

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DAVID THIBODEAU
Artillery, Army, World War II

2000

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Thibodeau, David. (1925-). Oral History Interview, 1999.

Master Copy: 1 video recording (ca. 70 min.); ½ inch, color.

User Copy: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 70 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

David Thibodeau, a Peshtigo (Wisconsin) native, discusses his World War II service as a howitzer gunner with Battery B of the 42nd Artillery Battalion which supported the 4th Infantry Division in Europe. Landing at Normandy three days after D-Day, Thibodeau recalls seeing wrecked gliders, living in a foxhole, moving through the hedgerows, and attempting to help soldiers who had been wounded by German fire. He touches upon his duties at St. Ló, being quartered at a park in Paris (France), and staying in a French hayloft. Thibodeau tells of crossing into Belgium and Germany, finding and drinking wine in an abandoned chalet and fighting in the Hurtgen Forest where he was wounded and taken prisoner. He describes his treatment as a prisoner of war (POW) including trading cigarettes with his captors, working in a bakery, stay in Stalag 4B, and working on a German farm. Thibodeau talks about the food in camp, actions of other prisoners, and being abandoned by the German guards and moving west to avoid the advancing Russians. He comments on liberation, stay at Camp Lucky Strike, and return trip to New York.

Biographical Sketch:

David Thibodeau was born in Iron Mountain (Michigan) in 1925 and was drafted to the army in 1943 and served in World War II in an artillery battalion in Europe. Thibodeau saw action in France and Germany before being captured by the Germans and spending the rest of the war in a POW camp. After the war, Thibodeau enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and became a teacher and social worker, than later worked in newspapers. Thibodeau settled in Peshtigo (Wisconsin) and was involved with the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) and the American Legion.

Interviewed by James McIntosh 2000

Transcribed by Joshua Goldstein, 2012

Reviewed and corrected by Amanda Axel, 2012

Interview Transcript:

McIntosh Talking to Dave Thibodeau this 22nd of June, year 2000. Dave, where were you born?

Thibodeau: I was born in Iron Mountain, Michigan; May 4th, 1925.

McIntosh And you entered military service, I see, in 1943.

Thibodeau: Yes, August 5th, 1943.

McIntosh You volunteer or were you drafted?

Thibodeau: I volunteered for the draft. They had closed all enlistments at that time because they needed bodies for the less glamorous services, you know. They need bodies to take some casualties with.

McIntosh So you joined the U.S. Army and they sent you where first?

Thibodeau: Well I went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for seventeen weeks of basic training as a field artillery replacement.

McIntosh Field artillery, they put you in a field artillery unit right from the get go?

Thibodeau: Well I spent three, four days at Camp Grant but they shipped us out by train from different places, yeah.

McIntosh In field artillery what type of things did they teach you that an ordinary soldier wouldn't get?

Thibodeau: Well you learn how to man a 105 millimeter —I learned how to man a 105 millimeter howitzer and learned that the shell was thirty-three pounds and the propellant case was another eleven pounds, for a forty-four pound semi-fixed ammunition.

McIntosh How does that differ from the 155 [155mm howitzer]?

Thibodeau: Well the 105 is really the basic infantry support artillery. The 155 is a little bit bigger, but there is one battalion of 155s to four battalions of 105s in any infantry division at that time.

McIntosh Was it easy to learn this sort of stuff?

Thibodeau: Well, there was nothing to it; it is what you might call a no-brainer nowadays. You just hand the thing over to the next guy and he shoves it in.

McIntosh I was thinking about cleaning it and maintaining the gun.

Thibodeau: The tough part was maintaining the cleanliness of your own personal gear. We had a U.S. carbine caliber .30 M1s and I got gigged once. I got gigged three times, in fact. I was considered kind of a poor soldier there for a while.

McIntosh Right, but the 105s, would that require maintenance right after every shot?

Thibodeau: No, no, we never did any maintenance in basic training, but when I got into a regular unit overseas all we did just keep firing with the darn thing.

McIntosh Never had to worry about anything caking up inside?

Thibodeau: No.

McIntosh Too much heat. The gun responded well and all that?

Thibodeau: Oh yes.

McIntosh Was this self-propelled?

Thibodeau: When I got into my line outfit overseas, yes, we had 105 M7 Priest—it was a medium tank with a gun on it, a howitzer on it.

McIntosh Manned by how many?

Thibodeau: Oh, we had way too many guys because they over-anticipated the number of casualties they would have so we must have had fifteen guys in our gun crew.

McIntosh But you really didn't need more than, what, four?

Thibodeau: Oh, well you need more because you go round the clock lots of times, probably about twelve would be about right.

McIntosh Assume I don't know anything, around the clock means that some sleep when some are working?

Thibodeau: Right.

McIntosh How the hell you going to sleep with a goddamn gun going off?

Thibodeau: Well, sometimes when things were fairly quiet you'd just fire one round. There would be a man on the gun all by himself. And he'd fire one round at random intervals during the night time called "interdictory fire," I

believe it was called, just to make the enemy not know what was going to happen next, you know.

McIntosh Might be followed by twelve more.

Thibodeau: Could be, yes. Incidentally, before I got over there, of course, I spent three months in England.

McIntosh For any further training or just—

Thibodeau: No, after the training at Fort Bragg I went home for a few days. Then I went to Fort Meade, Maryland, for another month of waiting and then boarded an LST [Landing Ship, Tank] to go to England.

McIntosh And where were you stationed in England, do you recall?

Thibodeau: Yeah Barry, Wales. B-A-R-R-Y, Wales, in a tent city.

McIntosh Bet that was crowded then.

Thibodeau: Well six guys to a tent.

McIntosh You got there when?

Thibodeau: We got there about 1st of February, 1944.

McIntosh Because that is when the intense build-up--there must have been G.I.s in every corner.

Thibodeau: There was some joke around that the barrage balloons were keeping England from sinking because there would be motor parks with hundreds and hundreds of vehicles and tanks scattered all over.

McIntosh When they had some time off they would invade the British pubs.

Thibodeau: Only once, they didn't pay us for some reason. See, we were replacements. We didn't belong to any particular unit and we didn't get paid till near the end of our stay there. So, I did go to town and get really drunk finally on wine. Four shillings a shot, it seemed like. I got really drunk they had to put me on a truck and take me back to the tent city.

McIntosh Did you get along with the Englishmen pretty well?

Thibodeau: Well they were kind of remote. They were a little guarded with us people. They were resentful, of course; they were afraid we were going to start to prey on their women. They weren't really warm. In fact, I went to their

show one night; you had to wait in line. Finally, some seats opened up and I moved forward, it was my turn. I had been there about an hour and the guy at the gate shoved me in the middle of my chest, pushed me back and said, "Let the servicemen in first." There were three British soldiers and he put them in ahead of me. So I just went home, I was disgusted.

McIntosh They didn't tolerate Americans too much. So then when you left for France, when did you go to France?

