

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JAMES W. STEVENS
Rifleman, Marine Corps, World War II
2000

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Stevens, James W., (1925-2006). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 34 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 34 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video recording: 1 videocassette (ca. 34 min.); sd., col., 1/2 in.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

James “Jim” Stevens, a Madison, Wisconsin veteran, discusses his World War II service with the 27th Regiment, 5th Marines on Saipan and Iwo Jima. He speaks about enlisting in the Marines while in high school, going through boot camp at San Diego (California), training to join a Marine Raider Battalion as a rifleman, and being assigned to the 5th Marine Division. He praises the Browning Automatic Rifle at length. Stevens describes the Marine landing at Saipan including difficulties walking through the volcanic sand, the effectiveness of Naval gunfire, and the challenges of fighting Japanese soldiers who were positioned in caves underground. He also details the landing at Iwo Jima, including: the change in morale when the Marines saw the flag on Mt. Suribachi; being wounded while attacking a Japanese machine gun position head-on; and his evacuation back to the United States. He comments on his extended stay at various Naval hospitals and learning of the death of President Franklin Roosevelt. Stevens mentions being home in Madison during the V-E Day and V-J Day celebrations. After the war, Stevens recounts using the GI Bill to attend the University of Wisconsin—Madison and become a high school teacher. Last, he discusses joining the American Legion in New Glarus (Wisconsin) but losing interest when it became too political during the McCarthy era.

Biographical Sketch:

Stevens (1925-2006) was born in Indianapolis (Indiana) but grew up in Madison (Wisconsin). He joined the Marine Reserves in high school and served with Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division in the Pacific theater of World War II. After the war, Stevens attended the University of Wisconsin—Madison on the GI Bill and became a high school teacher. He taught biology, social studies, and physical education in New Glarus, Mauston, and Madison, Wisconsin, for over thirty-five years.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000

Transcribed by Emily Johnson, 2008

Checked by Channing Welch, 2009

Abstract and Format edited by Darcy Gervasio, 2009

Interview Transcript:

James McIntosh: Talking to Jim Stevens, it's 30 August year 2000. Where were you born, sir?

James Stevens: I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana.

McIntosh: And, what year were you born?

Stevens: Uh, 1925.

McIntosh: And when did you enter military service?

Stevens: Uh, November of 1942.

McIntosh: And where did they send you first?

Stevens: I didn't go anywhere at first. I went and finished high school. I was a senior in high school at the time I enlisted.

McIntosh: Did you join a Reserve program?

Stevens: I joined the Marine Corps Reserve, yes. In fact I don't think you could join the Marine Corps at that time. You all went into the Reserve.

McIntosh: Right, right. [Approx. 7 Sec. Pause] And how long did you stay there? Just 'til you finished high school?

Stevens: I went into active duty in June of '43.

McIntosh: After you graduated.

Stevens: Exactly, within a--three or four days of graduation.

McIntosh: Okay, and where did they send you?

Stevens: They sent me to the University of Michigan. Into a V-12 Program, at the time. They, uh--it was supposedly an officer's candidate school. But being seventeen I wasn't much interested in going on with education at the time. So I asked for a transfer and was transferred to San Diego. The regular boot camp for the Marine Corps.

McIntosh: And how long did that last?

- Stevens: The boot camp itself, I believe, was approximately ten weeks. It was war time so it was shortened considerably.
- McIntosh: Okay, when you finished that did they try to make you into some specialist of some kind?
- Stevens: They did. I was transferred to Camp Pendleton in California and they gave us. I was in a raider battalion assignment, uh, Reserve battalion for the Marine Corps Raider platoons, and they taught us multiple weapon training. We had everything from flamethrowers to mortars to automatic weapons to demolitions. And then we went on and they broke up the Raiders because they didn't need Raiders anymore evidently and the paratroops and put us all into infantry battalions at the time. So we went under regular infantry training.
- McIntosh: Okay, and is that still at Pendleton?
- Stevens: It was all at Pendleton, yes from that point on until they shipped out from San Diego.
- McIntosh: And when did you ship out?
- Stevens: Oh, boy. It had to be still in 1943.
- McIntosh: Late '43?
- Stevens: Right. It would have to be--
- McIntosh: No later than June--
- Stevens: It would have to be either late '43 or early '44, very early, and we went to the island Hawaii for training. We were in Camp Tarawa and upper elements of the big island.
- McIntosh: Okay. Was that training different at all than what you'd been through?
- Stevens: It was in the sense that we had much more combat-type conditions. We had a lot of heavy weapon work and a lot of field work.
- McIntosh: Mortars?
- Stevens: No, at that time they had assigned me in the meantime to a specialized Browning automatic rifleman so I was an infantry rifleman as of that time. But I'm a BAR.

