

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
TOMMY A. TUTEN
Radio Operator, 82nd Fighter Control Squadron
1995

OH
360

OH
360

Tuten, Timothy A., (1923-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassettes (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Recordings: 1 sound cassettes (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Tuten, of Monona, Wis., describes his World War II service as a radio operator with the 82nd Fighter Control Squadron in the Army Air Forces. He talks about working for the Norfolk Naval Yards for an apprenticeship program, enlisting in the Air Force, being sent to basic training at Camp Lee (Virginia) and Petersburg Induction Center (Virginia), mechanic school at Kiesler Field (Mississippi) and radio school at Truax Field in Madison. Tuten describes life at Truax Field including recreational activities and parties stating that he met men from all over the Midwest, but that most of the men in his unit were from the South. He relates his transfer to Camp McClellan (New Jersey) and Camp Kilmer (New Jersey) prior to being shipped to Oran (North Africa). He tells of his unit's combat experiences across North Africa, into Italy, through southern France until they reached Northern Germany. He describes the German "airborne artillery" Stuka dive-bombers as turning your blood cold as they screamed by. Tuten tells about two guns that made up the German battery that shelled the Anzio Beachhead; together they comprised "Anzio Annie". He provides an interesting discussion about the German soldiers, his religious beliefs, the German towns reduced to rubble, and his tour in the Pacific. He characterizes his role in combat as keeping the radio operating and tells several stories concerning the radio. Also discussed are fox holes, recreation, and British soldiers. Tuten describes his priorities when he was discharged as getting married and finding a job. He points out that after his return to the United States in 1945, he eventually settled in Wis. and purchased a home using the GI bill. He states that he has attended several reunions.

Biographical Sketch

Tommy A. Tuten (b. 1923) was born in Miami Beach (Florida) and entered service while living in Morehead City (North Carolina). He served as a radio operator with the 82nd Fighter Control Squadron in the Army Air Forces and was involved in campaigns in Tunisia, Sicily, Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, Northern France, Southern France, the Rhineland, and in Central Europe. Tuten served from July 1942 to October 1945 and attained the rank of corporal. At the time of the interview, he lived in Monona, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by WDVA Staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by Gayle Martinson, 2004.

Interview Transcript

Mark: Today's date is March 17, 1995. Happy St. Patrick's Day. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview with Mr. Tommy A. Tuten of Monona, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Army Air Forces in World War II. Good morning, how are you doing?

Tuten: I'm fine.

Mark: Let's start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and a little bit about your upbringing and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Tuten: I was born in Miami Beach in a Coast Guard station in 1923.

Mark: Was your father career Coast Guard?

Tuten: Ya. He was career Coast Guard. In 1926 a hurricane washed it out into the ocean and so they closed it. Then Daddy was, my mother had died when I was two, she died in 1925 and so I moved to Vera Beach, Florida with my aunt, my brother and I until I was 14 and then my father had since remarried and was stationed in North Carolina at Warhead City and so he wanted us to come up and spend the rest of our school years with him. So my brother went up a year before I did and I was there for three years. When I finished high school things were just starting to open up and I applied to the Norfolk Naval Yards for an apprenticeship program. Instead, I was put into the apprenticeship program for the Naval Air Station at Norfolk so at 17 I went to Norfolk, and was working there. It was a nice job, I was learning how to be an aircraft electrician and I was making, for me, an ungodly sum of money, almost \$30 a week with overtime. So everything was going fine until December 7 of 1941 when I was in the theater and they kept shutting the movie down every few minutes, "Sailors from SSO report out front. There is a truck waiting to take you back to your ship. Soldiers from Camp Lee, or whatever, outside. There is a truck waiting to take you back to camp. I couldn't figure out what the Hell it was all about. I came out of the theater, Pearl Harbor had been bombed. My first reaction was much the same as I think most of us, "Where the Hell is Pearl Harbor?" I had no idea where it was. So from that moment on, our work week jumped from 48 hours a week to 12 hours a day seven days a week. After about three weeks of that they discovered that that was more than we could handle. Those last two hours we worked we were undoing what we'd done in the first ten. So they cut it back to a ten-hour day, six days a week.

Mark: Specifically you were doing what?

Tuten: I was in the assembly and repair department for the Navy for their fighters and their landing boats, PBYS, PBMs. We'd take a plane in and strip it right down to

the frame. All of the parts were sent out to be checked over and painted or whatever had to be done. New wiring put in or if modifications were being made and I was learning how to do all of this. I got to work on fighter planes, on engine mounts, on flying boats and it was real interesting. I really enjoyed it. But then, in the summer, I knew I was going to get drafted, I was 18-years-old and I thought you better enlist so that you get what you want. So I enlisted in the Air Force and from Norfolk they sent me to Petersburg Induction Center in Virginia and from there down to Kiesler Field in Mississippi and three weeks later I was in Truax Field in Madison for a 12-week radio course. I think I was selected for radio simply because I had done electrical work on planes as a civilian.