Thibodeau: Well D-Day happened June 6th, we heard about it at noon that day and three days later we were on an LST going over to Normandy.

McIntosh You got ashore and they shoved you where?

Thibodeau: When we got ashore, we were still a group of replacements. Some of us were going someplace, some were going to the infantry and we spent the first night a bit whacked in a big field, this was hedgerow country. There were smashed wrecked Waco gliders lying around in the field. That first night there was an air raid. The German planes went over and dropped flares; that was pretty exciting. An interesting thing, I looked along each hedgerow there is kind of a little ditch. So I talked another guy into digging our foxholes along that ditch line and a lieutenant with us came along and said, "Hey you guys, dig out the middle like all the rest." Well, it turned out in a combat situation that's where the foxholes were because that is where we dug ours because it is already recessed a foot, foot and a half, and the lieutenant was not an original thinker. I joined Battery B, 42nd Field Artillery Battalion. They took us in trucks and dropped us off. I arrived at the battery just at a time a bunch of .88 shells were coming in. I stood along side of a foxhole with a guy named Pappy in there and I said, "Can I come in there with you?" He said, "There is always room for one more." So I jumped in there with the guy because these .88s were landing all over the place.

McIntosh It wasn't time to move out to a different area?

Thibodeau: The battery usually moved every two or three days because the infantry was gaining a few hundred yards every day.

McIntosh It was slow going there at first.

Thibodeau: Slow going, yeah. We'd pack up every couple of days and move.

McIntosh What division were you attached to?

Thibodeau: 4th Infantry Division.

McIntosh 4th, so you were on the west side of--

Thibodeau: We went in on Utah Beach, and that wasn't nearly as bad as Omaha Beach. That is what our unit did, I wasn't with them yet.

McIntosh I understand. And then you headed towards Cherbourg?

Thibodeau: Well, yes. Now, one of the things that affected me personally was that the forward observer unit, the guys very quickly got combat fatigue. So the captain got us all together and asked for volunteers, what they called, "Go up forward," with the infantry. So I raised my hand and I had this experience, the first experience of being up there with the infantry as a result of that, it must have been quite a while before Cherbourg. It was really was my first experience of what war was. There were dead bodies in the woods and there was an infantryman, an American in an attitude of digging, entrenching two dead there. We arrived at night and joined the infantry company and we got there just after dark, so you could stand up and walk around. You would never do that in the daytime. We could hear the Germans running a tank around on their side, maybe trying to think maybe there were more than just one. Then we heard the clinking of their mess kits as they were feeding their soldiers after dark. It was an eerie feeling. Then in the morning we had what they called "jump off". We moved out, attacking the Germans. I carried a radio pack and another guy with me had a battery pack and we had a lieutenant along. We reached the first hedgerow in front of us there were two dead Americans with their heads bent together like a couple of drunks singing on New Year's Eve, but their heads were riddled with bullets. They apparently had been a high water mark from a day or two earlier. We went four or five hedgerow units and we came into a farmyard where there was a chunky German in a wheel barrel with both legs off, and apparently his friends were trying to wheel him away but he died on him so they took off and left. There were many dead and the place was full of dead dairy cattle, Normandy. I was looking through a hedgerow and I saw a bunch of cows grazing and a couple of .88s landed in the middle of them, or maybe it was our own 105s, and a couple of cows went down. And other ones milled around for a short while, then they started to eat grass again. It was a strange thing. I was up there about four days and when it was time to be relieved just before that, the Germans fired a salvo of .88s that went in right over our heads very low. As we went back, then we were being relieved, I saw what they had been firing at. It was an American mortar crew, three men, and they were blasted a part like a star, you might say. The dust had settled over them and they looked like they had been there for a long time. So we were glad to get in that jeep and go back to the safety of the battery.

McIntosh More about the .88s, you could hear them?

Thibodeau: Oh no, you never heard that first one. They had a high muzzle velocity.

McIntosh I know that, that is what I was wondering.

Thibodeau: And they had a very flat trajectory compared to our 105s. And you didn't hear that first one, but sometimes-- after a while my reflexes were so good I would be sailing through the air into a hole before the first one hit the ground. [laughs]

McIntosh You could hear it fire?

Thibodeau: No, maybe I was imagining I could hear it coming and I jumped. Anyhow, back at the battery it was just like a bunch of gypsies camping out. It was really--we didn't have many casualties. Once in a while something would happen. After, you asked about Cherbourg, yes we went through Cherbourg. After that we went to a place called Mortain where the Germans were launching a pretty tough counter attack. That was my second time up forward. That time they weren't asking for volunteers anymore, it was a rotation. Mortain was a lot worse than Avranches had been.

McIntosh When they asked you to go up to the front specifically, what were you to do?

Thibodeau: Carry either the radio or the backpack. And in order to call in artillery fire you had to take them off your back, put them on the ground and plug them together and raise an antenna, then the Lieutenant would call in the fire instructions.

McIntosh He did the talking?

Thibodeau: He did the talking.

McIntosh But you had binoculars or?

Thibodeau: He had the binoculars. In fact, at Mortain, the lieutenant I was with was looking through binoculars at a German tank firing--the guys were running across the road and he got three bullets right through his chest. I was right near him and he got knocked over, but by golly I helped him get out of there. I went and found the aid station and told them there was another guy who had been shot in the road, too. He was lying on the ground and he wanted to know if his leg was sticking up in the air. His legs were not sticking up in the air, he must have been hit in the spine and he thought his legs were sticking up. It said Blackie on his field jacket but anyhow, I went to the aid station and got those guys to come and pick up those two men. This tank was firing down this sunken road and the

infantrymen were running across at the same interval, and I knew somebody would get it pretty quick and sure enough he did. But when I ran across I changed the intervals and went back and forth a couple of times. Well that lieutenant survived, he sent cigars after a while.

McIntosh Amazing.

Thibodeau: Yup, after that incident then we had to attack and we were going single file along a hedgerow, and that same tank started fire across the field. Three, four, guys went down and I and my buddy that I was with hit the deck. And that darn machine gun guy was sweeping across. He must have figured we were radiomen and the bullets were just flying over my back and going into an embankment there. So presently, I waited a long time, and I got up and ran around the corner behind a hedgerow. Am I talking too long here?

McIntosh Too long, we have all afternoon.

Thibodeau: Okay. I ran behind a hedgerow and there was a guy there who had been hit in the throat and was bleeding to death. I couldn't do a damn thing for him.

McIntosh There was no pressure point you could find?

