

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
John C. Wozniak
Military Police Escort Guard, Army, World War II.
1994

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Wozniak, John C. (1912-1999). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Wozniak, a Stevens Point, Wisconsin resident, discusses his service with the 437th Military Police Escort Guard Company in France and Germany during World War II. Wozniak was born in McKeesport (Pennsylvania), but his family moved to a farm in Plover (Wisconsin) when he was a baby. Wozniak states he graduated from Stevens Point High School in 1929 and worked part-time for a bank in Pulaski (Wisconsin) for two years before he was hired as a bookkeeper at First National Bank of Stevens Point in 1935. Wozniak, who spoke Polish at home and in parochial school, addresses the role of Polish immigrants in central Wisconsin. Wozniak mentions that Pearl Harbor, which occurred only four months after his wedding, “changed the plans” he and his wife had made. In 1943, at age twenty-nine, he volunteered for the Army, but was labeled a draftee due to Army age limits. Wozniak outlines his physical in Milwaukee, his basic training at Fort Sheridan (Illinois), and his military police escort training at Fort Custer (Michigan). He comments that his real training occurred during his first assignment guarding German prisoners in Roswell (New Mexico). Wozniak expresses his respect for the physical condition and training of the German POWs who fought with Rommel in North Africa. In April 1944, Wozniak sailed from Boston Harbor to Liverpool (England) on the *USS Wakefield*. He describes his arrival in England and the lead-up to the Invasion of Normandy, commenting that the troops were “in the dark” and had a pool to guess what day would be D-Day. The 437th Military Police Escort Company landed on Utah Beach in Normandy on D+4 and marched inland. Wozniak vividly describes his first combat experience near Ste-Marie-du-Mont (France); his company suffered twenty-seven casualties when their air cover returned to England to refuel, leaving the troops open to antipersonnel fire from German planes. Wozniak explains his company was on temporary guard duty, rounding up German POWs in France and sending them back to England. Wozniak also details his responsibilities as company clerk tracking immunization records, payroll, and correspondence from his officers up through the ranks. Wozniak states the 437th was attached to Patton’s 3rd Army in Luxembourg, and he tells of an encounter between General Patton and a captured German General, Anton Von Dunford. Wozniak reveals the 437th was awarded a battle star because over fifty percent of the MPs in his company saw combat while guarding Patton’s headquarters during the Battle of the Bulge and Bastogne. Wozniak also addresses military life: he states off-duty soldiers did laundry and wrote letters, and he discusses the black market trading of cigarette rations. Next, Wozniak describes in detail the 3rd Army’s march from Luxembourg to Germany. He recalls turning a German concentration camp into a POW camp, protecting an ancient

bridge in Treves (Germany), and reclaiming Oberursel, an interrogation center near Frankfurt where captured U.S. air corpsmen had been tortured. Wozniak spends much time discussing the liberation of Buchenwald Concentration Camp. He walked through Buchenwald on April 19th, 1945, a week after it was liberated. Wozniak describes an emotional meeting with a group of Polish-speaking inmates and tells of translating for a Polish lieutenant who gave him a tour of the barracks, ovens, and mass graves. He also graphically describes the medical condition of the prisoners, many of whom were about to die. Wozniak questions how the Germans in Weimar could claim ignorance of the camp and tells how U.S. soldiers forced the Mayor of Weimar and his wife to bury the dead. Finally, he comments upon the Americans' reaction to the concentration camp, stating that when the soldiers liberated Buchenwald they said, "There's the reason that we fought this war." He also claims that General Eisenhower encouraged U.S. troops to visit Buchenwald because the more witnesses there were; the more difficult it would be for the Nazis to deny what they had done. On V-E Day, Wozniak states he was guarding 40,000 POWs in Langenzenn (Germany) and on V-J Day, he was stationed at a POW camp in Auerbach. In November 1945, his company returned via Calais (France) to the same pier at Boston Harbor they embarked from in 1944. Wozniak was discharged at Fort Sheridan a few days later and returned to his wife in Stevens Point. After the war, he resumed his old job at the bank where he worked as a teller and a farm loan representative until his retirement in 1977. He touches upon housing after the war, mentioning that he helped many veterans get G.I. Bill home loans. Wozniak was an active member of the DAV, the VFW, and the American Legion. He discusses medical care at the VA and states he served on the Legion's Veterans Service Committee for twenty-one years because of a belief that "alone you can't do much [but] collectively, there's more power when more people speak at one time." Finally, Wozniak recalls meeting famous war correspondents Ernie Pyle and Lowell Thomas during his service in Europe.

Biographical Sketch:

John C. Wozniak (1912-1999) was born in McKeesport (Pennsylvania). When he was a baby, his family bought a farm in Plover (Wisconsin) after his father lost an eye in a steel mill accident. Wozniak grew up speaking Polish and graduated from Stevens Point High School in 1929. In the prewar years, he began a career at First National Bank in Stevens Point (Wisconsin) and got married in 1941. His wife worked for an insurance company during the war (which helped them build a house later, in 1947). In 1943, the twenty-nine year old Wozniak was assigned to 437th Military Police Escort Guard Company attached to Patton's 3rd Army. He served as Company Clerk in France and Germany and participated in the D-Day Invasion, the Battle of the Bulge, the Invasion of Germany, and the liberation of Buchenwald Concentration Camp. In November 1945, Wozniak was discharged after thirty-two months of service. Postwar, he returned to his job at First National Bank where he worked until his retirement in 1977. Wozniak was an active member of the VFW, DAV, and the American Legion. He and his wife raised five sons, two of whom were also veterans.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994

Transcribed by Joanna D. Glen, WDVA staff, 1997

Corrected by Channing Welch, 2009; Corrections Typed in By Katy Marty, 2009

Abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2010

Interview Transcript:

- Mark: Today's date is September 27, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. John C. Wozniak of Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Good afternoon, Mr. Wozniak.
- Wozniak: Good afternoon.
- Mark: How are you today?
- Wozniak: I'm fine.
- Mark: Good.
- Wozniak: If we could just keep it on a personal level, I think it'd be all right. Just call me John; I'll call you Mark.
- Mark: Okay. That's fine with me, John. I sent you the questionnaire a couple of weeks ago. We'll just go down this list of questions here. The first question asks you when you were born and what year you were born in and where you grew up and maybe describe a little bit about your upbringing.
- Wozniak: Okay, answer this question when I was born on March 3, 1912 in, Mc Keesport, Pennsylvania. My parents and me, family moved to Plover, WI area in June of that year. I was about 3 ½ months old. I grew up in that area attending local schools. Attended Stevens Point High School and graduated June 6, 1929 from the high school. We lived on the farm so I was brought up—I was raised on a farm in the Plover area.
- Mark: What did you do for a living after high school?
- Wozniak: Well, I had various jobs because jobs were rather difficult to find so anything that you would come up--I even started digging ditches--there was just nothing available and the Depression was setting in so for several years I just bounced back and forth. I did work a short brief time--a couple of years--in a bank north of Green Bay at Pulaski, WI. I had to go out of town in order to get that, but other than that, I didn't start a regular job until June 1, 1935 when I started with the First National Bank of Stevens Point.
- Mark: What did you do there?
- Wozniak: I started in the bookkeeping department and continued in the bookkeeping department until I was ready to go into service.

Mark: I see. Were you married before the war?

