

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
James S. Spohn  
84<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Army, World War II.

1994

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**Spohn, James F.** (1923-2004). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 76 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 76 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

**Abstract**

In a reflective interview James Spohn, a Maple Bluff (Wisconsin) area native, discusses his service in the Army in the European theater during World War II. He characterizes Maple Bluff life and the general attitude of the city in the early days of the war before being drafted. Spohn relates his abbreviated basic training with the 87<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Mississippi and how soldiers spent their down time. He then describes being selected for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), preparing engineers for the Manhattan Project at Lafayette College (Pennsylvania). While involved in the ASTP Spohn served with Henry Kissinger describing him as “a sloppy soldier”. Due to a saturation of engineers in the program, Spohn was transferred to the 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division which he describes as having stronger leadership than the 87<sup>th</sup>. Spohn describes the conditions aboard troop transports and how volunteering for KP changed that experience. He illustrates life as a member of a communications squad upon reaching the European theater during the Battle of the Bulge and the Rhine River occupation. He also mentions the role of the American Red Ball Express and the role Black soldiers played in the segregated Army. Spohn discusses various interactions that occurred amongst the soldiers and civilian populations. He portrays the differences between American, British, and German soldiers while characterizing the Russians as “20<sup>th</sup> century Huns.” Also discussed are the comparisons of liberating British soldiers from a prisoner of war camp and a women’s concentration camp. Spohn also provides commentary on his travels through Europe while waiting to return home following the end of the war. He then provides commentary on readjusting to civilian life without involvement in veteran’s organizations. Spohn describes the two-year law school program and the housing shortage forcing students to Badger Village in Baraboo (Wisconsin). He characterizes war not as “cataclysmic” but “a series of little wars” and describes the mentalities of soldiers in the field. Spohn examines the notions of fatalism and religion on men in combat and the intensity of learning under fire.

**Biography**

James F. Spohn was born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1923. He served in the Army from 1943 to 1946 in the European theater. Upon his return to Wisconsin, he earned his law degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and resettled in Madison.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994.

Transcribed by Joanna D. Glen, 1997.

Transcription edited by T.J. Weinaug, 2008.

Today's date is October the 18th, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. James S. Spohn, a veteran of the US Infantry in the ETO during World War II.

Mark: Good morning, Mr. Spohn.

Spohn: Good morning.

Mark: How are you?

Spohn: Fine.

Mark: As we were just discussing before I turned on the tape, Mr. Spohn has written down answers to the questions so we'll just go through the questionnaire and see where it leads. So, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about your upbringing. You were born in 1923?

Spohn: Correct. I was born in 1923. My parents were living at that time at what was then Maple Bluff it was part of the town of Madison. The family physician came out to our home and found out that my mother was shortly due to have a baby, so the physician who customarily would look in on her at home, decided that it was time to take her to the hospital. Well, he didn't make it and I was born at the Stoeber Lying-In Hospital which was located on what is now the 200 block of Wisconsin Avenue. I grew up in Maple Bluff until I went into service and when I got out of the service I stayed in the family home for another four or five months and then I married and moved out.

Mark: Now, Maple Bluff today is a fairly well to do suburb. Was it the same way then? I'm interested in the Depression and how it affected you.

Spohn: Well, the original Maple Bluff area was put together by a bunch of land developers and it was a part of the Township of Madison. It wasn't incorporated as a village until 1929 and the reason that it was incorporated was because the City of Madison refused to extend sewer or water facilities to the area. Under the circumstances, my father who was also an attorney, and a group of the people living in the area incorporated as a village so that they could have municipal services. During the Depression years, lawyers lived rather high off the hog in comparison with the rest of the population. In Maple Bluff where Sherman Avenue intersects with the Northwestern Railroad, there was a hobo village and as a youngster I used to like to go over and stay in the background but listen to the hobos talk and tell their background and experiences, whether they believed or not. I went through Catholic grades schools, St. Patrick's School. As a youngster, my father was a lawyer making \$10 an hour as standard fee charges which are in startling contrast to what they are today for obvious reasons, but in contrast with the rest of the people in the area, we were affluent. We had a couple of gardeners, we had a maid, we had a woman who came in to do ironing and the

like. We lived on a two acre lot out there and I did chores such as spending one day a week cutting grass and the like and I kind of loafed my way up through school and went to Edgewood High School from 1936 to 1940. At the time that I was growing up out there, there was horseback riding in the area, a biplane was supposed to land at the Royal Airport which was not far away, ran out of gas and landed safely in the field across the street from our house, so that would be some indication of the sparseness of the population out there at that time.

Mark: This is interesting because I live in little corner of what's left of the Town of Madison near Maple Bluff. So, I'm kind of familiar with the neighborhood, although I don't live there actually. Just out of curiosity, your place was where in Maple Bluff, Fuller's Woods or

Spohn No, at that time it was called Lakewood which ultimately became Maple Bluff, but the original Maple Bluff started had the water pumping station on Lake Mendota and then went up the hill and beyond that. Lakewood was the area in the flat and then Fuller's Woods was in the area closest to the Yahara River and our family home was on Lakewood Blvd and my father's lot was 300 feet long and 120 wide at the rear, T-shaped and the stem of the T was opposite the present Governor's Mansion. The Governor's Mansion incidentally, I handled the sale of the Governor's Mansion as a young attorney to the State of Wisconsin for \$50,000 in 1949.

Mark: So you went to college then. This was after Pearl Harbor?

Spohn No. That is to say I graduated from Edgewood in 1940 and then I entered the University of Wisconsin and I took a standard undergraduate program in anticipation of going to Law School. I was partly through my junior year at the University and I was drafted. I left Madison on February 10, 1943.

Mark: I want to go back to the Pearl Harbor thing. Do you recall where you were when you heard the news?

Spohn Yes. I recall specifically where I was. I was in the breakfast room of our family home listening to a professional football game. The Bears.

Mark: Do you recall the reaction on campus?

Spohn The reaction intensified from the time that I started in 1940, the historical background of the situation was such that there wasn't too much pro-war sympathy in the community at the time. And then Pearl Harbor, the feelings intensified, ROTC programs and the like were stepped up and in late 1942 I was on campus and I went over the Memorial Union to a dance that the WRENs (Women's Royal English Navy) put on and I was standing on the second floor of the Memorial Union and I saw a girl that I had seen in a couple of my classes and

I struck up a conversation with her and six weeks later she said she'd marry me. So that was my connection with the military at that point, before I was drafted.

Mark: And so you were drafted in 1943. Was this, I'm thinking of the Vietnam experience and of course, sons of lawyers might not have got drafted at the time 'cause of the way the selective service system worked and yet, were students regularly being plucked out of school and going into the military or?

