

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

JAMES R. UNDERKOFER

Anti-Tank Gun Squad Leader, Army, World War II

1994

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Underkofler, James R., (b. 1923-). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 94 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 94 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

James Underkofler, a Portage, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service as an anti-tank gunner in the 104th Infantry Division in Holland and Germany and his studies at the University of Wisconsin after the war. Following Pearl Harbor, Underkofler talks about leaving the University of Wisconsin, where he was in the ROTC, and enlisting in the Army. He speaks of going to Milwaukee and Fort Sheridan (Illinois) before beginning basic training with the 87th Infantry Division at Fort McCain (Mississippi). Following basic training, Underkofler describes being sent to Rutgers University (New Jersey), where he took classes in pre-engineering as part of the Army Specialized Training Program. He recalls racial violence at Fort McCain. Underkofler talks about joining the 104th Infantry Division at Camp Carson (Colorado) and being sent to Camp Kilmer (New Jersey) where he boarded a transport bound for Cherbourg (France). He recalls the poor condition on his troop ship and coming under submarine attack. He states that after arriving in France in late summer 1944, many arrivals were impressed into the Red Ball Express, with the remainder, including Underkofler, sent to join the Canadian 1st Army. Underkofler addresses Black units. Most African-American soldiers he encountered were quartermasters, but he specifically commends the fighting ability and courage of two Black units—a tank battalion in Holland, and a rifle company attached to his regiment. While other regiments were broken up, Underkofler tells that his own was given special training and guarded munitions depots and similar installations. Underkofler describes first seeing combat in Holland, the beginning of his unit's 160 consecutive days of front-line combat. He claims his anti-tank gun was nearly worthless against German tanks, so he would abandon the gun and join the riflemen with bazookas and mines. He touches upon combat fatigue and terror in combat and describes two men who suffered mental breakdowns. He comments on the high quality of German soldiers, discusses American and German motivation, and describes acts of heroism. Underkofler speaks about various types of weaponry and their uses, from his own anti-tank guns and small arms to his encounters with German self-propelled 88mm anti-tank guns, and the psychological effects of Nebelwerfer and V1 rockets. Underkofler recalls two unforgettable emotional experiences: a friendly Dutch woman being crushed by a towed gun, and the liberation of Nordhausen, a concentration camp where he witnessed 3,000 dead bodies starved in their bunks. Underkofler also relates the high level of American fraternization with Germans; when his unit drove through a German village, the citizens celebrated and children shouted, "You beat your meat," having been taught that the phrase was a friendly greeting by another American unit that had passed through the village earlier. Underkofler briefly

touches upon SS soldiers. He discusses American relations with German and French civilians; while he had no problems with the former, he continues to mistrust and dislike the French. Underkofler describes the toughness of Canadian soldiers, the excellence of British soldiers, and the brutality and cruelty of Russians. He talks about replacements and recalls being wounded by a shell, which forced him to leave the front lines for a month. Underkofler calls the medical care he received superb. He describes crossing the Rhine at Remagen (Germany). Following V-E Day, which occurred when he was in Hollange (Germany), he discusses being sent to Camp Lucky Strike (France) before arriving at San Luis Obispo (California) for amphibious training in preparation for the invasion of Japan. He speaks at length about the controversy of the atomic bombings of Japan, which he fully supports. Underkofler relates the V-J Day celebrations in Madison. He talks of his discharge in November of 1945, return to Portage (Wisconsin), and reenrollment at the University of Wisconsin, where he attended undergraduate and law schools. Underkofler describes, at length, life in Badger Village, a community of veterans studying at the University of Wisconsin located at the Badger Army Ammunition Plant near Sauk Prairie (Wisconsin). Underkofler sympathetically compares the return of WWII veterans to that of their Vietnam counterparts, and notes that he didn't join the American Legion since its membership was composed of older men, instead of peers.

Biographical Sketch:

Underkofler lives in Middleton, Wisconsin and attended the University of Wisconsin before joining the Army in 1942. He served with the 104th Infantry Division in Holland and Germany during World War II. Following the war, he graduated from the University of Wisconsin School of Law.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994.
Transcribed by Karen M. Emery, 1998.
Transcription edited by Jackie Mulhern, 2008.
Abstract written by Kevin Axe, 2009.

Interview Transcript:

- Mark: Today's date is November 29, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview with Mr. James Underkofler of Madison. A veteran of the European Theater in World War II. Good morning Mr., Mr. Underkofler.
- Mr. U: Good morning.
- Mark: How are you doing today?
- Mr. U: Just great, thanks.
- Mark: Well, the place to start is always at the beginning. Perhaps you could tell me a little bit about where you were born and a little bit about your upbringing.
- Mr. U: Okay. I was born in Baraboo, Wisconsin on October 25, 1923 and I lived in Baraboo until I was in 6th grade and then moved. My father was transferred to Portage and I remained in Portage and went to high school there, graduated in 1941, went down to Madison and went to work and the war came along and I ended up approximately three years in service, came back and re-entered the University of Wisconsin and got a law degree in 1950.
- Mark: That's the whole thing in a nutshell.
- Mr. U: That's it, yeah. A capsule.
- Mark: So you graduated high school in '41?
- Mr. U: Right.
- Mark: I assume like in June or something like that?
- Mr. U: It would have, yeah it would have been in the spring.
- Mark: And so you came, you were working in Madison when Pearl Harbor was attacked.
- Mr. U: Yes, I was actually and was going to school; was going to the University of Wisconsin and working.
- Mark: Going to college?

Mr. U: Yeah. I entered the university in the fall of 1941. I was in Reedsburg, Wisconsin at my aunt's. My cousin from California was there and that's the reason for sort of a reunion and her family, her husband and little girl were in Los Angeles. I remember how distressed Rosemary was about that. And how everybody, of course, was distressed.

Mark: About Pearl Harbor?

Mr. U: About Pearl Harbor.

Mark: As an 18 year old, you were 18 or so?

Mr. U: Yeah.

Mark: As an 18 year old, when you heard that Pearl Harbor was attacked, did you, you were of military age; did the thought occur to you that perhaps you might end up in a war? Do you remember how you felt?

Mr. U: I don't recall ever having any apprehension or fear of that. I guess once many of my associates I'm sure rushed off to enlist; my parents told me well wait until you're needed. I did ultimately volunteer and go in but it was a lot different than what I guess it was like in Vietnam where, you know, people didn't want to go and so forth. But I think most of my contemporaries were anxious to get in there and do their part.

Mark: I see. So you enlisted then, not too long after. '42 sometime?

Mr. U: Yeah. And, see at that time enlistments had been closed in the sense that too many of the enlistments or volunteers were selecting services like the Air Force, the Navy, the Marines, and the Infantry was being kind of left behind. So they closed enlistments but you could volunteer and then take your chances once you got in. I had an Infantry basic in ROTC at the University of Wisconsin and that, I wanted to get into the Air Force but I ended up at Camp McCain, Mississippi.

Mark: What was so attractive about the Air Force? I hear a lot of veterans say ...

Mr. U: Oh, you know. The "fly boys" were glamorous and the impression of the Infantry was that's where the dummies went. It was the dirty part of the war. To a certain extent, that's probably true. The Infantry always got the dirty work. I didn't have any interest in the Navy but I did want to get in the Air Force. And I guess my principle motivation was to fly. I wanted to learn how to fly. But I ended up in the Infantry and from there they had then started the ASTP program. Incidentally, the division I took my basic with was the 87th Infantry, the Acorn division, and it was the division that, you

may recall, General “Yoo Hoo” Lear who was a three-star general, and during maneuvers sometime I don’t know when it was exactly, but it was maneuvers in Tennessee, and some GIs were driving past in a two-and-a-half ton truck and they hollered and yoo-hooed at some southern girls and the general was offended by that and he really threw the book at these guys. And so, and he got in trouble himself. We were the first division comprised entirely of 18 and 19 year olds. So Lear ...

Mark: The 87th?

Mr. U: The 87th. And so there was a considerable amount of attention given to the division and interest in how were these young guys going to work out and Lear was the corps commander. He used to come and visit and he’d end up of like a chicken shit. That’s what we used to say.