Wozniak: I was married, on matter of fact, we were to be married in October 1940, but registration was taking place and we postponed it. They told us we would have to serve one year and then we could be out. So we postponed it, but in 1941— by then I was twenty-nine already and they said anyone over twenty-eight probably would not be called, so we got married on August 9th 1941. And then of course Pearl Harbor hit December 7, 1941. That changed everything.

Mark: Yeah, it sure did, huh?

Wozniak: You bet it did.

Mark: I'll come back to Pearl Harbor in a minute. I just have one more question about the prewar years. We have spoken before and I know you are of Polish ancestry and you just mentioned that you lived in Pulaski for a while. Were you involved in —were most of your acquaintances of Polish ancestry? Were you involved in like a Polish ethnic community?

Wozniak: Plover, the area where we moved, the area was about half and half. Originally that area was settled by what we call the Yankees, the English and that, and the Polish started moving in there and my parents had some relatives in the Plover area and that's what made them move out of the McKeesport, Pennsylvania area. My father got hurt in a steel mill and he was given a lifetime job as a night watchman and he couldn't see being a night watchman – he was in his early thirties and he could not see for the remainder of his life. So he decided, and then they actually they bought a small farm and this is where we settled and we were in that area until I got married in 1941 and my father died in '43 and my mother still lived there and finally disposed of the farm in '45 and moved into the city of Stevens Point.

Mark: Did you speak Polish in the home or anything?

Wozniak: Well, I learned the language at home because we spoke I would say ninety percent of our conversation was in Polish, especially between us and the parents. I had two older sisters who of course were already going to school and they were simultaneously— this was a parochial school and they were learning the Polish and the English simultaneously. It was almost compulsory. The old-time padres, the parish priests, they were old-timers from Poland and they insisted that you learn the Polish language.

- Mark: I see.
- Wozniak: So you had to learn both. Sometimes you knew the Polish language better than you did the English.
- Mark: I see. Okay, let's go back to Pearl Harbor. Question two here, do you remember – first of all, do you remember when Hitler invaded Poland?
- Wozniak: Yeah, Well of course when Hitler invaded Poland we were living out on the farm. We didn't have any electricity, we didn't have any power out there. We had no radios. Radios were rather in the cities. Yes, people had radios, but there was no TV or anything like that. We depended on the newspaper – the newspaper we got the news or whatever neighbors passed on. And that was the only way that you got the news. So, I think that evening, September 1, 1939 when Hitler invaded and the newspaper came out I think that was the headline, so we knew that - we had been hearing that there were rumors that Hitler might invade and sure enough, September 1st, that's when he did. And now on Pearl Harbor, of course I was married on August 9, 1941, and almost to the day four months later Pearl Harbor took place December 7, 1941. This was - I still remember. Sunday afternoon about 1:15, a local radio program was on. It was interrupted and they said, "Just interrupting this program. We've just been notified. The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor." And this was Sunday afternoon about 1:15 and we were listening to this local programs. So we got it practically as the news come on. We got it on the radio.
- Mark: What did you think at the time?
- Wozniak: [laughs] Well, I looked at my wife and I said, we were married four-months, and I said "Well, that changes the plans."
- Mark: And it did, too, didn't it?
- Wozniak: [unintelligible] figuring to do that.
- Mark: Yeah. So you were drafted?
- Wozniak: Well, in a sense I was, because although I volunteered, I had to sign a waiver to waive my rights but anyone over twenty they would not accept a voluntary status. Those boys eighteen and nineteen just out of school they could volunteer but the rest of us, they would consider us as conscripts.
- Mark: I see, I see
- Wozniak: I don't know why but that was their—for some reason or another, that's what they did.

- Mark: I see. So you entered the service then in early 1943.
- Wozniak: Yeah, yeah. I took my physical in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on March 18, 1943. We were all rather apprehensive not knowing where we would be taking our basic training and what assignment we would receive. I entered active duty on March 25, 1943 at Fort Sheridan, IL and most of us were a kind of a cross section of individuals -- grade school, high school graduates, very few college background.
- Mark: Were they mostly people from your area? Or, from all over the Midwest or Wisconsin?
- Wozniak: Well, of course, at Fort Sheridan they were processing Illinois and Wisconsin recruits. Then of course they were assigning to various places. They had these places like Ft. Sheridan and that in several states where they didn't necessarily train. They did train some. There was a naval station outside of Ft. Sheridan also. And in answer to question number four, which of course we were sent to Ft. Custer, Michigan near Battle Creek, Michigan. A group of us recruits formed the 437th Military Police Escort Company and we completed our basic training by July 1, 1943 and we were assigned to Roswell, New Mexico to guard German prisoners that were captured in North Africa and we stayed there until January 25, 1944. Then we returned to Ft. Custer, Michigan for our advanced training before going overseas.
- Mark: Perhaps you could describe some of the police training that you took. What did this consist of beyond--
- Wozniak: It was a combination, it was a combination. It was a— part of it was everyone had to take some infantry training. But we were specifically trained because we were going to be destined that we were going to be guarding -- they expected a large in-flow of prisoners of war once the war started. If we were to go to the South Pacific, the Japanese were not surrendering, but over in Europe that was a different story. Germans had many conscripts from other countries and when things got tough, they threw up their arms and yelled, "Comrade, Comrade" so they were giving up. They didn't have much guts to fight for the Germans.
- Mark: Yeah I can imagine. So I wonder if you describe how you got into one of these units?
- Wozniak: [laughs] Well, that's easy. They just told you that's where you go. Period. Because with my banking background thought I'd get an assignment in Finance training or something like that. As a matter of fact down the line I

was asked how come I'd never got into a Finance Department and I said, "Well, that's the way the Army operates. If you're a blacksmith they are going to make a baker out of you and if you're a baker they're going to try to"— well they tried to make me a mechanic, a Air Force ground crew mechanic. But with my accounting training. As a matter of fact I had several colonels from the Finance Department ask me "How come you never got into Finance?" I said, "Number one," excuse me but I said, "I don't have the right hook to my nose, if you know what I mean. You know who the boys were in there!" Well they could see the invasion of Europe and Normandy and that coming and they knew there were going to be many, many prisoners. They were taking many prisoners from North Africa. Many more were going to be taken in Europe and so they had to have units that would take these prisoners away from the infantry units. Infantry could not be bothered with prisoners. They had other jobs to do.

Mark: In the 437th Military Police Escort Guard did you serve with people from your area?

Wozniak: OK, there were five other fellows from my town, very unusual that they assigned six of us from the city of Stevens Point. They did not like to do because if casualties occurred then of course the townspeople would be reeling. This happened when the National Guard went in and a group of people from Marshfield, WI – they were in the South Pacific and almost weekly and sometimes even daily someone would be wounded or killed out of the Marshfield people that were in the South Pacific. That had a bad effect on the townspeople.

Mark: I'm sure.

Wozniak: Yeah. So they tried not to do that but somehow we got assigned and as I say later here, every 5th man in our unit was either killed or wounded that first night and one of the six fellows was seriously wounded from Stevens Point. He was hospitalized for over eight months before he returned back to our company.

Mark: As you look back now, was your training realistic? Did it prepare you for what sorts of things you would come across or did you find yourself ill-prepared?

Wozniak: I would say that for the assigned job that we had we had some -- there wasn't a chance to get any specific training at Ft. Custer because we were just taking our basic training. But when we were sent to Roswell, New Mexico, where we were there was a prisoner of war camp— there was between 4,500-5,000 German prisoners from North Africa. There we got the actual training guarding them. They were doing duties and that. We'd

take 'em - farmers would hire them to pick cotton. We would guard them out in the fields and there was around the clock— 24 hours around the perimeter of the camp. There were guards, and you pulled guard— there were three companies and each company would go on and then they'd be off for two days and then they'd go the full company would be guarding the entire unit around the camp for twenty-four hours. So there we had actual experience.