McIntosh: Sure, I know.

Stevens: We trained there until it was time to ship out from there.

McIntosh: Which was?

Stevens: Which was less than a year later, I think.

McIntosh: Less than a year.

Stevens: Yes.

McIntosh: So it was --

Stevens: Actually, I--

McIntosh: Early '45 perhaps?

Stevens: Very early '45 or late '44 we shipped out and we went to Oahu first on troop transports. But prior to that we did invade Maui, by the way, it was a practice invasion, [both laugh] an amphibious invasion of Maui which was pretty unspectacular at the time. They didn't have a lot of development yet.

McIntosh: Right.

Stevens: That was for practice for landings later. And then we got on troop transports from Oahu and traveled to Saipan, actually, but it took us about twenty-nine [laughs] days on shipboard between Hawaii and Saipan, Tinian. I'm not sure which area we landed in but we transferred there into LSTs .

McIntosh: Mm hmm. Okay.

Stevens: Of course we had been at sea a long time so when we transferred into LSTs. We were then broken up into smaller groups obviously and more amphibious tractor type.

McIntosh: Right. So what was your outfit, your specific group then by this time?

Stevens: Well, I was in the 27th Regiment of the Fifth Marine Division.

McIntosh: 27th?

Stevens: 27th, yes.

McIntosh: Of the Fifth Marine Division?

Stevens: Right.

McIntosh: Okay.

Stevens: It was Easy Company, Second Battalion, 27th Regiment. Oh, you remember those things

McIntosh: You never forget those things.

Stevens: If nothing else. Yeah. [laughs].

McIntosh: What was the situation in Saipan? Had they made the initial landing?

Stevens: Oh, yes. Saipan was secured already when we hit there because-- see I was still pretty young, when you stop to think about the timing I got in right at the end of the war, more or less. Fortunately.

McIntosh: Right, you bet. So how was your duty then in that situation?

Stevens: I was just an infantry Browning Automatic Rifleman in a regular infantry platoon and we trained only for jungle fighting, by the way. Then we invaded Iwo Jima which didn't have a tree on it. [laughs] So, all that camouflage training and everything went down the drain.

McIntosh: So, you were--after Saipan you moved to Iwo Jima?

Stevens: Right, we transferred to the LSTs at Saipan and then went to Iwo Jima on LSTs rather than troop transports. So we were broken down in numbers and from the LSTs, when we hit the Iwo Jima area, we transferred to the amtracs, and then went in on those, invasion.

McIntosh: And that was the landing on Iwo Jima?

Stevens: That was the actual landing on February the 19th. I remember the dates very well because it was the February 19th, 1945, so –

McIntosh: Sure

- Stevens: And we were in the first wave because we were in amtracs and it was probably a good thing. At the time, we had shelled the island so extensively that the enemy was, more or less, underground and when we landed, by being in the first waves we didn't get any of their heavy fire back on us. It was leveled mostly on the following waves because they weren't out of their holes yet to shoot back yet.
- McIntosh: What about crawling up that black sand? People I've talked to said it was very good for them.
- Stevens: It was incredible. It was like walking in a grain bin.
- McIntosh: You just never seem to make any progress.
- Stevens: Well, it was tough because we had planned on a seawall being there because they had had a tidal wave prior to our landing several months before. And they knew what it looked like but they didn't know what the consistency was and that gravel-like, very small pebbled type lava ash ended up being a wall in front of us and we even had wooden ladders strapped to our amtracs so we could lay 'em down and crawl up this wall. Well, the ladders were useless of course, so we crawled up the hard way and you sunk in to just below your knee half the time to walk up this hill [laughs]. So it was kind of a messy beginning anyway.
- McIntosh: My classmates, I was at West, class of '41 and one of my classmates Roger Creely was in the Fifth Division--
- Stevens: Well, I'll be darned.
- McIntosh: And did just exactly what you did.
- Stevens: Oh, did he?
- McIntosh: Yeah.
- Stevens: We were in the early waves and I've always been thankful for that because we didn't take the pounding immediately that the --
- McIntosh: That some other guys did.
- Stevens: The other waves--took a tremendous beating.
- McIntosh: Yeah, an awful lot right at the beach.
- Stevens: Right at the beach.