Mark: I’ll get to that. That term is interesting. I’ll get to that in a second. I’m interested in your training. Perhaps we could backtrack a little bit. Perhaps you could describe to me your induction into the military. What steps did you take to go from the front porch to the barracks?

Mr. U: Well, after all the paperwork was done you went to Milwaukee and you had a physical and you came home, then you got on a train and you were transported to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. And there again you were given all of the physicals and so forth.

Mark: Is this where the haircut takes place?

Mr. U: Yeah. You were issued a uniform, etc., etc. And they put you on the train in the dead of night and you didn’t know where the hell you were going and woke up at Camp McCain, Mississippi. I remember the temperature was probably 35-40 and I was colder than I had been in Wisconsin at 20 above. We used to sing a song something about ending up with “Mississippi the asshole of the 48.” It was, Mississippi, it was, I enjoyed the people in the south. And I enjoyed the people in Mississippi. The uhm, so it was a bureaucratic process and you got down there and you, the cadre had already arrived and they were regular Army, a mixture of regular Army and National Guard. Our first sergeant was a regular, my platoon sergeant was a regular, my squad leader was a regular, the company commander was a National Guard. No that was, let’s see, Captain Shepherd. Captain Shepherd had just, yeah he left maybe a month later. Vasslick came in.

Mark: I see. And now, this is where the screaming and yelling starts. The military discipline and that sort of thing.

Mr. U: I can't really say that I ever felt afraid or, I guess I was intimidated. I can remember we used to stand formal retreats. This was really quite a ceremony. Maybe I was, you know, tank garrison soldier but I didn't mind that sort of thing, the spit and polish, etc. But I can remember one day falling out for weapons inspection before the formal retreat and Vasslick as he was wont to do, didn't do the inspecting, he let the first sergeant do it, and I remember sergeant, what the heck was his name, he'd come up to you and you'd snap your rifle up, he's going to inspect your arms with the bolt open, and I can remember the first sergeant looking at it and he said, "Mr. U:, what the hell do you do? Keep your money in here?" They'd, and the rifle was as clean as a whistle but they, you know, they just liked to make up stuff like that. So I ended up doing KP. But I don't, you got the public impression I suppose maybe the boot camps and so forth and the Marines, etc., but, yeah, it was tough, rough. And these guys, Sergeant Smith was a hillbilly that didn't know, he couldn't add two and two, and he turned out to be a very, he cracked up the first night in combat. But it was not, I didn't feel I was unnecessarily pushed around.

Mark: Okay.

Mr. U: But it might have been partly too because we were these 18 and 19 year olds and the media and the Army and the whomever the Secretary of the Army, were all watching us. So perhaps they were a little bit careful. But the training was good. I mean, I'd already had an Infantry basic here at the University of Wisconsin which was kind of perfunctory.

Mark: Now what about equipment and training? This is fairly early in the war. Did you have any troubles with, did you have perhaps old equipment or were things fairly updated for you?

Mr. U: No, we got M1s right away. That was our personal weapon. I was in a Anti-tank company and we were then using 37 millimeters which were pea shooters. They used them in the Pacific I guess because they were light and they could haul them around but they weren't worth a damn against real armor.

Mark: Against German Panzers ...

Mr. U: Oh, yeah. So they had this new what they called British six-pounder that they said had worked wonders in Africa. It was manufactured, well, the carriage was made in the States but the barrel and the mechanism was made in Canada. And, it was 57 millimeter, and we got that late in the game and had very brief training with it. That proved to be a poor weapon. We ended up, see it was pulled by a six-by-six and if you were attacked, you had to dismount, disengage the gun from the hook, spread the blades, and a good

squad could do that in less than minute, but even so by that time you had probably taken how many rounds from an 88? So, the 57 was, as we used to say, wasn't worth a shit.

Mark: What about some of the people in your basic training? You mentioned this was the first group of 18-19 year olds.

Mr. U: Yeah. My first sergeant was a pro, he was a regular. He knew, I mean, he knew the Army. He'd been in it all his life. He was probably 30, 35 years old. My platoon leader was a drunk. All he wanted was a bottle of whiskey and a woman and he was, the regular Army had a lot of guys in it that were that kind and when the war came out of I suppose necessity they ended up with stripes. And some of them were real good. And this one guy; he didn't go over seas with us but he was a disreputable reprobate. So the guys that were with me in the outfit were all, we were quite a few of us college, had attended college. As a result, when ASTP came along shortly thereafter, I and many others ended up in ASTP because they, number one, you had to have an IQ of better than 110. What was it for officer's candidate? I think it was 110.

Mark: I don't know.

Mr. U: And then if you had some college background and so I was there, I was. At Camp Mc Cain for my basic. How the hell did I leave? Anyway, they called me out into the company commander's office and said I was going to be transferred into ASTP which stood for Army Specialized Training Program, and then I was going to be transferred to a star unit which was known as special training and reassignment at the University of Alabama where I went and then I ended up at the University of Florida. I was there for about two days and when ...

Mark: Doing what?

Mr. U: Nothing.

Mark: I assume there were some purpose ...

Mr. U: Yeah, I'll get to that. And so they, one day they said fill this out and the company commander said any of you guys want to go back up north, you Yankees, and I rose my hand, and they sent us back. Ended up at the University of Alabama. Nobody knew, the star unit had been disbanded, the university, who the hell are you guys and what are you doing here? So they housed us for about two weeks until they could find our records. And they caught up with us and they shipped me to Rutgers University. The Army had, the purpose was to avoid the shortage of professionals at the end of the

war. Chemists, engineers, doctors, philosophers, language, and some guys took language. Anyway, I ended up in engineering. A friend of mine who I went to high school with, Ben Washburn who just retired as a general practitioner down here, was at Rutgers with me taking pre-med. He ended up going the whole route. He got his MD and everything. I was in pre-engineering. While there George Little, was the athletic director, George Little was the football coach and athletic director at the University of Wisconsin. The street out in front of the basketball field house which is known, or was I believe, as "Little" street. I always thought it was named Little because it was only about 100 yards long. Well, it was named after George Little. He built the field house. Very proud of that. Had a fight with Do Spears who was the basketball coach and he lost it and he ended up. Well, he was there at Rutgers and we had a basketball team, I played some basketball, not as Rutgers but as ASTP, and George Little, you know, I corresponded, he wrote me a letter a couple of times during the war, or when I was overseas and maybe once, he's dead now. Where he's buried I don't know. But at any rate, they busted up ASTP. I had the equivalent of 30 credits from Rutgers which our great University of Wisconsin, Committee of Advanced Standing only gave me 19. I could get 15 for just being a veteran. That was another thing that ticked me off. So they busted up ASTP and all of these guys, I was the only one in my outfit that had an Infantry basic. The rest of them were Air Force, etc. Ended up going to Camp Carson, Colorado. That's the 104th.

Mark: You mentioned something about "you Yankees going back up north." One of the questions I like to ask involves how people of different regions of the country got along in basic training. I assume, I get the impression for you, this was the first time you had, in large numbers, met people from other parts of the country.

Mr. U: Yup.

Mark: That's true for the vast majority of people you're training with.

Mr. U: Yup.

Mark: Was there tension between Northerners and Southerners that sort of thing?

Mr. U: I had a lot of Southerners ultimately that were cadre. 'Cause a lot of Southerners went into the military and made that their livelihood. I don't recall, there were Southerners that like, but you got Northerners too that were dummies, that got by just because they were blustery and bluffed a lot. I enjoyed, when we were in Mississippi, if we got a weekend pass, we didn't go to Memphis or to Jackson, we went to Water Valley, Mississippi which was a town of about 300 people. There was an old Southern hotel there that

we used to stay at and the proprietress was an elderly lady, Southern lady, and she just loved us. She couldn't do enough for us. The rest of Southerners were, with the Blacks it was something else. We had some Black, I think they were being trained as quartermasters. There were two incidents that I recall, racial violence. One was in the PX. I was sitting in the PX one night having a beer when all of a sudden this Southerner, as it turned out, was beating up this kid. He was just a Black kid working there. He probably couldn't have been more than 14, 15 years old. They used to pile the cases of beer, empties around and he was taking one bottle after another and beating this kid over the head until they finally pulled him off. He said, "That's the way we treat niggers where I come from" in Georgia. And I don't know what triggered the incident but it might have been just that he felt the kid was impudent or something. And that shocked me. The other incident was that the Black troops on the post, it was rumored that they were going to riot, they were unhappy about something. And we had, anti-tank company had a six-by-six that had a pedestal-mounted 50 caliber machine gun. And so we were called out to assist in the event there was any difficulty, which there was not. But I can recall Southerners hoping it would be.