Spohn Well, to give you an illustration, I went to high school with a young man whose name I won't reveal, and he and I were both destined to be lawyers. Almost immediately after Pearl Harbor, he switched to Medical School for the obvious reason that he could get a four-year deferment. I tried to get a commission in the military service and I have dreadful eyesight, 20/450 which is very, very poor, so I couldn't get into any of the commission services and was routinely drafted into the military and I was in the military for three years and never broke my glasses for which I was mightily thankful.

Mark: Including time on the Sigfried line?

Spohn Oh, indeed! (laughter)

Mark: So, but, were college students being regularly drafted?

Spohn I can't say that. I really do know that there was an influx of, there was activity on the campus which obviously spilled over onto the existing students. There was a radio training school out at what was then Truax Field and so there were increasing numbers military people almost immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was stepped up and of course even back in the lend-lease days, why it was a foreboding of war to come.

Mark: And so when your time came, you just..

Spohn When my time came I had no place to run. I didn't enjoy going into the Army but I wasn't a draft dodger.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe your entry into service. You left from the West Washington Avenue station and went down Camp Grant?

Spohn Yes. We left Madison and a group of us, I would judge maybe 50 or 60 GI's to be, late in the afternoon walked down West Washington Avenue to the Milwaukee Road station and boarded a Milwaukee Road train which took us in to Camp Grant.

Mark: This gang of young men, were there a lot of college students? Just kids from around the Madison area?

Spohn Well, at the time that I really for the first time was involved with a bunch of soldiers was when I got into the 84th Infantry Division and I think that in our whole regiment there were only a handful of people who had any advanced education beyond high school, which was typical. As a matter of fact, as late as 1940 in this area, immediately west of Madison there were many farm people who had only 8th grade educations so I found it difficult to find people to play bridge with.

Mark: I see. So, what happened at Camp Grant? Is this where you got the head shaved and the physical?

Spohn No, they weren't quite - the first thing that they did was to put you through a series of tests, standard Benet-type tests and the like, trying to find out what your areas of specialty if any, might be and that was kind of a cattle herding type of an operation. I mean you were given clothes, you were run through an abbreviated medical examination and the like. We were given any inductees at the time, once they passed the exams and were set to go and were technically enlisted, then we were given a one week leave so that we could go back home and say our good-byes and take care of whatever things we had. On December 10, 1941, my father had the good sense to purchase some life insurance on my life because on December 15th of that year, the major insurance companies, including Northwestern Mutual put a war risk clause into all the policies so that they wouldn't pay for any war casualties. So, I went back home for a week and I had gone into service with a man named Ben Anderson who was a premed student at the University of Wisconsin. He was a little older than myself but he was a back-door neighbor and I knew him quite well and he was so enthusiastic about ultimately getting into Medical School that he volunteered to assist and not to take that week's leave but to stay and help the medical personnel at Camp Grant process people through. That was a serious mistake because he contracted spinal meningitis and died within a week. So, that gave a little impetus to my decision to never volunteer for anything.

Mark: That's what they always say in the military, isn't it?

Spohn You better believe it.

Mark: So after a week you went down to Mississippi for your training?

Spohn Yes.

Mark: You described your training as adequate, not good, not bad, adequate.

Spohn Well, it's - you know when people move into a new house, there's a lot of chaos, getting carpet down and the like. We moved into a camp that was out in the middle of nowhere in a remote county in Mississippi where the population was 95% black and impoverished. The carpenters and contractors were hastily trying

to throw together a camp and so it was a little chaotic down there for a while, but eventually we started to get some semblance of organization.

Mark: I see. This training consisted of your basic infantry training. How to use the weapon, how to take it apart, how to storm a bunker, or whatever the case may be?

Spohn Well, there was a great emphasis in basic training on the physical side. We started out with 2-hour marches and ended up with - we were expected to do at the end of basic training, a 25-mile march with 60 lbs. on our backs including our rifle in eight hours so that was a little over three miles an hour - and usually night marches.

Mark: I'm interested in some of the other guys you were training with. Was there a mix of people from all different parts of the country? Was it a source of tension? Was it a source of humor? How would you describe the mixing of people of all the different areas?

Spohn Well, I would say that it was pretty much a cross section of the U.S. There was a certain element of regionalism in it because the camp was in the south, speaking just in a general way, the academic training and the like with the people that were coming into divisions that were trained in the south was less than that of any northern camps. There were just basic differences in education primarily.

Mark: Were there any sort of regional tension? Say, the southern guys didn't like the northern guys.

Spohn Well, you take an infantry division and we had very little contact with - I think that - just as more or less we were put into a concrete mixture and all blended together rather quickly. When you go through basic training I think that the whole purpose of the training is to bring people to a common denominator and that was pretty effective. We had very little contact with people not in service. Our contacts were almost totally in service. The big amusement of the week was to go down to the railroad station and watch the trains go by and have a good meal at the "hotel" that was on the railroad tracks.

Mark: I was going to ask about - did you get any free time or anything like that. Did you get off the base, did you go into town?

Spohn The base had pretty much - in the first place we were physically bushed.

Mark: I was in the Air Force so..

Spohn We were pushed physically to the point where we'd go to the canteen at night and have a pint of ice cream and a couple of boxes of Oreo cookies and go hit the

sack. We were pushed quite hard physically. So that they were trying to bring us down to our fighting weights.

Mark: This was what time of year? I've lost track.

Spohn That was in February.

Mark: So it wasn't oppressively hot.

Spohn As a matter of fact it was oppressively cold. We had tar paper barracks and it was 14° above in February. The only heat that we had in the 52-person barrack was a stove at either end, so it was cold.

Mark: Then you went into the ASTP Program? I'm always vague about what the ASTP?

Spohn Army Specialized Training Program was set up by the military primarily because of the need to get trained technicians and in particular to develop engineers who could assist in the Manhattan Project. It was relatively easy to get into the program if you were college educated and the like. I went in to the service in the summer of 1943, midsummer. After basic training we did some field maneuvers and then at that time I was with, initially I was with the 87th Infantry Division and then, as was common, they frequently reallocated people and then sent them out to beef up other divisions or whatever and I went through a military center at Clemson where I had to take some more tests and then I was assigned to Lafayette College in Eastern Pennsylvania and while there I took first year physics and chemistry and that was a very pleasant year that I spent there.

Mark: I suppose it was an environment that you were familiar with already.

