

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
**HOWARD J. WEBER**  
Artillery, Army, World War II  
2005

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**Weber, Howard J. (1916-2008).** Oral History Interview, 2005.

Approximate length: 22 minutes

*Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Abstract:**

In this oral history interview, Howard Weber discusses his service with the Army in the Pacific Theater during World War II and his duties in the 129<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery. Weber discusses being drafted April 22, 1941 and the extension of his service after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He mentions basic training at Camp Livingston (Louisiana) and how the conditions were nice because it was a new camp. Weber was shipped to Australia from San Francisco in 1942. He explains that the 129<sup>th</sup> was a supply unit and that he worked as supply for his entire service in the war. He recalls the dropping of the atomic bombs while he was stationed in Manila (Philippines) and the reactions of everyone to that event. He discusses being discharged on October 3, 1945 and getting a job in Racine.

Other topics of note in the interview include: discussion of furlough during his service, receiving V-mail, and his regret at not using GI benefits.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Weber (1916-2008) served with the Army from April 1941 to October 1945. After being discharged he worked with Western Printing in Racine, Wisconsin for thirty-six years.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2005.

Transcribed by Telise Johnsen, 2012.

Reviewed by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Abstract written by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

## Interview Transcript

MacDonald: This is a interview with Howard J. Weber who served with the United States Army during World War II. It's being conducted at 1:00 p.m. at the following address of [REDACTED] Bailey's Harbor, Wisconsin, on the date of July 16, 2005. The interviewer is Terry MacDonald.

Howard, can you briefly give us a little bit of background about your life prior to going into the military—year you were born and where you were born?

Weber: I was born on October 6, 1916, in Racine, Wisconsin.

MacDonald: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Weber: I had four sisters and one brother.

MacDonald: Were they older than you or younger than you?

Weber: Two sisters were older, and the rest are all younger.

MacDonald: Okay. Did you go to school and high school in Racine?

Weber: I went through twelfth grade, and then I went to technical school, you know, at times. Took up machine shop and woodwork and stuff like that.

MacDonald: Okay. And what happened when you went into the military? Were you drafted into the Service, or did you—?

Weber: I was drafted in the first draft there was, in 1941—April 22, I believe it was.

MacDonald: And when they drafted you at that time, was it, like, for a year or a two year—?

Weber: It was supposed to be one year. But then I was in until December, when Pearl Harbor was hit. And then they says, "Extended to eighteen months," but it ended up being four and a half years.

MacDonald: Okay. When you went in at boot camp, what was it like? And how old were you when you went in?

Weber: I was twenty-four years old.

MacDonald: Okay. And what was it like in boot camp?

Weber: Well, I thought it was really very nice. First, we started off in Milwaukee to get our shots and physical and all that. And then we went to Illinois—Camp Grant—for a short time. Then we went to Camp Livingston, Louisiana.

MacDonald: Was there a whole group that went from Milwaukee or Racine?

Weber: A whole group from Racine.

MacDonald: Then you knew quite a few of the fellows?

Weber: Oh, yeah. Out of the bunch, only two of them from my town ended up with me.

MacDonald: So when you were at Camp Grant, what were the living conditions like down at that point?

Weber: Well, Camp Grant wasn't much. We was only there a few days. We got a train and were shipped down to Louisiana.

MacDonald: And how about down South at that time of year?

Weber: It was pretty warm, pretty warm down there. We had a nice, nice camp down there. It was new—a very nice camp.

MacDonald: Were you living in tents or did they have some sort of barracks?

Weber: Down there—let's see—I can't think what it was. It was barracks, gas heat; it was fairly new.

MacDonald: And what kind of training did you do there?

Weber: Well, we went on maneuvers to the Carolinas, and that, several times. That was about the only training we had.

MacDonald: Infantry training, then, huh?

Weber: Yeah. I was in the Artillery, but we still had to do like Infantry.

MacDonald: Uh-huh. Did the Army send you to any specific type of training?

Weber: No. He wanted me to go in for officer training, but I didn't want that. I said, "No, I didn't want that."

MacDonald: Okay, so what happened after your—?

Weber: Training down there?

MacDonald: Yeah.

Weber: Well, then we went up to Fort Devens, took the train up to Fort Devens. When we got there it was snowing, a lot of snow was flying.

MacDonald: Where was Fort Devens located?

Weber: Massachusetts.

MacDonald: Oh, okay.

Weber: See, we were supposed to go to Europe, but the ship we were supposed to be going on capsized in the harbor—started on fire and it capsized. So they got us on a train, shipped us to San Francisco. We ended up in the Cow Palace there.

MacDonald: What year was this?