Mark: I'd like to back track a little bit. Back to about 1940 or so when you said things started to open up, I assume that what you meant was there were jobs.

Tuten: Yes. Jobs started to be available that were never available before. Like the Navy shipyards program, they only took in a very limited amount of trainees each year but when the war started, they just suddenly couldn't get enough. It made a big difference.

Mark: So this was mostly war work, the jobs that were opening up. Did you have a sense that we were going to get in this war before Pearl Harbor?

Tuten: At that age, I was only 17, I didn't really think that much about it. In retrospect you knew we were going to get in it. We couldn't keep shipping all those arms and supplies to England and not get in it. [Laughs] By the time I was 18 in that summer of '42, I knew we were going to get in it. In fact, we already had by then.

Mark: So basic training. I remember going to basic training. You went to Kiesler Field. Is that where you got the hair cut and the drill sergeant and the whole thing?

Tuten: No. [Laughs] We got the hair cut at Camp Lee in Virginia when we first came in. Down there they weren't really ready for us. We didn't have a rifle. I didn't fire a rifle until after the war was over. I couldn't be shipped home or discharged until it was on my record. We went out after the war was over, in Germany, and fired. Mostly it was drills. Drills and drills and drills. Marching around. They didn't have anything else for us to do. It was like the blind leading the blind.

Mark: Was it tough to get into the Air Force at the time?

Tuten: No. I had to take, sort of, an intelligence test, 50 questions and I got 49 of them right so I was a shoe in.

Mark: A lot of people wanted to get into the Air Force.

Tuten: I didn't want to get in the infantry. I wanted no part of that. I figured with the training I had had and what I was doing, working on airplanes, it made sense that that is where I belonged. That's what I did.

Mark: After three weeks at Kiesler.

Tuten: I came up to Madison for 12 weeks of radio school.

Mark: As we were talking before I turned the tape on, you like Madison a lot.

Tuten: Oh, I thought this was heaven! It was clean. Remember I had been raised in the South where it wasn't quite as nice. We didn't have the big powerful lawn mowers then that we have now and the grass didn't grow as well. It wasn't fertilized like it was up here. This was just a unique place. I had never experienced anything like this city.

Mark: Did you get off the base much? Did you get free time to go into town or anything?

Tuten: Not as much as I would like to have. They put us on a rotating shift, one four week period we would be from 11PM until 7AM going to school. Then we'd go from 8AM to 4PM and then from 4PM to midnight for the next four weeks. Three shifts of four weeks each. That was twelve. So I didn't really get in an awful lot. When we were on the day shift from 8AM to 4PM yes, we got in quite often then. But the other two shifts, no it wasn't too easy.

Mark: What did a young GI do when you did get in town?

Tuten: Oh, in Madison? There was so much to do it was pathetic. On the bulletin board were lists of names that wanted to have a GI for dinner. If you went into a bar and bought a beer, that would be the last beer you bought. I couldn't believe it. The people were so friendly. Now, I assume that after it got saturated with GIs later on after I was gone, that may have changed somewhat. Nearly everybody that I knew that came to Madison thought that this was heaven on earth compared to most places. I still feel that way about Madison.

Mark: You eventually relocated here.

Tuten: I loved it here and I still do. This is where my kids are all living and I have five married children all living within 30 miles of me. I don't want to live anywhere else.

Mark: Some of the men you trained with. Could you perhaps give me a sense of where they came from and what kinds of backgrounds, who

Tuten: They were mostly southerners. When we went down to Kiesler Field in Mississippi from Fort Lee or Camp Lee that was a southern area. Your dog tags tell you pretty much about the area you're from. Cause mine was 13065150. That number corresponds to a certain area in the country, I think. Part of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Mark: Sort of the mid-Atlantic region.

Tuten: Virginia and West Virginia, they're southerners. But we had some guys in there from New Jersey and New York. So we ran a line down the center of the barracks. We called it the Mason Dixon line. It was more fun than anything else. [Laughs]

Mark: Did you get a sense of educational backgrounds? Sometimes you hear stories about the guy from West Virginia who came without shoes and never had a pair of shoes till he got in the service.

Tuten: No that was false. A particularly good friend of mine was from West Virginia. He was a schoolteacher, he was no dummy. Another one was a linotype operator and he'd go over to the State Journal and work there on his free time. He enjoyed doing that kind of work. Most of them who were up here really enjoyed being here.

Mark: My next question was going to be, was there any sort of culture shock coming to a place like Madison.

Tuten: No. I always prided myself that I didn't have a real southern accent. My wife says I did, but it wasn't too hard to figure it out but when I came from North Carolina, now there was an area that really was different. They were settled by Cockney English. Holy mackerel! In some of those towns you would swear you were back in London. I hated that kind of thing. I didn't want to talk like that.

