

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

ADRIAN STRANSKY

Administrative NCO, Army, 32nd Division, World War II

2014

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1926

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Stransky, Adrian (b. 1919). Oral History Interview, 2014.

Approximate length: 1 hour, 51 mins

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Adrian Stransky, a native of Hancock, and resident of Madison, Wisconsin, discusses his service in the US Army from April 1941 to August 1945, an administrative non-commissioned officer with the 32nd Division during World War II. Stransky was drafted on April 15, 1941. From Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois, he was sent to Camp Livingston in Louisiana for basic training. Assigned initially to the First Battalion, 120th Field Artillery, 32nd Division, Stransky moved to Division headquarters in late 1941, an acknowledgment that skills cultivated before the war as a court reporter would be well-placed there. Preparations were made to go overseas at Fort Devens in Massachusetts, and the country was again crossed before his Division embarked from San Francisco with the goal of protecting southern Australia against Japanese invasion. Stransky arrived in Adelaide, South Australia on May 14, 1942. Stransky speaks highly of the friendliness of the people, of the beauty of the country of Australia, and expresses a desire to return there for a visit, if not to New Guinea. Further training for the 32nd took place at three camps, near Adelaide and Brisbane. A portion of the 32nd was sent to Port Moresby on the southwestern coast of New Guinea, with some infantry units to cross the Owen Stanley Range and keep Japanese troops from reaching Port Moresby, and Australia beyond. Stransky's skills landed him a job as private secretary to General Edwin F. Harding, commanding officer of the 32nd Division; and, as part of headquarters staff, Stransky flew over the mountains, jungle, and strife below to land on the east coast of New Guinea and help establish a base at Finschhafen. He relays stories of native women encountered; and of typewriter ribbons. He shares his opinion of General Harding, and of his removal from command by Generals Douglas MacArthur and Robert Eichelberger. Stransky covers ground on the eastern shore of New Guinea—by truck to Milne Bay in the south, by dugout canoe up the coast, and a seventeen-mile walk through jungle north to Magaubo Mission, wading across deep rivers, rumors of sharks adding to the oppression of 120-degree days. He tells of attempts to communicate with the native population. Stransky's first campaign was at Buna, New Guinea [Battle of Buna-Gona, Nov. 16, 1942-Jan. 22, 1943] taking and sending messages. He remembers being able to apprehend the approach of Japanese Mazda planes by the peculiar whine of their radial engines, and of the requisite preparation of a nearby trench slit trench that all-too-often provided a water-filled haven, “not even pleasant to talk about.” He feels troops could have been better prepared in the field with food and materiel. He speaks of censorship in writing home, and of how he got around it. With Japanese snipers overseeing the trails, the pathways were best avoided. Stransky attests to the diseases prevalent on New Guinea and his fortune in escaping their ravages. After Buna, the entire Division was sent back to Australia for more training—“severe training.” So revitalized, the 32nd landed at Saidor, New Guinea on January 2, 1944. Master Sergeant Stransky prepared daily Division reports now for General Eichelberger. Eichelberger made them fight harder. He comments on cooperativeness amongst

the troops. With Saidor secured in late February they went to Aitape, New Guinea, landing there on April 22 and fighting continuously for 125 days—a struggle Stransky considers the most difficult, as well as reflection-inducing.. Given the opportunity for promotion or rotation and opting for the latter, Stransky awaited a troopship home while working as an ammunition loader at a camp called Utopia. Stransky acknowledges the hardships of Army life, but withal he finds the experience to have been rewarding. Once back in the States, Stransky, after a ten-day rehabilitation leave that included reunion with his wife, was reassigned to military police duty in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he encountered anti-war protestors in the war's last days. Deemed an “essential soldier,” Stransky was further reassigned to assist at the separation center at Fort Sheridan, Illinois before his own release from service on August 10, 1945. He resumed his career as a court reporter for the next forty-three years, interrupted only by treatment for PTSD. Stransky has been a member of the Veteran of Foreign Wars—Madison Chapter, as well as of the 32nd Division Veterans Association.

Biographical Sketch:

Adrian Stransky (b. 1919) served in the US Army from 1941-1945, an administrative NCO with Division headquarters, 32nd Division during World War II. After service he returned to his pre-war career as a court reporter for the state of Wisconsin, retiring in 1989.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Ellen Brooks, 2014.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Service, 2016.

Abstract by Jeff Javid, 2017

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of Stransky.OH1926]

Brooks: Now, today is Thursday, June 12, 2014. This is an interview with Adrian Stransky, who served with the Army. And correct any of this if it's wrong. You served with the Army in the First Battalion, 120th Field Artillery, 32nd Division during World War II, 1941 to 1945. And the interview is being conducted at the Central Public Library in Madison, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Ellen Brooks.

Stransky: Okay. I should make a correction immediately. I was first assigned to the 120th Field Artillery but that changed shortly and I became a member of Division Headquarters. I had the experience, administrative experience. I could type and I could write and read shorthand and so my services were very much needed right away. And that's how that started anyway.

Brooks: Okay. That makes sense.

Stransky: Well, my name is Adrian Stransky. I've lived in Madison now for--since 1937, which is--you can figure it out. Yeah. I was employed as a court reporter by the state. My first knowledge of the draft came to me when I was on a trip outside. I traveled the whole state. I was outside the city of Madison. I was in Sheboygan and an announcement was made that all people of specified ages were to register for the draft. So I registered for the draft in Sheboygan. And, of course, the record was transferred back to Madison, my home. Okay? And I was drafted as of April 15, 1941. Well, there's lots of stories about that. My, gosh, I could go on and on.

I first went to Milwaukee for a physical examination and induction. And that took a whole day and a long part of the day and eventually, about 10:30 at night, we arrived in Camp Grant, [Rockford] Illinois. And that's where I was assigned for a few days, until further assignment. And, of course, at Camp Grant received my Army uniform and all of the proper clothing and shoes and instructions and whatever we were supposed to do. And then received word amongst all of the other events that we, our unit, which was the 32nd Division, were going to be assigned to Camp Grant--or to Camp Livingston, Louisiana, near Alexandria, Louisiana. And we all boarded the train down there, another long, long ride, and we thought we'd never get there. But finally we made it. And I was transferred--transported to my battalion. It was at that time the 120th Field Artillery. And I served in the 120th Field Artillery for just a month or so, when a call came that they needed help in Division headquarters and I was qualified to offer that help. So I assumed the duty there shortly and it was mostly a matter of taking dictation and typing and running some of the equipment. And that seemed to go well. I was shortly promoted and then right after that first promotion there was word that I was being transferred to Division headquarters. And that would have been early--

well, latter part of 1941. And that's where I stayed for the remainder of my tour of duty, except in Division headquarters I was assigned a lot of different duties, all clerical, administrative, or whatever. I worked--whatever job I was assigned, I did what I could.

[00:04:39]

And eventually we received--well, after about two or three months of training, basic training--everybody had to go through that--we received word that we were eventually going to be sent to Camp Livingston, Louisiana, which we were, the whole Division, roughly 13,000 personnel, of all positions, ranks, and names and addresses and everything. We stayed there just a few months and then one day word came through that we were going to be sent to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, and there to be prepared to go into combat in England against the Germans. And that process took a long time, of course. We couldn't all get on the trains. And some went by bus. However you could get there.

And so we stayed at Fort Devens, [Ayer-Shirley] Massachusetts. It was a nice duty place, our training, further training, and working. I was at least working on administrative duties all the time. Whenever anything needed to be written, taken in shorthand and typed, I would do it. I was the only person in the Division who was qualified to do that. So I had a good job right away. And I enjoyed that. It was work that I had been doing.

And soon, rather abruptly, we received word that our Division, the 32nd Red Arrow Division, with all its fame along with it, was being shipped back across the United States to San Francisco and then ultimately transferred by ship and plane or whatever, to Adelaide, South Australia [arrived May 14, 1942]. And the purpose of our going to Adelaide, South Australia, was to defend the south half of Australia from invasion by the Japanese. You know, the Japanese were already in New Guinea and about thirty miles from Port Moresby, which was one of the further south ports in New Guinea. And so we trained near Adelaide, South Australia. We were assigned to two different camps, Camp Woodside and Camp Sandy Creek. Some of this may be in the records. It should be, I suppose. And, again, I was very fortunate. I had plenty to do but I didn't mind that. It kept me occupied. And even got to meet some of the Australian people. And, I must say, we did like the Australian people. They were most friendly to us. They did wonderful things for us and very much appreciative of our being there to help with the battle against the Japanese.