Mark: What did you think of the Germans in the camp at the time?

Wozniak: They were toughies! They were well trained. They were young fellows. They were probably the majority, I would say majority of those we had in Roswell, New Mexico these were from the Africa Corps, Rommel's Africa Corps and they were about as well trained as any soldier could ever be. That's what Germany— they really depended on that. They were well trained. They were good soldiers in that respect. I mean we didn't have much love for them, but you had to admire them because physically they were in top shape. They were really; and most of them were probably between nineteen and twenty-five.

Mark: Were there any attempted escapes or anything like that? Did you have any trouble guarding them?

Wozniak: Well, we were out-- this was open country and if they did escape, they wouldn't have gotten very far. I think a couple of them did try, but they never got very far. We were out in almost like a part of a desert. We were about fifteen miles out of Roswell, New Mexico and you could see five-six miles down the road.

Mark: When you were in Roswell did you get any time off? I assume there were times when you were off-duty. I'm wondering if you got into town or any of that kind of thing?

Wozniak: Yes. There were times when we could go to town. They would have a convoy that would take us in trucks into town. I mean, and you had to get back on the truck to get back. You get a pass for a certain time and then of course while I was in Roswell in August, I got my first furlough and they were giving furloughs already by then because they felt that the fellas expected that, so we were given furloughs.

Mark: What did you do in Roswell? What was there to do? Anything?

Wozniak: Well, not much. They had a movie theater there and a few taverns where you could drink regular beer otherwise there was 3.2 on the post.

Mark: Now did your wife come down there at all? Or did she stay in Wisconsin?

Wozniak: No, she did want—when I came--actually, I was home for our wedding anniversary August 9, 1943, and we were married August 9, 1941. so I was home for the second wedding anniversary. She kind of talked -- she was working, she went back to work, worked at an insurance company, but she was kind of anxious to join me there. I had second thoughts. Some fellows did bring their wives out there and there were some problems because of that. They wanted to go to town and they couldn't always go and the women didn't like that and it caused problems. It just doesn't work out especially when you know that you are not going to be there very long. It's just a temporary assignment.

Mark: Right, and then you do go overseas?

Wozniak: Well, that's right. That's the next thing that's coming up. Isn't that the—?

Mark: Yup. Question number five.

Wozniak: Question number five. Okay. Well, lets see, we shipped out from Ft. Custer for England from Boston Harbor on April 13, 1944 on *USS Wakefield* that was a former luxury liner. Ten thousand of us plus the crew, 1,100 crew, so there was a little better than 11,000 of us. We were bedded in these hammocks five deep -- one on top of the other. We arrived in Liverpool in England on April 21, 1944. We were moved to Rudesleigh (??) in Midlands of England awaiting further orders. Accommodations were not the best but we didn't expect anything better than that. We were inside of a kind of a metal building and our mattresses were these mattress covers filled with straw. You didn't expect, whatever you could get you were satisfied. I'd like to state that two days out of Liverpool just north of Ireland, as we were heading toward Liverpool we encountered a very severe storm. Even the regular ship crew indicated that it was a bad one. At times, the forward section of our ship-- and it was a fairly good size ship, 11,000 troops, pretty good size-- the forward portion would go under water and then the propeller, sometimes the propeller would come out of the water. That's how much dipping it would do. Or, it would list from side to side and they said it was listing thirty-five degrees and that somewhere between thirty and forty degrees if it lists sometimes it doesn't come back. So it was a bad storm.

Mark: Sounds pretty scary!

Wozniak: When the crew says "This is a bad one!" We didn't know; we didn't realize. We were not naval people.

Mark: Yeah, and if they're scared you think you ought to be!

Wozniak: I think they all have a little fear.

Mark: I see. So you were then stationed in the Midlands for awhile?

Wozniak: We were there for probably about three or four weeks or so.

Mark: That's not very long.

Wozniak: This was just a temporary assignment. We were transferred from there to outside of Bristol and then – I may as well go to question number six, the invasion. The invasion took place on June 6, 1944. We were not in the first wave to go in and we were delayed instead of going into France on D+2 which would have been the 8th of June. We went in, we finally did go in on D+4 or June 10th landing on Utah Beach that morning and the beach was already secured. But, there was much confusion. No one seemed to know where anyone was to go. They said "Get off the ships and march in. You will eventually find your place." That's about all we got. People were marching on these roads going in and both sides of the road marching soldiers. The highway was occupied by trucks, heavy equipment and what not. If the German planes had been able to penetrate our cover of planes that we were protected, they would have had a field day, but we had constant cover overhead. So we were protected during the daytime hours only. Once it got dark, there was no protection.

Mark: If we could backtrack a minute. I'm interested in the days leading up to the invasion. Did you know something was going to happen real soon? Did you have a sense that the invasion was going to happen?

Wozniak: Well, there were rumors, there were rumors, but it was a very tightly held secret. Nobody really knew. All we knew is that we were there for that purpose. The question was when. No one really knew. Matter of fact, we had a pool; we had a pool, as to what day. A couple of fellows guessed the day just right. Most of us thought it would be before the end of May. There were other factors that governed the invasion, the timing, weather and so forth, but we didn't know anything about that. We were not privy to that information.

Mark: So you landed on Utah Beach and you went inland --

Wozniak: We marched in inland maybe a distance of four to five miles.

Mark: And then what happened?

Wozniak: Well, we got in beyond this one village, we marched past the village of Sainte-Marie-du-Mont until we arrived in the evening at crossroads and we decided that we were hearing ahead of us there was quite a bit of action, there

was small arm fire and what not, so we decided to stay in this one field and we spread out in the field. Some fellows stayed along the edges of the field and some of us went out in the middle of the field. They told us to spread out as much as possible so in case of any air attack, there was less chance of more of us getting hurt. Of course that's exactly what happened because when our planes went back because they had no landing places to refuel, they had to go back to England, this was double daylight saving time so at 10:00 it was still daylight and about between 11:30 and 12:00, I'd say about twenty minutes to 12:00, quarter to 12:00 all hell broke loose. We hardly heard the planes come in. They just snuck, the German planes just snuck in and they start dropping these small antipersonnel bombs. They claimed that they were like five to six pounders and they were filled with clock springs and these old-time big clocks where they had these steel wheels. They were filled with those and when they hit they'd spread over an area. They'd cover, if you opened up an average home, and if that bomb would drop in the middle of the home, anyone within the perimeter of that house was apt to get hit with one of them shrapnels and so what they were accomplishing was, they were disabling us. Not necessarily killing – that wasn't the incentive – it was just to disable. They accomplished that because I'll give you the breakdown. Two were killed outright. Three were seriously wounded, died at the aide station. Eleven were seriously wounded and eventually evacuated to England. Four had minor wounds and received first aid and returned to the company. So that's twenty-seven casualties.

Mark: That's a lot.

Wozniak: Five died, eighteen seriously wounded, four light, twenty-seven in all. You multiply twenty-seven by five you come up with 135 and that was our company strength. Every fifth man was either killed or wounded that night, that first night.

Mark: Sounds rough.