Mark: As a Northerner I suppose it was a serious phenomena.

Mr. U: Well, it, yes. And, of course, the way they treated Blacks in Mississippi at that time, see it was near Grenada and Grenada was a hot spot during the civil rights time. Well, it was, yeah, I mean, you know I suppose to Southerners it was nothing. But just separate toilets, separate drinking fountains, get off the sidewalk into the street when you came down. You didn't make any overtures towards them either because you are in trouble, got threatened.

Mark: So you wound up in Colorado. That's where you joined the armed forces.

Mr. U: Camp Carson, Colorado. I joined the 104th there. We had, I don't know how many weeks of training because some of the guys were really, they didn't know which end of the gun to fire. And I also remember that the 10th Mountain Division was training there at the time. We used to have to go out and get their, or help them round up their damned jackasses.

Mark: Oh, they had the mules that's right.

Mr. U: They had the mules. Yup. And, as you know, they were quite an outfit, too. So, and then we had, we went to Camp Kilmer where we got on the troop ships and ended up disembarking some on the beaches and some directly into the Cherbouc which had by that time got, at least the port had been secured.

Mark: So this was 1944?

Mr. U: Uh hum.

Mark: Perhaps you could describe your accommodations on your ship. As an enlisted man going ...

Mr. U: Crappy.

Mark: Crappy?

Mr. U: I mean, jeeze, that was one of the things I guess that I had to get used to. In the Army was other persons hygiene habits were not always of the best and down about the third hold and ventilation wasn't good. Well, some guys didn't give a damn whether they washed or not. And actually on the troop ship you couldn't anyway. And then as you'd go down to get your chow and get down into the bowels where the mess hall was, yeah, it stunk. You'd line up for life, or um, lifeboat drill I guess and you'd stand there two or three guys deep on the deck and guys behind you were throwing up and sometimes you get ... We were attacked. We were in a large convoy.

Mark: You were?

Mr. U: Yeah. We were attacked. And we were, our convoy, our escorts were Corvettes. Canadian, they're smaller than a destroyer. I can still remember, it was rough water and their screws would be out of the water as much as they were in. Even the small aircraft carriers, screws were out of the water. And so we were, yeah, we were attacked. And we were told later that we had gone as far south as Spain and then came up to avoid a wolf pack. I can remember, could hear the depth charges and we would, we got to know what a depth charge was. But at first we thought, oh shit, that's a torpedo. One night laying there I heard some, you were in the dark ... some guy, there was a depth charge that went off. There's, of course, the silence then there's a voice in the dark that said, "Anybody want to buy a good watch?" (laughs) which broke us all up. (chuckles)

Mark: So you landed then? This had to be the summer of '44.

Mr. U: Well, actually it was, I'm trying to remember how many, it was D plus something. Well this is interesting. Here's AT company, I'd written this down. KIA32, WIA2456, company strength 142. It was late in the summer, I think, when we got there. The first thing we had to do was, we were impressed into service for what was then later called the Red Ball Express. And a lot of our guys drove to supply Patton who had broken out. And the

rest, those that didn't drive truck were given special training and ultimately we were regrouped and we joined the Canadian First Army.

Mark: I see. The Red Ball Express, if I'm not mistaken, you had a lot of Black units also.

Mr. U: Well, the Black units, see what they did with the Blacks in the war were they made them, a lot, most of them, either engineers, not combat engineers but engineers, and I would say most of them that I ever encountered were quarter masters. They drove trucks and they were involved in supply.

Mark: Did you have much contact with those units?

Mr. U: No, we had, I can remember late in the war we were dug in on, I believe it was the Maulde River in Holland, and there was a tank battalion. We didn't, we called them bastard outfits because until the Third, we were attached to the Third Armored, we had British bastard outfits. They were battalions and they'd float. They weren't really assigned. They were not part of a division. And this happened to be a bastard outfit of Black Americans that were a tank battalion, which was unusual. And they were dug in firing on the indirect fire across the river for artillery. And I could, they were very proud of their tanks. If they could have chromed them they would have put chrome on them. And I can still remember the gunnery sergeant, he'd holler, "Fire" and they'd all fire and then he's say, "Now Mr. Hitler, count your men." But my, we did have some Blacks that were assigned to us, I believe as an experiment because the popular belief was that Blacks would panic under combat, they couldn't take it. Well, that's a bunch of bullshit. And these guys were assigned to our regiment and they were a rifle company with a White sergeant and a White corporal, all the rest of them were Black. I think half of them were college graduates. We saw them in action once and they knocked out a machine-gun nest. It was a very courageous action. So, what little I saw of them, the Blacks in combat, was that they were good soldiers.

Mark: About the Red Ball Express. Perhaps you could describe ...

Mr. U: Well, I wasn't part of it.

Mark: Oh, you weren't part of it?

Mr. U: See, part of us were.

Mark: I see.

Mr. U: I was assigned, my, why I don't know. I don't know how they made the selection but my regiment was not broken up and taken and guys taken to drive trucks. We were given special training and the duty we had was guarding munitions depots and stuff for about a week or ten days. So I had no driving experience or, other than when the guys come back. See an anti-tank company was, the purposes of an anti-tank company was to protect regimental headquarters and battalion headquarters and you were assigned; each platoon was assigned to a battalion. So the company, as such, very seldom ever was together during combat. You'd be, I think we were assigned to the Second Battalion and actually our platoon leader was under the direct command of the battalion commander and we did what he told us to do. So, after we got committed we saw very little of our other platoons.

Mark: I see. So, when did you first get into combat?

Mr. U: Well, we were committed in Holland. I can remember the event. I can't remember the date and this probably would tell us.

Mark: I think the date can be looked up ...

Mr. U: Yeah, and I can remember it because we were moving up, by that time we had been assigned to a rifle company or we were being used as rifle troops and our gun and truck was left behind. We were moving up along the road and as we got closer and closer we could hear the gunfire and the British, I think 92nd, it was the Polar Bear Division, I remember their insignia was a polar bear. These were grizzled veterans of Africa. And there was a tank unit that went by and we would go and they would come by us every so often one would stop. And, so there's this guy, a tank commander up there, and being a naive kid I said, "What's it like up there?" I can still hear him say, "Well, sonny you'll shite a bit but after that, it isn't too bad." And these guys were probably 30-35 years old 'cause they've been in the war from the beginning. So we were committed. I remember Joe Allen was up with us that night. I can still see him walking around even though there was sporadic mortar fire coming. We were all scared shitless, at least I was. We were, and then we got our guns. The first time we used our guns in combat we were, we knew we had a gun that wasn't worth a darn because we would a Mark hit and it would glance off. We couldn't do, if you got a flanking shot, you could knock off some tread or if you got a rear end, knock out the power plant. But they just, so we would leave the gun behind and go with the rifle troops and carry bazookas and land mines to protect. We could go as rifle troops and dig in and set up our perimeters for tank protection.

Mark: I see. In subsequent engagements did you find combat to be as emotionally draining as it was the first time? Does it get easier?

