

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
AKIRA TOKI  
Infantry, Army, World War II  
1996

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**Toki, Akira R.** (1916- ), Oral History Interview, 1996

User copy, 2 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips. mono.

Toki, a Japanese-American from Madison, Wisconsin discusses the home front, military aspects of being a Japanese-American and his service with the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team in World War II. He talks extensively about being Japanese, race relations, and his frustrations at basic army training at Camp Robinson (Arkansas.) He declares that the army segregated him at Fort Sheridan (Illinois) Camp Grant (Illinois) and Camp Blanding (Florida,) until the 442 was organized. Thereafter, Toki describes battles in Marseilles France, the Rhine River and Po Valley, including examining how he rescued a lost battalion. He tells us that VE-Day was marked by the 442<sup>nd</sup> pushing the German army from Italy into Switzerland. Toki reveals that he guarded a German prisoner and he tells a humorous story about returning to the U.S. on the Liberty ship during Thanksgiving. He used the GI Bill to attend the University of Wisconsin for two years. Toki joined the American Legion because they assisted his Japanese parents during the war. He states that dropping the atomic bomb on Japan saddened him. In 1992, Madison, Wisconsin students named a middle school in his honor.

### **Biographical sketch**

Toki, (B. January 17, 1916) served with the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team as a soldier in the Army. He fought in Southern France, Germany and Italy.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by Alissa Nolden 2003.

## Interview Transcript

Mark: Yeah, we'll just try to follow this. Today's date is February 12, Lincoln's birthday, 1996. This is Mark VanElls, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Akira Toki. Did I pronounce that correctly?

Toki: That's right.

Mark: A native of Madison and veteran of the Second World War. Thanks for coming in this afternoon.

Toki: Well, glad to be here.

Mark: I appreciate it. I suppose we should start at the top, as they say, and have you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Toki: Well, I was born in Madison in 1916 and I'm a native Madisonian, all my life, so far [laughs].

Mark: Are you thinking of changing that or something?

Toki: Maybe, I don't know[both laugh]. But anyway—so I was raised in Madison all my—and I grew up in Madison all my life so—and I have never lived any other place. I guess I must like Madison so that's why I'm here. Well, I like the four seasons, that's what I like. I like seeing winter, spring, summer, and fall.

Mark: I think we've had four seasons in the past two weeks here.

Toki: Plenty [laughs]. Especially the winter.

Mark: So you were born in 1916. You must have finished high school in the depth of the Depression I would suppose then.

Toki: Yeah, yeah. I say I went to school—oh—say—yeah—1916 I was born, then I was on the farm with my mother and father, and we lived on the south side of Madison. And ah, if anybody knows where South Towne is, I lived in that area for quite a bit of my life.

Mark: Oh, is that right? I suspect it's changed.

Toki: It changed an awful lot. It used to be out in the boonies at one time. And ah—the main—Broadway Road was Mud Road at that time. I used ta hear my mother say that they used ta take the horse and buggy to town—nothing but ruts in the road. So—then they went to town and south Madison was the end of the city practically and those roads were gravel road until later years they made a cement road and the main road ran behind Sheraton Hotel on the south side, right along the railroad tracks.

Mark: What sort of things did you grow on your farm?

Toki: What we grew on the farm? Well, we grew vegetables on this one farm. But then my father and mother had a friend that wanted them to run a dairy farm so that was about an 80-acre farm that was not too far from where we were living before. So we moved over to this bigger farm so my dad and mother got into dairy. So they had cows and chickens and pigs and those kind of things and they raised grain. So he ran that farm for quite awhile until, I think, ah—oh, I must have been in fifth or sixth grade in grade school. And then they went to this other farm ‘cause this farm, the owner wanted to bring in their son-in-law and daughter to run the farm so we had to give up—so—because we were renting the farm, so we sold all our livestock and equipment and moved to this little farm. That was over there, oh, must be four or five miles southwest of South Towne. So we ran that ‘till, oh, until I was—until high school. When I graduated from high school we were on that farm.

Mark: And so when you finished high school did you stay working in agriculture?

Toki: Yeah.

Mark: On the family farm.

Toki: On the family farm. I worked on the family farm the majority of my life so far. I did anyway.

Mark: How did the Depression affect your business?

Toki: Well, it—I think it affected it quite a bit because people didn’t have no money and they were, you know, living day-by-day. So—then we didn’t make no money ‘cause they didn’t have no money to spend, see. And we were, we had plenty of food to eat because we grew our own stuff, so we didn’t starve or anything—we weren’t hungry. And we, from there, see I went to Badger School. That was my grade school. See, Badger School is where Badger Bowl is right now.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Toki: Yeah, the bowling alley. That's where the school was. It was a two room school house there. So I graduated from there. Then I went to West High from there. Then—I went to West High for four years. Then in the meantime the Depression kind of hit us. We couldn't keep up our taxes and all that, so—we gave up the farm. Then we moved to another, better place on the Beltline and it was better soil and better ground and easier to work with. So we moved there in '36 right after I graduated from high school. And then we had the truck farm there. At the dairy farm, we only—ten years or so, that's all we ran. But the rest of the time we were growing vegetables all the time.

Mark: Now, you're a little older than many of the veterans I interview. A lot of these guys were, they graduated high school during the war. You graduated several years before.

Toki: That's right.

Mark: So perhaps you remember a little bit more about our entry into World War II as for the storm clouds of war, as they started to.

Toki: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: So you're a young man of, say, 22 years old. Did you see World War II coming?

Toki: I don't think I paid much attention to that 'cause I was—I don't know 'cause my mind is kind of foggy when Germany invaded Poland and—maybe if I think hard enough maybe it will come back but right now I cannot think when German invaded Poland and all that. I know about it but that's all. I can't tell you anything about it. But then I remember Pearl Harbor, see.

Mark: That made much more of an impression.

Toki: Yeah, made more, bigger impression on me.

Mark: Why don't you tell me a little bit about your recollection of that day and what transpired.

Toki: The Pearl Harbor?

Mark: Right.

Toki: Oh, I was, I think I was outside. Then my sisters heard it on the radio that they bombed Pearl Harbor so they came out and told me that Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. It kind of shook me a little bit. I didn't think they were going to do it but, you know, but they did. So—and—ah—well—then—oh, before that, I'm

kind of going back a little, back after Pearl Harbor, when, in the mean time, a lot of my friends were going into the Army through induction, selective service.

Mark: Right. There had been the draft by this time.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, there was a draft there already, see. 'Cause I was, when President Roosevelt had the draft started, if you know what a fish bowl is, all the numbers were in this fish bowl, well, I was in that first fish bowl so I was defer—on account of being on the farm, I was deferred for six months 'cause I went to the Selective Service Board, my father went, they—he wanted me home to run the farm, support the food stuff. But then I told them that if the United States went to war, went to war now, that I would join. So—a little while after they bombed Pearl Harbor I got a greeting card from Uncle Sam that I should come. So [laughs] I went in.