Wozniak: It sure was. You don't know what to expect. You don't know what you are going to encounter and all of sudden all hell breaks loose. The reaction is its unbelievable what was happening. Fellows that never performed first aid were giving first aid to their buddies.

Mark: So, what happened after the attack?

Wozniak: Well, they picked up eventually--that road that we just came off, we marched in, ambulances were going forward to the front to pick up any casualties and we were stopping them, they were picking up ours and they were taken to the first aide station and from there they were evacuated to a field hospital and from there they were taken by ships across the Channel. The seriously wounded were sent to England. Eventually, we received

about four or five of these fellows they returned to our company, but they didn't come back until about the next February. They were gone for quite a few months.

Mark: What did you do in the meantime? Did you have to get new replacements?

Wozniak: Well, the next morning we pulled back. We found out we had gone in too far. We weren't supposed to go in that far but nobody knew where we were supposed to be. We found out next morning so we marched back through the village and went back the way we came from the beaches and there was a big open field, cattle, dairy cattle, French cattle, in the field, and we used that as an open field as we were picking up prisoners from three different divisions, 101st Airborne, 82nd Airborne, and I think it was the 90th Infantry Division. This was just an open field, no enclosure, nothing we'd have three-four guards around them and periodically somebody would come with a truck and they picked those up and take them to the beaches and they would be moved to England. Eventually maybe even to the States. Our duty was just temporary. Take them away from the front units, guard them temporarily and they'd be taken away from us and moved on. So that was sort of continuous round the clock.

Mark: On the data sheet I had you fill out, you mentioned quite a few campaigns. You have Normandy, Northern France, and Ardennes.

Wozniak: Ardennes, and then the Central Europe and then--the Rhineland too. We participated in all five. We had, I think it was the 21st of December, I was company clerk of course and I took the call. Some Major called and he said "This is Lucky Forward. This is Lucky Forward. I'll give you this information but once you repeat, I will not repeat again. I want sixty-five men and one officer of your company due in truck in thirty minutes. Do you have it? Please repeat." There were serious things, some of them and he said "You will receive instructions en route." They wouldn't even tell us where to go or anything like that. So sixty-five men out of our company-- was actually cut in half and because we were south of Luxembourg-- Patton's headquarters were in Luxembourg, and some of the men went up to guard his headquarters and the rest of the men were on that route to direct traffic. A good share of the 3rd Army was diverted off the front to relieve the pressure on Bastogne. Bastogne was surrounded and so Patton had to switch a number of divisions and so our men were placed along this route toward Bastogne directing traffic to keep moving, keep moving. They would just say "Keep moving, keep moving. Don't stop, don't stall." In seventy-two hours, Patton had moved his units and they were already engaged at Bastogne. Of course, he helped relieve the pressure when they finally broke the pressure around Bastogne. That was as

close as we ever came to any combat because actually we were not a combat unit.

Mark: Yeah, I see. I thought maybe you could discuss your duties as the company clerk. That sounds kind of interesting. What kinds of things were you responsible for?

Wozniak: Well, you might say, it was a general office job. Well first of all, you were like a secretary or something to the CO and to the officers and to the first sergeant. You had to type any replies they would give you. Informally they would tell you what to write and you had to sometimes compose your own letters. We had to prepare the payroll. We had to keep all the personnel records, any shots that you got the medics gave you such as tetanus and all the other shots. You had to make a record. That had to be recorded. Each person had like a little booklet and all these records were kept up with anything and everything that transpired. A person got hurt you had to record it in there. So we were responsible--there was another clerk besides me and between the two of us we took turns. We would answer the phone and there was a charge of quarters. He would be the runner if we needed somebody to locate somebody, instead of us leaving, he would take off. We would stay put around the telephone in the office. Because once we left the link was broken. You get somebody else in there and then they say "What do I do now?" between the two of us, the two clerks we do pretty well. Like they say, we didn't say much but we knew pretty much what was going on and what wasn't going on [laughs]

Mark: Sure.

Wozniak: --because we were the backbone of the thing all the time.

Mark: I'm sure you've seen the TV show, "MASH" and Radar O'Reilly, the company clerk. He always seems to run the place.

Wozniak: [Laughs] He was something different, but it gives you some idea of some of the duties that would come up, you know. They weren't quite that exorbitant, but Reilly, of course, you know, he was something else.

Mark: Yeah. I thought maybe you could discuss some of the German prisoners once you got to Europe.

Wozniak: I didn't have much experience. I didn't have the access to them because very seldom that I had to guard. I did guard, I think it was, a two-star general that was captured in Minsk, Anton Von Dunford, Anton Von Dunford [Dunckern?]. He was a potbellied general and he wanted to see General Patton. He finally did get to see General Patton. Patton came along and

poked him in that belly. He say, whatever German he knew, he told him he was no German “Soldat” because German “soldat” would never have a potbelly. He didn’t like that. But of course Patton was in tough shape, he was really a soldier you know.

Mark: Yeah. Okay.

Wozniak: But other than that, once in a while if there was a shortage, if we had to go and pick up some prisoners and they were short of truck guards somebody would have to go, a driver and a guard with the truck. If where we would be picking up they were short of guards I would be asked to go and help out. Other than that I didn’t have much exposure to the prisoners.

Mark: I see. Because the question I was going to ask, was, were the German soldiers—was their morale better or worse in that part of the war than the prisoners you saw --?

Wozniak: That all depends who you ran into. If you ran into a mixture of-- because they had many Hungarians, Romanians, Austrians, Polish, Czechoslovakian. They had a mixture like that. Now like at Normandy, they were the first troops that the Americans met and the Germans were behind them so if they didn’t move the Germans would shoot them and if they moved against us we’d shoot them. So that’s why when they got so far they yelled “Comrade!”

Mark: Yeah, that’s a tough spot to be in, I’m sure.

Wozniak: They were in between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Mark: Yeah. Did you have any off-duty time while you were in Europe? Did you get into some of the French towns or German towns or what have you?

Wozniak: That wasn’t too easy. There wasn’t too much time. Once in a while we would get -- they didn’t want us to get in because there were problems, people would get mixed up and -- but we would go into one of these small villages where we were nearby, but normally, there weren’t any passes issued for any length of time. It would just be for a couple of hours or so. You were always busy. If you were off-duty. Well, if mail caught up with you, you wanted to answer a few letters, and you always had some personal things you had to do. Don’t forget, there was no laundry service or anything like that. We lived out of a duffel bag all the time we were there.

Mark: Uh-huh. Well, this is kind of getting at question number nine here. What you did on what free time you had. Some of the veterans I’ve spoken to have discussed drinking. Some others have talked about gambling. Writing home was one --

Wozniak: There was always – gambling was always going on. The day after four, five days after payday three or four or five fellows probably controlled about 50% of the company’s pay. [laughs] They were the winners. The rest of us losers. They eventually got to the point where they knew how to gamble, they knew how to make the money and save and then of course they were trying to – a lot of them send money home. Then, of course, there was – you could sell cigarettes on the black market, get \$10 a pack, \$100 a carton. So, you know that was tempting. But of course I didn’t smoke so I used to accumulate a lot of cigarettes and the fellows knew and they would come over and I’d wind up by the middle of the month, each week we would get a carton of cigarettes in combat. That was the ration they would issue to us. Of course, I didn’t smoke but I got them anyway. There was one time no rations were coming in and the CO found out I had all these cigarettes accumulated, so he made me, he lined up the company and he said to “Give them to me and I’ll pass them out to the soldiers because they are lacking cigarettes” and the other officer said “No, Captain you shouldn’t be passing them out. Wozniak should pass them out. Let the soldiers know that he is giving his cigarettes up.” He said “There’s some other fellows that don’t smoke. How about those fellows? Don’t they have any or did they sell them on the black market?” That’s exactly what they did. Some of them sold them to the black market. I had I think eleven or twelve cartons of cigarettes accumulated. So I passed a pack to each of the fellows.