- Mr. U: I never got used to an 88. I was terrified every time I heard one fire. It would go BANG, pouf, and it would hit you. I mean, it was, and those guns they had SPs, self-propelled, they had them on their tanks. And a self-propelled was the one that bothered us the most because they were an armored light vehicle with an 88 on it. And they'd bang you from here and then the next minute they'd be over here banging at you. I saw them wipe out, the tanks used to, our tanks used to hunt in packs because they couldn't one-on-one handle a Tiger, certainly. And I saw an 88 knock out about four, maybe five Sherman's. Bang, bang, bang. Flanking shots. Just penetrated the tank. It was a noise that's hard to, it's kind of. Well, the other thing that was terrifying were their rockets. What the hell were they called?
- Mark: Screaming mermies?
- Mr. U: That's it. Screaming mermies. They used a lot of those and then ...
- Mark: Were they effective in a destructive sense or was it psychological?
- Mr. U: They were big. Probably, oh, I don't know, maybe bigger than an 81 millimeter mortar in terms of the impact or explosive power. But they were, yeah, they were not for psychological reasons, purposes, but they certainly had a hell of a psychological effect. I mean you were, but then the V-1 came along and that was another thing. You'd hear that damn thing. It sounded like my mother's old one-cylinder washing machine. And they didn't fly very high. You'd hear them come over and then they'd cut out. That's when they go into their dive and then you just wait until they hit. But they were used mostly in _____.
- Mark: Was there a problem, you experience, with combat fatigue? People crack up in combat? Did it happen frequently?
- Mr. U: I didn't see many. When I was in the hospital, there was a kid next to me that they were working on. They used to use sodium pentothal which was an, I think may be still today might be used as a anesthetic. But to use it, I'm told for battle fatigue or mental cases, they give them a certain amount. They wouldn't knock them out. Well, this kid was walking around most of the time in the mornings and they were talking to him and he'd have pentothal. And what had happened to him was he was a tanker and the tank commander's head had been blown off and the body dropped on him and he just cracked. Who wouldn't? So I don't, one guy in our outfit cracked. And I was afraid he was going to shoot us in the dead of night in - forest. He had been our platoon sergeant. Our platoon leader had been hit. Our platoon sergeant was back at company headquarters or had gone for something. It was dark. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face and the Germans were dropping stuff in on the pine trees, getting trees

bursts, and we were holed up in a bunker somewhere and this corporal was in charge and he cracked. And he was, he thought we were the enemy. I mean, it was ...

Mark: As time went on, you had gotten different engagements, did the quality of combat change? For example, could you tell that the Germans were running low on supplies or they had younger and younger soldiers? How did things change as you went into Germany?

Mr. U: Well, you would find most noticeably after we crossed at Vehmacht that you'd find SS troops, an SS officer in charge of a war mocked unit. Little kids Hitler used, would stick their head out of a, or they'd give them guns and they'd shoot at you. And old men. But this was after we crossed the Rhine. And most, I would think, of the German, the German soldiers were vastly superior to us. They were probably better trained. They had, and that's another interesting thing about combat. I'm sure, at least in my opinion, the reason that I didn't panic or crack or do something foolish was because my peer concern, I didn't want to let them down or I didn't want them to see me in a cowardly way. And I'm sure maybe there were a lot of other guys that felt that way. The German units were very cohesive. If we lost a platoon leader, or if we lost everybody down to our squad, or, well, let's say down to our platoon sergeant, we didn't know what the hell we were doing. The Germans knew what to do. I mean a private would step up and take over.

Mark: That's an interesting observation. I'm interested in the motivation to fight. What, this is something you touched on already, but what made the Americans fight? What made the Germans fight? You think the Germans were more motivated? Would that be a way to put it? From your own experience.

Mr. U: Well, they were better trained. Training has a lot to do with it. Hell, those guys had been trained for ten years, you know, and they had been in combat for a long time. I think their officer corps was better. What made us fight? Well, as I said, you didn't want to misbehave in the eyes of your buddies. Number two, of equal, maybe greater importance, you didn't want to let them down. Number three, yeah, a certain amount of patriotism. But you never gave that much thought, I mean, in terms of I'm doing this to save my country. At least I didn't. You had it before you got into combat. Some of the acts of heroism I saw were just unbelievable. There was a guy who was a first sergeant, he got a battlefield commission, who was a rifle company first sergeant, that, we had been cut off and, this was on the other side of the Mulde River, we, that battalion that we were attached to, we were firing support fire from, with our 50 caliber and they had gone across and they had gotten cut off and they were in the holes and the damned tanks were just

coming in and sticking in and it was a rough, rough situation. But you could see what was happening. Particularly with you glasses. They couldn't _____. This, he was a Polish guy, I think he got the Medal of Honor, but he rallied the troops. Would run from hole to hole and you could see this guy, you didn't know who the hell he was, he was firing bazookas at the tanks and I think, it might be listed here, I don't know how many Medals of Honor, see we were in combat about 160 days without relief. So, what motivated? I suspect sometimes anger. Let me illustrate if I can. It was in Holland and our trucks and guns were absolutely useless, the roads were on the dikes and you were just like a shooting gallery 'cause you were outlined and hell the 88s could pick you off. So we'd leave the trucks behind. The guns weren't any good anyway. And we were, and then they'd bring them up. And as they were bringing them up, or as our drivers were bringing them up we were huddled in this Dutch farmyard and our, we had a new lieutenant, Lieutenant McCarthy had been hit I think, and this new lieutenant wasn't very good. Well, you know, he hadn't been in combat and so forth. And one truck of ours was maybe 200 yards away from us and parked against the side of a building which was a good place to park a truck, but an 88 had hit it. And we didn't know how badly damaged it was so the lieutenant said, "I want some volunteers to go out and get that truck. Check it and if you can, bring it back." Well, it had flat tires on it. I don't know if you could have started it anyway. And, so, I, for whatever reason, I said, "Okay, let's go." So I started and two or three guys followed me. We got out there and we could determine the truck was, you know, beyond, we couldn't use, we couldn't start it. The 88 was pecking away at it. I, why did I do that? You know, I didn't have to volunteer. I don't know. Was I showing off for the new lieutenant? I really don't know. It was a dumb thing to do. You just don't volunteer if you're sensible, in combat. Normally. So, what makes - fear I'm sure has something to do with it.

Mark: I think a lot of different ...

Mr. U: I don't know. Ask a hero. They called me Task Force because every time we stopped I'd dig a hole and I carried an, well, I got rid of my M1. (chuckles)- Traded, the tankers were assigned, instead of, I had a 45 because I was a gunner and I also carried an M1. Well, it was, an M1 was bulky, etc. So we'd leave that on the truck. Tankers were some of the, tankers were issued tommy guns. Well, a damn tommy gun, you'd carry it on a sling and you'd go to get out of a tank when it's hit so we traded, some of them had what we called grease guns. They were a new American-made fast fire, short nozzle, machine pistol, machine gun. Some of them had those. Anyway, I traded my 45 for one of those grease guns, as we call them. But you'd have to ask a psychologist or hero what makes, I'm sure a lot of it was responsibility.

- Mark: Now, you mention right here that you spent 160 days on the line.
- Mr. U: I think it was 160 days.
- Mark: That just seems incredible.
- Mr. U: It was a record.
- Mark: I was going to ask you, before this I was going to ask you, with the different engagements did they each have a different character? Or was _____?
- Mr. U: Yeah, it was different. And there was until we got to, in Holland and in Belgium, in Holland particularly, there was a lot of water. They had blown the dikes and, you know, where you could travel usually was on top of dikes. And that was rather perilous. I thought I had something in here that would tell about, yeah, this would do it. I don't want to be, if I can be accurate, I think it was 160 days. One-hundred ninety-five consecutive days of front-line combat. And that's, we met the Russians on April 26 and we didn't get credit for it but, I think it was a green division that they brought up, from all the press and everything recorded this. But we had been in touch with the Russians long before that. Used to go out on patrols on the Alp River, yeah, 195 days.
- Mark: This might seem kind of a trite question but which battle, which engagement was the most harrowing, most difficult? Or could you even answer that kind of question?
- Mr. U: I guess when we were in the forest that was - because, number one, the tree bursts. Number two, it was dark even when it was light. I mean it was a heavy forest. I guess I was, I didn't enjoy any of them but I guess that was about as frightening as any. I want to make sure I'm talking about the right forest, too. No I can't. This doesn't tell me. Matterhorn, Dusseldorf. I'll tell you, if you let me, to relate emotional experiences, two of them. Neither of them involved combat in a sense of fighting. One was we were moving up in Holland. In a convoy. And it was a long convoy. And when convoys start you move. I mean, you move. It's capital punishment if you don't. And we're stopped in this little town and the Dutch were out waiving flags. They were so happy to see us. And the convoy stopped. Now, we're pulling our gun. This, a six-by-six is a six-wheeled vehicle. It's got three wheels but they're dual, they're not dual in the sense like a two-and-a-half ton truck. The wheels are behind each other, okay? So you've got in front, you got two wheels. You pulled your gun and you carried, you got a 50 caliber pedestal on and you had your squad in the back and you your ammunition was towed. This sweet, little, grandmotherly old lady comes out with, and I don't know if you've ever seen these delicate cocoa cup with a high pitcher,