And the duty in Adelaide was only a few months and then received word that we were to move the whole Division to near Brisbane, Brisbane, Australia, which is on the east coast of the middle part of Australia. And that process was very complicated, particularly in the fact that in Australia at that time the railroads did not have tracks that ran all the way from Adelaide to Brisbane, for instance. So that meant we'd go a little ways and then transfer all the equipment and all the

personnel off the train and board a different train on a different track to go to Brisbane. That's how we got there. And that process, well, certainly did take a lot of time. But along the way you learned to appreciate the good things. There were a few good things, of course. And we stayed near Brisbane. We were assigned a duty in Camp Cable. And that's in the records, too. That would be--that could be tested and easily determined. And we went into heavy training there.

[00:09:33]

And shortly units of our division were transferred to Port Moresby and that is in the southern part of New Guinea. There's nothing very significant about it except it was a base for the people in New Guinea who then lived there. And there was a place to build a camp there. So we proceeded to build a camp. And from that camp certain units of the infantry portion of the Division--there were, I believe, four infantry regiments--certain units, I don't remember specifically which regiment, but they were assigned the duty to march across the Owen Stanley Range of mountains in New Guinea. And this was a very tenuous task. They didn't--there were no roads. You couldn't drive anywhere, except--well, you could drive from Port Moresby to Milne Bay, which I will describe later. Okay. So these men started off on foot with their equipment and weapons and everything and tried to march across the Owen Stanley Range, and in the process push back. The Japanese were already pressing to get into Port Moresby through the Owen Stanley Range. Well, after an exceeding amount of time and effort and loss of good men, we did succeed in pushing the Japanese away from the port, from Stanley, Owen Stanley Range. And, oh, there are many stories about that [laughs].

Brooks: Can you tell me a few?

Stransky: Well, okay. I was, again, fortunate because I was in the administration and I was working for the general. In fact, I worked--I should back up just a little bit. I was assigned as private secretary to General [Edwin F.] Harding, who was our Division commander. That was in Australia at first. I enjoyed that. He was a wonderful man. Unfortunately we were attacking Buna at that time in New Guinea and things weren't going well. And the upper headquarters decided that General Harding had to be relieved. And everybody liked him. He was a good man and I enjoyed working for him. And others worked under him. So it was a wonderful combination. That changed. Well, anyway, he was relieved and I believe, if I have this information correct, he was assigned for duty the rest of his life as a general to Panama Canal. And he hated it. There was nothing to do down there. There was no war going on down there. And so that meant that I lost my job as private secretary. I also, though, became private secretary to Colonel [William] Hones, chief of staff of the 32nd Division. And I enjoyed all of that.

Well, anyway, back to now, we are at Port Moresby and we're moving or attempting to move forward because we had to push the Japs back. And so a

certain group of men from the infantry walked across the Owen Stanley Range. I say walked and that's not true. They *fought* their way across the Owen Stanley Range, a very, very difficult task. But some of us were not quite so bad off. I got to fly over the Owen Stanley Range because I was needed at the next place, which--okay, see if I got this right. We were at Port Moresby. Yeah. Okay. Now, went over to Finschhafen, a place called Finschhafen in eastern New Guinea along the east coast of New Guinea and established a base there and our infantry units and artillery kept pushing the Japanese back all the time. I should—I'd like to insert some of these stories in there but I think I'm not putting it in the proper order. The one story that I distinctly remember--I'll tell you about this.

We were in Port Moresby. This was just after we arrived there. And being in administration again I was with Colonel Rogers, who was the G3 [Operations Section, Division Staff] of the Division headquarters. And we, he and myself and about five other sailors, all had to find a way to get all the way across the east coast of New Guinea. No roads. No tracks. No trucks. No planes available. So we were assigned to take a native dugout canoe, a double dugout canoe, on which we loaded all of our equipment and our people and we paddled our way up the eastern coast of New Guinea. It took a whole day. Started early in the morning. We paddled all day long. We had two native men with us who were to accompany us and help and they were supposed to paddle. But natives get tired, too. So they would stop paddling. Then we would have to take up paddling so that we could keep moving forward. We did finally get there.

[00:15:50]

Brooks: How did you get the canoe?

Stransky: What do I think of it? Well, now, it's a means of transportation. That's all the natives ever had. They used to have single dugout canoes. This was a double dugout canoe and it was loaded so heavily that at one point waves would come up and wash right over the top of the canoe. And we would know then that we had to make a move, had to shift some of the equipment so that the baggage would remain level. Okay.

Brooks: And did the--how did you get the natives to lend you the canoe?

Stransky: Well, that was all arranged and I don't know by whom. I'm sorry about that. I wish I had asked that question at the time. But we got--oh, I started to tell you, in order to get--we were to meet this canoe, the dugout canoe, at Milne Bay, which is on the far southern, yeah, far southern tip of New Guinea. A map will show you where it was. So in order to get there--we were taken by truck. There was a road, a rough road through the jungle and it was penetrable by a truck. Well, so they loaded a bunch of guys on the truck and I remember getting on the truck with several others of us and we had one man with us who had been in the Army for some time. And he had a lot of experience, obviously, and he liked to talk about

his things that he had done. And so bear in mind that as we go along this path--that's what it was really, a path, through the jungle--we would discuss what we saw and we often saw native people, and amongst whom were native women. Okay. And at that time the native women were, let's say, very bare, okay. And one native women, she was well empowered and our friend, older guy, who had plenty of experience, I guess, he said to us, said, "How would you like to get your nose in there and go woo, woo, woo, woo?" So that gave us a good laugh anyways. So we did get a laugh now and then. But we arrived safely there and we were also from--I know I backed up a little bit.

We arrived also from Milne Bay all the way up to--I believe it's Ambogu [Magaubo??] Mission. Now, some of these names may escape me but it was at least heading north. Again, we were working to get the Japanese out of New Guinea. That was our purpose. Now, didn't happen right away though. Okay.

And so backing off just a--I'd like to tell you this story about Australia. This is before we ever got as far as Port Moresby. We had typewriters there and we lived in tents and we had our duties. I remember I did do a lot of typing and that meant, of course, at that time we just had the old-fashioned fabric ribbons. No carbon ribbons or anything like that. And even those fabric ribbons in time would wear out or they would become so light that the print wouldn't even show through. So being so smart I thought, "I know what we can do. We can rewind the fabric ribbons." And so I took on the task of rewinding a couple of fabric ribbons to find out only that the fabric, when it was worn out, it was worn out on both sides. So turning the ribbon around didn't do any good. And then to make it a fun time--we had a lot of humor with it--to make some fun time out of it, the guys got together a bunch of old fabric ribbons from various other sec--bear in mind, this is 13,000 people and they all have offices and things to do and type. So they gathered together a bunch of fabric ribbons and packed them up in a box and tied it all up and brought it to me. That's kind of a fun thing. Well, we had a good laugh out of that, too.

[00:20:44]

Brooks: So it was like a present?

Stransky: Yeah. Like a present, yeah. So, all right. I know that that has diverted a little bit.

Brooks: That's okay.

Stransky: Well, that's two things that happened. Oh, no, can I go back to Australia?

Brooks: Yeah, please.

Stransky: You don't mind?

Brooks: Not at all.

Stransky: Well, okay. We lived in tents in Australia near Alexandria, Camp Livingston, Alexandria, southern part of Louisiana. Okay. To do our job there, that was again for intense training, preparing to be into combat wherever we went in Australia--we did not know for sure where we were going. So it was intense training. We had maneuvers--in camp. We didn't have--the maneuvers were outside at the--well, a false war, if you want to call it that. Gave us a chance to learn what to do without actually firing bullets or bombs or anything like that. But when we were in camp we stayed in tents. And we had a man in our tent, I think his name was Hornick [sp?], if I remember it correctly, and he was a heavy drinker. And at that time we could get a pass and go into Alexandria and go into the tavern and drink. I didn't, though. I was not a drinking man. But Hornick, boy. I remember one night all of us were in the tent. There were six men in a tent. And all of us were except Hornick. Five of us were in the tent and had been sleeping for a while. And in comes Hornick, late in the evening. And we played a trick on him. You probably don't even know what a tight sheet is, do you?

Brooks: No. Is that--well, you tell me. I have an idea.

Stransky: Well, a trick sheet. And what you do, you pull the bed apart and you pull the top sheet away from the bottom and you fold it over. Fold it over about in half. And it was a trick that a lot of the guys did. It was fun, in a way. Well, Hornick, he crawled in or tried to crawl in one night and he obviously didn't make it. The sheets were pretty well made. And then he got mad and he was cussing like all hell. And, boy, he had a bad time. And he pushed so hard that he pushed a hole through that sheet. It's called short sheeting.

