn't do anything with because we didn't have any artillery.

James: Or flame throwers or any of those things.

Smith: We used Aussie artillery which was only twenty-five pounders, which was probably not enough to handle all of this. (James chuckles) And—

James: You needed a flamethrower but you didn't have those at that moment.

Smith: Yeah, but they wouldn't work. And eventually there was a Company G, where the platoon with a heavy weapons company punched a hole through the Jap line. And they separated Buna village from the stuff up north. And I went down there, and it seemed very calm and very quiet. And they put over some of these

grenades and one of them hit up the tree and showered down, and it killed three and also wounded three. And I was one of the wounded.

James: I see. In the back, the head or—

Smith: All the way down.

James: Shrapnel. Small bits.

Smith: From the head down to the heels.

James: Oh my!

Smith: And then one of the five-centimeter pieces drove right into the kidney. So—

James: That made your urine bloody.

Smith: Oh yeah. Yes.

James: So what did they do with you?

Smith: Well, I went to the aid station. Then I went to this—the portable hospital. And I was there overnight and then they—then I was taken down to the airstrip at Dobodura, and then taken back to Port Moresby.

James: They flew you to Port Moresby.

Smith: Yeah.

James: Were you feeling—you were not unconscious at any time?

Smith: No.

James: And they took some X-rays and that's when they noticed that one of those pieces of shrapnel was in your kidney.

Smith: No, they didn't take any X-rays until I got back to Australia.

James: I see.

Smith: They didn't have—

James: I'm sure they didn't have it in the field, no.

Smith: No, no.

James: They didn't have enough power.

Smith: And I found this little hospital in Port Moresby was operated by the 135th Medical.

James: From Madison. I know a lot of those docs. 135th came from University Hospitals in Madison.

Smith: Well, there was a Doctor Eagleberger, Sidney Eagleberger, practiced over in Stevens Point.

James: I see.

Smith: And I was in his hospital. And I *knew* him.

James: Oh my goodness.

Smith: So, this whole story, it all hinges on General Harding. (pause while sounds like a tape being replaced are heard) General Harding in this time had only two regiments of infantry. All of our artillery and also the 127th Infantry, they were in Australia. Then the Aussies, they took the 126th Infantry and put it into the Aussie 7th Army. So that left General Harding with one regiment, the 128th. And General Harding asked if he could get more troops. So they—when we got to Popondetta, that was the end of the Kokoda Track where the Japs had pushed, had almost made it into Port Moresby. These Aussies pushed them back. We got to Popondetta just after these Japs had got up on the track, (clock chiming) and the 126th Infantry was supposed to follow these Japs. And this outfit I had, they weren't in any shape for combat. They were even lucky to be *alive*.

James: ____ (??) coming out of the jungle.

Smith: Yeah. And so they put my outfit in the Regimental Reserve. Well then they got the orders to send one battalion back to the 32nd. And then ____ (??) to send ours because we were in reserve and—

James: So it's your battalion that crossed the mountain then.

Smith: Yeah.

James: Twelve hundred men—

Smith: Yeah.

James: --was that battalion, the 2nd Battalion of the 126th Regiment, right?

Smith: Yeah. Right.

James: Ok. You um—(laughter)

Smith: And so—so that gave General Harding one regiment and also one battalion. That's all he had. And he got a dirty deal from old MacArthur. Evidently there was some kind of friction and I don't know—MacArthur had been told that there was just a handful of Japs at Buna. There were several thousand. And he was sitting down there in Port Moresby, and he had to have a victory. You know that whole _____(??) (unintelligible; interviewer talking at same time). And somebody told him that the 32nd wasn't doing well. They had nothing to do anything *with*. And the Japs were all entrenched or all in these pillboxes that you're—so—

James: Tell me about what did they do with you? When you came back from the airplane, full of shrapnel.

Smith: Well I was put in the hospital at Port Moresby. And then eventually they got a hydroplane and took about maybe twenty of us into Australia, into Townsville, and we were in the hospital there.

James: Where did they pick the shrapnel out? When did they do that?

Smith: Well, there was a lot that they left in.

James: Sure. Either it's too deep or it doesn't really bother.

Smith: No.

James: Do you still have some in?

Smith: Oh yeah.

James: I'm sure. (both laugh)

Smith: _____(??) (unintelligible – chuckling while talking)

James: I'll bet they do. Not surprising though. Yeah. Most of it's there in the back, and in the back of the legs and there—

Smith: Oh yeah.