Spohn Being from the Midwest I had little experience as respects New York City area, but I soon started to get in there on the weekends. I had made some good friends with some Jewish people and I spent a lot of weekends with Jewish people. I'm an Irish Catholic, but I got along well with the Jewish people and so I spent a lot of time in Brooklyn and very much, virtually 100% Jewish areas and at that time I met Henry Kissinger and I stayed with Kissinger for all the way through until about February of 1945.

Mark: That's interesting. Was this your first trip to New York City?

Spohn No. I had been to the World's Fair in 1936.

Mark: So you were familiar with the excitement that New York could perhaps offer?

Spohn It was more exciting to me because - as a 20-year-old than it was as a younger person without my folks around. I made it a goal to never stay in camp when I

had the opportunity to be outside the camp and so it was pretty easy to get weekend passes into New York and so

Mark: And it is not too far away either.

Spohn No. Lafayette College was at that time was a college of about 4500 or 5000 I would guess - something like that. We had deluxe accommodations there. They took over fraternity houses and I ended up being able to live in a fraternity house. I was particular impressed because it was - had been built lavishly sometime in the 20's and it had a huge shower with the water being piped not only from above, but from around you. They had circular pipes in the shower and that was something fancy that I hadn't seen before.

Mark: But your career in the ASTP program was cut short.

Spohn Yes, it was cut short because the original intent, by the time that I had done a year there, we had the Army had - the Manhattan Project had been developed to the point where they were saturated with engineers and they didn't need anymore.

Mark: Then you were sent to the 84th Infantry. Was this any different than the 87th?

Spohn Well, it was - it had been in the field and we were getting what would typically be advanced training. There were rookies that were in there at the time, but the time that we got into the 84th, there was probably a higher level of training and abilities than when I was with the 87th. The 87th Division went through a process of weeding out a while bunch of officers who had been National Guard reservists and the command was frequently weak. The 84th was in much better shape.

Mark: I should know this - forgive me. The 84th is the wood choppers?

Spohn That's correct. On a couple of occasions particularly right after the war, we were hanging around waiting to go to Japan. The USO would bring in stage bands and singers and the like, and on several occasions, Woody Herman brought his wood choppers in there and played music for us.

Mark: Well, that's nice. So, then you left from Camp Kilmer in the Fall of '44 to go to Europe. Anything eventful about your trip?

Spohn Well, I'm an opportunist and so I saw immediately that the ship was overcrowded so I applied for KP and managed to eat well and stay out of the congestion. I hung around the kitchen - galley or whatever you want to call it, most of the time that I was going across.

Mark: Because for an enlisted guy like you, the bunks were kind of small and crowded as I understand it.

Spohn That is correct.

Mark: The voyage took nine days?

Spohn I don't have any - I didn't make a diary of it - I would say that it took something in the vicinity of 8-10 days, something like that.

Mark: Were submarines a worry for you?

Spohn No, because I hadn't seen any and I wasn't looking for any, so I made it a rule from the start not to worry about things over which I had no control, so I just did a mental screening out of unpleasant things.

Mark: It's fortunate for you you can do that 'cause I don't think I could.

Spohn One of the things that I did learn, also which carried with me the rest of my life was that when we were in basic training starting with the 87th Infantry Division, they'd run the hell out of us for 50 minutes and then they'd give us 10 minutes of relaxation. What we'd all do was lie down on the ground in a circle. One guy would put his head on the belly of the guy next to him so you had a pillow and we'd snooze for ten minutes. I have - previous to the military experience - I had been an ordinary sleeper but somehow or another I gained the knowledge of how to go to sleep immediately and wake up immediately. That was very useful for me in service, because I could lay down on this floor here right now and be asleep in ten minutes and I wake up immediately.

Mark: So you landed in England then? And, you stayed in England for a couple of weeks?

Spohn Yes. We landed in England and we came in one of the waterways on the west side of Scotland, I've forgotten - it was one of those waterways and we were taken then and I don't recall if it was by train or by truck, I suspect it was by truck, we were taken to the south of England and we spent a couple or three weeks there in a mushroom farm, which was kind of a dank experience but it was under cover and then, again, I'm not precise on the dates but then we left from there to go over to the continent.

Mark: Which was apparently not the most pleasant voyage you've ever taken, judging from your manuscript.

Spohn No, it wasn't - I didn't get violently ill - a great deal of confusion - the military was constantly confused and various echelons of military government, half the time some of our captains or majors didn't know where the hell they'd been or where the hell they were going. I mean, it was very, very difficult to move so many people around. Even after the war ended. D-Day was obviously a major

confusion, but just ordinary logistics of getting troops over to the continent, getting the divisions reformed and the like, was time consuming.

Mark: When you got to France then what did the 84th do between then and your first combat?

Spohn They billeted us for a while in a bordello, which was really fancy with velvet walls and all sorts of toilet fixtures that we weren't accustomed to at home and the like.

Mark: The employees were gone from there?

Spohn The employees had been left out and then we gradually moved up towards the front and to the occasional accompaniment of buzz bombs and, flying over us and military planes. While we were in England, they were just starting to shoot V2's. That was noisy.

Mark: So, as you're moving up to the front, is there - what are the thoughts of the green infantrymen as he's moving up to the front? Are you scared? Are you excited to get up there? Do you have any thoughts at all?

Spohn Just jumping ahead a little bit, I went into combat at night around Geilenkirchen with a unit of 12 and I made up my mind that I was in the war for better or for worse, that I wasn't going to be a hero, I was going to do what I was told and that it would only hurt my ability to progress if I worried about it, so I didn't worry about it. But out of the first group that I was with, it was primarily a section that laid field wire between the Battalion Headquarters and the rifle companies and the first night that we were in combat, we lost our colonel who foolishly led the battalion, point man in the battalion, which was absolute crazy thing to do and eight out of the twelve guys that I was with, weren't there the first day. I don't know whether they were ever - got back into combat or not - they didn't come back to our unit - so, and I don't know whether that was an isolated incident or not, but it's a terrifying experience for young soldiers to go into a town that's burning and you're being shelled and shot at and the like and there was a fair amount of people that couldn't take it. Again, I don't know whether many of them were able to get appropriate medical/psychiatric help or whatever to come back into combat, I don't know.

Mark: Did this happen frequently? Soldiers would break down?

Spohn No, very seldom after the initial night - was by far - from the standpoint of signs of terror I think that the group that was weeded out the first night out of our units, we didn't see anything like that again.

Mark: I see. That's interesting. I'm interested in something like combat exhaustion is a term that you sometimes hear ...

Spohn Battle fatigue.

Mark: After you've been on the line for a long time, does combat take a toll on the soldiers or do you think people got used to being in combat? Is there such a thing?