Brooks: So does it make it so you can't get underneath the sheet?

Stransky: That's right, yeah. You can't. There's no way you can get under it. So he went through it and jammed his feet right through it. That's how he got there.

Brooks: That's horrible.

Stransky: Okay. I know I'm backtracking a little bit.

Brooks: That's okay.

Stransky: Well, that's another story, of course. Okay. Well, now, let us take us over to Ambogu [Magaubo??]. I think it was Ambogu. Yeah. At that point we were not encountering--well, often, once further up, we were encountering the Japanese still and the fighting was tough. It was very intense. And back--I was on duty, always in administration. Took notes, answered the telephone, typed if we--I did--that's another story. Anyway, I did have a typewriter and how I got the typewriter was because one of the natives carried my typewriter on his back!-- all the way,

and we marched. That was going from Milne Bay through to Ambogu Mission. I think I have this pretty right. And, again, only a low path, no roads, never a truck. You couldn't drive anywhere anyway. The jungle was heavy. A little path about two feet wide maybe. And so you had to follow that path in order to get where you were going. We knew where we had to go. We had directions. But you would encounter--on the way you would encounter several rivers. Well, no bridges across the river, of course. Never were any. And I don't know if there are any now or not but then--so you had to make your own way across the river.

[00:25:40]

Well, some of the rivers were quite deep. I remember wading through one, I was way up to my neck. And bear in mind that as you do that you carry your pack, and your pack is loaded with a few edible foods, canned foods, and also you have to carry your weapon. I had a .45-caliber submachine gun which I packed, which I carried all the way through the war. And I remember getting in this one river and you could--I suppose the natives had cut a log somehow and thrown it across but it was very slippery. So attempting to walk across that slippery log, I think you'd wind up in the river anyway. Someone tried it and they slipped in. Well, I decided to walk through. But it was--again, my weapon was all in water. That's not good for a weapon. You have to clean it, eventually clean it and get it dry so you can shoot it if you need to. So eventually that ended. It was seventeen miles through the jungle that we walked. That took all day.

Brooks: How did you communicate with the natives?

Stransky: Well, only by gesture. A few of them could speak a few words of English. Oh, that brings up another article I should mention. I had had some experience with reading and so they wanted me to get a list of native words and learn--take those words and teach them to the other English men, which I did, or attempted to. It didn't go very well but we did the best we could. Otherwise they would just, well, indicate by some motion what to do. Or if they wanted to stop they'd say, "Kaikai." Okay. "Kaikai" in the native New Guinea language means food and that meant they stopped paddling. Okay. So guess what? We'd wind up paddling, too. But anyway, that--oh, and I'm going along the eastern coast of New Guinea. We would see planes flying overhead and we all wondered, oh, boy, are they Japanese or are they American. Well, as it turned out they were all American planes. So we never did get shot at that way. But we had another element to face and that was it was extremely hot. 120, at least 120 degrees every day. And that was not so bad in itself but you'd get hot and your feet get awfully hot, too. So you take your shoes off and just let your feet dry, get in the water. You could--you had a place to sit on one side of this native canoe, dugout canoe. But then when we did that the natives would say, "No, no. Shark." So they knew enough that there were probably shark in the area so we could not leave our feet dangle because mostly likely we would be attacked by sharks. Another sidelight. Too many sidelights [laughter].

Brooks: No, not at all. Do you know anybody who did get a shark bite?

Stransky: No, no. We never did.

Brooks: Okay, good.

[00:29:13]

Stransky: I never saw a shark. But we worried all day. But what does it do to worry? No good at all. We got there. It was midnight and we had to pull our dugout canoe up on the beach and anchor it in some way so that someone else could come along and use it if needed. But we had to unload all of that—equipment, typewriter and everything, and carry it on another trail through the jungle to get to the next station where we were to be. Well, we did it, and we made that.

Back again in Australia. I can't help but tell you this. I mentioned General Harding and he's been written up in the history. He had a very good record, even though he couldn't beat the Japanese. He was relieved of his duties, transferred to Panama Canal, and remained there the rest of his career. But I was his private secretary and I would work for him every day. I'd take dictation and I'd go back and use my typewriter, type everything up for him. Once, after the war was all over and people started settling down a little bit, we had what's called the 32nd Division Association Reunion. So General Harding came to one of the reunions right here in the city of Madison. So that was a very special day.

Brooks: Did he remember you?

Stransky: Oh, sure, yeah. And he always was very complimentary about what I did. And I did everything I could for him. I would. He was that good a man. Okay.

Brooks: How long were you in Australia? Do you know?

Stransky: Well, okay. I was in Australia. I arrived in Australia April 15, 1941[1942]. Okay. And assigned again outside of Adelaide, about thirty miles north and west of Adelaide, Camp Sandy Creek and Camp Woodside. And, again, this was a matter of training. But in the meantime, of course, the Japanese were stopped in New Guinea, so they did not threaten the north. The Japanese planned to take on the northern shore of the northern half of the country of Australia. Yeah. So that time was not very long. Maybe, okay, if I can remember this, April, about April—well, it would have been April 22, 1941[1942] when we arrived. Twenty-one days to cross the ocean.

Oh, and crossing the ocean, a ship in a convoy, we had thirteen vessels in our convoy, some were transport, two transports, some were destroyers, and whatever we needed to accompany us. It took twenty-one days to cross the ocean and our

convoy would not go in a straight line like this. Oh, no, you had to avoid possible attack. So we'd go this way and we'd turn right off and go this way and that's how we got across the ocean.

Brooks: Oh, zig-zag.

Stransky: That's right. Yeah. Zig-zag across the ocean.

Brooks: And this is '41 or '42?

Stransky: This is '41. Forty-one. I know I'm backwards here as I'm remembering things.

Brooks: No, that's okay. Because '41 was-- December of '41 was the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Stransky: Yeah, that's right.

Brooks: So you folks were there before?

Stransky: Well--no--I'm sorry. Just a minute. Let me get this straight. No, the attack on Pearl Harbor was December 7, 1941. Oh, that's right. No. I'm mistaken there. It would be 1942.

Brooks: So April '42 is when you got to Australia?

Stransky: April of '42. Yeah, that's right.

Brooks: And when I mentioned it, just to back up even more a little bit, do you remember when you first heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Stransky: Yes. It so happened that I had a pass that weekend and I was in New Orleans, Louisiana, on a pass and they put up loudspeakers all over the city of New Orleans announcing all military personnel proceed to base at once. And so I had about three or four guy--I had my car with me even, if you can imagine that! But I did. And I had three or four buddies and so they got to work. And they knew where we would be. So they all got back promptly and we headed back to camp. Then our--I was still in the 120th Field Artillery at that time, and our commanding officer, colonel, he gave us a talk and I remember him saying, "Well, this is the beginning of the end." That was the way he put it, that we needed to get busy and fight, and that would be the beginning of the end of the war. Okay.

[00:35:16]

Brooks: What were your thoughts or feelings at that point?

Stransky: Well, I thought--Sometimes you wonder if the news is all correct, and did we hear it right. Well, we heard it right, of course. Then I was talking with my--she was not my wife then, yet, but we were talking and she was worried we were going to get in a war. Well, we were already in a war, in effect, yeah. And so I didn't feel very happy about it. Neither did anybody else. But we just learned to accept it. Had to go along and make the best of it and keep going so we could win the war. And that's one war we actually did win. Sometimes we'd have other wars and I'm not sure we'd win them. You fight through them but I'm not sure we ever won them all. So we accepted that. I'm sorry about the dates. I did get them mixed up. Yeah.

Brooks: Oh, no, that's okay. That's okay. I just wanted to make sure I was with you.

Stransky: So in December of 1941 I was in New Orleans, Louisiana. Yeah.

Brooks: And then '42 is when you went to Australia?

Stransky: Yeah, '42 I got into Australia and that's where we started the intense training and moving around.

Brooks: And how did you do with the training? Was it really physical? Was it tough?