Mark: So describe that process to me. I went off to basic training, it was 40 years after you did. [Toki laughs] Many things I remember clear as a bell. Some things I forget. I mean some of the things you never forget. So why don't you describe for me the process of your induction and going to basic training.

Toki: Well, let's see. When I got my greeting card, I was working in town, in a tobacco warehouse during the wintertime. So then I had to clear up some of my businesses that I had stashed away so they said I could have about, not even three months to clear all that up. So I cleared that all up and then on February 12, today, they gave me a greeting card and told me to report to Selective Service. So—I reported and then I went to—they had us all meet uptown. If you know where Washington Building is up on the Square, it's an old—ah—it's a new state building up there. G.F. 1. [ Referring to G.E.F. -1, presently at 201 East Washington Avenue.]

Mark: One of them. I get them all mixed up.

Toki: It's one, the first one. It was facing East Washington Avenue. So I rode up there and the Red Cross was there with donuts and coffee because it was 6:00 in the morning they told us to report back up there. Then—there was a Chinese boy that was inducted in the Army at the same time I was. You know what Chinese and Japanese were? We were enemies with each other but I didn't think nothing of it, you know.

Mark: Did he?

Toki: No, no. I don't think he did either. The publicity that we got at that time, seeing a Chinese and Japanese inducted at the same time, the media kind of

blew it out of proportion because they—saying two sides were inducted and armored at the same time.

Mark: So this made the papers?

Toki: Yeah, made the papers. Made the front page. And they had us—they sat us in the bus, took pictures as we sat together in the bus, and all that. And there were, I don't know how many were, I think there was—far as I could recall there were two bus loads of inductees that went at the same time. So, we went as far as Lake Geneva and then we had—they unloaded us and we had dinner there, then they took us to Fort Sheridan. That's where they processed all of us.

Mark: And what happened when you got there?

Toki: What happened there? Well, they assigned us to barracks and they processed us through giving our clothes and inoculations, physical, all that. Just like, I think it was just like—

Mark: The standard sort of thing.

Toki: —the standard thing they did. So, I was there a couple of days before Washington's birthday. They put me on detail so I had—did KP and things like that while I was waiting to get shipped out. And then this Chinese boy, he was shipped out quite early because he went to—ah— chemical warfare school 'cause he was—he studied at the University on chemical stuff so he had knowledge of that so they shipped him to chemical school. Then they held me back 'cause I didn't have that kind of education 'cause I just graduated from high school and did farming, that's all. And so from Fort Sheridan they sent me to Camp Blanding, no not Camp Blanding, Camp Robinson, Arkansas where they gave me my basic.

Mark: Which consisted of?

Toki: Eight, nine weeks, nine weeks of training.

Mark: The marching around and?

Toki: Marching around and—

Mark: I assume you did some weapons training and that sort of thing.

Toki: Yeah, very little because I think they had, at that time—before that, see—there are other Japanese boys there.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Toki: Yeah. See they collected some other Japanese boys down there. So they segregated us. So there was several companies down there at Camp Robinson, Arkansas. So when I went to the company—ah—there were six boys there.

Mark: Six other Japanese-Americans.

Toki: Boys, yeah. I think at that time, I think the government didn't kinda, they had a feeling that they didn't trust us or something so they segregated us like that so we won't be—ah—big mass groups.

Mark: Now, these other Japanese-Americans, where they from California or Hawaii or where were they from?

Toki: They were from West Coast, California. See they were drafted in before they evacuated the West Coast so they were in there before evacuation just like—'cause I was never in the evacuation zone.

Mark: Right.

Toki: But then when I joined those guys, funny part of it is, I didn't know what to say to them. See I, like with you, you're Caucasian, I could say a lot of things to you then you pitch it right back at me, see. But with those guys I didn't know if I could do the same thing so I had to be kind of shy and kind of figure them out.

Mark: And what did you eventually figure out? I mean, how did you guys sort of get along? Or did you get along?

Toki: Oh, we got along. Yeah, we got along all right, after we figured each other out. I think those guys thought I was kind of a [laughs]—ah—off beat guy, you know, 'cause they thought I had funny ideas and all that, see.

Mark: So this sort of limbo status you were in at that time, how long did that last? And what did you six guys do to pass the time? I mean, I presume you weren't out on the rifle range or anything.

Toki: No we—they had us in—ah—they had six of us—no there were—yeah, there were six of us in a tent, one tent, one of the perimeter tents, that leaked like a sieve [laughs] when it rained. But then we had, we had six, we had one Jewish boy in there with us. And, well, we got along all right after we got used to each other, we figured each other out, and found out where we were from. You know, with general conversation.



Mark: Now, I would imagine by this time you had some knowledge of the relocation going on in the West of other Japanese-Americans.

Toki: Not at that time, see. I think I really found out was when, after basic training, see, about nine weeks after when we got shipped out of there, see.

Mark: So these other boys had no—

Toki: Oh, they might have had an inkling about it.

Mark: But it's not something you discussed.

Toki: No, no, they never said anything to me. Maybe in the back of their mind they had something going in there. But we got along pretty well. And then when we were at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, after the basic, they sent all the Caucasian guys to another camp and we were left behind. You know, six here, six there, six there. We were all left behind. I guess they didn't know what to do with us at that time. So I think at that time—Washington must have had a order out that they figured out we were unfit for combat duty, see. So they load us on a troop train from Camp Robinson, Arkansas, then they shipped us to Camp Grant.

Mark: In Illinois.

Toki: Yeah. They didn't tell us where we were going. 'Cause they had the blinds all pulled, everything was hush, hush. So we didn't know what, where we were going, what we was going to do. We end up in Camp Grant. Then we—they divide us up into quartermaster and the medics and they were doing firemen duty. You know, firing the boilers in the barracks. And the reception center, 'cause I was in the reception center, pencil pushing.

Mark: Yeah. And so they had basically turned you into permanent party at Camp Grant.

Toki: Yeah, as non-combatant duty, see.

Mark: How long did that last?

Toki: About a year and a half, I think.

Mark: And what did you and the others think of it? I mean, did you want to get out there?

Toki: A lot of us bitched and moaned and hollered 'cause we saw, you know, a lot of the cadre were, Caucasian cadre, and they were taking troops out—recruits

out to other camps and then coming back and doing that kind of stuff and we were just stuck there. So I used to complain and crab and bitch and holler why we couldn't do that. But, you know, when they say we're unfit for combat duty and we're not trusted—that they took all of our weapons and everything away from us, we didn't have nothing. Just, just nothing. Just our clothes, that's all we had. So we—I went to the commander. I think I did the most bitching of them all 'cause, you know, when I live around all the Caucasians and I think I feel like I'm equal to anybody else, see. But then I think the first thing I knew, to shut me up, they sent me on a furlough. So my furlough, from Camp Grant to Madison [both laugh]—

Mark: Madison, right.

Toki: —that's a short span, see. But at least I stayed away from camp for a couple of weeks.

Mark: Yeah. Now, I was going to ask why you were at Camp Grant 'cause you were there for quite awhile actually. Did you get off the post much? Did you have much interaction with the community? And in your particular case, did they try to prevent such things?