Mark: A very rich man in that situation.

Wozniak: Well, that was worth money!

Mark: Yeah. OK, how about question ten here. We’ve touched on some of this before already. I was wondering what you had written down for question number ten? You said you wrote down some things for each of the questions.

Wozniak: As I said before we were fairly--a cross section of men in our unit. We jelled fairly well. Usually every unit has a few 8-balls so you leave them alone and get along better that way. Let’s see, I’ve got something here. Oh yeah, I think I’ve already covered that, but I’ll read this though because it’s more complete. I’d like to interject this subject since it was an important part of our mission during the Battle of the Bulge which started December 16, 1944. On two occasions we were called first on December 21, 1944 to send sixty-five men and one officer while serving with the 3rd Army to help in the movement of troops to relieve pressure on Bastogne and some guarded General Patton’s headquarters in Luxembourg. These men came back before the first of the year. And then shortly after the first of the year another contingent of either fifty-five or sixty were called on to go up there again for help. So twice our unit had to supply people. As a result, because when you take, not the same men went up there

both times, as a result of that more than 50% of our company saw service in the Battle of the Bulge. Therefore we qualified as being entitled to whatever battle star that the people were entitled when they served in a certain area. At first there was a question of whether we were entitled to it or not, but when I brought that question up at regular headquarters, they said once you allow more than half your company to be in a certain area, the whole company gets credit for it. So we were given credit for the Battle of the Bulge that way.

Mark: I see. Did you travel with the 3rd Army a lot?

Wozniak: We were attached. We were with the 7th Corps when we went in the invasion until August 1, 1944. On August 1, 1944 when the 3rd Army became operational, we were attached to-- we were what was known in Army terms as a "bastard outfit." We were just attached to the Army under the Provost Marshall. The Provost Marshall was like the head policeman of the Army and we were responsible to him. As long as we did our duties we were left pretty much alone. He'd come around and see that we were guarding the prisoners and there were no break-outs and we were doing our duty. He said, "Just keep doing that, you're doing what you're supposed to do." This is pretty much what we had to do. But we were not, other than that, we were not responsible to any other unit. Our responsibility was to take prisoners off the front unit, off the line, take them back somewhat to the rear where they were not in the immediate danger of front line combat conditions. That's a condition Geneva Convention condition that once a soldier surrenders, he is supposed to be moved from the danger area. Whether he is a prisoner or not, that doesn't matter. He's entitled to that.

Mark: I see, so when did you get into Germany?

Wozniak: Well, we got into Germany; I don't remember the exact date. I'm just trying to think. I think sometime early March. We left, 'cause we were just south of Luxembourg and we went to Trier. They called it "Treves". We were on top of the hill. There was a concentration camp. The Germans used it for a while and then they moved out and then we used it. There was a bridge that was built B.C., Before Christ, and it never got blown up because some the American soldier and officers got to that bridge and cut wires before the Germans could push the lever down to blow the bridge up and then the Germans were firing over us while we were on top of that hill where we were guarding these prisoners and the bridge was just over us and below us. When those big shells were coming over you could almost feel the wind, the draft. That's an awful feeling, you know.

Mark: Yeah, I'm sure.

Wozniak: You pray that they don't come down any lower. Somehow they never did knock it out. It remained intact. Then we moved, we crossed the Rhine near at Mainz M-A-I-N-Z. That's near Frankfurt, Frankfurt on Rhine and we went up to a place they call Oberursel. That was a sweating out place for the Air Corps.

When they captured any of our Air Force men, they would put them into a room that would be about maybe six feet wide and about fifteen feet deep. They had a hot air radiator that was – they would turn up the steam and they would heat, they would steam these Air Corps fellows. They'd sweat 'em out, try to sweat 'em out, trying to confess. The poor buggers you know they really went through hell and high water. They were trying to get information out of them. Just imagine a six by fifteen, you know, and a ten by twelve foot radiator in there.

Mark: Yeah.

Wozniak: Really givin' them the heat.

Mark: Were the Americans there when you got there?

Wozniak: No, they were already – we – there weren't any. They were – that was – well, the Germans moved out of there. I mean, they got the heck out of there. They didn't want any part of it.

Mark: I see. Now, I know you entered a concentration camp. Was it Buchenwald?

Wozniak: That's right.

Mark: My notes are kind of screwed up here. Maybe you could describe your experience at Buchenwald.

Wozniak: I've got it right here. Okay. Also, when we were stationed between Eisenach and Gotha at a small village if Laucha, L-A-U-C-H-A, not far from Weimar, W-E-I-M-A-R. Buchenwald concentration camp was liberated on April 11th and many of our members, including myself, had an opportunity to see first hand the atrocities committed by the Germans. I actually went through on April 19 and met a large group of Polish speaking inmates. Being able to speak the Polish language, I had an advantage to converse with them and our group was taken on a full tour by the Polish lieutenant. I would then translate his info in English to our group. When we walked into this one room there were about thirty-five, maybe to forty of these pajama striped uniform and they were almost scared shaking and the lieutenant -- there was about fifteen to eighteen of us from our unit and one Lieutenant took us down. We were only twelve to fifteen kilometers from that camp. He said, "Wozniak, you speak Polish. Why don't you say something in Polish. Maybe there's some Polish speaking inmates here." So when I said a few words "Any of you amongst you of Polish background? When they stood they trembled and they said "Polski, Polski, Polack, Polack, Polack" and they came bounding. They start hug and kissing me for about next. There wasn't a word said, and then they just – these inmates were so excited that somebody spoke to them in

Polish. My buddies were all looking. He said, "John's having a field day." He said "He's getting quite a greeting from all these inmates here." Then this Polish lieutenant that was amongst them, he looked a lot better than the rest of them. I looked at him. I said "How come you look so much better than the rest of them?" The rest of them were down to about eighty, eighty-five, ninety pounds. He was still kind of normal weight. He said "I've only been here two months. The rest of them might have been here a year, a year and a half." He says "You don't belong here." He took us from one place to another. He knew the camp layout. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

And we had – he took us to this first room. There were probably 150 people laid out on stretchers like the ambulance people carry stretchers. They were right on the floor. I stepped up to the American medic and I said "What's the status of these people here?" He says, "You notice you can barely hear a whimper." He says "These people are on their last stages." He says "Some of 'em are dying while you and I standing right here." He said "Of the group that's here, I don't know," he says "Probably LSD," he said, "Half of these are going to be gone by tomorrow morning." He says "They're on their last stages. If two, three or five survive from this group that will be a miracle. The medics have segregated these and they are not even trying to do much for them because they are beyond any help." The next room we went there was a similar group, and there you could hear the different noises of people, well, you know in pain. [Sighs] They would sigh, you know, and that and there the medic said, "These people here, we are not serving them any, just liquids, solid foods, just fluids." He said "With any kind of help, we think, we think we can save half of these people. Half of them probably will never make it but about half of these may come back," but he says "In that other room, it would be a miracle to see two or three or four survive." There we stood, right before our eyes. Really, that'll shake you up. When I see that, sometimes when I talk about it, I tell ya, it shakes me up to this day.