Stransky: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. We had exercises of all kinds every day. You had to toughen your muscles. We had to walk--we would take a hike, an ordinary hike, and be gone for probably several hours and you'd carry a pack with you, too, and a weapon so that you could be accustomed to that type of thing. So it was part of the process and we had to do it. It wasn't a matter of wanting to or liking it but we did it anyway. So, back again--eventually-- My first campaign as far as a battle goes--I have battle stars. I have several stars and I didn't bring that. But the first campaign that I proceeded through was Buna [New Guinea; Battle of Buna-Gona, Nov. 16, 1942-Jan. 22, 1943]. Now, again, my duties were, well, being available, take messages, type, write shorthand, take dictation, send messages. Well, anything like that that needed to be done. And that wasn't so bad. But there were hard parts. In Buna there were no camps for soldiers. You had to find your own place to lie down. And so, well, I kind of had a little thought ahead and I had arranged to buy--well, yeah, like a little--that you would stretch between two trees.

Brooks: Like a hammock.

Stransky: Hammock. I had a hammock. If you could find a place to stretch it between two trees, you could sleep there. Well, that was wonderful. But in the meantime the Japs were bombing us and they had a large group, I guess, of Mazda planes, and the Mazda planes had radial engines. And we knew they were coming because you could hear the whining of those radial engines. And so that was our sign. Well, you have to think ahead of this, too. In order to have a place to go, to jump,

you had to dig a slit trench. That's what it was called. A slit trench, six-feet deep, and about the length of your body. And that was a fine place to hide. Most times the bombs wouldn't get that far. But we'd hear the bombs falling. It was so close we could hear the bombs falling out of the plane. We'd have a siren, too. There would be a siren that would sound that would tell us to get going quickly and often, if you had to do that, you would jump into your slit trench and that would be full of water. Okay. But at least I survived all of that. Others didn't, though. It was awful. Boy, that's not even pleasant to talk about. It was awful. Well, anyway, completed the Buna campaign.

[00:40:33]

Brooks: It said something here about fortified Japanese bunkers? Was that in Buna?

Stransky: Yeah, Japanese bunkers were at Buna and the Japs were holed up in those bunkers and you couldn't shoot them out because you couldn't even see them. How would you get them out? Well, we had flamethrowers. So they burned them out. That's how we got the Japanese out of those bunkers.

Brooks: And were you ever near that when that was happening?

Stransky: Oh, I was close to it. I didn't see the flames but I saw the Japs, a lot of Japs I saw deceased, of course. Well, we had to call in for air support and anything that we could get that would help us. We were kind of off on a beginning without being properly prepared. That was my feeling. We should have been a little better prepared, but we did survive.

Brooks: What kind of preparation do you think you needed that you didn't get?

Stransky: Oh, well, we should have had tents. Cots and tents. At least cots, maybe, and tents brought up for us. But that was not even thought of. Couldn't even think about that. And better food. We lived for months and months on bully beef and hardtack and tea. You know what bully beef is?

Brooks: Yeah. I want you to tell me.

Stransky: Okay. Well, essentially it was mutton but everybody called it bully beef. There was no beef to it. It was mutton. And Australia raised millions and millions of sheep, so that's where the mutton comes into the picture. And did we ever get accustomed to eating mutton? Well, you eat because you have to have food. And it wasn't all that bad. But we should have had better food and better facilities for water. We had to treat all the water that we drank. And we had big canvas bags, must have been three or four feet tall, and we'd hang them from the trees, from the palm tree, and they had a little faucet on the bottom and you could draw water out from there. That could have been better. But, bear in mind, we were in the first battle and everything could not be done for us that we might have needed. So

okay. And more troops. Well, as some of our people were killed, injured, or wounded, they had to be replaced. Essentially, the Division itself was first composed of men from Wisconsin and Michigan, entirely from Wisconsin and Michigan, and eventually we wound up with men from all over the country. Even some native Indians. They were good fighters, too.

Brooks: Were you in the service with anybody that you knew from back home?

Stransky: Oh, sure. I did for a time. Yeah, I knew quite a few, a whole bunch from Madison. Well, I met them initially going to induction at Milwaukee and down at Camp Grant, too. Sure, I knew several guys. Right now, were I to try to find any of them, they're all gone. They've all died. And I'm way beyond them in age anyway. Of course, you know how old I am, I guess, don't you?

Brooks: Well, I have here that you were born February 10, 1919.

Stransky: That's right.

Brooks: Was that right?

Stransky: That's right.

Brooks: So that makes you ninety-five?

Stransky: Ninety-five, right.

Brooks: And I have to say, you don't look ninety-five.

Stransky: Well, that's kind of encouraging. Yeah. I'm managing. I shouldn't probably get into life afterwards but the hard part came when I lost my wife. That's twenty years ago.

Brooks: Oh, I'm sorry.

Stransky: Gosh. And I loved her dearly.

[00:45:03]

Brooks: Yeah. Well, I'm looking forward to reading through the book that you have of the letters between you and your wife. And maybe we can get a copy of that in our library. So that [inaudible].

Stransky: Well, I hope you can. If you can't, I don't know that I have another copy. We distributed it for my kids. They prepared this and edited it and had a few extra. But if you don't get it through the library you'll have to talk to me and I'll see what I can do for you.

Brooks: Okay, we'll figure it out.

Stransky: I've read the whole book, every letter. And the letters, as I review them, they don't give a lot of military detail. These are the letters that I wrote home. Well, because of censorship you could not write a lot of material home. You could, well, give a few suggestions maybe and if you had a smart wife like I did, she would figure out where we were and what we were doing and she could listen to the daily news at home, too, and so the letters are all reproduced as I wrote them.

Brooks: So if you couldn't write about what you were doing, what did you write about?

Stransky: Oh, well, we would talk about the natives a little bit and we'd talk about the guys. I would become acquainted with people, soldiers that I had--working with, and I would describe them, give names to her so she would have some idea if I wrote, whoever Frenchy was. There was a Frenchy. And there was a Bob Hartkopf [sp?] and Johnny Theodore and they were from all over the country, too. Jim Brennan from Florida. And Osborne, one of my best friends was Bill Osborne from Ohio. He's gone. I miss them. I suppose [voice breaks]--Well, back again, just to review briefly. My tour of duty, if I may?

Brooks: Sure.

Stransky: Buna was the first campaign, and I think you were given a sheet that may have stated some of the length of that. It was quite--I'm not sure if it's in there or not.

Brooks: It could be in this packet. Like I said, the dates aren't necessarily the most important. So this looks like Buna from September '42 to January of '43.

Stransky: That would be correct. Yeah, yeah. That's how long that was. And, okay, then upon completion of the campaign in Buna, the Division, basically the entire Division--everybody that was left--were sent back to Australia for further training. And we trained them at Brisbane, in Camp Cable near Brisbane, and the training was fine but it was severe enough that we knew what we were going to get into. We figured it would be another campaign. And that came up when Saidor [approx. 265 miles north of Buna, on the coast] arrived. Saidor [Jan. 2, 1944] was in 1943. Forty-two. No, latter part of 1942, I guess that would be. And that went on for some time. Again, I remember that because that's where we were landed by landing craft and I jumped off and I hit a pool of water over my head with my weapon and with my pack and everything.

Brooks: I guess you knew how to swim?

Stransky: I had to get out. A couple of the guys--That was one thing about the Army, I must say. Everyone watched out for everybody else. You didn't have any favorites or any question about asking someone to help you if you needed help and everybody

cooperated and that kind of cooperation I haven't seen in the present wars. I don't know about you. Maybe you don't follow it that closely. But everybody was on the same side of the game. So we watched out for everybody.

Brooks: So when you jumped in you jumped into the water that was over your head?

[00:50:02]

Stransky: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

Brooks: And another people also were in over their heads?

Stransky: Oh, yeah. I was not alone. There were others all around me--the whole outfit, was landing at Saidor [Jan. 2, 1944]. That was one of the most severe campaigns, too. I don't know how many we lost there but--and I don't remember the time. Because it would have extended from 1943--

Brooks: This says January of 1944 to April of 1944?

Stransky: At Saidor? Okay. That would be about right. Yeah, yeah. A very severe campaign. Lost a lot of men there. Very tough battles. And my duties, well, I hope I did these well. I was, like I said, in charge of preparing the reports of our activities, the whole Division reports of our activities for each day. I gathered the information together, I compiled it and wrote it out, and then typed it out and gave it to my colonel and he'd take one look at it and say, "Sergeant, you did a wonderful job." I still remember that.

Brooks: And then what would happen to those reports?