Toki: We used to go to town, used to go to town. But we try not to stir trouble. Well, going back to Camp Robinson, Arkansas, one of the fellows got in trouble down there. He got tangled up with a female and he got caught, see. That kind of put the kabash on all of us, see.

Mark: This was one of the Japanese-American boys.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So that kinda put the kabash on everybody so we kind of laid low. But then at Camp Grant we, well, nothing too much like that happened 'cause we were kinda quiet. But then when we, when I was at Camp Grant I, you know, a lot of those guys want to eat Japanese food, see. Things like that. So I bought, one of the boys, I don't know how he got his California car out to Camp Grant I don't know, but I think he had some Caucasian friends that drove the car out for him, but anyway, he had a California licensed car at Camp Grant. So, him and I and three others, five of us, said, "I'll take you home." And we all got a pass to leave camp and we took off. Then we—driving up north, towards Madison, then at Beloit somebody spotted us. So five Orientals in a car, with a uniform, you know, and they were real suspicious that we were spies or something.

Mark: In uniform, of course.

Toki: In uniform, that's right, that's right. So we got through Beloit, Beloit couldn't find us. Then we went through Janesville. They couldn't find us. Then they

had a roadblock at Evansville. That's where we got caught. The police took us into their courthouse. They interrogated us. And then ah, they wrote back to the—telephoned back to the company commander, asked him if we were legit, and they saw our pass and the pass was legal. Everything cleared up so they let us go. But the funny part of it, they stripped us everything. I even had a fountain pen like this in my pocket. They took the damn thing apart.

Mark: Did you get it back at least?

Toki: Yeah I got it back [laughs].

Mark: Still.

Toki: Yeah.

Mark: So you got back up to Madison.

Toki: Yeah, I got back to Madison.

Mark: How had things, how's, this is sort of a two-part question. How had Madison changed as a result of the war? And how did your own family situation change if at all?

Toki: It changed some but, see, the people here in Madison are more broad-minded and then, see, we had good American Legion posts here and the commander was real good. He was really civic-minded person. So he backed my father, mother up and then mayor of the city was on my mother, father side. And the FBI checked us through the whole neighborhood. Asked us what our—what we were—you know, how we were. They must have gave an awful good report because they didn't bother my father, mother at all.

Mark: So your family had very few problems as a result of that.

Toki: They only had, the only problem they had was they were restricted going out so far.

Mark: Like a 50-mile radius or something like that.

Toki: Fifty, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But, even at the height of the war—they told my father to stay home. They will come out and pick up the vegetables and take them back to the store to sell. So they were, you know, really helping my father, mother out that way. So, my sisters were in school at that time—and the teachers were—had everything under control.

Mark: So there was no California-like situation?

Toki: No, no, no, nothing like California situation—at all.

Mark: Now in terms of Madison in general, had you noticed many changes on the part of the war? For example, the more military presence in town on the university, is the town getting bigger, was rationing a problem on the home front, and that sort of thing? Did you notice any of that?

Toki: No, no. Well, it could be yes and no because I know some of the kids wanted to go to university here. Most young people want to go to university. They couldn't get into the university 'cause it was Army controlled.

Mark: Yeah.

Toki: So that's the only drawback they had so they had to go look for other schools. But, they like other people, you know, families that moved out here, relocated out here, they were just like anybody else. And besides, we were only family here in Madison before the war and a little after the war. Then they, after they relocated, some of them came out of the relocation camp and moved here, see.

Mark: Oh, is that right? Other Japanese.

Toki: Yeah. So there were several families here at one time but they all had the grass roots back in California, they all moved back.

Mark: So your family were the pioneers I guess.

Toki: Yeah, we were the pioneers in Madison.

Mark: So, you got a furlough and then you were back at Camp Grant for awhile. Eventually, they started to organize the 442.

Toki: Well—

Mark: How did all of that start? And when did you first start picking up on the formation of this unit?

Toki: Well, see, the 100 battalion was a Japanese group from Hawaii, they came to Camp McCoy. See, they were kinda in the same fix as I was—we were in Camp Grant, see.

Mark: Well this was a much larger unit. Hawaii has a large Japanese population.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it was a big group that came there. And then the start taking, they were trained at Camp McCoy. I think they came in the fall. They

stayed all winter 'till spring I think. But they befriend a lot of people up around LaCrosse area and they showed them how true they were. So they, and some of the officers used to come down to Madison. They, you know, talked to people here, see. Then they had the whole unit down here at one time. They had a big parade for them, around the Square. So they befriend a lot of people in Madison so they knew the 100 battalion were very good. See, my mother and sister went uptown to see the parade and those guys spotted my mother and father. After the parade they came over and the talked to my mother and sister and they befriended them so they used to come down to Madison quite frequently. They used to come to our house, they kicked their shoes off and sprawled all over the floor, relax. They made themselves right at home and my mother would cook them some Japanese food for 'em, you know, makeshift Japanese food, you know 'cause we couldn't get all the ingredients.

Mark: Now, I was going to ask you that actually 'cause you mentioned that previously. Before the war did you have trouble getting ingredients for standard Japanese dishes?

Toki: We used to get them from California.

Mark: Yeah, and I suspect that that was not the case after the war started 'cause of rationing.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So we, that's how we got some of the food, from California. But after evacuation we couldn't get it anymore so we made a lot of makeshift stuff, made it look like Japanese food [laughs]. So, and they were happy with it because we had rice and things like that, see. They were really itching for rice at that time. And—so—when I was at Camp Grant they asked me if I wanted to go join those guys, some of those officers did. But I don't know, I didn't think I wanted to go with them yet.

Mark: What was your reluctance?

Toki: I don't know. Something told me not to do it at that time. Maybe I thought maybe—I don't know 'cause that's something, something said something to me not to do it yet at that time. But they asked me to join them. But then I would have been one of the original 100 battalion boys but I'm not original. So—ah—it's—so they—when I—those guys moved to Shelby, Mississippi, then they have maneuvers and they went through regular Army training but in the meantime we were at Camp Grant and we had heard that they were going to close Camp Grant, see. And then we heard they were forming a 442 in Shelby, see. But then when they, we stayed there to close up Shelby, I mean Camp Grant, then I went back to Fort Sheridan again, got in the pool, stayed there maybe a month or so. Then I went to Camp Blanding, Florida. Had a

real basic training of sixteen weeks. They gave us everything. They showed us how to drive everything, shoot everything, shoot enemy equipment, real combat training.

Mark: Now, is this with the other Japanese-American boys?

Toki: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: So you all, you still remained all together through this whole thing.