Mark: So from Madison you moved overseas then. How did this--

Tuten: Well, after we got our diplomas, I think my final average grade was 87.

Mark: I'm sorry, I meant to ask you a little bit about your training. Was it mostly classroom or hands on?

Tuten: It was mostly classroom. We didn't have a great deal of equipment. It was mostly all theory. The people who were teaching us didn't actually know a great deal more than we did but they had the book. That was one thing I can say about the tech manuals that the Air Force issued. They were thorough. You almost had to be a complete idiot if you couldn't understand and follow what they were telling you. So, they gave us as good as you could get with what they had to work

with. After my twelve weeks they sent me to Atlantic City, that was an overseas replacement training center and I was there three weeks and we were supposed to be doing exercises and short order drill because they had nothing else for us to do and then from there I went to Camp Kilmer, a demarcation center and we didn't go overseas with the shipment we were supposed to because one of the guys got measles so we were delayed so we went over in January of '44.

Mark: Did you go with many of your classmates?

Tuten: No. We were all split up. I don't know how they managed it but they scattered us quite a bit.

Mark: So you went overseas on a ship. Could you describe it?

Tuten: It was a liberty ship, a cement mixer [Laughs].

Mark: It wasn't the most pleasing accommodations I take it.

Tuten: No, but it got the job done. It got us there.

Mark: It took you how long to get over?

Tuten: About ten days. We were in a convoy. We went to Oran. That's where we unloaded.

Mark: Was there any seasickness or that kind of thing?

Tuten: Some, yes. Oh, definitely. I didn't get seasick because when I was a kid living in North Carolina my father was the Chief of a 75 foot patrol boat. During the summer, every time that boat pulled out somewhere I went with it.

Mark: So you had some sea legs already.

Tuten: I had some sea legs already.

Mark: For an Air Force guy. So when you got to Africa then what happened?

Tuten: We landed at Oran. We got off in the morning and we stayed right there in the city of Oran until almost nightfall. Then we took a train to a little town that was nothing but an open field and I remember asking the Lt. where the barracks were. He said, "You're standing on it." So I put my GI impregnated clothes over my others and wrapped up in a blanket and damn near froze to death that night. Holy cow it was cold! Then by the next day when we could see, we started putting up pup tents. There were four of us. Each one had a shelter half and two shelter halves would make a half a tent. We got some straw from somewhere for

mattress covers and we lived out of that for about three or four weeks that I was there. We were there to be pulled into various units that had come overseas and were understaffed. I was assigned from there to the 82nd Fighter Control Squadron. I joined in just before we left Oran to go up to Tobessa in North Africa. One thing I regretted when I was there, I could have done it but I was afraid to. Some of the guys went into Oran and I didn't really want to go there but I was not that far from Cityville Abbey. The headquarters of the French Foreign Legion and I didn't go and I have kicked myself ever since. That was one place I wanted to see. But, I was 19-years-old, I was a little cautious.

Mark: So you got hooked up with--what's that unit again?

Tuten: 82nd Fighter Control Squadron. That was the one I was in. They were all radio people. We moved from Oran to a place called Tobessa in North Africa. Part of the unit was sent out because the action in North Africa was sort of coming to a halt and the rest of us stayed in Tobessa and got acquainted with the equipment that we were going to be operating. In May or something like that the war in North Africa was over so they moved us out to Cape Bonn right on the Mediterranean.

Mark: In Tunisia?

Tuten: In Tunisia ya. Then we invaded Sicily. Now in Sicily, I went in on D-4. There was no problem with our landing. I stayed right in Gala, and was an operator for a 422 radio set for our controllers to use. We stayed there until the action was over. That was the first time I ever heard a Stuka dive bomber.

Mark: Are they as fearsome as they make them out?

Tuten: God, your blood will turn cold when you hear that screaming. It was just the wind through the struts coming down, but oh man yes. I was out at the airfield that first night and they gave us a visit. But that's about all the action that I saw in Sicily because it didn't take but maybe six weeks to clear the whole island.

Mark: At this time we were fighting Germans and some Italians too. I haven't interviewed anyone from the Italian campaign this early so I'm a little unfamiliar with it.

Tuten: Well, the Italians stopped when Sicily was over, they were over. But we had plenty of Germans to fight.

Mark: Did you have contact with many of the Sicilians, after all you were invaders.

Tuten: We were invaders and I didn't speak any Italian and I didn't really get a chance to know them because Patton put out an order, you went downtown or you went

anywhere, you had on a GI Class A uniform, leggings and you carried a rifle. Boy, that's not conducive to being social you know. So that was not really worth the effort.

Mark: I was going to ask if there was much concern about the Sicilians or the Italians, that kind of answers my question.