McIntosh: Different than other landings where they let 'em come in and then they --

Stevens: Right. Well, see there was no reason to let 'em come in the darn place was too small to accommodate. [both laugh]

McIntosh: You didn't have any room for anybody else.

Stevens: Right, we had more than enough.

McIntosh: How did you then – did you secure that beach under those difficult conditions?

Stevens: We really didn't secure the beach. We just overwhelmed it. We just kept the numbers coming one after another until we--

McIntosh: You got underneath the trajectory of their guns on the--

Stevens: No, we didn't. We were always exposed in all honesty. The only cover we had were shell holes and, you know, they were literally grain bins with the centers cooped out. But uh, they were all underground at the time when we first landed so we didn't come into opposing fire until we were maybe a hundred yourds in.

McIntosh: And then the--

Stevens: And then everything broke loose, mortar and artillery both.

McIntosh: Oh.

Stevens: And you had Suribachi on our--we happened to land underneath Suribachi and they had shelling out of Suribachi. So that came down and from the north end we had shelling of artillery and mortars from the other end, so it covered the whole beach landing area pretty well.

McIntosh: Do you have any idea of the width of that landing area? Was it a mile wide?

Stevens: Oh, you mean – do you mean the actual landing area?

McIntosh: Right.

Stevens: I don't think it --you can't talk in miles because the whole island is only five and a half miles long and it was about two and a half

miles wide where we landed. So the beach area must have been not more than two-three hundred yards at the most.

McIntosh: Pretty concentrated then.

Stevens: Very concentrated.

McIntosh: Gave the enemy, you know, a considerable advantage.

Stevens: They did at that time, certainly. Plus they were underground primarily and we didn't even see them. We had nothing to shoot at actually.

McIntosh: I was gonna say you had nothing to see or to do anything.

Stevens: Not at the start. The first, in fact, the first thing I saw that made an impression on me was a completely covered pill box in dust and ashes and gravel and we didn't know it was there until a platoon on our flank opened a trap door on top of it.

McIntosh: What a surprise.

Stevens: And we didn't know what it was, and they were throwing grenades into the pit, and until Japanese started running out of the exits, we didn't know there was anything there.

McIntosh: Ran right past you.

Stevens: They ran right away from us, you know, as we came up the slopes.

McIntosh: How did you get those amtracs ashore?

Stevens: They came only as far as the beach and then we dumped out. We didn't have the new kind with the drop back ends. You had to crawl over the sides.

McIntosh: Right. So they never really did get--

Stevens: Never got in at all. Not like, you know, later invasions when they could ride right up on the beach.

McIntosh: So you set up in that evening then just in foxholes?

Stevens: That's all, just dug out messes. There were no real solid ground to dig in.

- McIntosh: Did it seem to you at the time that things were in total confusion or did someone seem to have a grasp of what the hell was going on?
- Stevens: I think we had excellent leadership but of course being so young and being so scared half the time, you might consider it confusion and it was in our sense, but not --it was pretty well organized actually because we had a direct route out that we were gonna cover and we did proceed on that basis.
- McIntosh: So you knew already-- which direction you were supposed to continue?
- Stevens: Always, yes. We were never lost from that standpoint. Frightened, but not lost. [laughs]
- McIntosh: I understand. Did they manage to bring any food or water ashore to you after?
- Stevens: We had nothing organized from that standpoint until the second day. The first day was just do what you have, take what you're gonna bring along with you and eat it and that's it.
- McIntosh: You had your BAR?
- Stevens: Oh yes, all the time.
- McIntosh: Right, and ammo for the BAR, did you carry that?
- Stevens: I carried it and I had an assistant carry the same amount as I had. A rifleman was my supposedly my protector and assistant. I had, as I recall, I had eight magazines with twenty rounds in each and then one in the BAR itself. So, and he had the same thing. We had suspender carriers for our ammunition pockets, otherwise we would have been weighted down too much.
- McIntosh: Exactly.
- Stevens: It was bad enough as it was.
- McIntosh: That's what I'm sayin'. It's hard enough crawling without any of that attached.
- Stevens: And the BAR itself weighed about nineteen and a half pounds.
- McIntosh: I remember the BAR because I took ROTC in my first year and I went on to the Pershing Rifles, you know, and that sort of thing.