Weber: That was '42, April of '42.

MacDonald: What was the feeling like? Going back a little ways, when the war broke out in the Pacific, what was the feeling of the guys in your camp at that time?

Weber: Well, we were all surprised that it happened. I know that. Never thought that would happen.

MacDonald: Did you think you were going to go to the Pacific, or—?

Weber: No. We thought we were going to go to Europe. That's where we were supposed to have gone.

MacDonald: Were you assigned to a specific unit at that time?

Weber: I was with the Service Battery, the One-Two-Nine [129] Field Artillery. So we didn't see much action. We were behind everything there—supplied them with supplies. I was lucky that way.

MacDonald: Uh-huh. So when they decided to ship you across country on a train, how was that for a train ride across the States?

Weber: That was very good. I had first class coach all the way over there. No junky boxcar or nothing; it was nice. And we saw lots of towns—stopped

at every little town, jumped off, got a little bite to eat or to drink. It was a nice, nice trip.

MacDonald: And in San Francisco, you said you stayed at the Cow Palace?

Weber: Cow Palace.

MacDonald: Did they have it set up for a big Army facility, or—

Weber: No. It was like our own big Quonset place. We slept in there just a couple days, and then we got on the ship. I got on the *SS Monterrey*, and that was exactly a year after I was drafted.

MacDonald: And on board the ship, was that a troop ship?

Weber: No. It was a ship that was used for the movie stars, and it was not converted yet. And all the way over there, I slept in a first class cabin above. And the Infantry was down below. I had it nice, and good food all the way.

MacDonald: And where did they ship you to from California?

Weber: We were supposed to go on to Brisbane—

MacDonald: Australia.

Weber: But then that Coral Sea Battle was on. That's a big battle, you know. So they rerouted us down to Adelaide, way down in the southern part.

And when we got there that night, nothing was set up. We had ticks; we laid on straw. I think that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Well, that first night we had mutton stew and chicory coffee, and everybody hated that. They were great for that stuff. That night, everybody got up and we went to town. There was a blackout, no lights. Went to town, and we drank a lot of wine over there—had a good time.

MacDonald: So when you were in Australia, then, how long did you stick around in that area?

Weber: Adelaide? Well, I don't know just exactly how long, not too long. And we got shipped up to Brisbane, and we kept moving up till we got to towns around Cairns, up near the northern part.

And from there, we went to Port Moresby [*New Guinea*]. And that was *all* jungle. I mean *jungle*. I seen the latest books that my boy's got here about

Port Moresby. And the books are twenty years old, and they got high-rise buildings in there now. My kids would be surprised now what it's like.

MacDonald: But, at the time you were there, it was strictly jungle. Did they use that for training for you?

Weber: No, that's where the Japs were. See, this Port Moresby, it's eighty miles from the ocean to where the ships were docked. And them Japs could shoot a shell eighty miles and hit them ships.

MacDonald: Hmm. Now, were you assigned to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division at that time?

Weber: No, I was with the Field Artillery.

MacDonald: Okay. And were the Japanese shelling some of the areas you were in at the time?

Weber: Oh, yeah, sure they were. I know they hit one of the ships they had in there. I know that. A fellow got killed.

MacDonald: Anything close to you at all?

Weber: No, nothing close to me. I was lucky, all the way. Oh, and then when we went to the Infantry, we had to cross the Owen Stanley Mountains. That's about eighty-two hundred feet up. And there was no way they could cross it by foot.

So we got in there with our spray guns. They had no camouflage suits then, you know, just blue fatigues. And we sprayed them, sprayed them, and they flew them over the mountains. And they pushed the Japs back.

MacDonald: You mean, you sprayed—?

Weber: We sprayed all the soldiers. They were just getting ready to eat. Everything was in the ovens outside. And we had to clean all that up afterwards, all their barracks bags and everything. And they flew them over the mountains to chase the Japs out of New Guinea. Then, after we left there, we went to Manila in the Philippines. We stayed there a few months.

MacDonald: What year was that, when you were into Manila?

Weber: Manila? That had to be 1945.

MacDonald: So, most of the time you spent down in Australia and in that area?

Weber: Yeah, Australia and New Guinea.

MacDonald: When you were in New Guinea, was there a lot of Japanese action in that area?

Weber: Oh, yeah. There was a lot of fighting; there was the Buna Campaign, and that. That was a big one.

MacDonald: And you were still in the Field Artillery at the time?

Weber: Yes.

MacDonald: And what was your job as a Field Artillery, as far as a battle, for example?

Weber: Well, we did all the supply to the troops—ammunition, food, and all that stuff, and clothing—whatever they needed.