Toki: We still remained all together. We were never mingled with Caucasians at all. We had Caucasian officers but that's all. And maybe one or two cadres but we were always together. So, from Camp Grant, to Fort Sheridan, to Camp Blanding, Florida, we were all together. Then, see, there was another group at McClellan, Fort McClellan in Georgia. There was another big group 'cause, see, what they did was there were guys stationed at Fort Custer, Jefferson Barracks and place like that, you know, clusters of Orientals just like there was at Camp Grant, see. So they rounded them, all of us, up together and shipped us to Blanding in Florida. I mean Blanding and McClellan, see, so they had our sixteen weeks basic. So, while we were in Blanding we used to go on furlough and there was one incident I had from down there—was—I went on a furlough and I think I was going to Jacksonville, Florida. You know—how the South was all segregated from black and white. Well, I got on the bus. There's lotta of room in the back. I could have been sat there, back there, comfortably, but two white women got a hold of me and they said, "No, no, you stay up here." They wouldn't let me go back there. So she made the other white woman move over and she moved over, sat me right there. That's the first time I ever had that kind of incident happen to me [laugh]. So it's, so I, that's where I first saw real segregation.

Mark: Kind of an odd sight for a guy from Wisconsin I suppose.

Toki: Yeah, yeah 'cause I never experienced anything like that. Well, I went anywhere, I did everything, from Wisconsin, see. So I never thought of that kind of stuff. But it kind of surprised me[laughs].

Mark: Were you, I suppose you were in uniform.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. We were, a whole bunch of seats, empty seats back there. She hung onto me and pulled me over, sat me down, she hung on to me. [laughs] She thought I was going to get up and go back there. Well, that's, well, there's a feeling that they were, you know, that the South had at that time. I knew they were segregated, you know, black and white down there but I never knew that kind of thing would happen to me.

Mark: Yeah, yeah, hum.

Toki: So going back to the basic, we had real intensive combat training. Then we got done with that, they gave us furlough, two weeks furlough on our own so we, each one of us went individual way. Some of them, you know, some of the fams [families] were in camp so some of the guys went back to the camp and looked up there family and stuff like that. I came home, by myself, with my traveling orders, and then I spent my traveling time furlough up here. Then I went, I had to report back to Shelby. See, that's were 442 was at. When I reported back there, well, all of us got together again. At that time we—all of us, most of us, had stripes. We had sergeants and corporals and tech sergeants 'cause, you know, we do, to make us quiet at Camp Grant or McClellan or Jefferson, wherever we were, they gave us stripes, see. So those guys down there, the 442 guys, they were in training. They were nothing but privates and they were kind of, you know, envy, or jealous of us so we used to have fights all the time down there. We used to—we were restricted, we couldn't go to PX or go to theater. Nothing. We were restricted to barracks because we would have had casualties amongst ourselves [laughs]. But they used to come to our barracks and attack us. So some nights there'd be fights in there, the beds would be thrown out of the barracks, and everything would be flying out of the barracks, and the guys would be flying out the door [laughs]. So they found out that we weren't getting along so they shipped us out. So they shipped us out to, put us on train, shipped us out to Fort George Meade.

Mark: In Maryland?

Toki: Yeah. And then they processed to go overseas. Then they moved us to Camp Patrick Henry and that's where the embarkation point was. So it was on the ship, on a troop ship, English troop ship.

Mark: It was a British ship.

Toki: Yeah.

Mark: And you went from Virginia to where?

Toki: Well, we went through Gibraltar, we landed in Naples, and Naples was all bombed up. The docks were not there so they improvised. Ships that were tipped over on the side, they laid planks and stuff for walk on. And then we, they took us to a grape yard, vineyard outside of Naples. We stayed there for a few days.

Mark: In some tents, jeez, I would hope. Or did you sleep out in the open?

Toki: I can't remember that part there. Everything was, I was kind of curious and excited what was going on, you know. So, in the meantime, the 100 battalion and the 442 boys were beyond Rome and they were coming back, coming down to for replacements, see. So—'cause we were the third replacement for the 100 battalion and the 442.

Mark: So after Naples, they moved you up the peninsula?

Toki: No.

Mark: No?

Toki: No. They regrouped us, signed us to each company, then they shipped us to France. In the meantime, France was supposed to be invasion of southern France but the advance in France was so fast they pushed them all the way back up into central France so we had a hard time catching up to them. So we—they put us on a boat and shipped us to France. We landed in Marseilles. We stayed, I think, two or three days there in the mud, the rain, and then, in the meantime they were looking for transportation for us to get us up to the front line, see, 'cause our line was so far up there they didn't have nothing back there to haul us up there. So they got the transportation, they hauled us on trucks and train, you know, those little 4x8 trains, the boxcars. The boxcar was, you know, they called it "40 and me." Used to be 8 horses and 40 guys used to stand, get in there. Well, they load a lot of us in that, and trucks. That's when we went up. And then on the way up the Rhone River we saw what air force strafed the German convoy. You know, all the equipment, dead horses, everything was pushed off the side of the road.

Mark: Stink?

Toki: Dead animals, yeah.

Mark: So this was your real first—

Toki: Action.

Mark: —exposure. Not necessarily to being shot at but as to what happens in combat.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mark: What was your personal reaction and those around you? I mean, did it get more serious? Or did you sort of take it philosophically?



Toki: Yeah, I think we took it philosophically, that way. A lot of us guys had the idea let's get the job done and get it over with. See, that's why—see, like our motto is “Go for broke” so we did everything to go for broke. We didn't let nothing stand in front of us. It's a—so then we went up the Rhone River in France, up to around St. Di \_\_\_\_\_ and there they let us out. Then we regrouped there and they separated us from each company and things like that. I think what I—like you say in your—some of the questions, how I felt when I was up there. Gee, I don't know. I think you're mind is all geared up some way that you're not thinking straight, you're not thinking of yourself or anything.

So we—I think we pushed off up there in the morning in the woods, see. It was a forest and the Germans are flying into the trees. There were a lot of aerial bursts so we didn't have, you know, I mean when the tree, artillery shell bursts through the trees you don't know where the shrapnel is going, you know, or coming at you so a lot of us guys got wounded and killed up there. And even our tanks couldn't maneuver up there 'cause there were too many trees and stuff in there, and rocky, you know, a lot of rocks and stuff. You couldn't dig a hole. From after that, we—each squad carried ax, shovel, and a pick. You threw away everything else to protect ourselves so we could build a—chop a tree down and put a roof over the top of us in the fox hole to protect ourselves 'cause we didn't know where these shells were coming from. And the woods was so dense you couldn't see in front of you very far. It was just like, well, you know, when you're small you go play Indians. You go from tree to tree. That's the kind of thing we had to do. So we pushed off, we got the one hill down, then we had to go get another hill, get the enemy out. That hill, we bombarded that hill so hard when the Germans came out of there they were pale white. That's the first clue, I ever seen a prisoner, his face shaken and it was pathetic what we have to go through to do those things.

Mark: This was the first time you had run across a German.

Toki: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: What was your reaction? I mean, the Nazis, the enemies. For someone whose been through a grueling combat campaign and then to see the enemy. I mean, what is, well, I can only ask you your personal reaction but what was yours?