iny cups. And she came out carrying this with hot chocolate and poured this for us and was giving us. And she's standing between the gun and the tailgate, okay? The order comes to move out. And we've got her cups. And of course bohunking driver puts it in gear and starts moving. He's picking up speed and this little old lady is running behind us. And she's hollering at us in Dutch and we can't understand her. We're saying, "Get away, get away." And we could just see the wheels of the gun coming closer and hit. She went down and the gun went right over her. Her head hit and sounded like a muskmelon. I don't know to this day whether she was killed or not. I mean, I was just, I don't know, it was just a horrible thing. The other one was when we captured Nordhausen which was a concentration camp. There were 3,000 corpses there. All of them had died in bed. They were starved to death. They had ulcers on their buttocks and their bodies laying on straw mattresses. The stench was - and what was, the Germans were forced to remove the bodies and we dug a mass trench and - that was an ungodly experience. Related to that, Colonel Dezovich, who was I think he was killed, I can't remember. He was our battalion commander. A hell of a good one. Found a dog, a German shepherd and he liked it and the dog liked him. And it was an SS dog that they used to patrol and keep the prisoners or the displaced persons as they were called, but whenever that dog saw a civilian, it would go berserk and Dezovich had to kill him. Because it had been trained to go after civilians, you know, the people of the concentration camp. They were making buzz bombs, we called them buzz bombs. They were making V1s and the German people were outraged, tearful, angry because we were, and I didn't know anything about it. I'd say bullshit because, you know, they were walking from the concentration camp to the factory every day and they were dropping, you knew that. Don't tell us you didn't know about it. Yet on the other hand, if it had been me, what would I do about it? You know, if I want to do something the SS would put a bullet in my head. Nordhausen was not, you know, like the others that got all the publicity. It was a horrible experience.

Mark: The 104th was the first American unit in there?

Mr. U: We were part of the, yeah. We were, I can't say we were the first in the sense because there was, we were then with the 3rd Armored, and we were moving pretty fast so we were, if not the first, we were one of the first to get in there.

Mark: And I take it you had no idea that you were going to come across such a thing.

Mr. U: We didn't. I'm sure Intelligence must have known. You could smell it. You never smelled anything until you smelled a dead body. That was another thing about the emotional aspects of the war. And that is that you

got inured to death. I mean, it was hard to see a German that was dead the first time around, but later on it was just another body.

Mark: I've got some other topics.

Mr. U: All right, go ahead.

Mark: Maybe we'll go back to some of these combat things in a little bit. I'm always interested in the life of the GI in Europe. I suppose if you're in combat 195 days you don't have much free time off the line. I suppose a trip to Paris or something like that, some leave time, some down time?

Mr. U: There was some.

Mark: Did you get any of that at all?

Mr. U: I didn't. I got to Paris because I'd been hit. I didn't, but some of our guys did get, and I don't know how they worked it but some did get R and R. But the division was 195 days on the line.

Mark: What sort of things do the GIs do to occupy his time if they're not actively engaged in combat? A little card playing or drinking? ... that seems to come up a lot.

Mr. U: When you had idle moments, one of the first things we did when we'd take a town was to find where we would spend the night and we'd take over a house, or a farm house, or kick the Germans out. One of the, I remember one place we took was called Guest House Elconny, which in Germany there are lots of guest houses spread out in the country and in small towns. And we were in this house for maybe three days and it was a pool hall and a tavern and a restaurant. And we used to have beer. I remember they delivered beer to us. The Germans.

Mark; The Germans?

Mr. U: Germans, yes. And fresh meat which was really wonderful. Eggs, eggs were really sought after. And we were there three days I think. While there wasn't much going on. This was after we crossed the Rhine I think, or was it. I can't remember. Anyway, what did we do? Well, the guys played cards. Some of them were chasing women. Some of them were very cooperative and others weren't. It was very clear, it was made very abundantly clear that, you know, any sexual relations with an unwilling German woman, you get your neck strung. And there were was no bones about it.

Mark: Was that true? _____ try it?

Mr. U: I don't know. I know there were guys that were shacking up with them but they were willing partners.

Mark: Now, the Germans were the enemy?

Mr. U: Yes.

Mark: Technically, if I recall, you weren't supposed to be fraternizing against the military with the Germans.

Mr. U: Oh hell. We fraternized with them. I mean, I never could hate the Germans. I mean, the Germans, to me, were more appealing than the French. I mean, the French would steal you blind. And as persons, you know, the German farmer or the German farm wife, I didn't have any personal, intense feelings. This is funny. This one little town we're coming through, a lot of the Germans were all of a sudden Americans, or at least wanted you to think they were happy you were there. And we're going through this town and you kind of half in combat and half not and they're out there with these kids. Now the 3rd Armored had moved through maybe an hour ahead of us. And I'm sure they put these kids up to it. 'Cause there was a lot of rivalry, sort of, between the two units. A lot of unit pride. Really, it was. And you talk about what made people do things. Unit pride was one of them. Anyway, we were going down the street and these little kids, I don't know where they got them but some of them had American flags. And, yeah, I'm sure the 3rd Armored had told them to wave their flags and holler at us, "You beat your meat, you beat your meat." And I'm sure the 3rd Armored had done that. And the kids thought it meant like, "Welcome Americans" or something like that. But, that's as far, and we thought it was funny as hell, too. But I never had any hatred for, except those SS troopers and they were not human. We were riding a tank one day and up ahead, I was in the second tank, up ahead, they used to dig a hole, the Germans were, would dig a hole and fire at you with a panzer pulse (???) which was the equivalent of a bazooka. And this guy stood up and you could identify an SS trooper immediately. They were always, usually as the war sent on they didn't wear their uniform but they were dressed in black and then they had under their arm two bolts of lightening. And their insignia was two bolts of lightening. So if you thought you had an SS trooper you just lift his arm up and you could tell. Anyway, they were fanatics. And this guy charged the lead tank with a panzer (???) and the tanker cut him down with his machine gun. There was a column of maybe six tanks and each tank spun their turrets on him.

Mark: Now, the name Mr. U:, it's not Irish necessarily.

- Mr. U: It's Austrian.
- Mark: It's a Germanic extracts. I'm wondering what was, if this would be part of your growing up and your background. Did you have any relatives ...
- Mr. U: No. My mother was full-blooded Irish.
- Mark: Oh, is that true?
- Mr. U.: Yeah. So I never, and my grandfather Mr. U: married a woman who was English. So there was, and neither, my grandfather couldn't speak German. So there was never any cultural emphasis or awareness in my family about Germans, about Germany. I had an uncle, Uncle Billy, who married my mother's sister, who was first-generation German, spoke German fluently. But I never, he never, I never felt German. But I just, the German people appealed to me. I don't, to this day, like the French. I just don't trust them.
- Mark: How did the Americans get along with the French, or Dutch, or Belgium as well? Were they different? Obviously ...
- Mr. U: I thought there was a distinct difference between the French as compared to the Belgians or to the Dutch and the Germans. Maybe it's because of a limited exposure and maybe an innate prejudice, I don't know. But I just didn't care for the French. Except the Normandy's, the people in Normandy who were genuine, honest, and happy to see you. I just felt the other French people as we moved through France were trying to steal you blind. I didn't detect any, I can't say that there was any animosity between GIs in general and the French. GIs are, you know, pretty gregarious and open and friendly types. And the Germans, I never saw anything that was I could say open hostility between GIs and German civilians except in the concentration camps.
- Mark: This then leads to the subject of relations, military relations between the U.S. allied forces. You mentioned you were attached to the British for awhile. I'm wondering if you could comment on ...
- Mr. U: Canadians were, the Canadian First Army was a hell of an outfit, in my judgment. They were excellent soldiers. Canadians could not go overseas unless they volunteered. They also had minimum physical standards, as I understand it. And they were all pretty big guys. I mean, probably be at least 6 feet. And damn good soldiers. I remember when we first, in Holland, came in contact with them, we were, hell, if we were going to light a cigarette, we'd dig a hole and get down and hide the damned thing, you know, so there'd be no detection. And then we got up to where the Canadians, we were to join the Canadians, they had a big fire going roasting

a cow. They just killed a cow. They were tough cookies. I had a lot of regard for them. The British soldier and the British of which we saw quite a few of their tank people, excellent, excellent soldiers. I never saw any of the French in combat. Never had anything to do with them so I can't tell you.