Mark: I'm sure it must! Did you go to other parts of the camp?

Wozniak: Well, we went to the other parts. I have pictures. I didn't have a camera, but my buddy did and he took some of the ovens. There's some skeletons, bones you know, in the ovens, and we would see an open pit where they were, those inmates that were dead or had just died. They had a two wheel cart, you know, they'd haul them out there. They made the mayor of Weimar come down there with his wife and they made him carry some of those dead inmates and he said, "I can't do that I'm the mayor of Weimar." He says "Oh yes you will." Because they asked him if he knew anything about this. "No", he said, "Never heard anything." He says, "How could you not smell it?" Because the odor was you know in the surrounding area. You couldn't help it – when they were burning those corpses. Then they just opened a big pit and there were probably several thousand just dumped in there and then they would just cover them up

and that's it. Someone said, "Well, didn't they have any funeral services?" I said "Sure, a Jewish Rabbi would come, a Protestant minister and a Catholic priest would say Pax Dominus Vobiscum and they'd cover them up." I said "That was it." I said "That was the funeral service." I said "What could you do?" Yeah.

Mark: Yeah. Did you get a chance to talk much with any of the inmates there, Polish or otherwise?

Wozniak: Well, I didn't get a chance with the other inmates, but I got a chance with this lieutenant because he took us around while we were going from one place to another and he was telling pretty much like what was taking place. I have a book "Doctors of Infamy" that was written by Dr. Ivy, head medical doctor from University of Illinois which tells about, well, some of the trials at Nuremberg. I also have an article that I cut out from U.S. News telling about the Commandant and his wife which ran the Buchenwald concentration camp. She would, for some small infraction, December, January, February, they'd make these inmates come out in these pajama uniforms, barefooted sometimes, you know, stand out there while they – sometimes they'd even make them undress, stand there in their birthday suits and she would look and see if they had any— oh, what do you call these things? With the – on the arms, that soldiers like to have – women and that, oh gol, what, I can't think –

Mark: Yeah, I don't know.

Wozniak: The – it's with ink, you know – when they – what to they call that?

Mark: Oh, the tattoos?

Wozniak: Tattoos, yeah. If she'd see a certain tattoo that she liked, she would have that removed. She would have lampshades made out of those. Eventually, she was being charged you know for some of these atrocities and she was sentenced. Well, when she was in jail waiting to be either disposed of, either hung or killed or something, she finally got herself pregnant by one of the guards. So they would not, they did not, the Americans didn't have the guts to hang her because she was pregnant. She finally hung herself. I have the article I saved from U.S. News.

Mark: I was wondering if you could perhaps describe some of the reactions of the other Americans to the camp.

Wozniak: I think that most fellows that I, even our own— I didn't get a chance with any of the other, from other units— but some of the fellows who had some doubts about what the heck are we doing over here fighting this war. When they saw

that, they said: "There's the reason that we fought this war. That's reason enough right here. We don't have to go any further." Eisenhower urged that as many people could possibly get away to see it firsthand so that when you get back home and somebody says "Ah, propaganda," you'll say, "But I was there. You weren't."

Mark: Yeah. There are some who claim today that the Holocaust never happened. I'm interested in your reaction to that sort of comment.

Wozniak: Well, I think you got that article that I -- on holocaust -- I think I gave the answer there.

Mark: Yeah. I just wanted to get it on tape, that's all.

Wozniak: Well, the people as I say, our own most of them they had second thoughts [about] why we were there fighting, but when they saw this when they saw all of this, especially that big open pit with all those dead bodies in there, they could see you know that -- and the Germans were very methodical for records and that's really, that was their downfall. Because it was all written. The doctors kept records on everything.

Mark: Now this was on April 19th you said?

Wozniak: Yes. The camp was liberated on the 11th. My buddy I think went through there three days before that, but I went though on the 19th. Well, some of the things were already cleaned up by the time I got there. Many of the inmates some of the inmates took off when they had a chance to take off. They just took off. Many, like this Polish group they were still there. Many of those rooms were still occupied. But the majority of them -- those that could possibly move they -- but too many of them were too far gone. They couldn't move. They could not walk.

Mark: Did this change the way you view the Germans at all, you personally? I mean being of Polish descent in the first place and then to see this.

Wozniak: Well, what could you do? I mean, so you take it out on those and those probably never had anything to do with the inmates. I mean those that we were guarding were not necessarily those that were involved with the inmates.

Mark: I see.

Wozniak: So you know you had to look at it realistically. Technically, and technically maybe, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised. I think at times if the German soldiers sort of got a little cocky. We had some pretty good sized boys in our outfit. I remember one, he was of Yugoslavian background. He was about

5'8", 5'9" went about 220 pounds. Boy, when he'd take a crack at a German, he was in good shape. He knew he got hit! They didn't fool around with him.

Mark: No, I bet not.

Wozniak: But technically, we were not allowed. We were not supposed to abuse them. That's the rule.

Mark: Yeah. Okay. So the war ended in Europe pretty soon after that then?

Wozniak: Yes. That's the eleventh question, I think.

Mark: Right.

Wozniak: We were in Langenzenn just north of Nuremberg when word was received that war was over in Europe, midnight of May 9, in other words one minute into the 9th of May. We had about 35,000-40,000 prisoners in an open field and there wasn't much celebration for us as we were duty-bound to guard these prisoners and not let them go free. By that time the majority of the prisoners had had enough war and fighting that they were looking forward to go home. Unfortunately, we were told that our unit would not ship back to USA, but go to the Pacific for invasion of Japan. Not very good news, but the atomic bomb changed everything and Japanese surrendered on August 15, 1945 while we were operating a prisoner of war camp in Auerbach, not far from the Czech border. The prisoners were being repatriated. Most of them were being repatriated and sent home except a few were hiding amongst these. There were some tough Nazis. They thought they could sneak through the net and now and then some of them did, but a few of them got caught and they got sent to Nuremberg eventually.

Mark: I see. So, you returned to the United States in November.

Wozniak: So we were in the Auerbach camp up to September 11, 1945, Army of Occupation. We left Auerbach for Camp Baltimore in France. October 5, 1945 we left Baltimore for Calais staging area just north of Marseilles. On November 5th, we left Calais area and embarked on *USS Charles Goodyear*. That was a liberty ship at 11:00 a.m. in Marseilles, France to sail for the USA. We arrived on November 21, 1945, docked at 0900 in Boston, Massachusetts, the same pier from which we left several months before and headed for Camp Miles Standish where we stayed at before we went overseas. On November 22, next day our company was deactivated. November that same day we left Camp Miles Standish at 1315 and arrived Fort Sheridan 1900 on the 24th of November. I think that was a Saturday if I'm not mistaken. 25th November I think was a Sunday. November 26th I was discharged at 1830 that would be 6:30 in the

evening and November 27th I arrived home at around 2000 after serving thirty-two months and two days.

Mark: I see okay. I have a couple more questions, but my tape is about to run out here, so I'm just gonna stop for a second, and then I'm gonna fast forward. **[approx. 20 second blank spot on tape]** You were discharged at Ft. Sheridan and then you took a train back to Stevens Point?

Wozniak: I stayed overnight in Chicago. I had two sisters there and I felt that I wasn't going to come back and visit them so I left Ft. Sheridan I went into Chicago and then I left the next day about noon I left Chicago and arrived to Stevens Point, actually it was outside Stevens Point, that evening, but the reason for one day later is I stayed in Chicago overnight with my sisters.