Spohn A man named Draper wrote a particularly good history of the 84th Infantry Division and people look upon war as being cataclysmic. In fact, its just a bunch of little wars and it might be that a given rifle company or the like would meet the brunt of a major German point attack and before the defenders could toughen up and get reserves into place, they might be decimated, so the war, as I viewed it was just a bunch of individual wars and individual successes or failures, each in their own context. Its very hard to describe the overall, without getting back down into the bottom.

Mark: You worked in communications. Were you involved in coordinating communications?

Spohn Well, it was very simple. When I was in Mississippi and Louisiana, I wasn't with the signal corps but the Army had communications units and we had hand-held radios which were several times the size of a telephone of today, battery operated and then we had communications lines that we either had to - typically the distances between the battalion headquarters and the rifle companies were such that if possible we would put a spool of wire on the back end of a jeep on a reel and reel it out from the battalion down to the line companies and then we would sometimes assist the line companies that we usually stretched out parallel to the front, we would assist the line companies in running lines from rifle company to rifle company.

Mark: Were these communications effective?

Spohn At that time, the radios were far from what they are today and the lines were usually laid alongside the roadways and they were frequently torn up. They were torn up by tanks, they were torn up by road traffic and other - so running out in the middle of the night and trying to track down a broken telephone line was sometimes difficult.

Mark: What I'm getting at is the inherent confusion in combat. I'm interested in your perspective as someone who is trying to coordinate the communications.

Spohn Jumping around a little bit in this interview, we've been in situations where we had rolling barrages from the British giving us assistance except they were falling behind us. I have been right in the middle of tank battles in the Battle of the Bulge where we drove a whole fleet of trucks down a ravine only to find out that there were tanks on either side firing on us and we had to turn the damn thing

around and get the hell out of there. I mean the boners that were made in the military were absolutely innumerable.

Mark: In your manuscript you also mentioned several friendly fire incidents. When those happened in the Gulf and perhaps in Vietnam it was

Spohn We had two infantry divisions, one was the 106 and I think one was the 102nd, but I'm not sure. They got onto parallel highways and they started fighting with each other because there was simply the lack of communication. On Christmas Day of '44, again I'm jumping around in point of time, but on Christmas Day of '44 we were all set for a pretty decent Christmas dinner and we had - this was during the Battle of the Bulge, we had big canvas signals that would identify us that we would lay out on the ground and a P38 came over us and looked at us and a young green soldier that was on the back of a truck 6x6 looked up at it and fired at it, so the P38 came around and made two passes and killed our kitchen and blew it up so, I mean that was just one of many similar incidents that you would get. You have a sense of helplessness about it.

Mark: When you say "killed our kitchen" do you mean destroyed the kitchen or killed the people that worked in the kitchen?

Spohn Both. They blew up the stoves, the gear and they dropped 500 lb. bombs on a group of guys that were down making Christmas dinner.

Mark: How would you rate the Germans in their combat capabilities and did their effectiveness change as you got further into Germany?

Spohn As I envisioned war, I'm a subscriber to the Patton belief that give me supplies and you can win the war and Germany by the time that we were really involved in it to any heavy extent, towards the tail end of the war, the Germans were running low on oil and I would pay special tribute to the American Red Ball Express, there was complete segregation in the Army at that time, but all of the truck drivers were Negroes and we call them Blacks today, but they were Negroes and they used to come roaring in and we didn't like the noise that they made, but they wanted to get in and out of the combat zone as fast as they could, and that gets you into the art of driving at high speeds in convoys. I don't know what experience you've had or other people tell you stories but most of these military vehicles that we had had two little - they had tail lights about this size - maybe 6" across or something like that and they were blacked out except that they had two little points so you could see two points and you would stay close enough to the vehicle ahead of you so that you could see both of those points, they would more or less converge and so it was interesting - I never saw any serious accidents with those convoys, but they used to race down those highways as fast as they could. So where are we on our narrative.

Mark: We're getting up to question 8 here. Did you have much contact with the people surrounding your stations? We've already discussed this stateside, did you get into the villages of Germany or Belgium or?

Spohn Oh yes. Sure. During the Battle of the Bulge, we were friendly to the Belgian people and they were friendly to us and they put us up. We were a victorious Army that hadn't achieved its goals but we - if we got into a static position anyplace on the line, we would assume that the Germans had no property rights and if we took over a house, then we put the natives back in the barn and so, it was not a jungle type of warfare. We took refuge frequently in basements. We were in a basement one time, oftentimes we were in situations where we were being shelled, particularly in the Battle of the Ruhr River. The Germans were retreating and they didn't have the facilities to carry all of their ammunition that they had stored on the north side of the river so all they did was keep shooting it off and then they would retreat. So, and they were also, at that time they had a lot of duds - they weren't necessarily duds they were using 88s that had armor piercing bullets and on several occasions I was in buildings where the buildings were hit by an armor piercing shell, the shell would go through one wall and out the other. They were intended to drive into a tank and so they just went right through a house.

Mark: Were you afraid of the German people at all as you came into these villages? You mentioned some incidents of sniping.- those were mostly soldiers?

Spohn Snipers were mostly soldiers, yes. But we did run in at the tail end of the war we ran into 11 and 12 year old kids who had been pressed into the Army and particularly down on the Autobahn, they would get up on the bridges and fire and it was very difficult to get GI's to fire back at kids, but if they met them head on they would do what they had to do.

Mark: What about the women and children and the older people in the villages. Was there any resistance, were they suspicious of you, did they welcome you? What was it like to go into one of these German villages as the conqueror, as you say.

Spohn Well, I don't think we had any sense of being conquerors - we were just a part of the dirty task force that was defending itself while attacking. I think there was a depersonalization to it. We did a lot of different things. We opened up prisoner of war camps, we were in situations frequently in the Battle of the Bulge where half the town would be German and half the town would be GIs and you didn't know which half was which. Just a continued confusion.

Mark: In your manuscript you mentioned contact with the British. How did the yanks and the limeys get along?

Spohn I would think by and large that the British were the best trained soldiers that I've ever seen. They were disciplined. We freed up a prisoner of war camp where the

British marched out and they were clean, erect and the higher officers first and then the enlisted men in the wake. We didn't like them because they would stop in the middle of the day at 4:00 p.m., the battle could be waging up in town but they'd stop for 15 minutes for tea and that was their inherent right so that's what they did. We got along reasonably well with the British. There was an extreme distaste for Montgomery and he used a bunch of crazy tactics, he was somewhat less egotistical than MacArthur, but Montgomery was heartily disliked.

Mark: Just among Americans or British soldiers too?