Stransky: Oh, they would go into the higher headquarters. That would be like to General [Robert L.] Eichelberger. After General Harding was relieved, Eichelberger was assigned to his command. A lieutenant general over a major general. General Harding was a major general. Well, Eichelberger came on with tough hands and tough hearts and that made it difficult. We had to fight harder than we had been. Well, it was not quite as pleasant, put it that way, not that any of it was pleasant. But, anyway. And Saidor happened and that went on for several months there. Finally we completed the capture. We fought the Japanese. Days, weeks, and hours there, and finally succeeded in capturing it. And then we were relieved from duty for a while and sent back into Aitape [329 miles to the north]. It says Aitape [? They win[??]

Brooks: Yes. So this is a battle record of the 32nd Division. I'm just making sure the recording knows what we're looking at. So next it says Aitape. The 32nd fought 125 days, from April 22, 1944 until August 25, 1944.

Stransky: Yeah, that's right. And I was through that campaign. Mostly my time then was as an administrative assistant. I prepared the reports, filed them. Oh, I was on guard duty, too, sometimes. Everybody has to do their guard duty. Not that that was all that bad. But, well, as you are out on guard duty you'll hope you're not going to be confronted by a Japanese. It's hard to hate people like that but we really did. When I say this, I'm sure I'm saying it was the most difficult campaign that we encountered there. And that was in late '44. Yeah, that's right. I had already been overseas thirty months, thirty-one months about, and when the announcement came in that rotation was being offered with thirty or more months of service, you had the option of staying if you wanted to stay, or accepting rotation and go home. And, well, I was presented with an offer. Maybe I should have accepted it. My colonel wanted me to be assigned as an officer. He would have gotten me a captaincy right away. A field captaincy because of my duties. I could have handled it, I think, but I could have gotten killed, too.

[00:55:07]

And I wrote to my wife. Well, she kept praying always that I would accept rotation if it ever arose and it did. So I finally told the colonel, "Well, I sincerely appreciate the offer but I think I should go home." And that's what I did. And that process was something else, too. In the first place, a troop transport--vessel ships--were not always available so you had to wait for your ship to come. So we went to, I think we called it Camp Utopia. It was no utopia, I assure you. Our duties were basically every day to load ammunition onto the trucks to be taken up to the front. By that time parts arose that could be used, that trucks could get across. So from the ammunition we would load off the ship, they would put on the trucks and take it up to the front. And I had information, because of my job, I knew we were going to the Philippines. That was our next planned assignment. And I thought, "Boy, do I want to do that?" I turned it down anyways. And I think I did the right thing. At least I'm still here. But I must say I didn't mind the Army so much at all. Others just griped about it all the time. They could never say anything good about it. But, sure, there are hardships. But I managed to accept whatever happened and got through it and made good on it. So I was glad to have had the experience but I was glad to be able to go home when that opportunity came. That was joyful.

Then, okay, I came back to this country, landed at San Francisco from a Liberty ship [cargo/troop transport ship]. Not a very nice place to ride, either. No bunks or anything. You just have to lay a blanket down wherever you want to sleep. And I was in the hold of the ship, the lowest part. Yeah. And others were, too. Many of them were. But when we got to San Francisco our welcome there was unexceeded. It was just marvelous. Many, many, many people out welcoming us back. We got back late at night. We got a steak dinner about midnight. And then, well, from there we were theoretically assigned to proceed back to our residence. Arrangements were made mostly by rail. Took trains here or there. And so I had

to make arrangements to get a train back to Madison. Or, well, eventually to Chicago. And that happened. My wife met me in Chicago. Boy, what a reunion.

And from there on I had a few days in Arkansas. Hot Springs, Arkansas. We had about a ten-day rehabilitation leave. And my wife was with me. And so we and some other guys that I knew real well, we went around and saw all the good sights that we could see, had good food and entertainment, and lived nicely for a few days. And then, of course, we had to accept a reassignment. Okay. Well, the time came and they gave me my reassignment and I was reassigned to the military police in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And well, that surprised me. I didn't care because essentially even the military police have administrative work. So that's what I did all the time I was with the military police. But I had to go out. We had a lot of protestors in Oklahoma. I had to go out many times with a whole gang of soldiers to try to keep order. I had a weapon, then I had a club. I never had to use it. I didn't want to use it.

[01:00:28]

Brooks: What were they protesting?

Stransky: Protesting? Well, as I recall that, it was a matter of protesting the fact that we got into the war and why did we get into the war and how are we getting out of the war and will there be another war and that type of thing. Not necessarily in the immediate days but looking into the future. So a lot of unhappiness. When we arrived home, we being members of the 32nd Division, we were well received everywhere we went. But later on, you probably have read about protests and about feelings against the military. A lot of people were opposed to the military.

Brooks: Are you talking about in later decades, later generations?

Stransky: Yeah. Well, later, even following when I got back. Yeah. And, well, that was in the Eighth Service Command. I suppose that could be checked, too. Based in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And I met some guys and got to know them and my wife was with me. She came down from Madison and got a job in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She had administrative experience too, so she was readily accepted. So we had a fine time there for a few months. Well, that would have been from about November 1944 to, let's say, about April 1945. I think I have those pretty close. And the order came through that I could be sent to Fort Sheridan for release from service. Well, that was the ultimate goal. So I accepted the offer and was sent to Fort Sheridan, Illinois and it looked good for a few hours. But then an order came through that all personnel, all Army personnel with MOS502 would have to be retained in service because they were needed at separation centers and other facilities around the country. I qualified, of course, with MS502, the highest rate. And so I was reassigned to duty at Fort Sheridan. And I assisted buddies of mine coming through for separation. It was pleasant in that respect. I got to see them. And I had to keep on with that duty from April 1945, yeah. Yeah, would be about

right. And then I wasn't too far from home. So my wife by that time was back in Madison. We arranged to get her back to Madison. Oh, she was also pregnant, by the way. So that was one good reason. So I did get to see her. And then a few months, about four months later, about five months later, an order came through that I could be released from service. But before that had happened I got published in the newspaper. I think I could bring that and show it to you if you wanted it. They wrote me up as an essential soldier. That was the word they used, that I was essential. And that's what they used for all of them, not just me, but for all of the soldiers who were kept in service following their regular duty. Well, that was my regular duty. And I finally was released from service on August 10, 1945 and that's when the Japanese agreed to surrender. So I was in before the war started and didn't get out until it ended.

Brooks: Wow. So you were there the whole time.

[01:05:00]

Stransky: I was there the whole--almost about four-and-a-half years.

Brooks: Do you remember what your thoughts and feelings were around when the war ended in Europe and the war ended in the Pacific?

Stransky: Oh, well, my thoughts and feelings. Let me see if I can withdraw anything from my mind. Well, mainly that I was happy to be released from service eventually and hopeful that we wouldn't have any more wars. And, well, so glad to be home. Concentrating mostly on that. But I did not regret being in the Army. I could have had a really wonderful assignment. I would have had to go, if I had accepted my colonel's offer, would have had to go to Washington, DC. I just wasn't quite sure I wanted to go to Washington, DC. I kind of liked Madison. It's not the best place in the world to live, not the worst by far. So I guess I didn't feel--I know I could have done okay but I don't regret that decision. I'm very content. Outside from that, well, I have eight children. Did you know that?

Brooks: I did not know that.

Stransky: And they're dispersed around the country. I don't see them that often. But I have one son who is right here in Madison. So I do see him and then some in state and several out of state. On top of that I have thirteen grandchildren. And guess what? In about two weeks I will have my twentieth great-grandchild.

Brooks: Twenty. Wow. That is a lot.

Stransky: Yeah. That's going to take place in Minneapolis. So I will see that baby sometime. I don't know just when.

Brooks: That's exciting. Congratulations.

Stransky: Oh, thank you. Now, well, I am living alone and people, lots of people will say to me, "Why don't you sell your house and go to a retirement center?" Well, I have so many wonderful memories in my house. Lived in my house now for sixty-three years. I remember. I don't want to forget. So I am living alone and managing it with some help. The kids, if they're here, they'll help me. But I never did regret, though, making that decision to retire when I could.

Brooks: You said that--and I always pronounce it wrong--but is it Aitape?

Stransky: It's Aitape.

Brooks: Aitape.

Stransky: Well, that's the way we pronounced it anyway. Aitape. A-i-t-a-p-e. Yeah.

Brooks: That's how I've heard it but I always forget. You said that was the hardest conflict that you were in?

Stransky: In my view, and watching the reports come in, I thought we lost more men there than any of the others. It was very serious. Very difficult campaign. And fought against the Japanese there. Well, I guess we have to say that we did win at Aitape. But you look at that and you think, "Well, is this what God wants for all of us? To kill so many people?" It doesn't seem right to me. Oh, that was the protestors, too. They were strong on getting everybody killed in the war back in Madison. Yeah. Or Oklahoma. That was in Oklahoma. So I have no regrets. I was glad I served. But I've lost all of my Army buddies. I don't think there's a single Army buddy left that I know.