Tuten: We had a nice Italian family that lived next door to us but because we were their enemies, we couldn't really socialize with them. Italy didn't declare themselves finished until the end of the Italian campaign.

Mark: So after Sicily had been taken, it was a while until--

Tuten: No, it wasn't too long before we went to Salerno. That's where I found out what an 88 shell sounds like. There again, I went in the second day not the first day. But, we pulled in to an area and set up our tents, we weren't combat people as such, I had managed to steal a cot by then so I was always looking out for number one as far as comfort was concerned, but you do some foolish things. I sat there and the shells from our Navy banging over my head one way to the hills and the Germans were trying to shell the Navy ship and Bang! over the other way. They were going both ways. [Laughs]

Mark: What goes through your mind in a situation like that?

Tuten: Well, you hope they don't fall short. You do some very foolish things. I never liked to go barefooted in my whole life. The German 88, I watched them one afternoon, they cleared out a wheat field. Those things exploded on contact with the soil. They didn't dig in, boom! Shrapnel went forward and they were mowing it down. So one night I got into my cot and the 88's started going off so I got up, I knew there was a ditch about 30 yards away from me, and I ran like Hell for that ditch until I got about half-way to it and I realized I didn't have my shoes on. I ran back, sat down, put on my shoes, tied them, then got up and ran like Hell for the ditch again. Later on I thought, "You dumb idiot! What's the matter with you?" Just some of the things you do under those conditions. Then I was to go to the Isle of Capri to cover the battle for Naples. I was sitting on a fellow's cot and we were talking and a truck came to the area that was going to go over to the Isle of Capri with us and I said, "Well, I better go over and help load the stuff up because I'm going over there tomorrow." I hadn't walked 20 feet away from him when an 88 shell hit in the area and blew his heel off. If I hadn't decided to get up and walk over to that truck, I'd have been blown up with him. Well, he didn't get killed, but he went home, so it was bad enough. The Isle of Capri was just like a vacation for us. We had our work to do but--

Mark: Did you get to the beach?

Tuten: Not on Capri. That wasn't that kind of an island. I'm sure there were some parts of it that were, but the grottos underneath, we could go in through a boat and it was very beautiful and there were two cities there, Capri and Ana Capri. Grace Moore, the English musical star had a home on Capri near where we were stationed. That was real nice for us. It was almost like a vacation.

Mark: Except for the shelling of course.

Tuten: Capri itself never got a shot. We were able to keep planes up all the time, night and day and the Germans really didn't do too much to Naples. When that was over, our unit was sent to Caruso's home town just outside of Naples in the hills. I can't think of the name of it now. We stayed there and it was a very, very easy time for us. We could go into the town and by that time, the Italians were very friendly. The biggest problem we had was the British soldiers didn't get the kind of money we got and they hated to see us come into a town because we threw money away like water compared to what they could do and we went in, the prices just skyrocketed and they couldn't afford it. That caused some hard feelings.

Mark: I'm sure it did.

Tuten: From there we went to Fratamajori to headquarters for a while then we were ready to go to Anzio. Then we went to a staging area out of Naples and that I think was the roughest time of all for us. We lived in fox holes. They dug them deep enough you could put your cot in it and cover it over. The German Air Force was five minutes away by air and we had a direction finder team of German speaking people we could pick them up as their planes were warming up north of Rome. They used our location as their point to go wherever they wanted to go. So I had a little map in our area with the little squares on it and when they got to D so and so, I says let's get the Hell out of this room.

Mark: So at Anzio - when did you go in - how long after the initial invasion?

Tuten: The second day. That was really interesting. We went on a British ship. Now they're cool as fighters. There's nobody any better than they are - the British. We landed late in the afternoon and I was standing on the deck talking to a British sailor and a lone German plane flew over and it stayed out of our range and he said, "They're going to be back tonight." Come nightfall, they came back. Of course, all of the GI's were sent below deck because the British were manning the guns. But, while I was down below the stern of the ship just raised up like that and settled down. This poor British boy came down and he was as white as a sheet. He said he could have struck a match on that as it went by. It was that close. Right during that period they decided to unload us. We went off. We couldn't see where we were going and I was driving a little carryall and drove out into a field with some of our squadron. We set up our cots and this young Negro boy came over and says, "Can I set up my cot with you guys?" We said, "Sure,"

and he did. The next morning I looked about 100 yards away and there was a big truck. I asked him what he had in that truck and he said aviation gasoline. One spark of that thing and we'd have all been blown to glory. [Laughs] You can imagine how scared he must have been. Anyway, the next morning I drove into what had been a garage in a wide open area and then two bays. I was out sitting on the hood folding the waterproofing off of the carryall and I looked up and here's a ME109 strafing. Shells went by and so I took off into the shed because I didn't know if there were any others or not. There were a couple of Negro soldiers from French Africa. They came in there too. One of them was trying to get into what appeared to be a closet door. When he opened it pots and pans and everything came sliding out of there and he's trying to put them back and get in himself and I am just doubled up with laughter. I don't know why but that struck me as Fibber McGee and Molly and I just couldn't stop laughing. I'd had the hell scared out of me the minute before but now I was laughing like crazy [Laughs]. We were at Anzio for quite a while.