Thibodeau: I had no training. He was gagging on his blood and he was kicking and kept kicking me with his feet. No, it was tough. A little later I saw that there was a half track burning where that tank--that tank had a good day that day. It seemed like I was relieved earlier at Mortain; that seemed like, oh, only about two days and I got out of there and that was a good thing. After Mortain--you recall the Saint-Lô breakthrough? That was a big air raid, 3,000 planes and three hours and the bombs coming down sounded like an express train just rushing through the air, *boom, boom, boom, boom*. As you know, the story is they started to drop them short because the dust cloud was moving in. And General McNair was killed at that time and the jump-off regiment was badly hit, I think. The 8th Regiment of the 4th Division was hit in the bombing raid. In fact, we were watching the shoal and then they got so close we started jumping in our foxholes. You never slept on top of the ground no matter how quiet it seemed. You learned that at night you always had a hole dug. First thing you did.

McIntosh What was your main concern at night?

Thibodeau: We had local security.

McIntosh Being overrun or just picking up mortar fire?

Thibodeau: We weren't close enough to be in mortar. The Germans rarely shelled the battery. After that first incident in Normandy there, very rarely were we hit by German artillery. At one point, right after the breakthrough, we were firing charge one and that is one powder bag only. And you could watch the projectile go the whole distance, it was like a watermelon flying through the air. And all of a sudden my tank got hit. Whether it was a bazooka or an .88 or something, it got hit and caught fire. There was a guy in the outfit, everybody called him Liver Lip; he was with the telephone section. All the rest of us ran, Liver Lip went up to the tank with a fire extinguisher and he got the Silver Star for that.

McIntosh For putting that fire out?

Thibodeau: He didn't succeed in getting it out but he tried. The rest of us were--

McIntosh He was crazy.

Thibodeau: The rest of us were laying low. Well anyhow, then we jumped in our tank--oh no, I jumped in another tank because mine was gone. And we went down the road a mile or two and there we were shelled by German 150mm. They must have seen us going or something and we were--

McIntosh That's pretty heavy stuff then.

Thibodeau: Yeah, and we didn't have any holes to jump into either.

McIntosh You were saying 105s with one bag over two bags, what is that distance that we are talking about?

Thibodeau: Yeah. The 105 had the variable ammunition. There were seven powder bags. The command would be, "Battery, adjust shell A, chief use quick charge four," let's say. You'd take the top three off and then you reset the projectile into the casing.

McIntosh When you are talking different bags, you are talking about how far you wanted to shoot them?

Thibodeau: There were several factors in the ballistics. There is what they call an angle of sight. For example, if the target on a hill's a couple of a hundred feet higher than where you are, that's all got to be all factored in. But usually yes, in most cases we'd be firing charge seven in most cases.

McIntosh That would be the full distance then, and that would shoot how far?

Thibodeau: 12,500 yards. That was the 105 range.

McIntosh That is pretty good range.

Thibodeau: Oh yeah.

McIntosh That's about two miles?

Thibodeau: More than that, let's see there is about 1,600 some yards in a mile, so seven, eight miles it will fire, sure. But the fire of course had to be observed. In Italy, where there are a lot of mountains, the forward observer guys could be perched up on a hillside and doing their thing. But in Normandy, you had to be right up with the rifle company. No place else because that company commander wanted that forward observing guy right with him at all times. So that is what made it so dangerous, there were guys shooting at ya.

McIntosh Was it hard to carry the radio; was that a problem to move around?

Thibodeau: It was a little awkward, especially when that guy was shooting at me with a machine gun. It was a kind of a clumsy affair. In fact, the last place where I was finally captured by the Germans, we couldn't get the darn thing to work.

McIntosh Oh boy, just when you needed it.

Thibodeau: Yeah, when we needed it. It was Concentration 242; the Germans were coming, lots of them.

McIntosh Where were we now?

Thibodeau: We were in the Hürtgen Forest inside Germany.

McIntosh Don't miss anything along the way here now.

Thibodeau: Alright. After the St. Lo breakout, we really started moving and by August 25th, I think it was, we were in Paris.

McIntosh Right, did you enjoy that?

Thibodeau: Yes, except by this time I got to be real super cautious about my own safety. I didn't go roaming around town. I stayed right with the battery. I stayed right were I belonged. We were in a big park.

McIntosh Did they allow you to if you wished?

Thibodeau: I don't think they allowed you to roam too far, no. We were in a big park and these well dressed French people were hanging around. Our mess area

was roped off and they were hanging over the rope, they were hungry. And finally one guy was pointing at my coffee cup as if to say, "Can I have some?" So I gave him the whole mess cup and he made some funny face and off he went with it. I said, "Now there goes my cup." He took it all the way the way home and shared it with his family. Then he brought back the empty cup.

McIntosh Well how sweet. That was really nice. [Thibodeau laughs] You were thinking all bad things about him and he turns out to be a nice guy.

Thibodeau: There was a guy there who identified himself as a magistrate, very well dress, good English, pretty good English. And I ask him, "How did you people feel here in Paris when the Americans bombed the Renault plant?" "Well me, I did not mind, but those who receive the bomb didn't like it so well." Paris you could tell was a great, marvelous metropolitan city even though it suffered through three, four years of depravation because of the war.

McIntosh Essentially untouched, though.

Thibodeau: The women were well-dressed. The place was an exciting place to be, but we soon moved out. We chased the Germans through Northern France. One jump behind them, sometimes literally their bowel movements were still smoking when we arrived where they just had been. Another point, our tank broke down, so we dropped out. There we were in the middle of nowhere and I saw a barn off in the distance. And a couple of guys said, "Let's go over to that barn and lay down in hay for a while." So we went over there and we climbed up in a hayloft. We left our carbines on the ground and were sitting there talking for a long time. There are a lot of Germans surrendering about that time and there was a fella named Clark with us. And I said, "Clark, what would you say if you knew there was a German hiding nearby and you wanted him to surrender?" He said "Kommen sie mit ihren händen heraus.[Come out with your hands up]" So I was kind of a clown and I said " Kommen sie mit ihren händen heraus." and just then four Germans came out of the back end of the barn with their hands behind their heads, three officers and an enlisted man. And this one guy Spencer, he was so shook up; he jumped off from the hayloft and grabbed carbine he was trembling and shaking. I went to the back end of the barn and all their four pistols were there with a round in the chamber and the safety off. They must have been discussing whether or not to shoot us guys. Then suddenly somebody hollered, "Come out with your hands up."

McIntosh They thought you had the whole army there right. You were more surprised than anyone.

Thibodeau: So I got some binoculars and a P38 pistol but the Germans got the pistol back.

McIntosh Where'd you take them? What did you do?

Thibodeau: We got on the radio and we called some of the MPs [Military Police] and they presently came with a jeep and took them away. We took them by golly--how could we—oh, we rode along with the jeep. This one guy was so nervous, he kept aiming at these guys with his carbine. They were glad to be captured. Although they didn't believe when we told them that the Americans were already close to the German frontier. They just didn't believe it.

McIntosh That's where you were.

Thibodeau: We were a hundred miles away from there, maybe. We got into Belgium, we got into German territory. Our patrols were going right through the Siegfried Line; there was nobody there, everything was going up north.

McIntosh What time was this?

Thibodeau: This was September about.

McIntosh September of '44?