Brooks: Yeah. Much fewer World War II veterans these days.

Stransky: Yeah, a lot of them are going. Yeah.

Brooks: You mentioned a couple of reunions. Did you join any veterans organizations?

[01:09:52]

Stransky: Oh, yes. I am a member of the VFW right here in Madison. And I regretfully don't get to the meetings, although it would be good if I did. They have good meetings and interesting things. Like right over on Lakeside Street, I could easily probably--well, I don't drive anymore either so that has changed my life a little bit. But, yes, I joined the VFW. I also still am a member of the 32nd Division Veterans Association. I just got an old letter from them. When I say old, it's the first one I've had in some time. So I joined that one.

Brooks: And the 32nd Division has quite a history. Did you know about the history before you were involved?

Stransky: Oh, yes, I did. I knew a lot about it. Even to the extent that I have some military memorabilia from the First World War--no, there was a priest named Bishop O'Connor and--is that right? O'Connor? Well, anyway, a bulletin was published about the war, the 32nd Division War, and I have a story about that. I have a name that isn't quite correct in there some way. But I also have two or three--I don't know whether you are interested in any of these things. I have some things I could donate. I don't know. You really would have to look at them. Maybe they're not of sufficient interest.

Brooks: Yeah. We have a whole committee, it's called the collections committee, and we get together and decide on what the museum is interested in taking.

Stransky: I see.

Brooks: I'm sure we'd be interested in at least seeing what you have. So we can talk about that a little bit later.

Stransky: Yeah. There are several things. There's one book entitled *A Papuan Campaign*. Papua was the Buna campaign but they called it Papua. This was published by the War Department and it was published right shortly after the campaign ended. And I suppose it's factual. It looks to be. I've read parts of it. And then I have a book published about the history of the 32nd Division in World War II. I have that. And several things from Australia. I don't know whether this would be of interest or not. I liked Australia. The country is nice and the people were so good to us. It was fun to meet them and do things with them and they appreciated us and we used to go to the zoo. You've heard of kangaroo, of course. You want to hear a story about the kangaroos? Okay. My grandchildren are just thrilled by this. It's not much of a story. In Australia we were basically quiet all the time. I mean quiet by without light. That's what I mean. And so we had a canteen, though, canteen being a place where you would go and buy gum and toothbrush and all that kind of stuff. And so now and then we would like to go. It was a walk through the woods. And, well, were there any Japanese lurking in the woods? You wonder about that. But, no, they were gone. They never got down that far. Actually, I don't think the Japanese ever did get into Australia, as I understand the history. Well, back to the kangaroos. One night I was walking to a canteen with one of my buddies. Went to get some candy, I suppose. We could get some candy. And as we were walking along, dark as could be--a little path--we heard somebody rushing through the woods. A lot of noise through the woods. And we said, "Uh-oh. Here we are." We began to wonder. Well, eventually there came to be a place that was a little bit open and these two objects hopped into view and they were kangaroos right in front of us. So that's all [inaudible]. But my grandchildren, they just love to hear that story. It's not much of a story at all.

Brooks: What did you do? Did you just wait until they moved or did you move around?

Stransky: Oh, they moved. Yeah, they didn't want anything to do with us. They weren't going to shake hands or anything like that. Yeah.

[01:15:00]

Brooks: Yeah, they were probably just as scared as you guys.

Stransky: Oh, I'm sure they were. Yeah. And then have you heard of koala bears? Do you know what a koala bear is?

Brooks: I've heard of them. Yeah.

Stransky: Oh, well, we had lots of fun with koala bears in Australia. If we had time off we would go to the zoo. You could even pick up the koala bears, hold them in your arms, and they would crawl around your neck and everything. I got pictures like that. That was fun.

Brooks: Do you remember any of the other things you did in your downtime, how you guys occupied yourselves?

Stransky: Well, I occupied myself--yes, I know how I spent my time. I wrote every day that I could to my wife.

Brooks: Were you already married when you went into service?

Stransky: Well, how this happened. We were not married when I was drafted. That was April 15, 1941. Our wedding was planned for May 1941. Okay. But the draft stepped in and so, well, as the next few months went, the war was not on yet, okay, and so we kept writing each other. Well, can we plan our wedding for October? And so that's what we did. We went ahead with our plans. We had to get permission, too. And you have an examination and all of that. And so we finally did have a date set and I was able to get permission, get a pass for several days so I could go back to Madison. That's where we were to be married. I remember boarding the train. I think it must have been at Alexandria. Anyway, somehow the train got on a line heading north and in the middle of the night there was a train crash and our train was stopped and we couldn't go anywhere, couldn't do anything. Had to stay with the train. And eventually whatever the problem was, I never did learn that, but it was several hours and another engine came and took care of the problem and we went back on our way. But I was already one day late for my wedding. Well, we just worked all that out. It worked out.

Brooks: Did you have any siblings?

Stransky: Did I?

Brooks: Siblings? Brothers or sisters?

Stransky: I had one brother. And he was in the Army, too. Actually, he did much better than I did. He went in as a private and came out a first lieutenant. But his life, though, was so different. He served well in the Army. And he was, again, in mostly administrative work, sort of like I was. He actually was in battles in Italy, several in Italy, and then over across the sea in North Africa. And he allegedly contracted a disease there which seemed to stay with him and he couldn't get it removed. And that would have been, oh--it was some type of systemic disease. And he had treatment for it. But when he finally did get out of the Army he found a job working at Fairbanks Morse in Beloit as, not an engineer but as a locomotive--a parts department. And, well, he didn't like that. And previous to that he had been a teacher. Before he went in the Army he was a teacher. And I thought maybe he'd get back into something like that. But his life went along. Not at all. My life, by comparison, was wonderful. His was not. And he died. He's gone several years ago. Well, older than I, but still deceased anyway, before I was. That was the only sibling I ever had.

Brooks: How did your parents feel about having both of their sons serving overseas?

Stransky: Well, it was my dad who was the only one who suffered with that because my mother died at a very early age. She died, she was only forty-five years old.

[01:20:06]

Brooks: Wow, I'm sorry.

Stransky: So she didn't even know that I was in the Army. And my dad, well, he said, "Give it the best you can." Or what else? That was the way he lived his life. I guess that's the way I lived my life, too. I did the best I could. And I decided--When I got in the Army I just thought, "Well, I'm here. I'm going to make the most of it, if I can." And that's what I did. I rose to the top rank of enlisted people. I don't have any regrets. I was glad I had the experience. Australia was wonderful. New Guinea, bleh. Nah, nothing. I don't want to go back to New Guinea. I would love to go back to Australia. And, well, talking about--I have some items from Australia. Again, I don't know how much you want. I'd have to show you. I got a whole boxful of things.

Brooks: Yeah. Well, we can talk about it after we're done recording but I'll put you in touch with the people who know stuff about the objects.

Stransky: And probably the way we'd have to do that, if they're available, is probably would have to--either I would have to bring that box down here or to the library or someplace or they would have to come to my house.

Brooks: Yeah, we can make that work.

Stransky: Yeah, all right.

Brooks: Yeah. And you were talking about how much you didn't like New Guinea. On the notes here it was talking about living conditions and malaria and jungle rot and dengue fever. What were your experiences with those?

Stransky: Well, I followed the medical directions. We were to take malaria medicine all the time, every day we were in New Guinea. And I did that. I followed those directions. I did not get malaria. I did not get dengue fever. Both of them were very terrible. Some people died from those diseases. Jungle rot. I had jungle rot. You know what jungle rot is?

Brooks: I do but I want you to tell me about it.

Stransky: Well, all right. That's where the flesh, particularly on the feet because they're exposed to the moisture so much, flesh would just get eaten away. I suppose there were bacteria, bugs of some kind that would do that. But I saw one soldier where the flesh of his legs, both legs, was eaten away. And, well, he eventually got medication and they were able--this happened up in Saidor, I think. It was terrible that way. But I survived all those things. Tried to take care of myself.

Brooks: Good.

Stransky: Anything else? You have any other questions?

Brooks: Well, I don't have anything specific but I'm just wondering if you have any more stories just about things you saw or people that you met or things you did in your downtime.