Stevens: Oh, sure.

McIntosh: And that summer, after my freshman year, in Pershing Rifles we had to learn how to take that BAR apart and put it back together again. I remember doing that.

Stevens: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Stevens: It was quite a weapon, actually, you know.

McIntosh: It was impressive.

Stevens: For a World War I weapon it was perfect.

McIntosh: It still is.

Stevens: To this day.

McIntosh: A weapon that is in service.

Stevens: Amazing, isn't it? Really. Mine was a 1914 model.

McIntosh: That Browning was one smart guy.

Stevens: Right, [laughs] I believe that. It was certainly the most accurate weapon. I qualified on the M-1 in boot camp, but I qualified as an expert with the BAR which was much more accurate I thought than the Garand.

McIntosh: Is that right?

Stevens: Yes. Less kick, you know, for one thing because it had the absorbed cones in the buttplate, you know, so --

McIntosh: I see. I never got a chance to fire it but I did have to take it apart [laughs] and put it together.

Stevens: Very easy weapon to fire. And accurate.

McIntosh: Mm-hmm. Okay, so you carried your food with you and you said the K-rations.

Stevens: We had K-rations and we were set for several days if we needed to be. But we were fed before too many days. By the fourth day we were getting--

McIntosh: When did it seem to you that we're getting this under control? How long was that?

Stevens: The one time that impressed me, I mean this is my personal feeling about it. When we were going underneath Suribachi across the narrow end of the island and then up the left flank to the north, eventually, but on the fourth day they raised the flag and that's the first time we felt like we were gaining ground, in all honesty, because it took us that long, just to get across this narrow inlet. And the fact that we could see the flag meant something was happening that was right, so we were impressed.

McIntosh: Somebody believes (unintelligible, then laughs).

Stevens: We were hopeful up until then, and then it looked good.

McIntosh: Right. Have you read Bradley's book?

Stevens: Pardon?

McIntosh: Have you read Bradley's book? *Flags of our Fathers* about the--

Stevens: No, I haven't yet, I'm going to.

McIntosh: He's from Wisconsin, you know.

Stevens: I just heard about it. Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah. Outstanding book.

Stevens: I'm a little late. I do have the history of the 5th Division they issued, you know, later, but that's all. [coughs] Excuse me.

McIntosh: So, once you got-- things seem to quiet down gradually? Was that the way it was or did it--?

Stevens: It never--I don't think it ever quieted down. It was--

McIntosh: Until you killed 'em all.

Stevens: It was a mess all the time and we knew, I think we landed-- before it was over--think we landed about 40,000 troops against their twenty [thousand]. So, here eight square miles [laughs] of dirt--

McIntosh: Did anybody bother taking prisoners or were they just eliminated?

Stevens: At the early stages, there wasn't any that I can recall.

McIntosh: Well, there wasn't any place for them anyway.

Stevens: Right, and that's very true. There were a lot of bodies laying around and even there we didn't see bodies for several days because they pulled 'em out. I mean they took their own people out deliberately so we wouldn't know we were gaining. And later on, they found several messes of them, but not at the time.

McIntosh: Your dug out areas.

Stevens: Right, well, everything was underground anyway. They had a whole series of caves and--

McIntosh: When you approached one of these caves did you bother going into those or did you just bypass 'em, and flame throw 'em and bypass 'em?

Stevens: Exactly. The bypassing was almost universal. Between flame throwing and demolition group throwing things in, nobody went into the caves.