Toki: Well, I think some of the guys had real bad feeling about it. To me, I had a feeling they were human beings. He wanted to live and I want to live. It's him or I, see. So, no I, he was doing something for his country and I was doing something for our country, see, and we had our orders to do it. Just like I said before, it was him or I, see. So if he's going to get me, I'm going to get him, see. But it's kind of sad and pathetic to do it that way 'cause everybody's a human being. [Pause] It was something that had to be done or we had to do

because the reason why we were so highly decorated and got put in places where nobody else would go, well, we had our pride, we had our guts, and we had to prove something, see. To prove that we were loyal Americans because, you know, some of the boys parents and family were incarcerated in camp back home so I think a lot of boys had that idea in their mind when they done it.

Mark: The proving one's loyalty perhaps led to a more fierce fighting spirit, you think?

Toki: I think so, I think so, I think so 'cause a lot of them—well—seems like when we were up in central France we had a general, 36<sup>th</sup> general, that we—he wanted us to rescue a lost battalion. There were 275 men in that group, and we were under-strength too. You know how many men are in a battalion, a little over 2,000 men, see, to rescue 275 men. So, we were under-strength. We didn't have that many 'cause we were already—didn't have no replacement or anything at that time so we were really under-strength. So the general comes up there with his aide, he asked what we were doing up there, 'cause we were stalled, we couldn't go any farther. He made us go. In the meantime, one of German sniper got his aide, killed him right there. But, see, this general, he was so gung-ho about it that his—our life was expendable so he—we pushed through and got those guys out but then we had high, high casualties 'cause, see, some of the companies only had one guy left in the company and some of them had seven. My company, A Company, only had 21 guys left 'cause I—and I was a squad leader. I only came back with one. So, you know—and then go rescue that 275 men. We lost over half of our men. And then when the general asked us for our review, parade review, he—so our colonel, regimental colonel, got us all together and he asked the colonel “Where are all the men?” and he couldn't, the colonel couldn't say anything anymore 'cause he lost them all. See, that's the kind of general he was 'cause he didn't care about any, he just wanted his, well, decorations or whatever you want, his citations, whatever was given for that, rescuing that lost battalion.

Mark: Do you know if he ever got it? Or what ever happened to him.

Toki: I know I've been reading in some of the books that he met some of these officers that were there with us, he wanted to talk to them—they wouldn't even talk to him. Wouldn't even shake his hand. They hated his guts for pushing us like that.

Mark: Do you remember his name?

Toki: Dahlquist (sp??)

Mark: Dahlquist (sp??)?

Toki: Yeah.

Mark: I'm not familiar with that particular incident.

Toki: No, it's ah—it was a—[pause] it was real tragic thing we did 'cause before we got there they took us off the line to give us rest and clean clothes. We barely had time to take a shower, change clothes, anything. We got called back up to the front lines to rescue this lost battalion. The guys in the lost battalion were happy to see us [laughs], but the suffering we had to do to get them because the other regiments of that same division tried to go get them but they couldn't penetrate the German line but we penetrated. How we did it, it was just like sheer guts and pride and we had to do it. Just like—and it wasn't easy, it was in the woods and Germans were all dug in and we were going forward. I think we did it in five days. While the other regiment couldn't do it, we did it in five days.

In the meantime we didn't have no replacement at all 'cause they were all Japanese guys. So it's a—and there's a lot of things that we did. See, another thing was they pushed us so hard we got caught behind the German line, too. We were trapped for three days. But then our own regiment of the 442 came and got us out. We were without—we were low on ammunition and food, water 'cause we advanced too fast 'cause the general told us to go. So—and there's a lot of little things that—what we did is—is like pride and guts and we went for everything, “Go for Broke”—'cause—we—had a hard time about it. Then we went to, well—after the lost battalion they—and like I said before, we had the dress review, but then they send us, oh, we went back up the front line again with very little guys left just to hold a line and then they sent some other guys up there to replace us. But it's a—then they sent us to southern France. Then we had a—that's where we regrouped, see, 'cause we got more replacements, see.

Mark: In combat, from your first exposure to it and as time goes on, is there any getting used to it? I mean, how do you get yourself to go back out there and do it every time? Does it get easier? Or is it always the same difficult process? And what keeps you going out there?

Toki: I don't know what makes us—keep us going up there. I don't know. It's something that back here, somewhere says you got to go, you got to go, because it may be, your number is there, see, and somebody from up there says you got to go. And if you're number is not there, you live, see. So I don't, that's something hard to figure out.

Mark: It's, perhaps, an unanswerable question.

Toki: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: But is there a way to condition yourself to going into combat? Or is it difficult every time?

Toki: Well, I think the first day is a little hard because you don't know what to expect.

Mark: Right.

Toki: See, you don't know what's going on. But as your days go on, you know, you prepare yourself and you dig, you prepare yourself to protect yourself, protect yourself any way you can. Like I said, like the guys I had in my squad, twelve guys, like up in the woods we had shovels and picks and anything else we threw away. We carried extra ammunition but we had extra tools, too, to protect ourselves. We didn't have no mess gear, we threw those away. The only thing we had was one spoon, the rest was all—and then we had a half a blanket, threw the other half, cut it off, threw it away, it was too heavy, and no socks, so.

Mark: Is there a point when it gets to be too much combat to handle? I hear battle fatigue or post traumatic stress.

Toki: Yeah, there is. I think there's a breaking point 'cause I know some of our guys had stress point broke. So I don't know where the breaking point is, see. But I think it's, a lot of it is your mental capacity.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

Toki: ... what you're doing in a way. Because, if you believe in something, you do it. I think a lot of us guys believed in what we were doing to get this darn thing over with, see. And then, well, like I said before, a lot of these kid's parents were incarcerated, had everything taken away from them, they had to start from scratch when they got out, so that's some of the motive was, you know.

Mark: In a unit such as yours that was so highly decorated and involved in so much combat, was there, did you see much combat stress or battle fatigue as it was called at the time? I mean, did many guys crack up under the stress and that sort of thing?

Toki: Well, I think there was one or two I know but not on whole, we held up because, see, we were more of a buddy system. We were always had somebody with us, see. Even when we dug a hole in the ground, there was always two of us in the hole, so I think that kind of supported each other. See, we were not alone at all.

Mark: And that was helpful.

Toki: Well, that's right. I think that's, to me it is 'cause if I needed something, you know, then I could depend on the other person to help me, see. Or if he wanted me to help, I help him, see. We just more of a comradeship and I think the whole battalion, regiment were like that. We still are like that yet.

Mark: I'm coming up to that. I'll ask some questions about veterans organizations and that sort of thing so I'll come back to that. I'm interested in that actually. Um, I presume you weren't constantly in combat. You mentioned at least once that you were pulled back. I'm curious to know how often you were on the line and how much time did you spend in the back.

Toki: Well, the only time I spent off the line was when we went to southern France. That's the only time we had some time off. That's when we had to regroup.

Mark: And you got replacements then.

Toki: Yeah.

Mark: Other Japanese-American soldiers.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mark: Probably a very welcome sight I suspect.