Stransky: Okay. Well, I can just tell you these stories. This story, at least. I was on a ship called the *Lurline*. Now, that has been docked or placed in the record, too. I even have a postcard picture of it. It was a cruise ship, which converted to troop transport. And the whole division could not fit into the [SS] *Lurline* so we had another transport. I think it was called the [SS] *Monterey* and that did most of the troops. But then there were other ships within our convoy, thirteen ships totally, and we all went on a convoy together, like I said, you know. Yeah.

Brooks: Zig-zag.

Stransky: But in the process of being on the ship, when we were off-duty, well, we could go and visit the guys. I started, like I said, in the 120th Field Artillery. So at night when my duties were done at Division headquarters I could go and find them in the 120th Field Artillery. And they might be several steps away or, well, quite a

ways away, anyway, and I could go visit them. And I could talk to them and I kept up with--and I did. Even after the war was over and we were back home, I kept up with several of my Army buddies that way. They were based around Wisconsin but they're all gone now. I mind that. And I mind being alone a little bit. But I like my life as it is enough that I want to stay with it. And so far so good.

[01:25:19]

Brooks: Good.

Stransky: I guess that's the way I'd have to put it.

Brooks: When you got back did you use any of the veterans benefits?

Stransky: Oh yes, I did. Yes. I was trained as a court reporter and I had been employed as a court reporter before I went in the Army. And when I got back and got things settled a little bit I decided I'd like to be brought up to date with court reporting, more training and more lessons, so I went to court reporting school in Chicago. It was called the Gregory Court Reporting School. Now, there is no such court reporting school like that anymore and the reason is because Gregg Shorthand has just virtually faded out of existence. And how did that happen? I'm not sure. Well, another way of taking court reporting proceedings was with a machine. I think that's what they do today, don't they?

Brooks: I think so.

Stransky: I guess. And so I think there's a little black--if you like to bring that. Yeah.

Brooks: This little notebook?

Stransky: I'd just like you to see that.

Brooks: Sure. It's a little notebook.

Stransky: Yeah. And in here, I didn't go into any of the details, but in this little book here--I was on a temporary assignment in Townsville, Australia, before I went to New Guinea, and I was there with my colonel because we needed to do certain duties there. Normally the rest of the Division was in Brisbane. Okay. But we had special work up there.

Brooks: What kind of work?

Stransky: Administrative. Typing, shorthand, messages, and so forth. And, again, see, Townsville, it's pretty far up. You know how Australia is? It has a sharp peak. Well, Townsville is pretty close to the top. And so even then we had to keep

watch on what was happening so that we didn't get any attacks on Townsville. So that was part, why we were there. And this little book has, in shorthand--well, like here's a whole page of shorthand.

Brooks: Yeah. I can't read any of it. Like R, J, O.

Stransky: What does it say?

Brooks: It looks like nine o'clock. That one says R, J, O. But I wouldn't be able to read any of that.

Stransky: No, no. I can read it. All I have to do is magnify it. I carry a magnifier with me. That's one place I have a little problem. My vision is not good. I wish it were better. But here I am. I've had it for ninety-five years and I'm not going to get any better vision at this point.

Brooks: Probably not.

Stransky: Yeah. Anyway, I wanted to show you that. And this I will not leave with you. Have you seen my Dorothy book at all?

Brooks: Well, I looked through it before and I remember your son had told me about it. And we're going to try to get a copy of it for our library.

Stransky: Okay, all right.

Brooks: Did you use your veterans benefits to go to school for court reporting? That's what you were--

Stransky: Oh, that's right. You did ask that question. Yes, I did. Well, used to call it brushing up. And I could handle the court reporting pretty well, but I figured if I can get better, as long as the benefits are available I will take them. So I went to court reporting school in Chicago for several months. How many months? Well, probably four or five. I imagine about five. But I had to live down there. That meant I was away from my wife, unless I got the weekend off. And so I did well with it. We had a couple of good instructors. They would keep good tab on how we were doing and I talked with them and they said, "Well, you're able to handle it. You read very well, you transcribe well." Said, "You ought to be able to make it." And so I said I wanted to go home and I guess they understood that. Yeah.

[01:30:04]

Brooks: So what did you end up doing for a career?

Stransky: I wound up being a court reporter from--well, I started back in court report--now, that presented a little problem. I wasn't feeling too well when I got back. There's a name for that. PS--Post-traumatic stress. Well, something like that.

Brooks: PTSD.

Stransky: Yeah, okay, all right. I had a little problem with that. But then I got over that and I court reported from 1950, just a minute, 1940--I got back in 1945. So '46. From 1946 until 1989. That's how long I court reported. And I loved court reporting. It was a wonderful job. I liked the work. You met lots of interesting people. And you saw lots of interesting sights. And I was fortunate enough to get assignments. I was assigned to work in Nashville, Tennessee for a while. And I traveled all over the state. So you get to meet a lot of people and you get to hear some interesting cases.

Well, I know I didn't mention this but back in New Guinea, my goodness. Back in New Guinea there was an officer who refused an order of a superior command, a superior officer. Well, that, of course, is subject to discharge. So they brought him back from the front. He was up at the front. I know where he was. He was on the front. And they brought him back and relieved him from duty and confined him to a tent down where we were. And eventually that process proceeded to a court martial and I reported the entire proceedings of that court martial in Australia. Yeah.

Brooks: Wow. And what happened? Was he discharged?

Stransky: Oh, he was dismissed from the service. Yeah. I'm not so sure that it was in--it was not in Australia, though, because he was in combat. Yeah, so it was in New Guinea. Would have been someplace in New Guinea. Yeah.

Brooks: Do you know what the order was that he disobeyed? Do you remember?

Stransky: It was an order to go out on a dark night on a patrol. And given that order by a direct officer and he refused to take the order. He said he couldn't make it or didn't feel like he could make it. He refused an order. And, of course, that's subordination or whatever else you want to call it, refusing an order. And so eventually that proceeded to trial and he was tried and dismissed from service. So that kept up with my shorthand.

Brooks: Yeah. Yeah. Gave you something to do.

Stransky: Yeah. It wasn't that I didn't have anything else to do.

Brooks: No, I know.

Stransky: I was busy. I used to work. I had to transcribe that whole court proceedings and I had to do it at night because I was a full-time employee during the day. But I got it done. I got paid extra for it, too, by gosh. Surprising.

Brooks: Did you ever get any sleep?

Stransky: Oh, sure, a little. I had enough.

Brooks: When you were out of the Army, was there anything about being in the military that you missed?

Stransky: Anything that I missed? Well, I missed the fact that I never got to see the buddies that I liked the best. And there were several. A bunch of guys that I really liked. And life changes when you get back. It's just different. It's better but it's also different. And I couldn't get to see those guys. Once in a while I might see somebody but eventually, well, they moved away from where they lived originally or, well, whatever. Some of them passed away, too. And I miss those. But now I wouldn't know how to find anybody that I was in the service with. I did keep in touch for several years. And that's how life goes. You have to take those things.

[01:35:08]

Brooks: Can you tell me a little bit more about your struggling with the PTSD?

Stransky: Well, yes. I will be glad to tell you that. I guess that's the proper term for it.

Brooks: That's what they call it now. I don't think they had that term for your generation.

Stransky: Yeah, probably didn't. Anyway, I came home. Well, I had a few months off. I went to court reporting school for like those several months in Chicago. And then I came back. I decided I wanted to go back to work. Well, according to the law they had to accept me back to work. That was part of the rules and regulations. And I remember I thought, "Well, this is wonderful. I'm glad." So I went out on a trip. And this was all traveling through the state. I did the court reporting throughout many locations within the state and outside the state, too. So one day, maybe it was some special day, I don't know what it was, but there was a hearing going on and I was to be the reporter at that hearing. And I got so upset that I just started to shake and I couldn't control it. Couldn't do anything about it. And so I was with an attorney. We were a team working together. I said, "I'm sorry. I can't continue right now." I said, "I'll have to give up and go back home." So went back home. Talked to the doctor, talked to my wife, talked to everybody, and they put me in the hospital for a while, couple of months, gave me special medication, and eventually I felt better and I thought I could handle it again, so I resumed work and I got back to the point where I could do it. I didn't get shaky anymore. I got so shaky I just couldn't sit and write shorthand. And I loved shorthand so it

was not a happy time for me at all. But I did have some assistance, and medication--well, there's not a lot of medication. Really, that's more or less a personal stress. You have to learn to handle that some way. And that's what I did. The medication didn't seem to offer very much. Okay?

Brooks: Yeah.

Stransky: Next question.

Brooks: Next question. Well, I think you answered most of the ones that we normally ask. So if you have any other--you know, I was explaining before we started about how we're just looking for stories and like thoughts. So if you have any stories about the officers that you worked with and for, any of your buddies and things that you did.