Mark: This might be a good time to bring up specifically what you did in a combat situation. What specifically was your mission in combat and how did you carry it out.

Tuten: It wasn't to fire a gun. It was to keep that radio operating. It operated 24-hours a day because we were the power to transmit to the planes and to receive from the planes their information which was carried by cable to our operations office. Our operations office had plotters who could plot the course of the planes, ours and theirs, and our controllers who gave the information to our pilots as to what to do. We could actually with the radar that was available at that time, we could put one of our planes right on the tail of a German at night, never seeing either one of them. Just from the radar screens. That was also part of it and no matter what was going on or what was incoming you operated. I stood there and I kept that radio going.

Mark: Were there problems that you encountered in keeping the radio going?

Tuten: Yea. We had one problem, we got blown off the air. Anzio Annie was a great big railroad gun. I don't know if they had one or two of them but they were dug into the side of the mountain. Our planes couldn't get at them and there was a time when our Air Force was located south of Naples and they'd fly up and then have to go back and there was a period there when there was no air cover and of course, then the Germans would come in like Hell and they'd wheel this Anzio Annie out and fire a couple of shots, mostly they were firing at the shoreline, at the ships coming in, but you could hear it and if you could hear it you didn't worry about it because it was on either side of you. It was only if it went directly overhead that you couldn't hear it. One night I was on duty. We had three receiver vans in a row, there was a tree and some fellow had put their tent right under the tree and then three transmitter vans. I was on duty that night in the outside receiver van, a

friend of mine from Green Bay was in the outside transmitter van. I was sitting at my desk and all of a sudden I was on the battery box. Boom! I heard a loud explosion—didn't hear it coming. Damn thing had hit the tree above us. Of course it knocked all of our antennas out. We used these 50 feet wooden antennas that we'd raise up outside and it blew the two inside vans and damaged them quite heavily. It knocked us off the air. All of our cables were cut so we just kept working until we got them back to operating.

Mark: How long did that take?

Tuten: About five or six hours. But we were back on the air. We worked right straight through.

Mark: Did you encounter any problems with perhaps the terrain of Italy? It's very rough and irregular. Did that hinder communications at all?

Tuten: Actually, at Anzio it wasn't. We were right on the shoreline. In fact, that was the problem, it was so damn wet that we couldn't push out and they couldn't push us out. Their tanks would bog down in that soil and ours would too. It was a stand off. Finally, we did make a break out but when I looked at Anzio and Atoona when we first came here they were two towns and when we left there were just two piles of rubble where the towns had been.

Mark: It was a very rough battle from what I understand.

Tuten: Yes, it was a real rough battle. I was going to the dentist one day on the beach head with a first sergeant, we both had an appointment down there and I'm driving along the beach road and he turned to me and says, "For God's sake speed it up!" There was an 88 shell following me right down the highway. [Long Laugh] I was lucky. I wasn't meant to get hurt and I didn't. I got shot at but I didn't get hurt.

Mark: Is that the way you look at it? It was destiny? Did you feel that way at the time, or is that looking back in retrospect?

Tuten: No, at the time I felt I could have, but since I didn't it must have been because I wasn't supposed to be because friends of mine that I was sitting right next to got it. When that shell hit between us a couple of our boys were killed that night and I saw a guy there at Anzio get killed without a mark on his body. He had gotten down into his fox hole and was just inside of it and a damn bomb hit a tree near him and the concussion killed him. It just wasn't meant to be. I was supposed to come home and have five kids.

Mark: Of the GI's in World War II that I've spoken to they seem - I like to ask the question is it true that there are no atheists in fox holes?

Tuten: I believe that's very true. I don't believe anybody can be an atheist when you figure that your days are damn well numbered. It's one thing when everything is going right, but when it's going wrong, boy, you climb aboard that bandwagon, I don't care who you are.

Mark: I was wondering like superstition like three guys on a match and stuff. Do people ever pay attention to that sort of thing?

Tuten: Not in my experience.

Mark: I got some questions about allies and enemies. You've mentioned that you were in contact with the British fairly regularly. How would you describe the relationship between the Americans and the British?

Tuten: Real good. I thought when we left Anzio I was sent above Rome to a place called Pambino and that's when I discovered that all Italians are not dark. I ran into my first blond Italians. It was sort of a shock. The war was really progressing and Italy was being cleaned out so they called us back and told us to get ready to invade southern France. When I got into southern France, I was attached to a British radar unit for a while in a place called Monte LeMarr. When we went in, we just drove in there was no opposition whatsoever because the Germans were retreating from southern France and that was the biggest carnage I ever had to pass through in my life.