Spohn We were - I was a part of the 9th Army and we were detached and sent over to the British Army and our officers generally felt that Montgomery's tactics, his handling of troops and the like left a lot to be desired. Montgomery was haughty and he was not a popular person.

Mark: OK. Let's move on to question 9. You have a very brief answer, I'm going to try to get a little more out of you. What sort of things did you do in whatever short amount of free time you had? "Writing home, griping, sleeping." Did you get much time off the line?

Spohn We got off the line a few times. Not too many times. I was a switchboard operator in addition to being laying wire and the like. Quite regularly I would take a stint at an old fashioned switchboard, where you had to ring up the number and a little key would drop down and the like. So, it was my prerogative to listen in on the conversations and that was always fun because I'd hear one officer chewing out the other or whatever. But there were some periods of rest, incidentally being with the British 2nd Army we got generous rations of rum. We would get typically 2 oz a day, but usually we would have men that were out in the fox holes, couldn't bring rum to them and we were usually understaffed in the process of always having to have replacements coming through to take care of the injured and ill and the like, so there was a fair amount of drinking in the military. I don't think I saw anything that particularly damaged the war effort, but people wanted the opportunity to drink when they could.

Mark: Did you have any experience with any sort of black market activities? Alcohol, cigarettes would bring up the subject of selling them.

Spohn Well, there wasn't much time - immediately after D-Day you got into all sorts of these curious things, but speaking of entertainment, one day I got a telephone call right after the end of the war I got a telephone call from Henry Kissinger and Henry had been taken out of our infantry division in February and he was running with what we would call a little county. I mean he was the Chief Civilian Military/Officer in these municipal establishments. Henry had a nice big house that he had taken over on the top of the hill. He was surrounded by servants, he was gaining weight, as we all did after the war and that was a very interesting experience to see Henry because Henry was a sloppy soldier - I mean he was a sloppy, sloppy soldier.

Mark: I'm not familiar with his military career. He wasn't in the 84th

Spohn Sure he was. He and I came out of Clemson together, we went to Lafayette College together and I went up frequently to New York City with him.

Mark: What did he do?

Spohn He was the same as I was, the wire section.

Mark: He was an enlisted man?

Spohn He was an enlisted man. Lou Yantemeyer, anthologist and a prominent writer who was his uncle and of course, Henry spoke fluent German. He came over here when he was 16, so he was an asset, first to us and then to military government. He was then a very interesting man. Very, very interesting and a good sense of humor. Sloppy soldier - he tried to tie his necktie in the morning, by 7:00-7:15 am he would look like a bale of hay.

Mark: I'm wondering if you could give me, I'm sure you're familiar with this term, a definition of this term, chicken shit. A term you haven't heard in 50 years?

Spohn No, its a term that was one of many that were commonly used. Basically, something that was chicken shit was something that was unnecessary, that had had a tinge of disfavor in it, that somehow or other, the higher-ups were imposing requirements that were useless or futile. Anything that is chicken shit is really an exercise in futility.

Mark: Was it a problem? Or was it a pain in the rear end?

Spohn Sure. You'd get young second lieutenants that would come in and we were in combat situations and they'd chew you out if your uniform wasn't in the precise way that it should be. That's typical of chicken shit. Petty - small stuff.

Mark: If it impairs operations and morale, where do you think it comes from? Why does it exist in the first place? I realize I'm asking you to philosophize.

Spohn Well, there's an inherent conflict between the military requirement that everything be done by the book and the practical problem of not restraining free thinking GIs. The American GI was basically one of the most versatile soldiers in the world. They were capable of great accomplishments, but if they followed the book every step of the way, they would have lost the war. So, that's the way I see it.

Mark: Describe some of the men in your unit. You described Henry Kissinger already.

Spohn I think I've described them generally in my comments, basically they were a cross section of the American people of the time. There were some good guys and there were some bad guys. If I had to put together a very dangerous mission, and of course I wasn't involved in mission planning, but if I did, I would pick up people that were paroled out of prison, I would pick up people that had street smarts, that knew how to get things done, cutting corners or whatever the case may be. They used ingenuity to reach their ends and we had in particular a very excellent force towards the tail end of the war. We had a very excellent second lieutenant and he was a marvelous leader for us and when the war ended, there were some of the people in my group and this lieutenant that were having to wait, we didn't have enough points to get out of the Army. We had to wait to go over to Japan in August. So, this lieutenant didn't have any airs, he got a jeep and he got permission to take three of us on a tour through Germany, all we had to do was to call back to our headquarters weekly so that they could reel us back in. I went down to Berchtesgaden with him, we went to Munich, went through Dachau, a whole bunch of these places and so that kind of a leader, that is a good natural leader and so that kind of a leader, that is a good natural leader and we also had many enlisted men who became officers because of their abilities in combat.. Also many of these farm-type people were excellent machinists, they could step in and change tires or fix tracks on tanks or whatever else was needed.

Mark: In terms of discipline, this is something you've already kind of referred to and I want to pursue a little further. Officer and enlisted relations, were they strict with a lot of Yes, Sir - No, Sir, was it informal, how would you describe it.

Spohn In the basic training areas it was everything by the book. The American soldiers' training and background came about through the English when the German Hessians taught the English how to fight, it was all emphasis on discipline and in a democratic society, there's a lot of rebellion at the Germanic approach to warfare. I think that the Americans were substantially ahead of the Germans in their ability to meet any given situation independent of the higher command. They were less rigid, they were more flexible, they were excellent soldiers.

Mark: I was wondering - in your manuscript you mentioned some prisoner of war camps and a concentration camp that you liberated.

Spohn I mentioned that we did cut loose a prisoner of war camp where the British had been imprisoned for several years - a year and a half or two years at least. They came out clean and neat, ragged but organized. The experience that we had with the women was something else.

Mark: I'm not familiar with the women's concentration camps.