MacDonald: Approximately how far behind the main battle lines was your outfit located?

Weber: Well, we were just over the mountain. I don't know how far that would be. Owen Stanleys—they couldn't cross by foot. That was out.

MacDonald: So then in '45 you went to Manila. Was the Philippine Islands still pretty active with the Japanese?

Weber: No, they were all pushed out of there by then.

MacDonald: And so what was your job?

Weber: We had the same job all the way through—supply.

MacDonald: And were you supplied by ships, or how was your outfit supplied?

Weber: Oh, it all came by ship.

MacDonald: Okay. And then you transferred by trucks and stuff to the front lines, or wherever it was needed.

Weber: Right, uh-huh. Yeah, I got down to Sydney, Australia, a couple of times, you know. It was heaven there, I'll tell you. I'd like to go back there again, but it's expensive.

MacDonald: When you were over there, did you see any USO shows come through or not?



Weber: No, but the Red Cross had put something on. I got the picture; I'll have to show it to you. I got all the names of the fellows on there, too, all the names.

MacDonald: How long did you spend in Manila?

Weber: I was there, maybe, six/seven months.

MacDonald: Were they getting ready at that time, were you training or getting ready to go for the invasion of Japan? That's what you thought was going to happen, right?

Weber: I wanted to get there, but they discharged me in October. I think about a month later they went to Japan. I'd like to have gotten to Japan.

MacDonald: So you were on the Philippine Islands, then, when the atomic bombs were dropped, right?

Weber: Oh yeah, uh-huh.

MacDonald: What was the reaction of the soldiers when you found out that that happened?

Weber: Oh, everybody was glad. They said, "Boy, we're going home."  
[MacDonald laughs] "I'm glad it's over."

Maybe they should do the same thing in Iraq.

MacDonald: So, when they did that, that pretty much stopped the invasion force. There were some troops that went over and occupied. But what happened to your group? Can you tell us what happened to your outfit?

Weber: I don't know. I got discharged. I was one of the first ones to get discharged. I don't know what happened after that.

MacDonald: Why were you one of the first ones to get picked?

Weber: I don't know.

MacDonald: Did they go by points at the time, or that was mainly used in the European Theater?

Weber: I don't know how they did that. I don't know. I was just glad to go home. Going over there took us twenty-one days and twenty-one nights.

I flew home on furlough once from New Guinea.

MacDonald: Oh, you did?

Weber: I had thirty days. I went on a B24 bomber all the way. Everybody says, "Whoa, that's a flying piece of dynamite." That took ninety hours. We stopped at all these little islands, you know—Hawaii and everything.

MacDonald: Uh-huh. That was kind of unusual for you to get a furlough during the war, wasn't it? That wasn't very common, was it?

Weber: Oh, yeah, they give it to them. They give it. I got thirty days and came home. But I had to go back. I didn't want to go back. I had to go back on a Dutch ship again. That was called a Palalu [sp??], or something, it was a Dutch ship. It wasn't too bad of a trip.

MacDonald: So when you got back, how much time did you have left before the war ended, then?

Weber: Let's see—I was in New Guinea then—well, not too long. Less than a year, I know that.

MacDonald: What was your rank when you were discharged?

Weber: Sergeant First Class.

MacDonald: Okay. Oh, yeah. What Howard's showing, he's got a framed case showing his medals that he received and his insignias and his service stripes--quite a nice display of material, there.

When you got shipped back to the States, what happened when you got back into the United States? Did they ship you back on a ship again to come back?

Weber: How did we go back? I don't remember. Did we go back on a ship? No, we must have come back on a plane, we must have. Got to San Francisco, were there a few days. Then we got to Fort McCoy, and that was it.

MacDonald: What month was that, that you got discharged?

Weber: October 3 of '45.

MacDonald: Did you go back to Racine, then?

Weber: Oh, yes. My mother and my brother-in-law and sister picked me up in Fort McCoy, Illinois.

MacDonald: Oh. Fort McCoy—?

Weber: No, not Fort McCoy. I take it back. I went from Fort McCoy to Fort Sheridan. At Fort Sheridan, they picked me up.

MacDonald: Okay. Then, when you got out of the service, then, did you use any of your GI benefits?

Weber: No. I'm sorry I didn't. I wished I'd a gone to school to learn something. I wish I had been a teacher, woodworking teacher or something like that. But I wanted to get a job and get going.

MacDonald: So, were you able to find something—because with all the soldiers coming home, were you able to find a job?

Weber: Yeah, I got one right away. And they wanted me to start the next week. I said, "No, no. I want a couple weeks off." Hired right away; I worked there thirty-six years.

MacDonald: And where was that?