McIntosh: Right.

Stevens: And the tunnel system must have been pretty good because--

McIntosh: Extensive as it turned out.

Stevens: Many got away without, you know, any difficulty, but at least they were closed off so we didn't have to worry about them coming behind us.

McIntosh: Right that would be the concern.

Stevens: We had very little sniping from behind.

McIntosh: Well, no trees.

Stevens: Nothing to hide behind [laughs].

McIntosh: Snipers lived by trees.

Stevens: They sure did.

McIntosh: Yeah. So, after this they brought in some heavy stuff and you were able to set up some real areas and that sort --

Stevens: The early stages then they brought in these multiple rocket throwers, small rocket throwers, launchers I don't know what they are, but they used those extensively and it was like, you know, a machine gun firing rockets. And so we had a lot of protection with artillery and rockets once we were established across the base of the island.

McIntosh: But did they set up facilities like a small hospital?

Stevens: Oh yes, tent hospitals and—

McIntosh: Tent hospital –

Stevens: Yeah, and early –

McIntosh: And mess tent, too?

Stevens: Pardon?

McIntosh: A mess tent?

Stevens: I don't recall, I didn't ever get in one so I don't know if they did or not. We did have field –

McIntosh: Your field rations –

Stevens: We had K-rations for quite a ways and then when we did get something it would be like pots of hot coffee or something like that brought up and doled out in our mess kits. That was it, but the actual mess gear and what have you was established later, I think. I didn't last more than ten days so I don't know what happened from that point on.

McIntosh: And at the end of ten days what happened?

Stevens: I was wounded and they evacuated me so --

McIntosh: Tell me about that experience.

Stevens: Well, [clears throat] it's kinda odd, actually, we were attacking a light machine gun position and it got to the point where we had to expose ourselves in order to get to it. So a group of men in my particular platoon were just told to attack it. So we did and he mowed all four of us down, and we got him, of course, in the process.

McIntosh: Frontal assault.

Stevens: Right, that's all it was and wide open and--

McIntosh: From here to--what are we talking about, twenty yourds?

Stevens: About twenty yourds at the most, yeah, otherwise I don't think we'd even got him because he chopped us down very easily and we got him in the process but by the same token all four of us were evacuated later.

McIntosh: So you received several slugs or one?

Stevens: No, I was fortunate. I only got one but it went through me so it was a case of--

McIntosh: Well, that's good, too.

Stevens: It was in this case because it was in my flank so it didn't hit a vital organ other than intestines and what have you, but went through and came out my back and didn't hit my backbone so that's a good sign.

McIntosh: That's called a million dollar wound.

Stevens: Amen! Plus it got me out of there. What more can you ask?

McIntosh: When I was on a hospital ship in Korea, I had a guy walk in who had a small bullet hole here.

Stevens: Oh boy.

McIntosh: I couldn't believe he was walking. He'd been a prisoner and he escaped after being, you know, several days after being shot. I thought, there's something wrong here. And he had a little bullet hole in the back. Missed his heart, missed his aorta.

Stevens: Bounce off a bone or something, come out.

McIntosh: It didn't even hit a rib so he had no –

Stevens: I'll be darned

McIntosh: He had no fluid in his chest. I remember seeing, it was the most amazing wound. Of all the thousands of wounds I saw that was the most amazing.

Stevens: I think the most amazing one I saw, I met a gentleman in the hospital in Hawaii when I was evacuated later and he had a bullet hit his knife belt and it broke through to his knife and turned the blade into his side. And so he was stabbed with his own knife, and that was all that was wrong with him.

McIntosh: Incredible.

Stevens: Can you imagine that? Just freakish, you know.

McIntosh: Exactly. So, when you went down, uh, medics came up and--

Stevens: No, no.

McIntosh: No?

Stevens: We crawled out of there...

McIntosh: I see.

Stevens: ...back to the beach area because there wasn't, you know, we weren't that far away, fortunately. And, in fact, you were never very far away, but we crawled back to first aid and first aid treated us immediately and then put us on litters and carried us out to LCVPs and out to troop transports. And they gave us immediate treatment at the troop transports and then shipped us from the troop transports to the hospital ship Good Samaritan, which was laying right off shore right there.