Mark: In southern France.

Tuten: In southern France. Miles and miles of dead animals and dead people. German vehicles that had been pushed off the road and they just took bulldozers and covered them over. That was all they could do. The smell was awful.

Mark: Where did you go to shore in France?

Tuten: St. Tropaz. I only stayed there a day and then I and some of the rest of us were at Monte LeMarr with this British radar unit. The only thing I didn't like was the way they cooked GI food. Holy Christ! That was a new experience for me. But as far as the guys were concerned, they were top flight. There as good a fighter as there is in the world. If they have one thing that I couldn't quite fathom was the tea time at 4:00 PM, I don't give a damn how bad things were, they quit. Had tea. [Laughs] I couldn't get over that. It's tea time and that's it. Boy, they'd fight the Hell out of you the rest of the time. [Laughs]

Mark: The Italian theater, there were a lot of different nations fighting there at the time. Among the American forces there were some Black units, the Nisei units, did you

have much contact with other sorts of - you mentioned the French-African soldiers.

Tuten: I never really had any contact with them. That was the only time I ever saw them. I didn't see any of - hardly ever did we come in contact with the guys who were carrying the rifles. We were always on some mountain top somewhere because we needed the best terrain we could get to get the best air coverage that we could get. We were really isolated so much of the time.

Mark: What does a GI do for fun or relaxation in a combat zone like this?

Tuten: You don't have any.

Mark: Did you play cards, gamble, drink?

Tuten: Oh ya, ya. We did that. I did some but not a great deal. The only thing that I can really remember about playing cards is that one of our boys was a dealer. He was a Chinese boy. He was a dealer at Las Vegas and I stole the pot from him one day. Then I showed it to him. I never played with him again because I figured he'd kill me. [Laughs] But after I left Monte LeMarr, we went to - France was being cleared out pretty fast, we went to a place called the Alsace Lorraine district. Now that was sometimes German and sometimes French, a sort of mixture of both. We were on duty there one night, I was on duty, and got a call from our controller says, "Tear down the operation, we've got to move out." I said, "You're crazy. Everything is frozen to the ground here. We couldn't get these plates up." He says, "You got an hour to be out of there and gone." When I asked why he said the French 7th Army pulled out and there's nothing between you and the Germans. Man, in an hour we were gone.[Laughs] **[End Tape 1 Side A]** We went back to Nancy and stayed there until we got a new location.

Mark: What was military discipline like?

Tuten: Very loose. Most of the officers, the closer you got to where the shooting is, the laxer it gets. We had one captain that military discipline didn't mean a damn thing to him. Of course, he got nailed by Patton too, for it, and reduced to a 1st Lt. I'm sure he got his rating back but we were there to do a job and that was all. The fact that we were soldiers, we weren't professional soldiers we were just there to win the war and get the Hell out of there. That's the way I felt about it and everybody else.

Mark: So the proverbial "chicken shit", you didn't have much of that?

Tuten: No. Not really. One night one of our cooks stopped a Lieutenant from taking a loaf of bread. He says, "I'm going to take this. We're going to have a little party." He says, "No you're not Lieutenant, that belongs to the men." And, he

wouldn't let him have it. The Lieutenant had to back down. I'm sure if he could have he would have pulled his rank, but he couldn't do it. It wasn't bad at all.

Mark: In the 82nd Fighter Control Squadron, what sort of men were in this unit, was it pretty much the same as you trained with?

Tuten: It would change. Even of the people that were in our unit, I'll bet I didn't know a third of them because we weren't in the headquarters group and when you're on a unit you're gone for 6-8 weeks at a time and another unit is out someplace else, and you don't come back in at the same time. A lot of guys in the 82nd that I never knew. I've been to several reunions and some of the fellows there, I've got a lot of pictures of our reunions, that was the first time I met a lot of them. We had a Captain Jordan who was controller one night at Anzio and I was on duty and he was a British bullfighter. The pilot called and he says, "I've lost my navigator." Our controller says "What do you mean? What happened to him?" The pilot answered "I don't know, but he was here when we started." The guy evidently had misinterpreted something that was said as a sign to bail out and he did and he didn't even tell the pilot. [Laughs] The guy was just gone. I asked Jordan about that after the war at one of our reunions and he said, that was what happened. [Laughs] The guy bailed out and didn't tell the pilot. Our relationship with our superior officers was good.

Mark: What about the Germans? You were involved in the campaign from '43 to '45, a long time. Did the German resistance change at all from your perspective?

Tuten: Not from mine because I wasn't fighting them.

Mark: No, but for example, were there less German airplanes in the air as time went on?