Thibodeau: Yeah. Everything was going up north. We had six rounds left for our gun. When we arrived there we were handing out cigarettes to these Belgians, and after about a month we were trying to bum cigarettes from them. We did have food, though. Anyhow it was very quiet and guys even went deer hunting. So okay, let's wind up this story, unless I can think of anything else. The next thing the captain thought of was anybody that got drunk had to go up forward with the forward observer. So we had gotten into some sort of chalet or something. There was a wine cellar there. It was Calvados or something like that. What is that powerful French liquor?

McIntosh Calvados is one.

Thibodeau: I got really drunk and two guys had to carry me right back by the battery commander's tent and everything else. So that did it, I got nominated to go up forward again. It was worse place I had ever been. We rode a jeep all night, our Commanding General, Raymond O. Barton, dropped off a regiment to help out in the Hürtgen Forest because the 79th Division and 28th Division had gotten all blooded up, shot up over there. We were the division he dropped off.

McIntosh Still in the 4th division?

Thibodeau: Yeah, the 12th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Division. We had a new lieutenant from the States, and he and I and a guy named Blackie rode this jeep all night in this great big convoy. And Blackie was talking a mile a minute he was regaling-- this lieutenant was fresh from the States. He was regaling this lieutenant with all his exploits, going up front and getting souvenirs and all that. I got out of the jeep and the whole woods were just jumping with artillery fire, so they didn't want to endanger the jeep any more. So, we started walking into this and all of a sudden Blackie gets a side ache, an appendix attack. He can't make it any more so the lieutenant took his radio pack and he headed back. I heard later he was fine when he got back. So then we went up and we relieved the 28th Division unit by unit, platoon by platoon, foxhole by foxhole. The woods were full of bodies. The woods were all shattered. The trees were smashed down. They were like matchsticks intersecting one another. So we took shelter in a German bunker made of logs. A guy by the name of King by this time came up to replace Blackie and the lieutenant was in a different bunker. It was so hot there with artillery and mortars coming in they couldn't even get water up to us. So there were three or four dead Germans in kind of a V-formation outside this bunker, and I went out and took their canteens. They were brave Germans who died attacking whatever Americans were around. I took the canteens so we would have some water. After about the third day Lieutenant, his name was Lieutenant Ware, came and said we were going to jump off in the morning. Here we go again, attacking the Germans and as we were moving out, the infantry guys ran into a minefield. They call them shoe mines, it would blow a guys foot off. Another two more guys had to carry him screaming back towards us. And because we were in this minefield, we all hit the deck, we laid on the ground. There was snow on the ground. They sent for the engineers with the Bangalore torpedoes to blow a path through this minefield. They never did get there. But anyhow, suddenly some guy up front of us yelled, "The Germans are coming," and a panic ensued. I saw a BAR man throw his Browning automatic rifle down.

McIntosh Threw it down?

Thibodeau: Yeah, just threw it on the ground and ran. See, this outfit had been shot up so bad, the 4th Division had 28,000 casualties in ten months. They had been shot through two, three times over. They didn't have that old gung-ho anymore. Our intentions were to return to the bunker. Yeah, we did return to the bunker. And Lieutenant Ware made me go outside and set up the radio and raise the antenna. He was trying get what they called Concentration 242 to come in on those approaching Germans, but we couldn't make the darn thing work. Here they come; the Germans were coming firing from the hill. So someone in the bunker said, "We got to get out of here!" And Lieutenant Ware gave me a little push outside the

entrance which is towards the Germans where they were coming. He said, "You go first." So I went and I circled around and I started on a little dog trot and all of a sudden I had a wrong turn and I was lost, lost in the woods all by myself. So I saw a German foxhole that was dug cleanly in the ground; there was no fill around it because we had air superiority and they didn't leave any mess. I jumped in this foxhole to get my bearings. In a short while, I heard a little commotion and the Germans apparently set up a machine gun and were sweeping over the ground a little bit. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** Then that stopped and I heard voices in a strange language. I took my helmet off so I could hear better. And I saw a pair of legs going over this way and a pair going over that way and pretty soon there was a guy coming right at me. So I said this is it and I jumped up with my hands up and these were young infantry men maybe sixteen-year-old boys. One of them kind of tightened up on his trigger but he didn't shoot; then he went beyond me and a sergeant made me sit under a tree. He said, "Well what did you think when the German Army captured you?" I said, "Well I thought I'd get shot." He said, "That is your Jewish propaganda." But anyhow, a young lieutenant looked to be about nineteen came along with a luger up in the air and he asked me where my comrades were. I said, "They are all kaput." Well then they took the dumbest guy in the outfit, looked to be a borderline Down Syndrome guy, marched me back to a bigger bunker that was full of young officers and young guys. And there were candles lit in there and then comes Concentration 242, the one we were trying to call in; and it was this crossroads where we were. And it kept blowing our candles out, but these soldiers, Germans treated us courteously, asked what we had in our pockets. One of them, at that time I smoked, asked him if I'd trade him. So he gave some of his and I gave him what ever I had, maybe Lucky Strikes or something. After things quieted down, they walked us back to their battalion headquarters. We were there for a while. There were three guys by this time. I had joined up with two other guys. One of them I called "The Singing Kid." He kept singing like Bing Crosby all the time, seemed kind of out of place. Well anyhow, some young clerk type guys were giving us noodle soup and everything else at that place. Then they put us on a truck and took us back to what was probably Division Headquarters. There was a high ranking guy, probably a general, barking on the telephone. They always say, "Heil Hitler," when they answer the phone. And after he got done, he hung his phone up and he came over and he lifted our pants legs to see we didn't have any long underwear on. That told him something, see. After that, we had another truck ride and went to a little town, upstairs in a big warehouse-type building. By this time there are twenty to thirty of us guys. A young officer comes in, he must be an intelligence lieutenant or something. "Well boys, what can I do for you?" Well we wanted some tobacco. He was a pipe smoker, he dumped out his tobacco on the table. One bad day there, we looked out the window and we could see some P-38s circling this little town. Sure enough down they come. Dropped a few