Spohn The Germans were really interested in eliminating the German Jews and women and they established some prisoner of war camps for women on the eastern German front and as the war progressed and the Russians were pursuing the

Germans toward the Elbe River, the Germans forced these women to walk to the west ahead of the advancing Russian army and in the process of doing so, they marched about 500 miles in very adverse conditions and there were literally thousands of them and they reached a point in western Germany where they were put into a prison camp and we came along and liberated the prisoners. They came out of this camp, starved, they all had prisoner uniforms on with crosses on the back to that they could be shot at, used as targets, and the GI's were absolutely frightened by these women and at the time it was just overwhelming to see what was happening. They were emaciated, they were so ravenous that they didn't look like human beings. They were just in terrible shape and I think in that paper that I wrote I may have described about 25 years afterward I happened to see a British movie on those women walking across, showing the rigors of their march. There are a lot of different things. In an interview like this you pull things. One of the things that occurred to a lot of us fresh out of basic training into the war, was to see that you couldn't retrieve the bodies of deceased comrades and sometimes they fell in the street and they were run over by tanks, you just had to sit back and let the graves registration take care of them three days later. That was a tough thing to experience. I saw, after Malmedy in the Battle of the Bulge, I saw American soldier - well if American soldiers in the Battle of the Bulge saw German soldiers retreating wearing GI boots, they'd take the boots off the soldiers and march them to the rear barefoot, there were minor atrocities like that. The medical - they used to pour sulfa into some of these poor GI's gaping wounds. They would just pour it in the way you'd pour salt on a beef steak. We had sleeping bags that were - you'd fill them just constantly shaking DDT into the sleeping bags 'cause that's all you could do to make sure that they weren't lice filled and so it was - the war - have you read much on World War II?

Mark: I like to think so. I don't claim to be an expert on military affairs though.

Spohn I think one of the better books is Draper's history of the 84th Infantry Division because the real place to start learning how warfare exists is to read a division's history as distinguished from these overviews. They try to give you a description from the top - the commands on down. The division histories are pretty good.

Mark: I haven't read Draper. After speaking with you, I think I will. There are some who claim that warfare is a brutalizing experience. Do you have any comments on that? Has it affected the way you view the world?

Spohn Well, it's an intense learning experience. I'm 71 years old now and I was 21 or 22 at the time and my perspective now is totally different from my perspective then. I was fortunate enough after we got through VE day, I was still stuck in Europe lacking the points necessary to get back to the States, but because my IQ was such, out of the Division I was one of 15 men that were picked out of our Division to go to a University in England in Shrivenham, England. It was a military barracks that had been used by the British and by that time, they were not engaged in training so it was an empty building. Several American universities

took empty troop ships back to England and they established an American University in England. I was there for eight weeks and I don't know if you have a background in history or not, but Arnold Toynbee was a great historian and I went up to Cambridge for eight nights, one night a week, and sat down around Toynbee and there was a group of us that did so. The interesting thing was that we were always trying to ask Toynbee questions. In the meantime, Toynbee was trying to do what you're doing with me now, extract what our views and the like were towards war. I think that war reduces everything to simplicities. Yes, there were cases of brutality, there were cases of rapes, there were cases of humor. One of the greatest humors that we enjoyed was walking down Mannheim after the end of the war and they had a VD station where people could go in and get a shot of Penicillin and we'd see Captains and Majors and Colonels over there and of course, that just elated us to see that they had been fraternizing and got caught. And, bear in mind that the Stars and Stripes cartoons, explained a great deal of the war. I think that if you were to read it, the whole book of Bill Mauldin cartoons you'd get a good sense of the war and the feelings of the GIs.

Mark: That's an interesting observation.

Spohn That's the way that I see it. I had some vicarious comments jotted down. Let me just see if there is anything else that I might add about what we're talking about. I really had admiration for the Red Ball Express. I think we've covered pretty well - we would get occasional leaves - my post war experiences were very good. I traveled England extensively. After the war there were 50,000 GI troops in England. The USO's were all kept open and maintained. Again, as I had done in Germany, when I was in England I was go all the time and saw plays, got in touch with the English people very well, that was a wonderful educational experience which I would - did I mention about the failure of a lot of American munitions?

Mark: No.

Spohn Yes. We had so-called chemical mortars which were 4.2 mortars and I think that the failure rate on those things was something like 8 out of ten. There was just a whole bunch of inferior munitions that came over from time to time and you couldn't - it was very frustrating. You couldn't - one of the things that we had - we had some crazy error problems. We had a 34 year old man with four children in our rifle company and we did everything we could to protect the guy. We were mostly all single and young and we also nobody wanted to be the last guy to die in World War II and I sat on the - about 40 miles from Berlin - I sat up on the levee which is very similar to a levee that we have at Portage, Wisconsin on the Wisconsin River and the Russians were pushing the Germans across the Elbe River and they would get across the river and flee to the rear and for about a week or ten days we sat up on that levee and we watched the Germans trying to swim and get to the - the Elbe River is a pretty wide river at that point - we'd watch them drown- regularly you'd see eight or ten during the course of the day drown,

half naked because of their abject fear of the Russians. We met the Russians at the Elbe River and

Mark: Your impressions?

Spohn Well, my impressions were that they would kind of remind you of 20th century Huns. They had women traveling with them, they probably 80% of their transport was by animals rather than motorized, they were short on oil, they gave the impression of being tough fighters. There was the usual trading of patches and emblems and the like. They looked like they'd been - the American soldiers basically, most of us, didn't look like we'd been ravaged by the war, I mean we got three meals a day most of the time, sometimes you had k-rations that were cold or whatever, but the Russians looked pretty haggard and as though they'd been living off the land which they had been.

Mark: Was there any suggestion of the coming cold war?

Spohn No. No there wasn't any. The American soldiers including myself really didn't have a very deep background of the whole war business, all of the events that led up to the war. Someplace, and I haven't opened all my boxes yet, but someplace I have a bunch of German propaganda, I went to Berchtesgaden at the end of the war and I took my field shovel, chopped - Hitler had a 14-foot round coffee table seen in many movies and pictures of Hitler meeting various high officials and I have a little piece of that table. That's my only real tangible piece of World War II.

Mark: Now we've come to my area of research interests, that is the post war experience. I'm interested for example about the school you went to in England, just to clarify things. Was this something you volunteered for?

Spohn Yes. You were given the opportunity - they had all of our test score records so what they obviously did was to go through and pick off the top ones and I got into that school for that reason. We had excellent professors. These professors, Charles William Hendell was the head of the Philosophy Department at Yale, I did a couple of papers for him, we had a man named Young who was a distant relative of Brigham Young and he was an economist and so we had an excellent thing. And, there we had - we were in a very decent barracks, we ate in a civilized fashion and we had a great deal of personal freedom. We could travel virtually anywhere we wanted to. We'd get passes on the railroad.

Mark: These professors came to England?

Spohn Yes, there were empty troop ships and there was a bunch of GIs over there, so they just put two and two together and brought the empty troop ships over and waited until about December to go back to the States. Many of these men looked upon that as their contribution to the war.

Mark: So you returned in January 1946? Took a ship into New York City or something?