McIntosh: I understand. What treatment did they afford you there? It wasn't much to put a bandage on that.

Stevens: That's right. All they did was plug up the holes and--

McIntosh: 'Cause you were through and through.

Stevens: Right and then, take you to a place where-- for further use. But they actually didn't do anything until I got on the Good Samaritan as far as operating and there they put drains in and the whole bit.

McIntosh: Sure, yeah, 'cause there was some bleeding accumulated there.

Stevens: Not enough, fortunately.

McIntosh: How did you feel?

Stevens: Punchy. But, actually, I didn't have any trouble except long afterward, the pain started increasing as time went on and since you were kicked around and pushed around a little while there, getting evacuated and what have you, then I think the shock of the treatment started to take effect. So I had pain, but other than that, no basic problem of any kind.

McIntosh: And how long were you on the hospital ship?

Stevens: Just long enough to take us to Guam, where they put us in the hospital again.

McIntosh: Ah, what treatment was left for you then?

Stevens: Well, at that time I guess it was just a case of making sure that everything was out and that I was draining properly

McIntosh: Sure.

Stevens: and no shrapnel in there and what have you.

McIntosh: They hadn't taken the drain out that they put. That was--

Stevens: No, that was in all the way 'til Hawaii before--

McIntosh: That's good.

Stevens: That's what they said.

McIntosh: Maybe a pain to you but it was good for your health. Otherwise you would have got an abscess in there for sure. Then you've got a simple problem and then you turn into something else.

Stevens: I never thought of that but, you know, it was, at the time, it was a pain because it kept drying on me and it'd stick to you and there was--miserable.

McIntosh: I understand.

Stevens: But at least I wasn't in difficulty. In fact I was so happy with being away from the actual fighting that—

McIntosh: I'll bet.

Stevens: no question about not wanting any more of it. You know, I don't think anybody does.

McIntosh: So in Hawaii they let you go free and get out much or no?

Stevens: No, uh, they took real close care of us for awhile and then as we, we got to a point where they didn't worry about it anymore. Then they'd see you daily and make sure that everything was going alright and you were eating properly and then they decided they were going to ship me to a hospital in the States.

McIntosh: That drain was out by this time?

Stevens: No, it was still in [laughs].

McIntosh: Okay.

Stevens: But, no I guess they did take it out before they shipped me out of there, yeah.

McIntosh: I would think so. Surely in ten days they--

Stevens: My memory isn't that great.

McIntosh: Sure.

Stevens: But we went back on a ship, just to give you an idea of the timing of all this, we went back on a brand new troop ship and while we were en route to the States, President Roosevelt died. So it must have been about April--

McIntosh: Twelfth.

Stevens: Ok, good. April 12th. And they announced it over our loud speakers system while we were on board. So it was before we even got to the States and we went to Frisco--a hospital in San Francisco.

McIntosh: So they still hadn't discharged you from care?

Stevens: No, they didn't. Although I was considered recovering and all, I mean, at least they didn't send me back to the Division they said--

McIntosh: From this part then you went back home?

Stevens: First--that's kind of interesting. What they did was say, "We're going to ship you to a hospital close to home." And since I lived in Madison at the time, of course and have for many years, Great Lakes Naval Station was the obvious hospital they were going to send me to, so they sent me to Astoria, Oregon instead. Just like, you know, the service [laughs].

McIntosh: You've got that right.

Stevens: Right, and, fortunately I was there at a time of the year when it was good. The weather wasn't bad and I got a break in that, when I got a convalescent leave from the hospital in Astoria I got on an air transport command plane and flew home, which was, you know, really great because at the time it was a four or five day trip on the train if you got lucky enough to get on.

McIntosh: Right.

Stevens: And they flew me to Chicago, and from Chicago I took the milk train to Madison. [laughs] And I was home. I was home in time for V-E Day.

McIntosh: You weren't discharged though?

Stevens: No.

McIntosh: You were still in?

Stevens: Still in.

McIntosh: Right. So you got a thirty day leave?