bombs and it seemed like the ceiling came down about a foot and went back up again. We could see the Germans running for shelter down below us. They took us out one by one and interrogated us. Three of us went together and this young officer, I think he was an enlisted man, took us to a little café and said, "Well boys, what do you want?" I saw a Coke sign I said, "I'll have a Coke." He said "Well we haven't seen a Coke around here for quite a few years." I think we got a cup of coffee. He asked a bunch of questions. He got out a catalog of American equipment like half-tracks and so forth. He wanted us to know what this was and what that was. You are supposed to only give name, rank and serial number only, right. I wasn't gonna get too formal with these guys about that. I heard all about the death camps and all this and that. There was a Jewish boy in with us. They came and got him and took him away and he never came back. Now, I don't know. So I wasn't going to get to uppity with them about name, rank and serial number. I knew nothing, anyhow, of any value to them. It seemed like one nice sunny day we marched down a road with a German guards on bicycles and we fetched up in a town where again they put us upstairs. We did various kinds of work. The sanitary facilities were primitive; all they had was a big barrel up there, everybody by this time had dysentery. All night long these guys were perched on these barrels and it would get filled up with excrement and then it would spill over under the straw where the other guys were sleeping and they were swearing at the guys. Then in the morning in comes this cheerful little German guard. He says "zweiman [?]," needed two men to carry that thing down the steps, nobody moves. So he gets mad. He says "zweiman, do icht do[?]," grabbed him by the collar, grabbed the thing and took it down the steps. Another time I was working in this kind of field bakery for these guys, the same place. They had two kinds of bread. They had this sauerbrot for their ordinary guys and they had real nice rye bread for the officers. So I decided I was going to try and swipe some of that rye bread. This real cheerful baker guy kept calling me "Nicht razor," [?] 'cause he always asked me why I didn't shave. I'd say "nicht razor[?], I don't have a razor." So anyway, I was stealing this rye bread and I was throwing it over to the guys on the other side. One of them fell short and bounced into the partition and landed on the ground. So he reached over and grabbed me by the ears, "Nicht razor, eh?" This is like Hogan's Heroes. Anyhow, after that we got sent to Stalag XII-A which was all Americans there. The food there was called grass soup. And it began to be filling up quickly, although it was getting cold now and the guys were starting to burn the slats from the beds in the stoves. A German said, "You keep on burning up those slats and we will take the bunks out." Well it kept on and they did take them out. By this time the Battle of the Bulge had happened and the American prisoners were streaming into these camps, so they had to move us again. They put us on a train, jammed us in there, and it was about a four day trip. It was cold and there was not even any straw on the floor and they didn't give us any food or water because they didn't want to have

sanitary problems. It was a pretty mean ride. At one point we were on a siding, peeking through the cracks, and we could see the damn P-38s buzzing around looking us over. Presently, one peeled off and ran the whole length of this train hammering away with his .20 millimeter cannon. But there was a German quad, I think .20 or .40 millimeter right along on this siding. They started firing at this American plane. And I thought, I hope those Germans are good shots. They changed their minds and kept going. They made just one pass. Now I don't know, I heard when we got where we were going that there were seven dead guys on the train. Whether they died from exposure or guns shots, I don't know.

McIntosh Where did they take you then?

Thibodeau: They took us to Stalag IV-B, at Mühlberg, Germany. It was a huge camp.

McIntosh American only?

Thibodeau: No, there were Russians there too. Russians, Americans, English. We were processed by English guys that had been prisoners a long time and they had positions of trust by that time. By this time, I had sold my jacket, my good field jacket, to some Belgian for cigarettes. This little Englishman says, "Where's your field jacket?" Well I said, "I got it right here, field jacket HBT." I was familiar with the manual. The shirt was called field jacket HBT. I sold my jacket like a damn fool. I got this Belgian's funny looking jacket. Anyhow, Stalag IV-B, we didn't have to work. We were quarantined because somebody had come down with typhus, so we were there a whole month. It was pretty good life considering, for a prison camp. We had a phonograph. We had some books.

McIntosh Something to eat?

Thibodeau: Well it wasn't enough, but we kept going.

McIntosh What was the standard fare?

Thibodeau: I think it was like potato soup and of course we did get occasional Red Cross parcels too. They kept you alive, see. So after about four weeks at IV-B, then we got sent out in what they called labor commandos. I and my friends got sent to a flax mill. I don't know where it was located, but when we first arrived, the Germans made quite a show of humane labor relations and they had us elect a leader, a collective bargaining specialist; that was a guy named Louie. I didn't know what the heck we were doing. I guess we were threshing flax, getting the seeds off it. There were forty Russian and Polish forced labor girls there and they called us "babushka" because we

worked so slow. They even knitted mittens for us guys, these girls; they were sweet kids.

McIntosh They were essential prisoners.

Thibodeau: They were prisoners, forced labor, but they had a few more privileges I guess than we did. The Herr Commandant kept threatening us people; we weren't putting out enough work. They were going to send us to a punishment camp and sure enough he did. After a month we got put on a train and we ended up in a place called Königstein. There we got one meal a day and that was at night, potato soup and about 200 grams of bread, worked pick and shovel all day long.

McIntosh Building roads?

Thibodeau: It was some kind of major engineering project; I never knew what it was. We were filling gondolas with earth, the soil. Fill all day, shoveling them full. We were putting out about two gondolas a day per crew, four guys in a crew. It was cold.

McIntosh You recall what month this was now?

Thibodeau: In February.

McIntosh '45?

Thibodeau: Yeah, February of '45.

McIntosh Getting near the end there.

Thibodeau: We are filling these gondolas with earth. Well the Germans kept yelling at us to work faster, arbeit lo schnell, all that stuff. Here is something funny about the flax mill I should tell you. The Herr Director—when we got there we were processed and we were asked about our civilian occupation. So I said I was a student, a high school student, that's all I ever was. Well, I'm out there shoveling charcoal briquettes with my friend Jim Howering [?] from North Carolina, and this Herr Director comes along and he grabs my shovel away from me and says, "Here arbeit—so so so-un so, schnell." In other words, work faster. Then he gave me back the thing and he says, "Student hey ho ho." He thought that it was funny that I was a student; that was a funny one. Anyhow back to Königstein—

McIntosh Now is this further east than your other previous camp?

Thibodeau: Yeah, it was right on the Elbe River. It was near Dresden. Okay, we're shoveling this stuff. One day the guy in charge says whoever fills up their

two gondolas up first gets to go home to the barracks where it is nice and warm, see. So some damn fool filled their two gondolas by two in the afternoon. The next morning he says, "Everybody, three gondolas." Everyday we got on a ferry boat crossing the Elbe River. We went up a long stairway like a wooden staircase. There is a high bluff there and we were so weak you would have to push your knees alternately. You were tired after the day anyhow going up those steps. We were full of lice, we had no soap. We had no razor blades.

McIntosh How much weight had you lost?

Thibodeau: I think I was down about a hundred and ten pounds. A lot the guys had facial edema, it is a symptom of starvation, is it not?

McIntosh That's a vitamin B deficiency.

Thibodeau: That's what it is, vitamin B deficiency.

McIntosh Sure, lousy food.

Thibodeau: Well potato soap and 200 grams of bread everyday. The bread was pretty good stuff. It was sauerbrot, it was heavy. It was a food item, not just something to put stuff on. You always had to watch for the soup; the main thing was how far along they were in the kettle. The guys who hit the top of the kettle only got broth. If you were lucky enough to get to the bottom of the kettle you had quite a few potatoes in there, some times even a couple of strands of horse meat. Now I'm not faulting the Germans for this entirely because their communication system was being bombed night and day. Their own people didn't have very much.

McIntosh They were starving too.