Spohn Yeah. We came back on the Lake Champlain which at that time we crossed the Atlantic in four days and six hours. We had 15,000 GIs on the ship, on the aircraft carrier and the bunks were five high down where they would ordinarily stack the airplanes. The fantail of an aircraft carrier is about 80 feet above the water and I would put on all of the clothing I had and climb up the steps and sit under the fantail at night and just watch the foam and have the privacy of not having 14,999 guys around me.

Mark: What was the mood on the ship? Is it joyous? Is it anxious?

Spohn It smells if you can imagine 15,000 GIs with bananas and oranges and the like, the smell of that is just like a pig pen. It's just too much. I would gladly get out in the cold weather as much as possible.

Mark: So you landed in New York City? Parades? Celebrations?

Spohn I don't recall any. I think that there may have been a band at the dock but I sure don't remember.

Mark: You were discharged from the service where?

Spohn Camp Grant. Took a train from New York to Camp Grant. Incidentally while I was out at Lafayette, and also when I was down in Mississippi, I would get three-day passes and it would take me a day to get up to see my fiancée and my family, spend one day in Madison and then a day to get back. I would do the same thing, I recall coming out while I was at Lafayette College I had a three-day pass at Christmastime and I came out on I guess the day before Christmas and went back the day after and I stood up all the way from Pittsburgh to Madison.

Mark: So, when you got back to Madison as a 22-year-old guy, what were your main priorities when you first got home. What did you do want to do first?

Spohn The first thing I wanted to do was to go and enroll at Law School. At that time, the University of Wisconsin - traditionally the University of Wisconsin had a three-year Law School, but because of the big onrush of GIs they put the program into a two-year Law School with no vacations and so the first thing I did was to race back to Bascom Hall and enroll in the Law School. I had talked with my fiancée over the phone when I got back to the States I talked with her over the phone and she knew generally when I was going to come in. Well, I'll be damned, but anyway I went in and enrolled and got my registration set up, who should I meet coming out of Bascom Hall but my wife's sister. So, I said "Hi" and my fiancée was a little perturbed that I saw her sister before I saw her. But, it worked out well.

Mark: So you started school when?

Spohn Immediately. I started school within a week from the time I got back.

Mark: Did you use the GI Bill benefits?

Spohn All the way.

Mark: Was it explained to you how to utilize the program? Were you shooting in the dark? Did the University help you get the GI Bill monies? How did that work?

Spohn They had an admissions system and all you had to do was show your discharge papers and you were entitled to get right on the GI Bill.

Mark: So, the University

Spohn There was a collaborative effort between the University and the federal government. I can't describe the detailed mechanics by which that worked.

Mark: But it wasn't a problem?

Spohn No, no problem at all.

Mark: The GI Bill covered your whole education?

Spohn It covered two years of Law School, which was all that I needed to get out of Law School.

Mark: In the future did you use other GI Bill type of benefit, like to buy a house for example?

Spohn I don't think so. I was able to get an FHA loan, as I recall it, but I had no difficulty in getting a loan.

Mark: If you could comment perhaps on campus life after the war. There were a lot of vets on campus. You went to school before the war started, perhaps you could compare pre-war and post-war campus life.

Spohn Well, yes. It was quite easy. Pre-war there was a lot of social activity, guys would date. The experience for people like myself who were headed to Law School was such that they had fought the war and they wanted to get out and earn real money and so there was a de-emphasis on social life and my wife and I didn't have children until about 5 years so she was working. I was going to Law School and frankly, Law School wasn't very difficult. I had a friend I think I mentioned in this interview, that one of my classmates in high school had opted to go into

Medical School to avoid the draft. Well, his father was a good friend of mine, a family friend of mine, and the father was in the real estate business and was involved in the savings and loan so he had access to apartments. He rented me an apartment - housing was very tight. Many of the people would - of my vintage - many of them were driving 40 miles a day up to Baraboo to Badger Village which was the student housing place up there.

Mark: So you guys were pretty serious, the vets who came back. Pretty serious about their studies, getting on with things.

Spohn Well, if you opted, surely because many of these fellows had family responsibilities, they wanted to get going. They wanted to get started into their careers and professions and the like. So, I don't know about whether the other schools like Engineering and the like, I don't know if they put crash programs on or not, but the Law School did. Before the war I hadn't traveled very much and on a very limited basis and I came back after the war and my wife and I started taking trips, vacations and the like as time permitted and you gain a maturity of perspective that many of my contemporaries who weren't in the war never do get. I think that the war placed a major - I think the war had more to do with the development of my present persona than anything else in the world. It's the big battle.

Mark: That brings up an interesting thing that I was going to discuss. In the 60's and 70's the Vietnam veterans suffered a lot of problems readjusting into society. As a World War II veteran did you have any similar readjustment type problems? Did you feel that the civilians didn't treat you with respect?

Spohn You've got two different scenarios. The public opinion strenuously in favor of the American position after D-Day. That was looked upon as being a just war. You can't kill six million Jews without some recognition of the fact that something is really amiss. The complexities of the Vietnam War or the background of the Vietnam war were entirely different and it is almost impossible to compare the two. I'm a good friend of Bob Froehlke who was the Secretary of the Army in the 70's and Froehlke and I were in school together and I got him to come down and speak to the Madison Council of Service Clubs a couple of weeks ago. Bob gave an excellent talk and one of the things that he brought out was based on his experience during the Vietnam war days. He felt that it was incumbent upon the US to have a compulsory two-year draft, no exemptions, no nothing. You get drafted, you do your time and go out. I think that the inequities of the Vietnam war among college students were so blatant that it was a terrible fiasco.

Mark: In your own personal experience you were able to put the war behind you? You closed the book and that was it?

Spohn I think so, yeah. What you are doing to me by way of this interview is somewhat similar. I have found that I shut the door on World War II at the end of the war. By the time I reached 60, I would start to swap war stories with our fellow guys who had been through the war with us. But there was a long gap between the war ended and the time that I really did any discussion at all with fellow GIs about our experiences.

Mark: How would you explain that?

Spohn I can't explain it except that I never felt comfortable talking about my war experiences with people who hadn't been through wars and so as our group got smaller and smaller by attrition, and we got to know contemporaries and the like, why we got together. We never had any formal reunions or the like. I belong to that so-called Rail Splitter Society but other than that I haven't been in Veterans of Foreign Wars or anything like that.

Mark: There was one incident in your manuscript I thought was interesting. When the jet flew over your apartment on Johnson Street.

Spohn That was just a post-war traumatic shock. I had ducked in war, particularly we were involved in some dangerous artillery battles and we got so that we could recognize the sound and we would dive for cover. Did I mention in my notes about my lieutenant getting killed?

Mark: No, I don't think so.