Tuten: Oh, yes. The last two months of the war we were stationed in Germany and I could watch those B29's flying overhead. It seemed like nonstop, never ending supply of planes bombing the hell out of Germany. When we'd go through Germany, all I'd see of a town was rubble. I couldn't understand how they survived it. They took an awful pasting. Nobody takes pride in that, I don't care who you are. You just felt very sorry for them in some ways but in other ways you figured damn it, better to happen to them than to us. If somebody's got to be bombed, I hope its not going to be our country.

Mark: This brings up the question of how you perceived the Germans and how others did. Was there hatred or just ?

Tuten: How can you hate somebody? The only person that I would ever honestly say I ever hated in my life was Hitler. I couldn't hate most of the people. Ordinary German guy in the service was the same as I was. His country was at war. He didn't ask who started it, it was there. Just like the homeless, why do you go

down and help them? Because they're there. You don't ask them how they got there or why they got there. They're there. So you do what you can to help. Same way in wartime. You enlist because there is a war to be fought and there's a country to protect and that's yours.

Mark: Sense of obligation.

Tuten: Yes. You are obligated to do that.

Mark: So, on VE Day you were where?

Tuten: I was in Edencoben, Germany.

Mark: Where is that in Germany?

Tuten: It's a little hard to say but it was in the hill country and we were certainly safe there. After it was over we all went back to headquarters and you knew we were going to come home.

Mark: Do you recall hearing the news that the Germans had surrendered? Do you remember your reaction?

Tuten: Well, I was very happy about it because it meant that I should be getting home. I had been over there for almost 33 months. That was a long time.

Mark: So for you, going into the Pacific didn't seem like

Tuten: I didn't want to go.

Mark: Did you think you would have to?

Tuten: I didn't really think so, I had 108 discharge points and you needed 85 to get out. So I was waiting to go home and get out.

Mark: After the surrender you said that you went back to headquarters. Describe for me the process--

Tuten: We stayed there. It was just a real easy - they tried to give us things to do like we had softball leagues, I took an educational tour to Munich to the beerhauler that Hitler made famous. We went to Salzburg in Austria where the Olympics were held. I had one foot in Austria and one foot in Italy, the Burner Pass, and I was struck by so much of that part of Germany because it looked so much like Wisconsin. It was in August and it was rather cool, because we were in the high ground. It was beautiful. I wanted to see what I could see while I was there.

Mark: It's probably the first time you had a chance to really relax.

Tuten: Ya and just do that. Well, I had three days in Paris too, when the war was winding down.

Mark: Before VE Day.

Tuten: Ya. I had a choice, I could either take a week in London or three days, sixty hours, in Paris. I only had about \$225 or \$230 so I thought I better take the sixty hours in Paris. I didn't think the money would last me for a week. I got back and I know I shouldn't say this but when I got back from Paris I think I had about \$20 left. The guys asked "How in the Hell could you spend over \$200 in 60 hours?" I said, "I spent \$180 on women and booze and the rest I threw away foolishly."
[Laughs]

Mark: Must have had a good time!

Tuten: At that point I think I was 20 years old. I did have a good time. I went into a smoke shop, I wanted to get my future father-in-law a pipe in France and some French tobacco and a pouch and the clerk that I dealt with spoke better English than I did. I asked him "Why is this, everywhere I go in Paris everybody speaks English?" He said that we have to because they depend on British and American tourists and they won't speak French. Well, I went to see the cathedral of Notre Dame, I went to Napoleon's tomb, I went to the Arc of Triumph, the Eiffel Tower, I crammed as much into those 60 hours as I could get in. Paris is a big city. That was about all I could physically accomplish in that length of time, but I did it!

Mark: So you came back to the U.S. in October. Come back on a ship?

Tuten: I came home on the U.S.S. America. In peacetime it was America's biggest cruise liner.

Mark: This trip took you how long?

Tuten: About five days. We ended at Newport News and because I had listed my home town as North Carolina, they sent me to Fort Bragg where I was separated from service.

Mark: What was involved in separating you from service? What did they do?

Tuten: Well they told you about all the GI benefits that were available and the life insurance, they wanted you to keep that, the GI Bill, the schools you could go to. They were also trying to sell you to reenlist. I was a corporal when I came out and I would have been made a sergeant immediately upon signing and given 90 leave and go to the base of my choice.

Mark: But you didn't bite.

Tuten: I wanted out.

Mark: Were there many takers when it came to reenlisting?

Tuten: I saw a few but not many. I think most of them who did didn't want to do it right on the spot because they would have been booed all over the place.

Mark: Booed by the other soldiers.

Tuten: Yes.

Mark: So you're out. What were your priorities for getting your young life back in

Tuten: Getting married. That was what I wanted to do first. I came back to Madison and married Ruth.

Mark: You had met her when you were here.