Thibodeau: Sure, sure, although they could have given us a little salt, you know. There was no salt in the food. I guess you need that for gunpowder, right?

McIntosh I guess so; I don't know.

Thibodeau: Anyhow, as it began to warm up, the guys would eat dandelions and eat the buds off the trees. And be out in the field eating dandelions like billy goats. The Germans didn't like that because it was a reflection on what they fed us and yell at us for that.

McIntosh They didn't like you eating the dandelions.

Thibodeau: Well they tasted great. Well one time, a train passed between—there were a couple of guys eating dandelions out in the field and the train passed in

between them and the guards and when the train got passed the two men were gone. They jumped the train! But they were back in a couple of days.

McIntosh They had no place to go.

Thibodeau: No place to go. Germany was a garrison state, there were guys practically guarding every crossroads. They went to a farmhouse and asked for food and the farmer got on the phone and that was it. We weren't physically abused. They called us names. "You're sheep, you're not soldiers, nothing but sheep."

McIntosh You'd rather have something to eat than hear that.

Thibodeau: Yeah right, so as time went along we could start hearing the Russians.

McIntosh That's right, you are close to the Russians.

Thibodeau: We could hear their artillery off in the distance.

McIntosh Did you ask the German guards about that?

Thibodeau: No. There were I think some Englishmen and they were real smart. They kept themselves nice and neat and they were shaved and they were kicking a soccer ball around. Stuff like that. They were getting parcels from home see, and we weren't. They would come in formation to roll call, see. We Americans we dragged ourselves around. We looked like—

McIntosh Bums.

Thibodeau: Bums. Yeah, we were bums. The English kind of lorded it over us that way. Anyhow, as the Russians got closer--some Englishman had a radio. They said it was a crystal radio, I don't know. So we were getting BBC reports. We were also getting reports of what was happening in Berlin. They had this big deal, like they had secret weapons that were going to turn the tide. Then they had this other deal that they were going to make peace with the West who would then allow them to continue fighting the Russians, all this crazy stuff. One morning we went to work and our supervisor said, "Well boys, Roosevelt is dead." Well we knew about Harry Truman being our Vice-President and all that stuff. So anyhow, finally the day came about April 16th we didn't have to go to work anymore. They knew the jig was up. We just stayed in the barracks and we even cut wood for fires and started swapping addresses. We didn't get any more food, no.

McIntosh The guards left?

Thibodeau: They didn't leave us till—we evacuated the camp about May 3rd. They marched us down a road. The first night we slept in a big barn, and in the morning the guards were gone. So we were on our own. We just went on the road, we were heading west and south I think.

McIntosh You'd grasped, though, what was happening?

Thibodeau: Oh yeah, we knew what was going on. We were mixed in with German army units. We were mixed in with civilians with carts and civilians on foot. It was a chaotic situation.

McIntosh All heading west.

Thibodeau: All heading west to get away from the Russians. The next late afternoon, we came to a little town. The edge of the town we knocked on the door and asked the lady if we could sleep in her barn and she said no. So we slept in a ditch and in the morning the Russians came through, big convoys of Russians and Americans six by sixes just roaring through. They drinking dill pickles and canned good and vodka and they would stop—

McIntosh They share any of that?

Thibodeau: I don't remember if they shared with us. They would stop and everybody would pile out and they'd go ransack houses then pile back in and away they go. Well some Russian was drunk and he ran a little Ford into the ditch and he gave it to one of our guys and he drove it home. By this time we had taken over the lady's house. She had invited us in. That night a Russian major came pounding on the door howling about a "Ruskie auto." So I went up to him and told him that the "Ruskie soldat" just gave us that car. Ruskie whipped out his pistol, "Ruskie auto." So we gave him the auto back. But then that is not a true picture of how our encounters went with the Russians. They would come and we'd shake hands. They'd say, "Americanski Ruskie," and we'd shake hands and we'd re-enact the meeting on the Elbe River. We hitchhiked with a Russian unit. They took us quite a ways then we stole or commandeered a horse and a wagon from some German people. We did some things I'm not at all proud of. We would loot these people. They were trying to get home or get somewhere and we'd take away what they had, sausages and stuff like that. We had a big pile of stuff by an intersection there. I kept saying, "We got enough guys, let's knock it off." Anyhow we got into a little town called Teplice, it is in Czechoslovakia, I found out later. And the German civilians were on the outskirts of town begging us to come and stay with them. So we were installed in an apartment house there smoking cigars, wearing white shirts and leading the good life.

McIntosh You still hadn't seen any Americans?

Thibodeau: Not yet.

McIntosh I'll be darned.

Thibodeau: Some lieutenant—see we were in the part—the Russians really—

McIntosh Right.

Thibodeau: So a German would come up to us and say, “When is your army coming?” We'd say three days, someone said they were coming in three days, they never did come. But anyhow some American lieutenant got up a train and took us about four days to get to where the 1st Army was because it [the train] was fired with wood and they had trouble finding wood, but then we finally got there. 1st Army guys looked so fat; their faces were so fat, and big powerful men. We were so damn skinny, you know, we looked like scarecrows. They took us somewhere and deloused us and they apologized for delousing us and we'd just say, “Give us another squirt, man, we need this.” They put us on C-46s and we flew from Nuremberg to Reims. We got to Nuremberg by truck. From Reims we went to Camp Lucky Strike which was Saint-Valery, France, which was all full of recovered allied prisoners of war. We were there about a month, got on a ship went back to New York. How's that for a story?

McIntosh Fantastic. The lice that you had, they were just all over you? Just your head? All areas of your body?

Thibodeau: Body lice live in your clothing. You can take all the baths you want, you have to put those same clothes back on. And they lay their eggs in the seams of your clothing. So you can put it on the stove and boil it if you have the heat and water and the next day you are right back full of them.

McIntosh They bite you?

Thibodeau: Oh yeah they suck blood. You crack them between your finger nails when you catch them you see. These are not head lice, they are body lice, an old European plague.

McIntosh Was that the most annoying thing?

Thibodeau: Not enough food.

McIntosh Food, mainly.

Thibodeau: Our only obsession was food. It's what you talked about. You talked about making up an ice cream sundae with a whole pint of ice cream, vanilla ice cream, then maraschino cherries, then a whole bottle of chocolate syrup and another bottle of caramel syrup, then sprinkle nuts all over the top of it. This is how we talked. Guys would talk about rich foods, candy bars, all the different kind of candy bars, then you'd talk about ordinary things like T-bone steaks. We didn't talk about women hardly at all. There were a couple of guys that were married and they maybe talked about their wives and that stuff. There was no sexual interest I don't think at all.

McIntosh I interviewed a guy who was in a Japanese prison camp for three and a half years. And he said we had one guy each day had a duty and his duty was prepare the menu.

Thibodeau: Oh really?

McIntosh The same thing, he would prepare the menu for days. We are going to start out with a little soup and describe the soup. Then go through the whole menu, these guys just lived for that day that they could just listen to him talk about that.