Weber: Western Printing in Racine, Wisconsin—big print shop. But they're bankrupt now; they went bankrupt. They just choose from the art, stole everything, and sold everything. But I was out before that happened.

MacDonald: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

Weber: I belong to the VFW. I'm not active in it, or anything. I should be. Then I'd get to meet somebody, and I don't know anybody up here at all, hardly anyone.

MacDonald: So how did you get to be in Door County, Howard?

Weber: Well, my boy and his wife came up here all the time. They saw this piece of land, here. They said, "Pa, come up and look at it."

So, I looked at it, and it's eighty acres here, you know. And I asked the realtor how much he wanted for it—ninety-two thousand. I says, "I'll give you eighty." He took it. Everybody says, "You stole it from him." It's worth a lot more than that now.

MacDonald: [Laughs] And so how long have you been up here now?

Weber: I've been up here since about September.

MacDonald: Oh! Okay.

Weber: It's different, though, I'll tell you—nothing convenient here, nothing.

MacDonald: [Laughs] You're out in the boonies here, huh?

Weber: Right. When I was home, there was everything. Then last winter, I was here. Boy, it's boring as heck up here! I don't know what to *do*. That's why I'm thinking of going to some technical school come fall—take a little machine shop or something.

MacDonald: So can you tell us what impact did the military and serving during the war have on you? Did it have any impact on you at all?

Weber: No, it didn't. I was single at the time, so—. Something I would never have seen otherwise, never.

MacDonald: Uh-huh. Did you get a lot of correspondence when you were in? Did your family keep in touch with you, and how did that go?

Weber: My folks wrote to me, and sisters wrote.

Then when my dad passed away in December, we had this V-Letter, you know, this V-Letter? Three days I got it, that my dad had passed away. And two days later the Red Cross came to me and says, "We got bad news for you." I says, "I know all about it already." They were later than the V-mail was. And I couldn't come home. Nobody could go home.

Yeah, I crossed the equator four times.

MacDonald: Did they do anything special for that?

Weber: No.

MacDonald: They didn't in the Army, huh?

Weber: No.

MacDonald: Because I know in the Navy they have a special thing first time you cross the equator. But they didn't do that, huh?

Weber: No, we didn't do nothing—just that we knew we were crossing it. You felt the bump going over the hump, and that's it. [Laughs]

MacDonald: Did you make any friends with anybody special when you were in the Army, or people that served with you?

Weber: You mean ladies? [Laughs]

Oh, hey, I had one gal. I was going to go down to Sydney. I was going to go take the ferry ride. Well it had closed, and this gal comes up to me and starts talking to me. I'll show you a picture after awhile. I kept writing back and forth.

And when I got married, my wife says, "You got to cut that out." And I lost track of my place on the Internet, trying to find her again. But she could have been passed away by now, because she was about six year younger than me. So she might be gone. I hope not. Nice woman.

MacDonald: Uh-huh. Howard, I see you have some of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division books there. Did you have the opportunity to ever attend any of the reunions or anything that they've had?

Weber: No, they were all a little bit too far away, and I just didn't feel like I wanted to go. Now, most of them were held in Stevens Point [*Wisconsin*].

MacDonald: And have you kept in contact with any of the soldiers that you were with?

Weber: I did for awhile, but a lot of them have gone away, passed away.

MacDonald: So, do you still get a booklet every so often in the mail for the Division?

Weber: This fellow here will send me a newsletter every once in awhile. He puts everything together. He don't put no period; he just keeps right on going, you know--interesting.

MacDonald: Yeah, Howard's got a couple of booklets, there, that describe the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division. And it's, "Headquarters Battery, D Battery, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 120th Field Artillery; Headquarters A Battery, Service Battery, 129<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division." And it's the official World War II history compiled in June 1991.

Weber: Here's one here of the fiftieth anniversary of the same Division, same outfit.

MacDonald: Howard, do you have any other World War II memorabilia that you've kept over the years?

Weber: Well, I've got the big emblem, a bronze—I'll show it to you. And I got this. When I had my estate sale, they sold my jacket. It didn't fit me anyway no more. Otherwise, I have nothing no more. My barracks bag they sold. I had no use for that stuff.

MacDonald: Well, do you have anything else you'd like to mention about your military experience in World War II?

Weber: Not really, not really.

MacDonald: So, overall, you thought it was a pretty decent experience for you.

Weber: Oh, I never wanted to go in the Army, but, boy, I never was sorry, never. I wouldn't want to go back in now, though, not at my age. [Laughs] But, I don't think they would take me, anyway.

I'll let you take these if you want to, Terry. But I want 'em back. If you want to take them along, and if—

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**