Toki: It was, it was [laughs], it was a real—

Mark: When it came to breaking these new guys in, if you look at the experience of the Vietnam War, one of the problems was that there was this constant rotation of troops and breaking new guys in along with battle-hardened guys such as yourself. It's a challenge I suppose. How did you guys meet it?

Toki: Well, we took the new guys and trained 'em. We had a field out there and we trained them. While we're doing front line post—guard duty some of us come off the front line and trained these new guys. So they went to school and trained 'em. Showed them how to do demolition work and booby traps and mines, things like that.

Mark: Did you try and scare them a little bit? Or were you just pretty straight with them?

Toki: We were kind of straight with them because ah—they'll find out sooner or later how scary it sometime.

Mark: But you didn't try to exaggerate that or any sort of—

Toki: No, no.

Mark: And how did they, I mean, how did these new guys seem? Did they seem frightened? Did they seem confident?

Toki: They had confidence in us old-timers. They trusted us. They had to trust us 'cause we knew what we were getting into.

Mark: So, being on the line all the time, I don't suppose you had much contact with the French for example, or as you got into Germany.

Toki: No, we didn't. Well, going back to before we went to France, we were supposed—I mean before we went to southern France, we were supposed to go to German border but we didn't get there 'cause we didn't have no more guys left, so that's why we went. And contact with the civilians—well—we had some but France didn't care for us too much.

Mark: Why was that?

Toki: Well—they think we're elegant or something, they think they're elegant I mean.

Mark: You mean Americans generally or the ...

Toki: French think they're high-brow.

Mark: Oh, sure they do[both laugh]. I'm well aware, actually.

Toki: Because, no—

Mark: And so fraternization with the French wasn't terribly much of an issue.

Toki: No, not too much of an issue. Oh, well, we fraternized with the female every once in awhile but with the men, no. Then—well—we—sometimes we catch a Frenchman and we'd interrogate him. But the French people are different altogether. Then like in, when we went to southern France for our champagne war—

Mark: Our champagne war?

Toki: Yeah, that's what we called it.

Mark: This was the reintegrating of these new guys.

Toki: Yeah, that's where we had a little more free time. We'd go to town. See we were—at that time—we were in Monte Carlo, see, but that was off limits to us.

Mark: Really? And why was that? Too much gambling.

Toki: No, there were too many spies and stuff like that in that area.

Mark: Well, France was an odd situation actually. Did you come across the French Underground or the Collaborators? I mean, there's sort of a really difficult mix of French.

Toki: I know. No, we didn't get, I didn't get mixed up with them too much.

Mark: So your fighting experiences were mostly against the organized German Army. There was no French Resistance or any of that sort of thing?

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mark: Um, when VE Day happened, where were you and your unit?

Toki: Well, before we get to VE Day.

Mark: Okay.

Toki: We left France.

Mark: Oh, you did?

Toki: Yeah, we left France. Went to Italy. See, then we opened up the Po Valley Campaign. See the Po Valley Campaign was stalemate. They were just holding them. To finish it up they called us from France back to Italy 'cause we fought in Italy before.

Mark: Yeah.

Toki: They fought around Cassino and Anzio and places like that, see, Belvedere. But I was never there, so—but I was there in Po Valley, see. And then, see, our sector had the 92<sup>nd</sup> Division up there. That was all colored division. And they were supposed to hold that line but they couldn't hold it, see. In the meantime, they had American division in back of them to keep the 92<sup>nd</sup> guys up there while the Germans are in front of them harassing them. So, they were getting harassed so much they start moving back, see. They're losing ground,

you know. To prevent them from losing ground they had this 34<sup>th</sup> American division in back of them so they got it from both ends if they moved any more, see. So they found out they were not too good so they broke up that division, at that time. So they had one black regiment, one anti aircraft divi [division]—anti aircraft guys turned into infantrymen and then they had our regiment there. So, that's how—it was all American division then 'cause it was—92<sup>nd</sup> Division was all American division. And then when we were ready they put us up there. And ah, we spearheaded that opening. They said we could do it in five days but we did it in one day. We broke that line in one day, went through, see. And then there were other regiments kept up along with us, see. We just kept pushing the Germans back. Then the whole Gothic line moved at the same time. So, that shows—that tells you that we were, what's another word for [pause], we were expendable, our guys were expendable 'cause we pushed it and broke open the line. See, that's where I got hurt, see.

Mark: This was your first combat wound?

Toki: Yeah. Well, I had one, going back to France, I had one little scratch. Little teeny scratch, didn't amount to much but I didn't get no Purple Heart for that but I got the one in Italy.

Mark: Sounds like you're remarkably lucky if nothing else.

Toki: I know. Something, somebody up there told me to, see, I believe up there, see. But, ah—so we pushed off and then we finished up in Italy up to Switzerland border, we pushed them all the way up to Switzerland border and the Germans surrendered then. And the VE Day was up in Italy, in Po Valley.

Mark: And what was the reaction?

Toki: Let's see [pause], where was I? Was I in the hospital? I think I still was in the hospital with the rest of the guys but my wound wasn't that bad, you know. I stayed in the hospital 'til the end of the war 'cause I saw enough already [laughs]. Then they shipped me all the way back to Naples, they was going to send me home. But I told them I didn't want to go home. I want to go back to my unit so I got another boat ride all the way back to the Po Valley area. Then I joined them up at Lake Como area.

Mark: Now the war against Japan was still going on.

Toki: Still going on.

Mark: Was there any talk about sending you guys over to the Pacific?



Toki: One day we were alerted. They had us pack up everything. One day. And then they rescind that order, they made us occupational troops so we were to guard German prisoners all that time, and processing them. We had—well, I had a German prisoner that he was a merchant marine I found out, he was an elderly person, you know, I don't know how old he was but he was a merchant marine, that we were guarding. So he used to—he was in the stockade so we used to let him out, he'd clean our boots, shoes, wash our mess gear, even cleaned our rifle [laughs]. Well, we gave him—used to give him candy and gum and cigarettes so he was tickled. He figured his days are, you know, all done for, so. So [pause], the only way I could talk to him was I talked to him in Italian, he understood Italian, but then I want to learn German so he talked German to me and translated it back to Italy—Italian, so I knew what he was saying. It was kind of interesting at that time. Then I went on pass and things like that.

Mark: Yeah. Was Italy any different than France when you went out on pass? I mean, the war was over so, I mean, the situations are kind of different.

Toki: Yeah, it's different but its—people are a little different because people in northern—anything north of Rome—people are nicer. They're more wholesome and they're more, you know, friendlier 'cause a lot of them had that, a lot of them are that German or Swiss blood in them, they're mixed there more. But anything south of Rome, you know, you get the Sicilians and—

Mark: A little tougher I would imagine.

Toki: Tougher, yeah. They were tougher. And they were, well, they're more beggars, they didn't have no pride, see.

Mark: Now, you came back to the U.S. fairly soon after the war was over, before Christmas of '45.

Toki: Yeah, I came home, let's see, I came home on a liberty ship.

Mark: Did you come home on points? I mean, did you have enough points and your time was up.