Thibodeau: And it was the same stuff everyday, right?

McIntosh Every guy had different assignment, had to come up with a different menu.

Thibodeau: Where'd he get the variety of food?

McIntosh They made it up.

Thibodeau: Oh, I see; it was all imaginary. Well people often say to me, "You were prisoner six months in Germany? Boy the prisoners of the Japanese had it a lot worse." Well they did, they were murdered, they were beheaded, they were brutalized, but all I can say about that is we would never have lived through another winter in Germany. The guys were dying; one or two guys were dying every week.

McIntosh As you recall, they were starving to death?

Thibodeau: Yup, starvation. You got a bad cold you'd probably die back then, everybody had dysentery.

McIntosh They didn't have any typhoid or anything?

Thibodeau: No infectious diseases. The Germans were forever giving us tetanus shots. They must have reported to the Red Cross, "Boy, we administered two

thousand tetanus shots last week to these prisoners.” Okay that’s wonderful, you guys are really benevolent. All the times these damn tetanus shots. We had a guy in my room, room twenty-two; there were about twenty guys in there. A guy named Vasow[?]. He kept selling his food ration for cigarettes everyday on the job. So at supper time, three, four guys would show up for Vasow’s [?] food and he only had one ration. He quit eating. I guess the guys said he had bleeding piles and he kept losing blood and kept getting weaker and weaker and finally he just laid in his bed and kicked the feces out of his bed. Everybody was disgusted with him. Well the Germans moved him to what they call the magazine and there he died. He died of starvation but partly self-induced because he sold his food, he didn’t want to eat anymore.

McIntosh Again with my Japanese prisoners of war, these guys who was there so many years said, “Most of the guys if they had the right attitude would have survived, but so many of them gave up.”

Thibodeau: Yeah.

McIntosh “Frequently they were youngest soldiers, but they would just give up they saw no hope. They just stopped eating and doing anything and lay there till they were dead.”

Thibodeau: Must have been what Vasow [?] did, yeah.

McIntosh There is certain psychology there.

Thibodeau: Time to die. One time one of our guys died and the Germans put him in a storage place and this Englishman came in, a little delegation: “How indignant one of your blokes is there in the magazine,” or whatever the hell you call it. We just shrugged our shoulders; we were beyond caring, I guess. I’ll tell you a funny one just to finish this off. Maybe everybody wouldn’t think it was funny but in a prison camp it seemed like it was funny. Our latrine consisted of a pole by a pit mounted on a couple of sawed off stumps like. So the guys would be sitting on this pole and one day some guy lost his balance and threw out his arm and took two guys with him down into the pit.

McIntosh All three?

Thibodeau: All three went down. Couldn’t climb out, the other guys wouldn’t let them back in the barracks for a while.

McIntosh Did you get any showers or any water?

Thibodeau: Oh, no, bathing? No. We had water. Come to think of it, I think you had to go to the kitchen to get water and bring it back in a wash basin. In the morning we got a wash basin full of ersatz coffee; that was our breakfast. We sent one guy down and he'd come back with it. You had to have a cup and a spoon, otherwise you were hurting. Major equipment that you needed was a cup and a spoon. Well the cup was made out of a tin can; that was for your soup. You'd bring back this basin of water then at night we sent one guy down to bring back a loaf of bread for six men; then the guy who cut the bread into six pieces got the last pick. He acquired the skills of the finest surgeons because they had to be exactly the same size because he'd get the smallest one. You went and got the soup yourself because you had to take your can and stand in line. That was the potato soup, always potato soup. "How many bags of potatoes in the soup today?" "Ten bags today." One day eleven; eleven hundred men in the camp, so you can figure about what your caloric intake was from the number of the bags in the soup and the amount of bread you got; 200 grams of bread. Once in a while a little ration of margarine; a little pat of margarine and once in a while a little ration of ersatz jam and once in a while even some sugar. So when you got something like that you spooned that down right away. You didn't wait to have bread to put it on, you just spooned it right down.

McIntosh No turnips at all? Some of the guys in German prison camps had some turnips in that soup occasionally.

Thibodeau: Yeah, this camp didn't offer turnips. One time we were crossing the Elbe River on this ferry boat and I caught a turnip floating down the river and I fished it out. I took it home that night and divided it up with my best friend. It was kind of a rotten turnip.

McIntosh Tasted pretty good.

Thibodeau: Oh yeah, anything taste good. You know, even a potato has the most subtle flavoring to it. It has the most nuances of flavor. You wouldn't believe it. There is chicken in a potato. There is the flavor of nice, rich gravy, everything.

McIntosh Do you still have that taste with you?

Thibodeau: Oh no. I still like potatoes, but--

McIntosh I mean those little appreciations left after you start getting food in front of you?

David Yeah that's right, you have to be starving to **[End of Tape 1, Side B]** get the full impact.

McIntosh That's the next thing I want you to tell me--

Thibodeau: What?

McIntosh When you got back to the American lines--tell me about feeding you.

Thibodeau: They told us not to overeat. We got standard army fare, but we didn't get to go have milk shakes and all that stuff right off the bat, no.

McIntosh Some did.

Thibodeau: We built ourselves up gradually. By the time I got back to the States I was about getting back to my normal weight pretty much. Although I got sicker than a dog on the train going to Fort Sheridan; I came down with hepatitis. They had to load me off from there on a stretcher. I had a 105 fever or something like that.

McIntosh When was this?

Thibodeau: After we got back to New York on the boat, they put us on a train. I was heading for Fort Sheridan for some kind of processing. Halfway to Sheridan, I got sick on the train. I was practically in a coma, I was so damn sick with hepatitis. They took me off the train on a lighter and put me in a station hospital there. It took me about a month to get over this.

McIntosh You probably picked that up in prison camp, don't you think?

Thibodeau: I don't know where the heck it came from.

McIntosh I'm thinking about the incubation period of hepatitis but I think it is probably two weeks.

Thibodeau: Is that all?

McIntosh Yeah, so maybe you picked up at Lucky Strike.

Thibodeau: Could be, it could be at Camp Lucky Strike. I was really sick. They gave me intravenous. They didn't know much about hepatitis then. They didn't know anything about hepatitis B, hepatitis A; it was all hepatitis. They put us in a ward with other guys that were wounded and every other thing. They didn't worry about the infectious nature of it, but I believe they called it infectious hepatitis. I was there a month and then I recovered pretty good. They told me not to drink beer but after I went to town, I went to Highwood and got drunk on beer and slept on some guy's yard over night.

McIntosh But you never had any reoccurrence of any of the liver disease?

Thibodeau: No, no my liver is okay. I got to take Zocor for cholesterol and I'm okay. I'm in good shape.

McIntosh So you they processed you out in Fort Sheridan?