Spohn In the Battle of the Bulge, this is one of the things that reinforces my belief that you can't worry, we were staying in a large Belgian horse barn and they had heavy stone stalls that separated one stall from the next. The lieutenant was on one side of the wall and I was on the other side of the wall. These mortars, especially if fired at close distance, don't have any real noise at all and a mortar came in to his stall and killed him instantly. We was wearing a GI overcoat and if you held it up to the light, there were more holes than there was cloth in the coat. The man was killed instantly. I was in the next stall and I wasn't touched. I was deaf for three days. That's war. I'd been laying out wire in the field and the shock comes right below my legs. You get to the point where you just have to shrug things off.

Mark: I'm going to change gears here. This brings up something interesting I've read in some of those studies that have been done on World War II soldiers and that is this idea of fatalism or religion. Would you say in your experience that the GIs were more fatalistic or did a lot of people take solace in their religion? Is it true that there are no atheists in fox holes? Lucky socks or three guys on a match? How would you respond to that?

Spohn Oh, I guess there are six billion people in the world and there are not two that are alike. As far as fatalism is concerned, I think that that is true. I think that at least the majority of the soldiers were realistic fatalists. They recognize the situation, they were able to survive because they knew that they didn't control the situation. So, that's how I would describe the situation. As far as religion is concerned, that is such a matter of individual preference that it is very hard to generalize. There were many priests and rabbis and ministers that exposed themselves right up at the front, they would walk to the rifle companies and the like. They were bearers of - they were upbeat in their approach to the extent that there was a spiritual influence. Who can tell? I certainly can't. That's - but the contrast between the Vietnam war and the World War II is just - they're irreconcilable. The Vietnam war was - that was a grievous, grievous mistake. Look what the Americans did to the Japanese - they sent off to minor concentration camps. No justice in that. I don't think that I have any particular notes beyond anything you might have.

Mark: I have two more things. I'm interested in the relationship between you and your fiancée. You mention that you met before the war. Did you keep your contact - write letters and so forth?

Spohn Absolutely! I must have written 300 letters a year on a regular basis. It was far easier to get mail from the war zone to the States than from the States to the war zone. I wrote extensively.

Mark: I'm not going to pry, but I assume you didn't mention personal danger?

Spohn Oh no, I never did at all.

Mark: And she kept you up to date on things going on here?

Spohn They were pretty passionate letters. She was waiting for her fiancée to get back. There was an element of that in her letters fortunately.

Mark: And you found that sustaining?

Spohn Sure, I had no - bearing in mind that I had met the woman and six weeks later she said she'd marry me, and then she didn't date or do a damn thing but wait for me for three and a half years, I was very fortunate. She is an outstanding woman. It was just one of those things that the chemistry worked right early on.

Mark: How long after the war that you got married?

Spohn I was discharged in early January and married in the middle of August.

Mark: One last area I want to cover, we've touched on this already and that involves veterans reunions and veterans organizations. You've never joined any.

Spohn No.

Mark: After the war on campus there were some veterans groups active, you didn't want to participate in them? You didn't know about them?

Spohn I'm well read and I certainly knew about them, but I never have been one to be joining organizations for the standpoint of joining organizations. I just don't like an organized approach. I didn't think much of fraternity life. I like to carve out my own goal. What has your experience been as far as talking with other veterans, am I pretty much the same ilk or ?

Mark: Yeah. I was a little surprised. What I find is that the reunions of the units are much more popular among veterans that I've spoken to. You did mention a membership in the Rail Splitter organization but you haven't actually attended any of the functions.

Spohn Yeah, I have not attended any of the functions, but I am planning to take a trip through Europe to recover my trail.

Mark: On your own or with a group?

Spohn Probably on my own, probably hiring a guide and just taking my Rail Splitter map following through on it.

Mark: Like next year or something?

Spohn Probably.

Mark: I'm interested in what makes you want to go back there?

Spohn Well, I've seen some of the - I've been to Europe several times, but I haven't followed the Germany track. One of the most remarkable things that I did was I - a couple of things. I forgot to tell you that I was in Mannheim in the summer of '45, I saw General Patton close up and that was quite an opportunity to see this flamboyant guy 'cause he looked precisely the way that he was pictured in the Fort Knox Museum. I got diverted, what were we talking about?

Mark: Going back to Europe.

Spohn Oh, perhaps two months after the war ended, I got an inspiration. There was a nearby airfield down near Mannheim. I have forgotten how I got out there, maybe I bummed a ride, probably in a jeep. And, they had a bunch of DC3's that were being sent back to the States. They had been ripped out as they had been used as cargo haulers. so there weren't any seats or anything like that in them, but they had installed huge 500 gas tanks in them. Probably 1,000 gallons in all, that would enable them to fly back to the States. There was a young pilot there that I

struck up a conversation with and he was starting to take off and spend the afternoon flying and we got to chatting and he agreed to take me up and to fly me over many of the battle zones that I had been in and so I took him up and that was a real thrill and it particularly showed the waste and I think the military waste as a consequence of war is just preposterous. The material is just all over - just strewn all over the countryside.

Mark: Have you talked to Henry Kissinger since the war?

Spohn No, I have had practically no contact with Henry since the war. No, he has his own niche and I think I may have talked with him once and he's a different person than he was in the Army.

Mark: Or at least his persona...

Spohn I think all the way around he is fairly different. We drifted apart.

Mark: That's all I have. Do you have anything to add?

Spohn Oh, I can't think of anything off the top of my head. If you want to halt your thing, I'll just see, but I think I've covered this thing fairly well. One of the things that we haven't talked about previously in this interview was that while we were waiting on the Ruhr River, waiting to cross the river, at the same time I witnessed V2 rockets being shot out of Holland towards London. and I watched overhead air battles at night with the bombers American and English bombers coming over. The English bombers primarily were the nighttime bombers. To bomb Cologne and for several days and nights we were in a building, a home, that had been vacated and I used to climb up on the roof and lean up on the top point of the roof and just watch the bombers coming in and the air battles taking place. That was something to see. The other thing that I haven't mentioned I don't think is that we frequently, particularly when we were subject to bombardment, we would get down in these German cellars that had vaulted or circular roofs and they were usually very safe places to be until one time I put my hand on the ceiling and burned myself. Of course, the building on top of us was burning so we had our choice of getting out or staying in. We decided to stay in and let the fire burn itself out and that was that.

Mark: What about the oxygen?

Spohn The fire didn't suck it because we were in a dead end with just a small stairway out so we were encapsulated and then the fire burned itself out. But that was just one of the little incidents that you can kind of sit back and sift through your memory and dredge up. So, that's the end of this.

Mark: Thanks for stopping in.

**[End of Interview]**