Stevens: I got a thirty day overseas leave they called it. And then after I got home and served my thirty days I was shipped to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. And I was just waiting there for a discharge, but I got a--no, first of all, it was a convalescent leave for thirty days and I was home for V-E Day, watched Madison celebrate that. Then I got a thirty day overseas leave from Camp Lejeune and I was home for two or three weeks. I was there for V-J Day. So I

celebrated both ends of the war in Madison. Just unique and freakish but lucky. And I was finally discharged from--

McIntosh: Lejeune.

Stevens: From Lejeune by points by that time.

McIntosh: You-- did you utilize your GI Bill?

Stevens: Absolutely.

McIntosh: Good.

Stevens: I got my full education on the GI Bill. When I came home I wasn't sure what I wanted to do but I had the opportunity so I went to the University of Wisconsin here in Madison and I went for a year and decided that I needed more income than the GI income provided. So I worked for a year and then I came back to the University and finished. That all worked out very well. I never would have finished college if it hadn't been for the GI bill.

McIntosh: That's the story.

Stevens: It was a Godsend.

McIntosh: For everybody.

Stevens: That and the fact that my family, I was the first one to graduate from college. So it was a case of, we didn't have the background or the money to promote all this in the first place.

McIntosh: You were single yet?

Stevens: Oh yeah--No, I was married by the time I got out of college.

McIntosh: Oh, you were.

Stevens: Yeah, I got married in '47.

McIntosh: Okay. And what did you graduate with, what type of degree?

Stevens: Bachelor of Science.

McIntosh: Science, and did you use that degree after that?

Stevens: Oh yeah. I've been a teacher for thirty eight years.

- McIntosh: Teaching general science?
- Stevens: I had some general science. I taught just about everything at one time or another but I ended up in physical education and coaching. But I taught biology and social studies and--
- McIntosh: All of this at West?
- Stevens: No, the first four years I spent teaching in New Glarus, Wisconsin. There's the place that I did most of my outside activities other than phy-ed. I taught social studies and biology and boys and girls physical education and first aid and everything known to man, you know how small schools are. It was wonderful. It was great experience and I learned a heck of a lot.
- McIntosh: I'll bet.
- Stevens: Then I went from there to Mauston for two years and did the same thing as athletic director and what have you. And finally after two years at Mauston I came to Madison and spent thirty-two years at West.
- McIntosh: That's my high school. I send my granddaughter there on Monday.
- Stevens: And I'm an East grad. [laughs]
- McIntosh: I think I knew that.
- Stevens: So, this is interesting.
- McIntosh: Sure. Did--where did you get the teaching experience in sports? guess I don't know how to say that exactly.
- Stevens: Well, I was an athlete in high school so that started me, you know, in that line and then all my experience of course came at the University as far as the training and what have you, but you just, you take your professional courses, you know, and then whatever you love you work at. This happened to be my field of interest so I developed it.
- McIntosh: When you were at West did you, besides your coaching, what teaching? Same teaching?
- Stevens: I started there as a general science teacher.
- McIntosh: I see.

- Stevens: And then when an opening came in the Phy-Ed Department I moved into it.
- McIntosh: Completely, you mean?
- Stevens: Completely, yes, and from that point on I didn't get out of the phy-ed area at all. Just coaching and phy-ed.
- McIntosh: You were happy with that?
- Stevens: Very.
- McIntosh: Yeah. Well, you've had a good record there. You should be happy about that.
- Stevens: I was very fortunate to have some great kids, that's all. A pleasure.
- McIntosh: Yeah. Did you keep track of any of your friends?
- Stevens: Constantly.
- McIntosh: In the Marine Corps?
- Stevens: Oh, in the Marine Corps? No, I've always been unlucky there. I went to only one Division reunion and that was in Chicago. The only time it was in this part of the country, and there wasn't one soul--
- McIntosh: This was the Fifth Division we're talking about?
- Stevens: This is the Fifth Division, yeah, Reunion. They had the general that we had and all. His name was Rocky, and they had it in a hotel in Chicago and there must have been, you know five-six hundred men there, but I knew *nobody*.
- [End of Tape 1, Side A. ca 30 min.]**
- McIntosh: Oh my.
- Stevens: Nor did I meet anybody who knew anybody I knew.
- McIntosh: How disappointing.
- Stevens: It was very. In fact, I've never even tried to find another one since that day.