Mark: When you finally got discharged how did you feel?

Wozniak: Well, it was a relief, glad to get out because I didn't realize, you know you didn't have any idea what we were faced with, what we were going to do and everyone was glad that you survived. I mean, the fact that you made it, I mean that in itself was always a good feeling, because well – we, I helped bury, in Normandy I helped bury two different days. One day we buried Americans. We buried between 350 and 400 and the next day we buried Germans, about the same number. We had the German prisoners dig graves. They had to dispose of those bodies otherwise there would have been more problems, health problems than you could cope with.

Mark: Yeah. I see. So down in question thirteen here. When you first got home, what were your priorities? What did you want to do? Did you look for a job the next day or --

Wozniak: No, no. I took a couple weeks. I went to the bank where when I went to the service I worked and I told them, I said "I wanted a few days to unwind" I said [laughs] "I might start using language that people have been accustomed to in service," I said "I want to forget some of that." So I think I took a couple of weeks, but then I met the Executive Vice President at the Post Office one day, and he says "When are you coming back?" Well, it was about two and a half weeks of December left, and he says "Christmas is coming up, " And he said "Why don't you get back?" He says "You know, around Christmas time we like to pass something around." He says, "You might even be included." He says, "After all you're still considered one of our employees." So I think I went back about two and a half weeks of December left. Actually, on this question number thirteen, I think there was a question there about whether I took any special courses or that. I never took advantage of any of that, and a matter of fact, the bank and I had eight years before I went into service. So they said, "What are you going to study?" He says, "You know probably as much as they're gonna

teach you.” So I never did. They could have given me a special course, but I never did. So I never took advantage of any of it.

Mark: I see. It was a big advantage for you I suppose.

Wozniak: It was an advantage in this respect. My time was never broken for retirement. It was just a leave of absence. I had almost eight years when I went into service, plus almost three years, that was eleven and when I wound up in 1977, I had forty-two years of service. Otherwise I would have had thirty-one, thirty-two years. That would have broken and cut that previous service out. This way it benefited me in my final retirement.

Mark: I see.

Wozniak: You also asked about organizations. Well, you name it, I guess I belong. I’m a life member in the Legion, life member in the DAV. I’m a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. You probably wonder why I’m a member in the DAV. I wasn’t wounded but I developed dermatitis on my hands and face. I had it when I was over there and then it came back to me when I got out of service. I couldn’t even shave. My face was covered and blistering.

Mark: It came back when?

Wozniak: Well, within four-and-a-half, five months. Fortunately, it came back within six months and they sent me to a VA hospital. Had it been six months and one day, I’d been out of luck. Anything over six months is not service-connected. The service officer in our area and my doctor, who was in the South Pacific they caught that and said “When did you get out?” I said, “November 26, ‘45” and this was about the 20th of May, 1946. He said, “Hey, we better get you to the VA hospital.” I think I had six days to go. They got me in there and then eventually I got a – it took a long time, but I got a ten percent disability.

Mark: Was that Ruben Lewis, the service officer?

Wozniak: Rube Lewis. Yeah, did you know him?

Mark: I know of him.

Wozniak: Oh, you know of him. Yeah, he’s long dead now. He was a World War I vet.

Mark: Did you go to the service office much? When you were--

Wozniak: Well but you see, that was one thing about him, he kept a very close tab. When he heard someone having trouble, he wouldn’t let up. He would work with the doctor and he would work with the VA hospital and he told me, he

taught me what to do. He said when you get down to the VA hospital, he said they'll tell you they have no room. He says tell them "That's okay, put me up in a hallway." He said, "Stay there. They might talk you out of it so that the time goes out beyond the six months. Don't let them talk you out of it."

Mark: I see.

Wozniak: He knew the ropes.

Mark: So he kind of sought you out actually.

Wozniak: Well, that's right, he helped me out, that's right and then we were fortunate because the American Legion representative at the VA was a fellow by the name of Burns, and the Burns family is very prominent in the Almond, Wisconsin area, southern part of our county. I gave him Power of Attorney through the Legion, so he acted on my behalf. It took about a year and a half before I, first I got a zero disability, and then eventually they awarded me a 10% and I still draw a 10% disability.

Mark: So the service office from the county, from the Legion, they both helped you a lot?

Wozniak: Very much, very much, you bet and eventually I wound up serving on that committee for twenty-one years.

Mark: On the veterans' service committee?

Wozniak: Yes.

Mark: Is that right?

Wozniak: And I was its chairman.

Mark: Because of the work of people like Rube Lewis and James Burns, was that one of the reasons you joined the Legion?

Wozniak: No, because there was a fellow in the bank, he was in the Navy in World War I. The first day I came to work he says, "John, you got extra \$3?" I asked him what it was for and he says, "I'll sign you up in the Legion." So the very first day I came to the bank I gave him \$3 and he signed me up and I was a Legionnaire already. So I'm a fifty year man already.

Mark: Yeah. I was going to ask why you joined these organizations.

Wozniak: Well, I think they told us that he said eventually, he said “Not right now, you might not realize,” but he said “alone you can’t do much, you have no power,” he says “collectively, there’s more power when more people speak at one time.” This is another reason that I joined the DAV. Because I didn’t think, I didn’t feel that I was wounded, that I was entitled to be a DAV, but Rube Lewis told me that when you get this disability number and you are eligible to join the DAV. There is a number that is assigned to you for disability purposes and when you have that number then you may join. And of course VFW, well I was overseas. It was in a foreign war so there was no question about that. I think I can see that today. If we had stayed alone individually, some of these fellows never joined, but when they needed something, “Oh, how come the Legion doesn’t help me?” I said, “Do you belong?” “Oh, no, I never joined.” I says, “Who is going to speak for you?” So that’s the problem that people don’t realize that.

Mark: Were you active in the organization? Did you attend meetings and that kind of thing?

Wozniak: This fellow from the bank, he was Finance Officer for many years. I used to be his assistant. They wanted to elect me Commander and that. I never wanted to get involved in that. There were activities that I didn’t care to get involved in. So I never got to be—other than I—serving on committees.

Mark: As you can tell, we’ve gone through all fourteen of my questions.

Wozniak: There are a couple of things that I would like to add.

Mark: I’ve got a couple of –

Wozniak: Sure.

Mark: I was wondering about housing in Stevens Point. I’ve talked to a lot of veterans but most of them have been in Madison here so I’m interested in other parts of the state. In larger cities, they had a problem finding housing for veterans. Was there any sort of housing shortage in Stevens Point?

Wozniak: No, I don’t think so. As a matter of fact, eventually when I came back I got a job as a teller instead of bookkeeper, they moved me up to a teller and I served as teller for a number of years and then this fellow who signed me up in the Legion he was loan officer and then I started working in loans. I got into house loans and being a farm boy, I was also the farm representative. I’m responsible for all this irrigation business in central Wisconsin. That was my work. So, I worked with many veterans. He was a veteran, I was a veteran so people used to come because they felt at home when they spoke to either one of us because they knew that they would get help. We helped out many of them. There was the

state loan and there was the regular VA, get a Certificate of Eligibility. Rube Lewis was the first to see to it that they got the Certificate.

Mark: So, a lot of veterans came to the bank?

Wozniak: Oh yes, we had quite a few.

Mark: Did you have to turn any down for some reason?

Wozniak: Well, of course, it all -- we didn't really turn them down. I think if there was any turndown, it would be by the VA. They wouldn't guarantee it because they felt they were maybe taking on too big of a load. Of course that was justifiable.