James: None in your head?

Smith: Yeah. Right here.

James: Can you feel it?

Smith: Well, yes and no. The doctors, well they picked out a lot at the portable hospital. _____(??) (unintelligible – chuckling while talking)

James: I've done a lot of that. In Korea I did a lot of that. Picking shrapnel out. I was a surgeon on a hospital ship.

Smith: Oh.

James: So I did a lot of shrapnel work. A lot of the soldiers wanted them. I just had to save the piece I took out, they want to take it home and tell their mom.

Smith: Well, these were all small ones. Other _____(??). I ended up in a Harvard hospital in Australia. I'll tell ya, they had _____(??) there for all the year. And all that they had ever looked at was _____(??). And they were _____(??) there was no question. But when they first _____(??). Oh, ho, they'd kill you with kindness. And these doctors—anytime that you didn't look right, these nurses, they would call your doctor. _____(??) night or day, they would come down and sit on your bedside and talk to ya.

James: Really.

Smith: Yeah.

James: How nice.

Smith: It was. That was *wonderful*.

James: Yes. Did you keep in contact with any of these ladies? After the war?

Smith: No.

James: Didn't write 'em letters or they didn't write you?

Smith: No. This kidney abscessed.

James: Ah, ok.

Smith: And there was a Doctor Richardson, who is a surgeon. And this same doctor, the same Doctor Richardson made the first kidney transplant.

James: Oh. _____(??)

Smith: No.

James: Now, when did they stab that abscess and drain it?

Smith: Well, after I was in Australia—I was wounded December 7th—

James: Forty-what? '44?

Smith: No, '42.

James: '42?

Smith: Yeah. And this was abscessed after Christmas.

James: Yeah. They explained to you what happened—when the thing hit your kidney you leaked urine in there, around the kidney. And when it sat there it became infected and that was your abscess, yeah.

Smith: But they fixed it up and I haven't had any—

James: All they do is just drain that pocket.

Smith: Haven't had any trouble since.

James: Right.

Smith: You know, I had a very interesting time in the army.

James: (laughs) Well that's true.

Smith: I was in the hospital, well about five months.

James: Five months?

Smith: Yeah.

James: Because?

Smith: That kidney.

James: You mean before or after they drained it?

Smith: Well, it was after. They didn't know whether I would have any more trouble. So they kept me in the hospital.

James: There(??) in Australia.

Smith: Yeah. And then I was put on limited service, with orders to the only assigned _____(??) with the General Hospital. Oh, and they were very, very nice—

[End of Tape 1 Side B]

Smith: Oh, and they were very, very nice and were wonderful.

James: So after five months where did you go?

Smith: I went down to the Base Section 4. It was in _____(?), in _____(?). [Base Section 4 was in Melbourne, but am unable to decipher the tape.]
And I was there—I went down there in April, must have been, and then I was sent home in October.

James: '43.

Smith: Yeah.

James: Did they discharge you from the service then? Or were you at a base here?

Smith: No. I was in a hospital at the—in Utah, and I retired.

James: You retired from service then. From that hospital you left the service?

Smith: Yeah.

James: You retired as a Lieutenant Colonel or full Colonel?

Smith: No. I was a Lieutenant Colonel.

James: Had you got your twenty-five years in? You were proud of your _____(?) time. Should be pretty close.

Smith: Oh yeah. I had twenty-four.

James: Twenty-four. So you retired on twenty-four years, that's good. For the term(?). See, they're still paying you for that.

Smith: Oh yeah. Every month.

James: Every month. Right. When was the full course(?), or Lieutenant Colonel get per month at this stage, in retirement?

Smith: Well now—I don't know what the present ones do, but I get about \$2400.

James: \$2400 a month?

Smith: Yeah.

James: That's pretty nice. But you deserve it. _____(??) you're in a tough place.

Smith: Oh yeah. There's no argument there.

James: When you went overseas were you married then?

Smith: Oh yeah. There was a Corps friend, General Eichelberger. He _____(??) we were, there was no military courtesy, these guys hadn't shaved, their uniforms were all tattered, and nobody got up and saluted him or anything. And he was—

James: He was _____(??) (unintelligible)

Smith: --he was just a little mad about that. and then I—then he came where I was. I said _____(??) (chuckling while speaking).

James: You were living in the bush, you know, you can't stay pretty.