Mark: Now, what about the Russians? You mentioned you ...

Mr. U: Yeah, we met the Russians. They were, we sent out patrols, unauthorized really, but our people apparently thought well, hell we, the war isn't over yet and so we want to know what's out there. And we'd get in contact with the Russians and we'd go through Germans who wanted to surrender. They'd tell us that we going to be fighting the Russians with you in six months.

Mark: Did you believe it?

Mr. U: No, we didn't believe it.

Mark: I mean the relations between ...

Mr. U: We didn't believe it but we came damn close to it. After the war. They were a motley group. Great believers in artillery. You talk about terrifying artillery. We saw it from a distance. Hub-to-hub - for as far as the eye could see. I mean artillery and tanks. And they would, we used to have, sometimes what we called a moving artillery barrage. It would move out in front of us and we'd move in behind it. Well, we'd keep a pretty good distance and even then the short rounds would drop. These guys would probably lose half their men but they'd get to the German holes, trenches before they had time to recover. So their regard for human life was very low. A lot of women truck drivers, tank drivers.

Mark: _____ TALKED OVER EACH OTHER

Mr. U: Women. And you couldn't tell them, I mean, they wore these padded uniforms and their features were coarse but they were women. Liked to drink vodka. Would move into a town and they killed everything that moved. Rape the women, hang them there. I tell you, I wouldn't want to fight them. So, the Russians, course, crude, brutal.

Mark: I've got some notes here about some more military-type things. I'm interested in replacements in a unit. As you move up, obviously you're killed and wounded and replacements come in. Was there, when you study the Vietnam War one of the problems a lot of military people would tell you was that there was a constant flow of personnel. I'm wondering how replacements were dealt with in a unit such as yours. Did the new guys get along with the old guys? Was there any hostility as there sometimes was in

Vietnam? Did you guide them along or did people just come in and take over? How did it work?

Mr. U: In my outfit, I think we tried to take care of them. I know in a rifle company, because the VAR guy was the first one to get knocked off when a replacement come up because nobody else wanted to take the VAR so they'd give it to a replacement. Second lieutenants as platoon leaders were always getting knocked off. And a new platoon leader, you had two of them. Oftentimes the platoon sergeant would take him under his wing and if he was a smart guy, he'd listen to the platoon sergeant. Replacements, I remember when I was coming back from the hospital, we ended up in a barracks, well the barracks was an old greenhouse, it was a repo depot, replacement depot. Guys from all over. I was in with a bunch of guys from the 82nd Airborne. And those guys were going over the hill to get back to their outfit. And a lot of other guys were going over the hill because they didn't know where the hell they were going to end up. And this unit pride was very strong. And Eisenhower issued a general order saying that, except in very extenuating circumstances, a guy that was coming back was to be assigned to his original outfit, and I ended up back with my original outfit. But you were also supposed to go back carrying your weapon that you were assigned, which, my MOS was for a sidearm, 45 and they didn't have any. As a matter of fact, they didn't have any weapons for us. You know what they gave us? Brought in a box of 03 rifles, World War I, 03 rifles. Where the hell they got them I don't know. Full of cosmoline. Clean them. No bolts. So we clean them. And away we went carrying absolutely worthless ... (chuckles)

Mark: Did you actually use this in combat?

Mr. U: No, no. You threw it away.

Mark: I see. I never heard of anyone using a Springfield in combat.

Mr. U: Oh, yes, they did. (scoffs) The snipers used them. You bet. A lot of snipers used them. Yup. Very accurate and you didn't, you were more interested in accuracy than rapid fire. Yeah, a lot of 03s.

Mark: Now, you mentioned several times you were wounded. Was it just once?

Mr. U: Yeah.

Mark: I'm interested in that incident and your experience with the Army medical system.

Mr. U: Well, a superficial wound as it turned out. I was firing with a guy, 50 caliber support fire across the Mulde River. We'd fix our fields of fire and then hang a blanket over so we'd try to hide the muzzle blast. But ultimately the blanket would disintegrate.

Mark: Now this is in Holland?

Mr. U: Uh huh. And we were in the second story of a house. And an 88 came in the room next to us and the concussion knocked me out and the plaster whatever, I put my hand on my face and I thought "Oh, my God. I'm going to be blind." But it was just superficial. And a spent piece hit me in the belly but it didn't penetrate to the intestines as it turned out. So I was sent back, had surgery, went as far as _____(?). The medical system, medical care, superb. Went to a hospital in France. I just can't say enough for the, and the battalion aid station, you know, jeeze, those guys were doing things under combat conditions that I'm sure saved a lot of lives. And you got back to division and as you went further back, of course, the care. And so I can't, the medical system was, in my observation, superb.

Mark: And so by the time you were wounded and got back up to the line it was maybe a month? I get the impression it wasn't terribly long.

Mr. U: Because it wasn't a bad wound as it turned out. I was hit on my birthday, I think. October 25. I was back on the line, oh golly, I know it was long before Christmas. I was probably gone a month.

Mark: Now, you mentioned - beyond that.

Mr. U: I think it is. It just says Purple Heart Medal, G06027. Wounds, nope, October 29.

Mark: After your birthday.

Mr. U: Yup.

Mark: You mentioned you were at the Remagan Bridge? I'm not as familiar with infantry units and where they were at different times. This was the actual liberation of the bridge. You were there some time after?

Mr. U: Yeah. The outfit, I don't know what outfit it was that liberated it ...

Mark: I can't remember either. _____

Mr. U: Yup. And they, you know, couldn't believe their eyes and then they got across and secured the bridge. When we got there, I can't remember, maybe

it was two days after this had happened, and we were pulled off from where we were and sped down to the bridge because they wanted to put as many across as they could but by that time the bridge was unsafe. It was under fire, and so the engineers had put up pontoon bridges, so we crossed on a pontoon.

Mark: I see.

Mr. U: I don't know how many troops actually. I don't think it would have held any trucks or their guns or anything but a lot of foot troops got across I know. I think it may have been combat engineers were the first ones that crossed it.

Mark: So, when the war ended, where were you?

Mr. U: We were on, Hollange, Germany?

Mark: _____(??) were in Europe because in your notes here you were in some training. So on VE Day _____(??)?

Mr. U: Well, on VE day we were in Hollange, Germany I believe, which is not too far from the Alp. We were living in a house and living pretty good. And so the war ended and we were almost immediately told to move to Camp Lucky Strike, which was in France. And so we packed our gear and our trucks and away we went.

Mark: You went back to the States?

Mr. U: We were at Camp Lucky Strike, see they named all of the camps after cigarettes for whatever reason I don't know. And we went back to the States and I got a two week furlough and then reported back to Fort MacArthur, or no, Camp San Lois Obispo. I was discharged from Fort MacArthur. And we were to be, I was in Madison on VJ Day.

Mark: Oh, really?

Mr. U: Yeah.

Mark: Could you describe the scene?

Mr. U: It was wild. I wasn't downtown. I was on the east side at my aunt's with my parents visiting my aunt and her daughter. It was even out, it was down in Monona. But even there it was wild. All kinds of celebrations. But I never left the house. I just stayed with my parents.