Stransky: Well, let's see. I reviewed General Harding.

Brooks: Yeah. It's obvious that you respected him and really liked him. Can--

Stransky: I thought he was a wonderful leader. He didn't believe in throwing the whole Army into the combat right now. He wanted to take it a little easier. I think he would have been right. But General Eichelberger--his immediate commander, lieutenant general--relieved him. Well, they didn't say that he had failed in his duty, exactly, but the word was they relieved him because General Harding wasn't getting rid of the Japs. That was the story that we soldiers heard.

Brooks: What was it like to have to see him leave? Did you get to say goodbye to him before he was--

Stransky: Oh, yes, I did. Yeah. Yeah. It was so hard. And he was respectful to everybody. And, well, there were some soldiers who didn't seem to think--I shouldn't say this probably. Well, I'm not on record, am I? Or am I?

Brooks: You would be now. Yeah.

Stransky: Okay, all right. Well--

Brooks: I can pause it if you want.

[01:39:58]

Stransky: Well, there were things said about General Eichelberger showing that they didn't think much of him as a leader. He was tough, he was strong. He wanted action. He wanted the Japs cancelled out right away and General Harding didn't believe in that way. So I liked General Harding because he was a leader but he was a quiet leader. Put it that way. A good leader, I thought.

And others, well, oh, that Colonel Hones, chief of staff. Almost next in line from the general. Another good man. I think that's written up in my little notebook here. I was working one day at my desk and he came over. This is in Australia now. And he came over and said, "Come on, Sergeant, we're going to take a little trip into town." I said, "Well, Colonel, I don't feel that I should go. I've got a lot of work." And he said, "Oh, come on. You'll get it done." So, by gosh, we went out into Adelaide and drove the whole--around the country. Beautiful country around Adelaide. There's some nice beautiful hills, a lovely view of the ocean. And we spent that day together. He took us out to lunch. There was one other guy with me. Rosey Braca [sp?]. I wonder if it was Rosey Braca, another guy that I liked. Anyway, we had a grand day and the fact that work didn't get done didn't matter because it stayed [inaudible] until I got there the next day. So that's another person that I liked. Oh, boy, can I think of anybody else? Well, there was a lot of enlisted guys that I really liked.

Oh, this may be of interest. I've written it up in here. The guys had a nickname for me. I am short, of course. I never did grow up. That's what I always tell them. I just never grew up. Well, so they called me Snuffy. My nickname was Snuffy. "Come on, Snuffy, let's go over here and get something to eat," or whatever. So I lived with that. It didn't last after I got home though. Nobody seemed to want to call me Snuffy anymore.

Brooks: Seemed like a lot of people in service had nicknames. Seemed to be the thing to do.

Stransky: Yeah. Yeah. There was another name they gave me. I shouldn't--I don't think I want to tell you this. [laughter]

Brooks: Will you tell me later?

Stransky: All right, I'll tell you later. Don't let me forget it. But I don't want to put it on the record.

Brooks: Okay. That's okay.

Stransky: Okay.

Brooks: But I'm curious now so I'll ask you later.

Stransky: Well, okay.

Brooks: So do you have any last thoughts or reflections on your experience in general and maybe how the military changed you?

Stransky: Well, I cannot complain about the military. I was treated well. I was respected. And I know of some soldiers just detested the military. They didn't like it at all. I never had that feeling. I just thought, well, I'm here. Let's make something of it. So I never had a feeling that I didn't like the military. It was a good experience. A tough experience, sure. A lot of danger. Lots of times there was danger. I remember--Did I tell you about the bomb dropping outside my tent?

Brooks: No.

Stransky: Oh, for heaven's sake.

Brooks: That sounds important.

[01:44:22]

Stransky: Okay, well, this would have been in--not Buna. Not Buna. Probably Saidor. Yeah. I explained, though, that we dug a slit trench-- that's six feet deep and often full of water. Yeah, well, I remember the Japanese plane, a Mazda with a radial engine and you could hear the radial whining. It had a particular whine to it. And when we heard that, if we heard it, we knew that we had to do something. By then, of course, the area siren would sound. And so I got out of my--in the hammock. I did have a hammock. Yeah. I crawled out of that quickly. It hung between two trees. And that was a danger probably in itself. So I jumped in. About fifty feet away the bomb dropped, right outside where I was. Just missed it by that much.

Brooks: That's really close. Did you know anybody who got hurt at that point?

Stransky: Oh, there were several. Oh, yeah. Several people got hurt. Japs dropped bombs. And strafing. Another thing. Strafing. Oh, boy, a lot of strafing. And do you know what strafing is?

Brooks: I do.

Stransky: Well, all right.

Brooks: But you can explain it.

Stransky: All right, okay. Probably Saidor. Not Buna. Yeah, probably Saidor. But we used to dig trenches, large trenches which would hold six or eight or ten people. And we knew that when we heard the sound, the siren, that we'd--because that meant the Japs were coming and we'd have to get in. I remember this one day several planes came over and they were strafing and they were just pelting. Let me back up. We had covered the holes, the basic holes, with palm tree, heavy thick palm tree branches that would shield off some of the bullets. And branches, too. Well, we heard those planes strafing us and you could hear the bullets rattle off of the palm trees. We were that close.

Brooks: Did any of the bullets get through?

Stransky: No, not this time anyway.

Brooks: So you're safe.

Stransky: Yeah. So we were satisfied with that. Oh, this is Saidor again. Bad. Not as bad as Aitape, though. But at Saidor several Jap planes came over. These were the Mazdas with the radial engines and they were bombing and strafing. And it happened that they hit the area where our engineering battalion was located. Now, the engineering battalion, of course, is a very critical part of the division. They do everything from making bridges to fixing trucks and so forth, yeah. Engineering department. That's their duty. That dropping of those bombs that day killed all of the members of the engineer battalion except thirteen men. When that strafing was over only thirteen able-bodied men were left. The others were killed or injured. Yeah.

Brooks: So you had to replace all those men?

Stransky: Oh, yeah. Those men all had to be replaced. We couldn't always get replacements as fast as we needed them. We'd have orders out for more men. You mentioned other things. Okay. Well, this is one thing. We didn't always get replacements as we should have had them. Not a criticism necessarily but a fact. That's all.

Brooks: Is it because they weren't available or just the time that it took?

Stransky: The time. Mostly the time--and probably didn't have enough training either. You did have to have a certain degree of training.

Brooks: Did you ever fire your weapon?

Stransky: I never did fire it. Well, yes, I did fire it, but only in practice. I think that's written up in here, too.

Brooks: In your notebook.

Stransky: I had a submachine gun and we had one day of practice. Out of a hundred shots I made the shot eighty-two times.

Brooks: Wow.

Stransky: Oh, wasn't too bad. And I was glad that I never had to shoot at anybody. I always have that feeling. Could I have? No, I don't think of an instance when I could have used my weapon. We had Jap snipers. The snipers were so bad. They would crawl up in the trees. They'd have a little bag of fishnet with fish heads in there.

That would be their food. And they'd just stay up there in the top of the trees and watch our guys come along on the patrol and shoot at them as they were marching in. That got a lot of our guys.

[01:50:06]

Brooks: How did you deal with snipers?

Stransky: Well, there wasn't much--you had to learn to stay off the trail. You almost had to get off the trail. That's where you would be seen. If you were right on the trail the snipers up there would be on the watch and all they needed to survive for them was just a few fish heads. That's what they lived on. That's what they told us anyway.

Brooks: Wow.. Anything else?

Stransky: Oh, I've probably forgotten a lot of things but I can't bring anything to mind right now. I guess not.

Brooks: Okay. Yeah, if you remember something really important later we can always sit down again and record.

Stransky: Okay. I'll be glad to do that.

Brooks: Great. I'm going to take a photograph of you, if you don't mind, before we're done here and we're going to look for this book. Is this you on the front cover or is that somebody else?

Stransky: Yes, that's--just a minute. Oh, yeah, that's me.

Brooks: That's you?

Stransky: Yeah.

Brooks: Writing a letter?

Stransky: I was writing a letter and at that point I was a corporal. I eventually wound up as a master sergeant.

Brooks: Right. Great. So we're going to look for this to put it in our library and keep some of this, the rest of this stuff. All right?

Stransky: Okay, all right.

Brooks: All right? So I'm going to turn this off now. Okay?

Stransky: Okay, all right.

Brooks: Thanks.

[End of stransky.OH1926] [End of interview]