Smith: _____(??). (unintelligible; still chuckling) Somehow, he and I hit it off.

James: Great.

Smith: And then he came up again and he called me Herb. And he asked me when I had eaten last. I said, "I ate this morning." He says, "What did you have?" I said, "Captured rations." (James chuckles) He said, "What, don't you know those could have been poisoned?" I said, "What the hell _____(??) (both are laughing throughout this)

James: How I die, right. (both laughing) That's a great story.

Smith: And then he asked me—he said, "You have any children?" I said, "Yes. I have a son." "How old?" I said, "He's about seven years old." And I thought that was the end of it. After I was home and out of service and in about forty-five years, my son called me. He said, "Do you know anything about these Army (clock begins chiming)—

James: Patches?

Smith: --arm patches?" I said, "No, not an awful lot." He said, "Well, I've got some. A General Eichelberger sent them to me—

James: Oh my goodness.

Smith: --when I was a kid." And _____(??).

James: _____(??) General Eichelberger? (unintelligible; it is not clear if this is Smith speaking or the interviewer. They seem to be speaking over each other here.)

Woman: I think I did.
[An unidentified woman was also present at the video interview.]

James: You said that you didn't know he did that, huh?

Smith: No.

Woman: No.

James: I'll be darned. That was awfully nice.

Smith: Yeah. And--

Woman: What did he send him?

James: Arm patches. From the 126th Infantry.

Smith: _____(??). (unintelligible)

James: That's the cloth, cloth things.

Smith: From all of the fuzzy ones, and the other army ones—

James: Oh my goodness. _____(??). (unintelligible)

Smith: --we had about twenty of them.

James: Oh my.

Smith: He _____(??). When he got into Japan, he only been there a couple days, and he wrote me a two-page letter. I kept in correspondence with him. In service. He was interested in how I was doing and we just hit it off.

James: That's wonderful.

Smith: Then he wrote a book, and there were six National Guard officers in there that he would have any time—

James: You were one of them. That's wonderful.

Smith: So—

James: Did you keep in contact with him after the war?

Smith: Oh, yes. After I was home.

James: Yes.

Smith: But he didn't live long after he was home.

James: That's what I was going to say, because I know he didn't last long.

Smith: Yeah. And he—

James: He was one of MacArthur's right hand men. He was a very important fellow.

Smith: Yeah. But he was really nice to deal with.

James: He was the one that MacArthur said, "I want you to take Buna or not come home."

Smith: "—or don't come back alive."

James: "—don't come back alive." (laughs)

Smith: Yeah, well, he understood what we were up against up there. He really knew.

James: It's interesting that your company's experience was less from the Japanese and was more from the elements that you were forced to live in.

Smith: Oh yeah. And also these odd diseases.

James: Yeah. Now that was going to be the balance of my next subject here. Tell me about the men getting sick.

Smith: There was a order issued that anyone who—with a temperature under a hundred degrees and two would stay.

James: Under a hundred and two.

Smith: Under a hundred and two.

James: Over a hundred and two—sent back.

Smith: Yeah.

James: Generally that was due to malaria?

Smith: Yeah. Well, the—oh, oh yeah! And also these other jungle diseases.

James: Did you get dengue?

Smith: I didn't even get *dysentery*.

James: You're probably the only one that was in the South Pacific that didn't. (laughs)

Smith: No, I wasn't the only one, but I was one of the very few. And I didn't get any malaria till I was out of service and *home* here.

James: You mean you had an *attack*. You contracted it there and it just bothered you after you got home.

Smith: That was the first one that I had *had*. Every other test was always negative.

James: Amazing. So they didn't give you anything for it then. Then what did they treat you with?

Smith: Well, there was a doctor lived up north of here that was in my regiment, early, and then he got ill, and then he was out. But after he learned that we were over in New Guinea, he got a hold of a great big jar of—

James: Adamen(sp??-I know this is not correct)?

Smith: Wasn't adamen, that--_____ (??).

James: It's what?

Smith: _____ (??)

James: What was it for?

Smith: For—

James: Malaria?

Smith: Yeah.

James: Was it a newer drug, the chloroquine?

Smith: What do you call the—I know, quinine!

James: Oh! Quinine! Well that goes back on the other side. That's the original stuff.

Smith: Yeah. He had a great big jug of it. And I came home, the _____(?), “If there are gonna be kids coming in here, you’re gonna have to have this. So you just take care of him.” So I was _____(?) of the quinine here. (chuckling)

James: Was it in pill form?