- Mark: Was it an odd experience for you to be back in Wisconsin, Madison, after having been through the combat experience? And at the time thinking that you might have to go do it again?
- Mr. U: Yeah, I felt on a high. Very high, in terms of being home. And, of course, everyone thought you were a hero. Wherever you went, people wanted to buy you a drink and listen, but one of the difficulties, and this is actually, you've heard more of my experiences than anybody, one of the things at that point in my life was difficult to do was that you couldn't, it was difficult to tell anyone what it was like unless they'd been there. And so I never talked to anybody, really, to any great length until recent years.
- Mark: Did anyone ask you?
- Mr. U: Yeah, they'd ask you what was it like. And, you know, my father in particular wanted to know more about it. But it was just, they sensed I'd rather not talk about it. I, the two incidents about the concentration camp and this little lady, that really still gets me, in terms of those, terrible, terrible tragedies.
- Mark: I'll come back to that sort of thing in a second. I'm interested briefly in your experience in California. You actually went to San Lois Obispo ...
- Mr. U: Right.
- Mark: You were discharged from ...
- Mr. U: From Fort MacArthur.
- Mark: California.
- Mr. U: Well, we went to San Lois Obispo. We were supposed to, the war had ended but they still sent us out there. And we were to receive amphibious training there. Then, it was kind of a lark for awhile. And guys with high points were leaving. They would, a lot of the time was spent with people, officers from say headquarters, telling us what we were supposed to have done - in the training. And it would, I wrote a letter to the Smithsonian Institute and told them that I was really outraged at that.
- Mark: I was going to ask about that. Thanks for reminding me. The whole, the atomic bomb, you were scheduled to go to ...
- Mr. U: Damn right.
- Mark: ... Japan and fight?

Mr. U: And our division would be in the first two waves. And casualty estimates of the first wave, according to the officers who were talking to us, was 50%. They estimated 1/4 million GIs. What were these fuzzy-duzzies down there that never had the experience, wouldn't have had to die and now all of a sudden they're apologists for Japan. I talked to a guy from Janesville that was on the Bataan Death March. I mean, I just, I'm furious about the, to me a deliberate distortion of history. If they want to report about the war, they want to report about the atomic bomb, report it without editorial comment. And so I wrote them a letter and sent a copy to Congressman Klug. I didn't get an apology or anything. They, I said I want to see a copy of your financial statement. I want to know where the money is coming from to support you people and they sent me a copy of their annual report which is about as an elaborate glossy report as I've ever seen. But it doesn't tell you anything. But they get a fair amount of money from the government. I don't, you know -- why the Japanese civilians certainly were, I suppose one could say the victims, but who triggered that. I mean, have you been to Hawaii?

Mark: No, I haven't.

Mr. U: Go to the USS Arizona. You know, there's still, what, 4500 guys down there in the hole? So, we were fighting militaristic, well, fanatical establishment as were the Germans. And I would have said if the only way we could win the war against Germany is to drop nuclear, I'd say nuc them. I just, I don't understand the rationale, but I, as I said to the people at the Smithsonian, you know, who's to say about Patton. It's my guts and your blood.

Mark: Now, this is something you briefly reflected on previously. The Smithsonian.

Mr. U: Uh huh.

Mark: I don't know whether I should ask the question or not, but do you recall learning about the bomb and do you remember what you thought about it?

Mr. U: I said, great, the war's going to be over and we shouldn't withhold our -- I wouldn't favor biological warfare, but -- you know, Germany came that close to having it. We didn't know. I don't know if our intelligence people knew how close the Japanese were coming to. But they wouldn't hesitate to use the damn thing, I'm sure of that. But to disparage the decision and disparage those who executed it and to apologize as I gather from reading the quotes from some of the stuff that they had there, to the Japanese, is just outrage. I mean it's insult. I'll tell you frankly, I was, I didn't go to the 50th reunion over there. I could have. I could have with Steve Ambrose, but I

didn't. I'll tell you why I didn't go. Two reasons. Number one, it would be a media event, which it was. Number two, I couldn't stand there and listen to the platitudes of the President of the United States. I mean, all right so forgive him for his indiscretions. All right, I can forgive him but I don't think that Clinton's changed his attitude in respect to the military. Of course, the senator from, that stupid jerk, you know, Helms. God. But, and so you say well, you feel strongly about it. Well, you're damned right I feel strongly about it. The most moving thing I have ever done since the end of the war was go to the Omaha Beach Cemetery. 'Cause I had some people that were buried there. I mean, and so, you know, those up there that made the decisions maybe you can criticize them and, so maybe some people say we were dummies for doing what we did. Bullshit. If we didn't do what we did, Hitler would be running the world today. Or his successor. I'm not saying war is the only answer to it but at that particular time, in those set of events, there was no answer other than doing what we had to do. And we ended the war. So, I think, you know, people that study the Civil War which was probably the most brutal in terms of casualties, highest in ...

Mark: In U.S. history.

Mr. U: ... don't seem to have the same, what? They almost glorify it in many ways. But why would they, I don't know, maybe you could tell me, you're a different generation. What do you think about it, I mean in terms of using the atomic bomb? Do you think ...

Mark: Well, we can talk about that after I turn the tape off.

Mr. U: Okay.

Mark: I don't ...

Mr. U: Don't want to be on record?

Mark: Oh, no. I just like to stay neutral for all my -- I've interviewed vets who protested wars and I've interviewed one guy who used to step on the Roosevelt Dime to go across the mountains. We can talk about it after.

Mr. U: Okay.

Mark: I'm interested in coming home to Madison. As I mentioned, this is my area of __(?) interest. When you first came home, you were discharged then.

Mr. U: It was in November of 194...

Mark: 45.

- Mr. U: November of '45. November 11, how about that?
- Mark: And so then you returned to Portage, was it?
- Mr. U: Yes, I returned to Portage. There was a period of time where the Circle Bar was a headquarters for returning veterans. Every day there'd be a new guy, an old friend. We formed a basketball team called the Ruptured Ducks. We played basketball in the armory against anybody that wanted to play against us. It was a lot of drinking. A lot of partying, a lot of celebrating. And so my good friend, Carl Alvance, he'd been a tail gunner who'd been shot down and had a miraculous escape out of France, and I decided, hey, you know, we can't, this is enough. So we went to the post office and got a job delivering Christmas packages and stuff and then went down to Madison and re-enrolled at the university.
- Mark: Now, did you mostly socialize with veterans after the war?
- Mr. U: Yeah.
- Mark: Was it just because every one you knew happened to go into the war? Or was there something more?
- Mr. U: I think it's because most of my generation were veterans.
- Mark: Yeah. And so you went back to school.
- Mr. U: Went back to the university.
- Mark: Did you have any trouble getting re-enrolled or anything like that?
- Mr. U: Nope. Except they short-changed me on my credits.
- Mark: I made a note of that here and I was going to ask you about that. 'Cause I didn't get a lot of my military credits here either. I don't know, maybe it's just a UW tradition. I don't know. You were supposed to get a certain amount of credits for your ASTP training?
- Mr. U: Well, first of all I think you got 15 credits just for being a veteran. I'm not sure if that's the correct number or not. Rutgers, you know it's an Ivy League school, good standing. And I had, I think the equivalent of 35 credits maybe, 40 credits. It was at least 30 credits 'cause it was two semesters of work and it was probably 16-18 credits so that would be 36-32. And it was in math and chemistry and stuff like that. My grades weren't outstanding but they were Bs and Cs.

Mark: Acceptable.

Mr. U: Yeah. And so the university, I got my transcript and turned it in, and they ask you to do that as part of your re-enrollment, and I went to the Advanced Standing Committee as I recall it was called, I think I got 19 credits. Well, I could have got 15 just for being a veteran. See, they didn't add my total credits, 19 credits. So you couldn't do both. Take your 15 and add that on to the 19 credits.

Mark: Is this common?

Mr. U: I don't know. I really don't know.

Mark: Did you use the GI Bill to finance your education? Or did you do it on your own?