McIntosh: That cured you--

Stevens: Right away. And that was the very first one they ever had in this area of the country. I don't even know where they have them if they have them anymore.

McIntosh: It's hard to believe you wouldn't have found somebody.

Stevens: You're right. I looked--

McIntosh: Even though you found 27th Regiment friend--

Stevens: I found no friend from the 27th Regiment. None at all. There was nobody from my Company, but then we were pretty much wiped out as a company --

McIntosh: That's probably the reason.

Stevens: So I mean I don't know how many even survived. I know of only one or two for sure who survived from our whole platoon. So, they're across the country. I think the one thing I did learn was, when we were training in Hawaii we had a tent of eight men and one was a first aid man, not a first aid man but a Navy medic, you know. What did they call them? I can't remember.

McIntosh: You mean a corpsman?

Stevens: Corpsman, yeah. He was a Mormon.

McIntosh: Mormon Corpsman.

Stevens: A Mormon corpsman, yeah. And I know he was killed because I attended him on the beach area when he was wounded. But all the rest of them disappeared in their various areas and the one oldest fellow in our tent was about twenty-two and he said, "After the war we'll never meet." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, if we survive," he said, "you'll go your way and I'll go my way and we all have different backgrounds and we're all from different parts of the country. "He was from New Jersey. And he said, "We'll probably never even like each other in civilian life because we're so different." It was interesting and I didn't give it a lot of thought at the time, you know, but I have since.

McIntosh: Very prophetic.

Stevens: He was quite right.

- McIntosh: Yes. Isn't that interesting. And so, (unintelligible) did you join any veteran's organizations?
- Stevens: When I was in New Glarus, I felt I should join everything you know because I was a teacher in local small town so I joined the American Legion. That's all there was, they didn't have any VFWs. And they made me adjutant of the company for awhile. Everything went along fine until they got to the book burning phase. Somewhere along the line they got to a phase where they were, it was, maybe it was during the McCarthy era or something, they were down on everything that was printed under certain emphasis. So I, it kind of turned me off and I just didn't continue. I just quit and let it go at that. I didn't make a big deal out of quitting. I just--
- McIntosh: The American Legion is just a frail organization compared to what it was--
- Stevens: That's too bad in a way because I thought it was a good idea but--
- McIntosh: I think when they turned to politics I think they--a lot of guys like yourself were lost--I was never interested in it because I was little later.
- Stevens: I wasn't truly interested either but by the same token I thought I should join all organizations in this town where they're paying me for a living.
- McIntosh: In a small town it was important that you do those things.
- Stevens: Darn right. And I can't, and the people who were in it were all nice. I mean, I had no problems. But they started an investigation or something. I don't even remember what it was, but a Federal Bureau of Investigation agent came in one day when I was in school and asked me questions about people who had Communist backgrounds and what have you, and I thought: "Good heavens what's this?"
- McIntosh: This is in New Glarus? [laughs]
- Stevens: In New Glarus. I thought, hey mister, do you know where you are? [laughs] But I let it go at that. It was interesting just to meet one, that's all.
- McIntosh: It must have been a slow news day.

- Stevens: Must have been something. I was astounded.
- McIntosh: Right. That's funny. Alright, boy this went along fast.
- Stevens: I hope I didn't bore the tears out of you.
- McIntosh: No, it's just fine. You did it just right. I just--can you think of any other stories about your experience with the Fifth Division that we didn't cover?
- Stevens: Oh I don't know, I think we've covered pretty much of the territory. I certainly enjoyed my stay at the time, you know. Everything was new and unique and I wasn't homesick and everything was fine.
- McIntosh: Other than being shot at it was alright.
- Stevens: [laughs] Right. If they had eliminated the violence it would have been great. The travel was fine.
- McIntosh: That's good. Alright, well, I shan't keep you any longer. Thank you so much.
- Stevens: Oh, you're very welcome.
- McIntosh: I appreciate that.
- Stevens: I hope I don't sound too idiotic.
- McIntosh: Well, you'll find out because I take these home, you know--
- Stevens: Oh yeah?
- McIntosh: --and I make video tapes on 'em.

[End of Interview]