Smith: Yeah. Mm hmm.

James: But that only bothered you that one time.

Smith: Just that one time. Mm hmm. I went to the local doctor and I said, “Doctor, I’ve got malaria.” “Oh,” he said, “you’re crazy.” I says, “Take a—

James: Blood sample.

Smith: “—take a sample.” I said, “I’m coming back in a few days.” So, I went back in two days and I had another, another attack. He hadn’t sent in that other sample so he—so then he knew that I had it. And I had the quinine and there was a five-a-day, and then a four-a-day, then three-a-day, then two-a-day—

James: Until the attack was gone, yeah. How high did your temperature go? Do you know?

Smith: No, it doesn’t—

James: Was it up to a hundred and four or--

Smith: Oh no, no, no. No.

James: Because usually that’s what it does when you get an attack.

Smith: I was ambula[tory]. I was around and I had a little chill, had a little fever, ate the quinine and took this whole series.

James: Right. That was it.

Smith: That was it. I haven’t had it since.

James: What would you do with the boys if they came with severe, wounded—not wounded but sick with the diarrhea? Do you send them back or just—somebody had to carry them didn’t they?

Smith: Well, when we first started over these mountains, they were out maybe three, four days—maybe five, six days—and they got diarrhea. So our four doctors, they established four different—well, they weren’t hospitals—well, probably call them

treatment joints. And one day, when they were able, they would move up one station and then see the doctor again.

James: Did they have to walk back? Was there no one to carry them?

Smith: No. Well they—I don't know of anybody that was carried because—

James: You had no room to carry, really. Just a footpath you were _____(??) on.

Smith: No.

James: But I'm saying about what you did with the boys who couldn't walk you see—

Smith: Well—

James: --you just left them there at the hospital and—

Smith: Yeah.

James: --moved on.

Smith: Oh, yeah. This hospital was probably a couple weeks catching up with us.

James: So you'd sort of leave them there and walk on till the hospital came up to *them*.

Smith: Yeah.

James: Did you worry about any animals in the jungle?

Smith: No.

James: They were never a problem?

Smith: Some of these natives thought they saw things there in the grass—

James: Snakes?

Smith: Yeah. But I never saw any. _____(??) someone pushed out of the way _____(??). They had a name for it, which I don't remember. And I said all that I do is *kaikai*. (laughs)

James: Generally through the jungle, how far did you go in a day's march?

Smith: Well—

James: Of course I'm sure it depended on how hot it was, but--

Smith: I can't tell you. Their line was a hundred miles. It took the forty-five days.

James: Forty-five days for that hundred miles?

Smith: Yeah.

James: Of course it was probably *two* hundred miles the way *you* went, up and down, in and around.

Smith: Yeah.

James: That path had already been created by hundreds of years of natives walking that path, is that right?

Smith: Yeah. And part of our trail, I'm told, that this certain section had never been seen by—

James: By men?

Smith: --by any non-native. Yeah, it was—the trees were like that, and tall, and just hung with moss, and also vines. And you could put your walking stick all the way down. Just—

James: Mossy ground. Yeah. Mushy.

Smith: Yeah. And must have—have lain there for eons just building up.

James: Of the twelve hundred that started out to cross the mountains, how many got to Buna?

Smith: All of them.

James: All of them? Very good.

Smith: They all got there. They really—they really treated each other like family. A guy couldn't carry his rifle; somebody always carried it for him.

James: What did you carry? _____(??)?

Smith: Yeah.

James: Rifle?

Smith: I—

James: Any packs, or did you leave that to the boys?

Smith: I carried a regular pack, and also a Springfield rifle.

James: _____(??)

Smith: Yeah. That's what I would do.

James: In that situation. Well, we were talking about the weapons again, now we get down to weapons. You carried .30 caliber machine guns, or heavier?

Smith: No, they only carried .30's.

James: No .50's.

Smith: No.

James: And mortars? 61's?

Smith: No.

James: No mortars.

Smith: No.

James: No *mortars*?

Smith: No.

James: The 61's aren't so heavy.

Smith: But the ammunition?

James: Yeah, that's right. The ammunition _____(??).

Smith: And—

James: It's too moist for that ammunition too.

Smith: These guys ended up with half a blanket. They cut the blankets in two so they wouldn't have to carry so much. No _____(??) heads. Just a toothbrush. No razors, no comb, no nothing—that was gone.