Mr. U: Oh, no. I got married. Began to have a family as was the case with most GIs ...

Mark: While you were in school?

Mr. U: Yeah. And I had, I went back to work part-time, Wisconsin Power and Light.

Mark: Doing what?

Mr. U: Clerical work. What I had been doing before I left. And then got into law school. And so I was getting \$90, I think, a month.

Mark: Which covered your expenses.

Mr. U: Bull. My rent for the apartment was \$50. So that's better than half and then you add -- I remember we moved to Badger Village.

Mark: I was going to ask.

Mr. U: And my wife, I'm remarried now, my first wife is dead. We had two children. Or one child and the second was on the way when we moved to Badger. I can remember going into Baraboo to buy food and it was \$15 a week that we budgeted. A lot of hamburger and we got by. They were good days.

Mark: What were conditions like in Badger Village?

Mr. U: All veterans. Everybody was on the upbeat. The war was over and manyana, sun shining, tomorrow's going to be a great day. And everybody was having kids.

Mark: There were lots of kids running around?

Mr. U: Well, they weren't running around 'cause they were just babies, most of them. No body had any money. Lee Dreyfus was my neighbor.

Mark: Is that right?

Mr. U: Yeah. And they were good days. I look back on those days with considerable fondness.

Mark: Are you still in contact with people you knew back then?

Mr. U: I had a buddy who was in law school with me, Jerry Parks, and we lost contact ten years ago. No, I can't, well there was one guy, Gordy, ooh, he ended up being a deputy attorney general here, and he's retired, and Helen just died about two years ago. Samuelson, Gordy Samuelson. We maintained contact for a long time. But no I can't say, and I don't know of any reunions or groups that have organized to keep -- how about a Coke or something? Or a glass of water?

Mark: So, we were talking, oh, about people in the Badger Village.

Mr. U: Oh, yeah. And so as far as I know there's been no organized effort, you know, to have reunions or anything like that.

Mark: I like to know for my own selfish scholarly interests?

Mr. U: As far as the 104th, they had reunions. And then they kind of petered out. I maintained contact with about half a dozen. We call, there were three guys. James R., James K., and James T. James Tandy, James Mr. U., and James Shaw. We were, we call ourselves James R., James T., and James K. I kept in touch with them up until of late. That's kind of, and I'd like to do something about that.

Mark: I'll come back to the college thing but while we're on the subject, did you join any sort of veterans organizations after the war. In college or afterwards?

Mr. U: My father ...

Mark: Were you in for that?

- Mr. U: Well, they turned me off.
- Mark: In what sense?
- Mr. U: I don't know. It just seemed it was, I was just too busy getting back with my life and I didn't really, and I didn't feel, and this may sound, I don't know -- I didn't feel that I deserved any special, although I took advantage of the GI Bill, I didn't feel that I deserved any special consideration. I remember my father had a good friend, George Weber, from Baraboo who had been state commander of the American Legion, and George was after me all the time to join and wanted to make sure because I had been wounded to file a claim and make sure I got that on record. I never did that. I don't know. I think a lot of, well, I shouldn't say this but ...
- Mark: It's up to you.
- Mr. U: I just, I didn't feel comfortable with, and they were all older guys. World War I. I just never got interested.
- Mark: Back to campus life for a minute. You went to school before the war? And then you went to school again after.
- Mr. U: Uh hum.
- Mark: How was the campus different?
- Mr. U: Oh, it was crowded. You used to sit in Bascom Hall out in the hallway to listen to Grant Hines lecture on history. I mean, it was tough because it was -- the university was doing the best it could. They were great to the veterans in many ways, like Badger Village and the Quonset huts and stuff, but it taxed their resources. The quality of the education suffered, I think, because there were just so many guys and gals to take care of.
- Mark: Were the relations between the professors and students different? This is something I read sometimes.
- Mr. U: I can't tell you because I was never -- when I came down here to go to school before the war I was working half days and going to school half days and studying at night. So I never had any social life. And same way when the war ended. I was, you know, caught up again going to school. So, though I have a fondness for the University of Wisconsin, I was not involved in anything other than just going to school.

- Mark: And just one thing. Did you have, were there any sort of counselors on campus to guide you in using your benefits or were you on your own? You had to come onto campus and know that you had options on the GI Bill, for example. Or was there some one who would ...
- Mr. U: Well, when you re-enrolled they took a lot of information. I think that they took care of your filing for the GI Bill, etc., etc. But, and I never, I'm sure they had counselors that would counsel you on a variety of things but I never used one.
- Mark: 'Cause there's a veterans coordinator on campus today.
- Mr. U: Yes, oh there were lots, I'm sure, for example, Holly, I think his name was, the guy that ran Badger Village. And that was all veterans. So they, yeah, they really did their best to accommodate the vets. Everybody did. It was a great time in this nation's history in terms of my book. And all the golden years that followed. We really haven't had any since. So, I think the university did a good job. The GIs, you know, I guess they set records with respect to grade point. They were very industrious as a group and were busy raising families and catching up.
- Mark: There were other aspects of the GI Bill. There was the 5220 Club. I don't get the impression that you ...
- Mr. U: That was unemployment compensation.
- Mark: Right. You went to college right away?
- Mr. U: Yeah. I didn't get 5220.
- Mark: There were housing provisions. I don't want to get too personal or anything, but did you use GI Bill benefits to finance your first home, for example? Were you able to do that on your own?
- Mr. U: No, I went the conventional route.
- Mark: Okay. And the last thing I want to ask about involves any sort of readjustment problems you had coming back into society. The problems the Vietnam veterans faced on the TV and in newspapers and that kind of thing. Did you experience the emotional kinds of things, acceptance back into society, any of that sort of thing?
- Mr. U: Well, my heart bleeds for the Vietnam veterans. First of all, we were all heroes. Everybody loved us when we came back. The Vietnam vets were, in many cases, looked upon as having done dastardly things. Number two,

World War II cut across the board. Vietnam, I think, by and large, was fought by minorities and those that were in a lesser advantaged economic class. That wasn't true in World War II. So, I don't, I got married rather quickly, started having a family. I don't recall, my wife said I used to have nightmares but I used to have those when I was a kid, too. I have memories flood back on me every so often but I don't weep, I don't, you know, I'm proud of what I was involved in. So, I don't, I can't really say I had any emotional readjustments. I'm sure some guys did that had a rougher go than I did. I really didn't have, compared to most of the combat guys, I didn't have a very severe experience. Like Milo, I mean jeeze, Milo Flaten's experience.

Mark: Well, I've run out of questions. Is there anything you'd like to add before I turn the tape off?

Mr. U: Uhm, I think I'd like to add that I wouldn't want to do it again. But I'm glad it happened to me. It helped me develop certain values and out of those experiences higher regards for other people. Some of the people that I rubbed shoulders with in the military I would never had met, like the hillbillies that were uneducated, had habits that were offensive but were courageous and good buddies. It caused me to develop a greater appreciation for the human spirit in people. _____ But it was an, this may sound screwy but it was an enriching experience for me, personally. As terrifying as it was and I saw enough of combat to know and to have just the highest regard for the guys, when I look at what went on D-Day and Point Blanc I guess it is, and than I think about, I don't know anything about Vietnam, I wasn't there, but the closest thing to Vietnam I suspect is Guadalcanal and that jungle warfare there. And those poor guys in Vietnam I'm quite sure suffered a greater, greater stress and bloodshed and hardship than we in World War II did, by and large. I'm sure there were a lot of guys that had worse experiences but I just enough of veteran to really have my heart bleed for the Vietnam guys. In addition to the Omaha Beach Cemetery, another impact on me emotionally was the Wall, the monument in Washington. I just think that's, anybody that -- you know, when I was there, there was a guy standing maybe five yards from me, I looked over, he was a funny looking tall, skinny guy and he had a ranger with him, a park ranger, and a woman. And I looked again. Do you know who it was? Jimmy Stewart. He'd lost a son in Vietnam.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Mr. U: Yeah. See he was a flyer in World War II _____. Well, I've run out of spit, too, as we used to say.

Mark: Well, I thank you very much for stopping in.

[End of Interview]