Toki: Yeah, I had too many points. See, I kind of want to stay there 'til the regiment came home but I didn't think that way 'cause I had too many points. 'Cause, you know, I had a lot of points, I was stateside and then I had a lot of points over there, see. So I came home that way.

Mark: Liberty ship?

Toki: Liberty ship.

Mark: What was the mood like on the ship? When ...

Toki: I'll tell you this much, there were 500 of us guys on that ship. It was a cargo ship. There was nothing in it except iron ore in the bottom of the boat for ballast 'cause we hit a storm coming back, you know, how the waves are like this? Well, when the waves are—the boat tipped down this way, the propeller'd be sticking out there [laughs]. You're going back and R-R-R-R-R. Then when we had our food, Thanksgiving food on the ship, so—nothing to sit down on. It was stand up table so our food would be sitting here in front of you and the ship moved one way, your food would be going down this way and then it goes the other way, you'd be going the other way, you'd be eating somebody else's food [laughs].

Mark: I suppose it all works out in the end.

Toki: Everything came out all right. So, we didn't know whose food we were eating [laughs]. Five hundred of us guys were on that boat. And then, we found out when we got into port, they broke a seam, so maybe I would have had—maybe fish would have had me out there.

Mark: But you did get back.

Toki: Yeah, I got back.

Mark: Did you land in New York?

Toki: No, I land back same place where I started out from. Camp Patrick.

Mark: So, in terms of your out-processing, you had, did you go to Fort McCoy or did you do that sort of thing on the East Coast somewhere?

Toki: No. I landed Camp Patrick Henry, Newport News. Then they put us on a train. I came back to Fort Sheridan. I came back to Fort Sheridan. Well, I had—we had a choice, we had a choice. We could have went to New York or Boston or somewhere to get discharged but I wanted to get out, see, so I came back to Fort Sheridan and got discharged out of there.

Mark: And so started the rest of your life.

Toki: Yeah.

Mark: When you came back to Madison, you're a recently discharged veteran, what, when it came to getting your life back on track, what were your priorities? For example, did you go back in the farming business with your folks?

Toki: I came back in the wintertime so I had all winter and part of spring to get myself readjusted.

Mark: Was it difficult for you?

Toki: Well, I was restless. I was pacing the floor. Then I was smoking at that time.

Mark: Which you hadn't done before the Army, I take it.

Toki: Yup, yup, yup. Well, everything was free, see. Even our beer, whiskey rations, it was all free so we used to do those things. But ah—no, I was real restless at that time. Then I—let's see, then I met my wife then, too, 'cause I wasn't married then. So—so there was no—and I was cold, you know, coming from Italy and come to Wisconsin. I was real cold. I wasn't used to it, so my dad took me uptown and got me warm clothes [laughs].

Mark: First things first, I suppose.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mark: But when the springtime came around, did you go back in the farming business? Or did you—

Toki: No, I went back farming. Yeah.

Mark: There were various government programs for veterans. There was unemployment insurance, housing loans, and GI Bill and that sort of thing. Did you use any of those at any time? GI Bill was one that was very popular.

Toki: Yeah, I used GI Bill for a little while, two years.

Mark: Where'd you go to school?

Toki: Here, university.

Mark: The university.

Toki: In the Ag. I went to Ag school. But then, I don't know, I just dropped out of there. I didn't go any further so I stayed on the farm. Then I got married, so.

Mark: So, after the war, many veterans had trouble finding work. That wasn't your situation.

Toki: No, that wasn't my—see, ah—well—I tried to get unemployment compensation after I got discharged.

Mark: But no luck with that.

Toki: No luck, see, 'cause I didn't know the right person, see. But then I met a buddy that I knew. See, I dropped by GI insurance to half, then he come up and talked to me and he told me to reinstate that insurance to back full \$10,000, see.

Mark: Was this just a friend of yours or was it someone who worked in veteran's services?

Toki: He worked for veteran's service but he was a friend of mine.

Mark: What was his name by some chance.

Toki: Bill Walch.

Mark: Walch?

Toki: Yeah. He's passed away now. He used to work with me before the war during my—I think it was high school years. Him and I used to work together. So I knew him for quite awhile. Then he talked me into it. So I got my insurance back to \$10,000, so, I had that.

Mark: There were various home loans from the state and federal government for veterans and someone in farming, perhaps those were of interest to you. Did you use any of those?

Toki: No, no, I never thought of it. Well, 'cause—I never thought of that 'cause the farm was there and my dad was there. I just fell in step with that and progressed along.

Mark: In terms of medical or psychological adjustments, did you have any trouble in that regard? You mentioned you had been wounded. Was it something that continued to affect you after the war? Did you have much contact with the VA system and that sort of thing?

Toki: Well, I have now.

Mark: When you say "now," you mean like over the age of 60.

Toki: Well, no. I always had a little bit of contact with the VA Hospital but now I have it more 'cause—on account of my age. But ah—no, I didn't ask too much from the VA when I was in my younger days. I just, you know, let things slide by I think. But as I grow older I realize I need a little more help. Then I have my compensation that Bill Walch helped me get back.

Mark: The GI insurance thing.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mark: As people get older, it's natural that they need more help as you said. But at this point in your life, are some of the problems that you have related to the war? Or is it simply the process of getting older?

Toki: No, nothing related to war. Well, see I was wounded in the head, see. But I used to get headaches but nothing, you know, drastically bad.

Mark: Nothing to affect your making a living it seems.

Toki: No, no, no.

Mark: Um, sometimes combat veterans come back with nightmares and these sorts of problems. Did you experience any problems like that? And if you did, how long did they last?

Toki: Well, sometimes I get them.

Mark: To this very day.

Toki: Yeah. But it don't last very long.

Mark: When you first came home was there a transition problem there? Or does this sort of just crop up from time to time.

Toki: It just crops up from time to time. I think—I don't know, maybe it's under certain stress or something. I don't know—'cause every once in awhile I get—then I perspire, but it's nothing I could pinpoint it to.

Mark: And nothing debilitating, nothing that's caused you to seek any attention or anything.

Toki: No, no.

Mark: Okay. I've got just one last area to cover, and I know you're involved in this, and that involves veteran's organizations and veteran's reunions and those kinds of things.

Toki: Yeah.

Mark: When you came home, when you were a young veteran in Madison in the '40s, at that time did you join any groups like the Legion and the VFW?

Toki: I joined the Legion because—see—they helped my father, mother, so I joined the Legion at that time, with that post.

Mark: Which post was it, do you remember?

Toki: Post 57.

Mark: Fifty-seven. And were you active? Did you join for any reasons other than the assistance they gave your folks?

Toki: No, I wasn't too active at that time. Well, I had, I think I had too much other things on my mind, things I wanted to accomplish, see.

Mark: As a young man.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, as a young man, see.

Mark: So, as time went on, did you get more involved?

Toki: Yeah, yeah, I got more involved, see, 'cause right now I belong to American Legion, VFW, DAV and, let's see, American Legion, VFW, DAV, oh, The Purple Heart.