James: Who was that—everybody?

Smith: *Everybody.*

James: So at the end of the day, the time to sleep—where'd you sleep?

Smith: On the ground, in half a blanket. (clock chiming)

James: You took the blanket and slept *on* the blanket, not under it.

Smith: Just rolled up in it.

James: What about mosquitoes? No mosquitoes up there probably too.

Smith: No.

James: It's too high for that.

Smith: Yeah.

James: That's *one* problem you didn't have.

Smith: Yeah. Probably the only one.

James: Well, that—was going to say, that should keep the malaria down, because malaria is only where the mosquitoes are.

Smith: Yeah. But after we got to Buna—

James: Yeah, then you had a lot of them. Yeah, there on the shore. Yeah.

Smith: Yeah. That was all tidal swamps inland just a short distance. And then were only narrow trails just to cross those. And if you weren't on any trail you were up to your ears in mud and water.

James: Oh boy. Yeah.

Smith: But(??) it was—

James: Yeah, that's not very pleasant.

Smith: No, it was—

James: You must have been wet almost all the time.

Smith: Yeah. Well, not *all* the time, but—

James: Yeah. Did it get very cold at night?

Smith: Only up in the mountains. We got up to—up around ten thousand feet. It was cold up there you had to have _____(?). But it was something different.

James: Right. So the only explosive device you had then were hand grenades, is that right?

Smith: (chuckles) Unless you were Aussie.

James: Which meant what? They didn't work? (Smith chuckles) Oh, really?

Smith: It was too damp. You see they set those over (chuckles) the desert you know. They were okay over there, but up in New Guinea they didn't do any good.

James: I'll be darned. So when you attacked the Japanese village down there, then you were attacking with M-1 rifles and .30 caliber machine guns and that was about it.

Smith: Well, over at the—we had mortars.

James: Oh.

Smith: They had shipped those over.

James: Oh, you got them when you got down to the coast.

Smith: Yeah.

James: 'Cause I was going to say, it would be very difficult to attack the Japanese in pillboxes—

Smith: Oh yeah.

James: --unless you had some kind of explosive device.

Smith: Yeah. They were starved out. The only thing that saved us were two battles. (loud noise) The Coral Sea and also Midway. That's all that saved us. Well they could have _____(?) without any trouble at all. But they didn't do it.

James: So. What decorations did you receive?

Smith: Well I—

James: Probably your Purple Heart.

Smith: I had a DSC [Distinguished Service Cross].

James: DSC? That's wonderful. You certainly deserved it.
You had those in crossword puzzles, the DSC. (this is an aside to the woman in the room)

Woman: Uh huh.

James: Then of course the Area(??) Ribbons.

Smith: Yeah.

Woman: Who is this, Jim?

James: That's Edie Gorme's husband.

Woman: No it's not. Who is that?

Smith: (laughs) That's my son—

Woman: It's the son-in-law.

Smith: --son-in-law.

Woman: I *thought* so.

James(?): What is this she just looked through?

Woman: Ok. (laughs) I thought maybe he was a pro golfer.

Smith: No, he's a pharmacist.

James: So after you got out of service, what did you do? You had a GI bill.

Smith: Yeah, but the family owned this local telephone company.

James: Your family owned that?

Smith: Yeah.

James: And you worked for them, or you ran it, or—

Smith: Well, when I was a kid I was out making post holes(??), putting up cable and putting up wire and that. Then I moved into the office. Eventually I was the manager.

James: In Neillsville?

Smith: Yeah. My dad was more interested in politics, so he was in Madison an awful lot.
And I got _____(??) experience.

James: You used the GI bill to build a house then.

Smith: No.

James: Oh you didn't really?

Smith: No. I already had a house.

James: I thought everybody used their GI bill for something.

Smith: I didn't use it.

Woman: Did you know that he's an excellent seamstress?

James: No. (laughs)

Woman: True.

(Smith chuckles)

James: Seamstress?

Woman: Yes. He sews.

James: You sew?

Smith: Oh yeah.

James: You have all kinds of talents.

Woman: Are the little ducks in the wood puzzle—did you make those?

Smith: Yeah.

Woman: He's a woodcrafter as well.

James: Oh my.

Smith: And I can also cook.

James: Oh! (laughs) Well, that's wonderful!

Woman: Wow! Talented. Some of those things—

Smith: _____(??) (unintelligible)

[End of Interview]