Thibodeau: Yeah. Because I had been sick, my treatment was different from the other guys. But then I got a sixty day furlough, I think, and went home for sixty days. Then I went back to Hot Springs, Arkansas, where they treated us like kings for two weeks in a big hotel. If you want to hear the rest of the story, I was put on a train to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and I was supposed to be discharged, but I didn't know that. So I'm going through a processing line and I saw these guys had all kinds of ribbons and badges. I said this guy's got eighty-four points and this guy had seventy and I only had sixty, sixty-two points. I told the guy, "I think there is a mistake, I only have sixty-some points and I'm--" He said if I had shut my mouth I would have been out of the army in about ten minutes. So then I got put into sort of a casual unit where you had to work with picks and shovels and stuff. So I started goofing off and hiding and everything. Finally, I saw a thing about re-enlisting, ninety day furlough, 300 dollars. So I re-enlisted. I was home for ninety days and then I got sent to Camp Campbell, Kentucky, and presently I went to 5th Division typing school and learned to type. They made me battery clerk and I was reading a War Department circular and I had been sent to Leavenworth to be discharged.

McIntosh That's the first time you found that out?

Thibodeau: Yeah, right. I put in a whole year because I was so honest. But anyhow, I finally got to be a corporal. I was a buck private two years and four months, then they made me PFC [Private First Class] after because I had been a prisoner. I really didn't come home for good until November of '46, then I went to the University of Wisconsin.

McIntosh You were still single?

Thibodeau: Oh yeah. I went to University of Wisconsin on G.I. Bill and became a teacher and then I became late a social worker. Now I'm a news reporter, that's the story.

McIntosh It's a great life after you got out.

Thibodeau: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh Then you got married?

Thibodeau: Yeah, I didn't get married until I was about 30.

McIntosh That's wise.

Thibodeau: Well I guess so, yeah. We had four children, live out here in the country. We get along fine. We have enough to live on.

McIntosh Are you enjoying the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]?

Thibodeau: Well, I was a charter member here in Peshtigo, but then I kind of lost interest. Then I was in the Legion in Orangeville, Illinois, where I taught school. But presently I'm in the VFW now, but the post paid my dues. I guess they consider me some kind of a show piece or something.

McIntosh Well being a POW.

Thibodeau: Yeah, right, but anyhow, I kind of don't like either one of the magazines they put out. Their magazines seem to be like--

McIntosh Nazis--like Nazis.

Thibodeau: Yeah.

McIntosh The NRA [National Rifle Association] does it.

Thibodeau: The Legion magazine had a big thing in there about Harry Truman abandoned ex-POWs in Russia or some place-- Korea and so forth. That is just not true, abandoned--those guys are all dead. Like, there are a bunch guys still in bamboo cages in Vietnam, they're all dead. And they are always agitating for a total preparedness for war of course, but they want maximum benefits for Veterans. They're all the time hullabaloo about-- you now those veterans hospitals are obsolete.

McIntosh I used to work in them.

Thibodeau: The one in Iron Mountain--

McIntosh Dreadful place?

Thibodeau: Well, it is alright but it has to be updated. It will cost millions and millions of dollars. Why don't they--

McIntosh It is not associated with any university then.

Thibodeau: No, maybe the thing to do is if a veteran needs medical care that he can't afford or he qualifies for, just send him to the ordinary health care people.

McIntosh My experience is the only veteran's hospitals that are worth a damn are the ones that are tied in with a University hospital.

Thibodeau: Okay.

McIntosh Like in Madison.

Thibodeau: Is that tied in?

McIntosh Oh sure, the staffs interchange so they are really an extension of the University Hospital.

Thibodeau: That is good.

McIntosh Then everything is up to snuff and they get all the new stuff and they have the new people and blah blah blah and the money.

Thibodeau: Yup. I got a boy and a girl living in Madison, you live down there?

McIntosh Yeah.

Thibodeau: Where do you live down there?

McIntosh On the west side.

Thibodeau: Right in town in Madison?

McIntosh Right on the edge between Madison and Middleton, far west side.

Thibodeau: Okay.

McIntosh I'm a Madison boy. I have been there all my life.

Thibodeau: Oh really? I'll be darned.

McIntosh All my life. I practiced Urology there for 35 years. I retired ten years ago in '88. Go to the Museum?

Thibodeau: I haven't been there yet. I was down there in Madison a couple of weeks ago for a church conference, a Methodist thing-- oh jeez, what is the name of that big hotel in Middleton?

McIntosh It's the Marriott now.

Thibodeau: Yeah, I was at the Marriott for three, four days.

McIntosh Oh really.

Thibodeau: Living like a king on the Church, sure.

McIntosh Next time you come down we will get together so we can show you the museum.

Thibodeau: I got to see that museum. I heard about it.

McIntosh It is beautiful and has won awards.

Thibodeau: Wait a minute, I think I was there.

McIntosh Right on the square.

Thibodeau: You have a lot of Civil War stuff in there. I was there. I'll go back because I heard there have been some improvements, too.

McIntosh We have had a lot of stuff done.

Thibodeau: New displays in there.

McIntosh And I can show you the stuff that is not on display too. It is in the basement. There is all kind of stuff.

Thibodeau: You have enough room for storage?

McIntosh No.

Thibodeau: You don't have enough room for storage?

McIntosh We have a supplement area up in King. You know where King is? That's a retired army officer's home.

Thibodeau: What building was it originally? Where you are?

McIntosh 30 on the Square; it's an office building. The Museum only moved over there seven years ago. It was in the State Capitol.

Thibodeau: You are not the curator, no?

McIntosh I'm a volunteer. I just do this on my own time. There are a lot of us who are interested in history and interested in the Museum. We give tours down there, particularly to children.

Thibodeau: It's called Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

McIntosh Exactly.

Thibodeau: Does it get a subsidy from the state?

McIntosh Of course, it is run by the state of Wisconsin. It is part of the veterans division run by Ray Bolton who is Secretary of the Veterans for the state of Wisconsin. He is on the seventh floor of the same building.

Thibodeau: You're not taping me anymore?

McIntosh Well I haven't stopped it- why you say something you don't want to--

Thibodeau: No, no. Yeah I'll say something I don't want on there; this is kind of funny. We're at this flax mill, see, and they made a big show of having our own guy to negotiate and everything. We got done working every day we went by a bin where they had charcoal briquettes. So everybody grabbed three, four of them to put in the stove at night. Well there was a guy there, he was the German in charge, and he kept screaming at the guys to quit stealing that charcoal. This guy named Louie was our collective bargaining guy. He bellies right up to this German and he says, "Fuck you!" [laughs] He is saying it three, four times. Finally this German says, "What is this 'fuck you'?" He didn't know what the hell it was. [both laugh] He told the guard to shoot us. He was yelling at the guard to shoot the guys for stealing that.

McIntosh Wonder if he figured out what he had said.

Thibodeau: No, no I don't think he ever found out what it meant; maybe after the war he found out. Actually, it is an old Germanic word.

[End of Interview]