Mark: That's quite an assemblance of organizations. When did you join these other groups? Were you—a little later in life? In your forties or fifties.

Toki: Yeah, yeah, later in life I joined.

Mark: And for what, and as someone in their fifties, what possessed you to join these groups?

Toki: Well, I kind of want to support them, you know. That's why I did it. See, then I belong to this 100 battalion of the 442. I had their L.A. and Hawaii so I belong to that, too.

Mark: Now, when did these veteran's reunions start? Was it fairly soon after the war? Or, again, a little later as you get more time and money.

Toki: Yeah, they were too busy making money and getting their family going. And—they're more active after they retire, see.

Mark: And do you attend these reunions fairly often?

Toki: I go to the Purple Heart department convention and things like that. But this-- I've been to—let's see—three of them already. See, ah—I think the last one was when I went to Europe, when we went to the lost battalion area and \_\_\_\_\_, Dijon. Then we went to Dakar, 'cause our group was there, too—our field artillery was there. And then we went through Austria, France, I mean, Switzerland and then into Italy.

Mark: When was this? Just a couple of years ago? Or was it awhile ago now?

Toki: Yeah, a couple of years ago.

Mark: Like for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary?

Toki: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mark: Was it, um, what was it like going back?

Toki: Well, I was back there once before. I took my family back there. See, I have a family in England—so—I had him drive, we had a car, so we toured the area in France where we were but we didn't go down to Rome or anything at that time. But I just wanted to show my daughter where we were, and my wife, so they could understand what I'm talking about, see. If they didn't see it, it don't mean nothing to them. Right now I could talk to them, they understand what we did and what we went through and how things were 'cause you hear other guys talk about it.

Mark: Yeah, yeah. Was it helpful for them? And was it helpful for you to go back?

Toki: Well, it was kind of helpful 'cause—reconstruction of the area, what the damage the war did, 'cause like in—well, the first time I went back there was—we went to—we were never up there around Omaha Beach or anyplace like that but I could see the destruction that happened there and how it was restored and this town, St. Lo, where they had the church bombed, how they restored it and how they kept some of the mementos inside the church, you know, so people could see it. Things like that. Only place we see some destruction is in these little hamlets or villages. You could see potholes in the

walls and things like that. But in the big city, you don't see any of that. Where they took the rubbish, I don't know.

Mark: Yeah, I spent 2 ½ years in Germany myself. You'd never know.

Toki: Never know. Can you figure out what they did with the rubbish?

Mark: I have no idea, no.

Toki: That's what I can't figure out, what'd they do with the rubbish?

Mark: There were a couple of other things I was going to ask you. Oh, the school. Now this is one of the reasons I know your name and why you're on television all the time. It's because they named a school after you. Why don't you tell me the story about how that all got started.

Toki: Well, let's see. The school started was, see, they were looking for some minority names and my supervisor, or whatever you want to call him, my boss at the VA Hospital, had some kids going to that school. And him and his wife and his kids and some other kids got together for submitting names. They had told me they submit it. And me working with him, well, this is what he says, that he was getting tired of naming schools after Indians and blacks and people that are deceased. He thought he would like to see a live one named at the school. So they propose that, so—and the kids did the research on all these five names. And then they present to the student body, and then they present to each grade—student body—then they present it to the school board, then it went to the superintendent of school to get okayed by her. And then they had a—they—where they had to come to school and dedicate that name. And—to me, I don't take the credit but I give the credit to the kids 'cause they done it. I don't give it to the parents or nothing. I give all the credit to the kids doing it that way.

Mark: Is it a pleasure or is a burden to have a school named after you?

Toki: Well, the way I feel is—after I pass on, there'll be something here in my name, see, so that name won't die, it will be here for a long, long time.

Mark: Do you get to the school? I mean do you stop in occasionally?

Toki: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, I stop in there every once in awhile but it disturbed the class [laughs].

Mark: I suppose they all know who you are.



Toki: Yeah, yeah. So if I'm walking on the sidewalk, try to go to the entrance, and all the kids—a couple of kids see me, and then the whole class comes and starts waving to me. So I kind of sneak in the back door [laughs].

Mark: Oh, the burdens of being a celebrity I suppose.

Toki: Yeah, I don't know about that part [laughs], I don't know about that part. But that's how it got selected.

Mark: I see.

Toki: So I go back there every once in awhile. But I go to other schools, too.

Mark: Yeah. Um, oh, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this past couple of years here. As a World War II veteran, does that mean, I mean the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, what has that meant to you as a veteran?

Toki: Well, let's see—boy—it means a lot to me 'cause with my experience of what I went through, and what I had to do, and how I lived through it, and how the world changed. So, it's hard to say 'cause—see—coming back to reunions—I—we had our reunion at Camp McCoy also 'cause, see, the 100 battalion was there, so we dedicated five—restored five barracks to 'ere original setting, so there was five barracks up there we dedicated for Camp McCoy. So the PR lady up there gave us a big splash for us up there.

Mark: The atomic bomb issue has been one of the more controversial aspects of this past year. Any comments on that at all?

Toki: Well—to me—atomic bomb was no good. But—if they didn't drop it we would [pause], the war would have never ended that quick. There'd be more casualties, more people killed on both sides, more suffering, so maybe it was a good thing. I don't know. To me, it was kind of sad to have it done but 'cause I was over there, in Japan, I went to that park.

Mark: Oh, you have?

Toki: Yeah. See, I went there—we went to Japan, we went to the peace park, and we went to their museum but when I went to the museum they have a guest book there. I couldn't sign that book. It made me feel so bad. Then I went to—then I came back to Hawaii, I was on the Arizona ship, battleship. That gives me another weird feeling. Just like at Hiroshima. So it's, ah—deep down, I feel bad. It kind of affects me—that that kind of thing has to happen. Like on the Arizona, there's over 11,000 men still down there. And then like at Hiroshima, you go to museum and places like that, it's—it's something to remember and you can't forget it. The same thing with Dakar, too.

Mark: With Dakar?

Toki: Yeah, you know, that German concentration camp they ...

Mark: Oh, yeah.

Toki: In Munich.

Mark: Uh hum, right.

Toki: I've been to those three places and it's hard to forget those kinds of things. What atrocity that people do to each other. So it's not—I don't know—it's not human, that's the way I look at it, 'cause I don't want to harm you and you don't harm me so you want to be peace.

Mark: Well, I wish we were ending on a lighter note but that's pretty much all the questions I have.

Toki: Oh, sorry [laughs].

Mark: Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you think we've skipped over or anything you want to elaborate on a little?

Toki: No, I think we covered quite a bit unless you have more. You could always call me up and ask more questions.

Mark: Well, perhaps I will.

Toki: You could do it on telephone, too.

Mark: Sure, I've interviewed guys on the phone before actually. So in lieu of that I guess, thanks for coming in.

Toki: Well, I'm glad to come.

Mark: I'm glad you came.

Toki: I don't know if I—gave enough knowledge, I don't know.

Mark: Oh, yeah, absolutely, absolutely. It was very interesting.

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