Tuten: Yes. We corresponded all during the war. Of course, I knew that she was going out with a different GI practically every night while I was gone. That was all right, that was the way it should have been, because these guys were lonely as I was lonely when I was here and there was nothing wrong with it. They'd just go out to the various restaurants and have a good time, or the USO dances and stuff. In fact, this summer we had two of her old boyfriends come back here just out of the blue and said, "We're coming to Madison". One was from New Jersey and one was from New York and they didn't even know each other. They both picked the same week to come and we had a ball! Lord, we took them up to the Dells, to the World Circus Museum, Mt. Horeb the Mustard Museum and down to Monroe for the cheese. They both say they're coming back. We really had a ball for that week.

Mark: So you came back to Madison months after discharge. Was it before 1946 that you came back?

Tuten: Well, we got married in '45. I got discharged I think on October 3, and we were married on the 28th or 29th.

Mark: I'm reading this data sheet I had you fill out. You wrote down that you worked for one year.

Tuten: Well, after we were married yes. I went back to Norfolk and worked for a year there.

Mark: With your wife.

Tuten: Yes, I took her with me. Of course. Then she was under a lot of pressure to come back to Madison and I liked Madison, I figured I could do as well here as any place else. So I came back and I never regretted it.

Mark: Did you have trouble finding work? There were some GI's who complained that they couldn't find work.

Tuten: No, I went to work for McKay Nursery Company under the GI Bill for \$200 a month. McKay started out paying \$90 of it and the government paid \$110 and every six months the government would pay less and McKay would pay more and I stayed at McKay's about seven years. I never had any trouble finding a job in Madison in my life.

Mark: What about housing? Did you have a problem there?

Tuten: We bought a house after I'd been here about six months.

Mark: Did you use GI benefits to finance that?

Tuten: GI Bill, 4%, no down payment.

Mark: Did you encounter any problems using these programs? Did you know who to go see?

Tuten: Just go to the VA and they helped us. Of course the Realtors were very willing to help too. They were dealing with this every day in selling homes.

Mark: They were pretty knowledgeable about what to do?

Tuten: Ya. It was to their benefit to be. If I was selling houses, I damn well would be. This was a fine choice for me. I never regretted it.

Mark: Did you have any problems readjusting back to civilian life? I had one vet for example, who was noncombat but he did some artillery training and ended up deaf in one ear. Did you have any medical problems?

Tuten: No. I'm going to get myself tested for a hearing aid in a little while too, but it's not because of the war it's because of my age. I really had no problems at all.

Mark: I've just got one last area that I want to cover and that involves veterans organizations and veterans reunions. You've mentioned that you've attended some reunions already. Is that right?

Tuten: Ya. That's strictly our fighter wing.

Mark: When did you start getting involved in that and for what reason?

Tuten: I got involved starting with the second reunion because they didn't have my address they just had my North Carolina address and my stepmother did not send me the information. I went to the second one because that was the time that I picked up the Bronze Star. That was in the paper and somebody got in touch with the fellows who were putting on the reunion in St. Louis and they sent me the information and I've gone ever since.

Mark: This was how long after the war?

Tuten: A number of years. I think it started in the '80's. We hold one every two years. We're going to hold one in September in Louisville, Kentucky. Each year it gets smaller and that's only common sense, we're getting older and we're not all there.

Mark: What makes you go to these reunions?

Tuten: I guess for some people they feel very, very close to the people who went through the same thing as they did. I don't quite have that feeling. I guess it's because I only knew about 1/3 of the people that I was with. To me it's a chance to see different cities, a chance to talk over old times with some of them. One guy, a fellow named W.C. Weaver was in our squadron, he was in Motor Pool, I never even knew him while we were in service together, I never saw him. But during one reunion we got to be pretty good friends and he lived in a little town called Pensen, TN and nobody had ever visited there. Well, I did. He got a new house there and he was so happy that somebody from our Army career stopped in and spent some time with him. I was on my way to Florida and it was a little out of the way, but not that much and I never knew where Pensen was until I got there. It was interesting. It was next to a little larger city where Casey Jones was raised and grew up. Now he's dead (Weaver). At least he did have somebody come and see him.

Mark: What about the Legion and the VFW and these sorts of groups? Did you join any of these?

Tuten: No. I'm not that socially inclined. I don't think that because we're veterans we're entitled to anything other than what we have already received. I'm not looking for anything else. I did what we had to do and it's done. I'm grateful for the GI Bill. I thought that was a very, very nice thing that was done for us.

Mark: Did any of these groups try to recruit you at all? I know sometimes they have very vigorous--

Tuten: Ya. Especially after I got the Bronze Star. I got letters from all of them, but I just wasn't interested.

Mark: Well, you've exhausted my line of questioning. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Tuten: No. I think it's nice to have a museum like this and if I find anything at home that I think the museum might like to have as a display, I'll bring it.

Mark: Thanks for stopping in.

[End of interview]