Mark: Right. But from your end, most of--

Wozniak: We tried -- if the VA would guarantee, we would go along.

Mark: They mostly bought homes and that kind of thing?

Wozniak: Usually they would, yes.

Mark: What about yourself, did you already own a home before you left for the war?

Wozniak: No, I was going to build in '42, but then with Pearl Harbor I postponed it so I built it in '47. I couldn't build in '46 because I was in VA at Wood. So I built in '47, but I never took a loan. I had a little money. My wife had some money. We never mortgaged a house. There was never a mortgage on this house from the day we built it.

Mark: Oh, well that's good for you! That's probably the ---

Wozniak: My wife worked for several years. She had some money and I saved some and we built--not a very expensive home but a home for to live in--raised five boys so--

Mark: Well, that's good. I was wondering if you could comment on the VA medical system as you experienced it with your skin condition. You mentioned you were in Wood for a while.

Wozniak: Yeah, I was there, and I was there again, I spent some time in 1980. I was there, well I was actually going there in 1978 I had some ear problem. I first went to Wausau on my own to a regular ear doctor and I had infection and it was discharging, a bloody discharge. And in November 15, 1965 I had melanoma cancer in my right eye. I lost that eye. I only have one eye, but that was not

service connected or anything like that. I was concerned about that discharge because it was my right ear and I was concerned that it had some connection with the eye with the melanoma cancer. This November will be twenty-nine years since I lost the eye. That's a long time. Anyway, my biggest complaint about going down to VA at Madison when I was going for this ear business. If you'd go down there, in six months time you'd probably see three different doctors who would check you. Each doctor had to go through the -- find out what was the problem. They'd stay there just long enough to get a little experience and they'd find themselves a job on the outside and they'd go. I was fortunate that I was to have surgery in January 1980, they had me on the operating table and there was a lady--I think she was from India. She was the anesthesiologist and she calls the last shot. She says, in her broken English, "What is the blood pressure of the patient?" Dr. Looks at his assistant and the assistant looks at the helper -- nobody took my blood pressure. She says, "Take blood pressure." They took my blood pressure and that second figure was too high -- over 100. She says "No surgery." They had me strapped and everything. They thought I was getting a heart attack. The University Hospital is adjacent to the VA Hospital. They took me back and I was in the VA Hospital in Madison. They sent a heart specialist and I got one of the best check-ups that I've ever had in my life with the heart specialist and he said, "What happened to you, I think we all have a little anxiety when surgery comes up, I'd probably feel the same as you did." Then he said "your blood pressure went up, I think it just has to come down. That's natural. We all face the same thing." So I had to come back in April and they did the surgery. They had to flip the ear back to get at the mastoid bone. They were going to grind that down and implant some bone on that but they never could it was too far gone. So, I've lost about 85% of my hearing in my right ear. Then they were going to give me a hearing aid and that thing really got fouled up. The impression got lost between Madison and Wood. It never got there. Then they took another impression and that wasn't working right so they had to make some corrections and then they said it was going to cost too much and then all of a sudden they said, "Oh, but your not service connected, you're not entitled." So, I never got one.

Mark: This was how long ago?

Wozniak: This was back in the '80s.

Mark: What about the first few years after the war? I would think the VA medical system would be pretty crowded at that time.

Wozniak: Well they were. I was going because of this skin condition and then eventually I think I spent thirty-five or forty days at Wood and then I came home and after a couple of months I wound up at Marshfield. There was a Jewish doctor, Dr. Epstein, and he helped me probably more than anyone else. He developed some kind of a vaccine that I had to take once a week, but I had to

go down to Marshfield in order for them to give it to me. I finally talked him into making a sample of it and send it to my doctor and my doctor would give it to me in Point. "I really don't have to do that, but I feel for you" he said. I says I could lose my job having to come here every week. He said, "I agree with you." When my doctor would run low, he'd just call him and they'd make up another batch. I was taking it for about twenty years. Finally, when I lost that eye, I said to heck with it. I quit and it still comes back periodically, but not as bad.

Mark: There were some things you want to add?

Wozniak: Ya. There are three or four things that stand out because of my service. Okay. I'd like to make a few comments. Each stands out in my mind. First night in Normandy, just before midnight when our company received twenty-seven casualties every fifth member was either killed or wounded, that naturally stands out. Whenever we meet, whenever any of our buddies meet, we always talk about some of the fellows who got hit, who got killed and everything else. When many of our members, including myself had an opportunity to visit Buchenwald concentration camp and saw first-hand the atrocities, we realized why we had to fight this war. That our efforts were not in vain. Third thing, Ernie Pyle, the war correspondent, paid us an unexpected surprise visit in Normandy when we were in the city of Bricquebec, he talked to several individuals in a group of eight or ten soldiers. He wanted their reaction as to any problems we may be having with the German prisoners. This was about June 25, 1944. I don't remember the exact date. I, just by accident happened to be in the group of these seven or eight or nine people that he was interviewing. I couldn't add much, as a matter of fact, I spoke up and I said, "Mr. Pyle, I can't say too much because I'm company clerk, but these fellows are guards. They face the prisoners of war. They guard them. They are the ones that can tell you what reaction." I said "Let them talk, let them tell you and then you'll know because what I tell you wouldn't be really complete." And so he said that I was right and he took their reactions and then later he talked to our officers. And this was around June 25th, 1944, I can't remember the exact date. Then also a visit by war correspondent Lowell Thomas about middle of April 1945 when we were in central Germany, village of Laucha. And I mentioned Laucha before because from there we went to Buchenwald to make the visit. I was waiting for the 1st Sergeant to be located to give him a tour of our prisoner of war camp. I had an opportunity to visit with him personally. So for about seven, eight, nine minutes or so, he said, "Well, while we're waiting for the 1st Sergeant, I'd like to ask you a few questions." He says, "When you want to get some information you always want to talk with the Company Commander or the 1st Sergeant, sometimes you get as much information from the company clerk because he's the back-up. He knows what's going on. He knows what the captain is doing, what the lieutenants are doing, he knows what the Non-coms [Non-commissioned officers] are doing. The only thing he can't talk. He has to keep

his mouth shut.” We had a nice visit. He was real tall, about 6’2” or 6’3” very impressive. So we had the privilege of meeting two of the top war correspondents, they came and paid us a visit unexpectedly. Ernie Pyle eventually got killed in the South Pacific on Iwo Jima. If I understand correctly.

Mark: Yeah, I think that’s right. Thank you for taking time to talk to me today.

Wozniak: Well, does that pretty much cover what you would like to hear?

Mark: It sure does. I thought it was a very productive interview.

Wozniak: I had to dig some of this stuff because some of the records I kept an itinerary as we moved from one place to another. We were not supposed to identify the dates. All I did was mark down the date, nothing beyond that. I was privy to the company records so I could go back after the war was over and I picked it off the company records and filled in where we were and if something unusual happened on that day and that place. I’ve got that itinerary. I saved it, I’ve still got it. So that helps me when something like this comes up, someone asks and I can go back and say wait a minute that’s where we were on that day. Because I have that itinerary, otherwise that’s lost. One of our fellows, he was a history teacher at Hustisford, Wisconsin, originally a Madison man. Harold Johnson, he has now passed away. He wrote our company history and I helped him on some of it because some of the things--his history was pretty much from his own personal standpoint, but there were some specifics that he didn’t have like the number of people who were wounded and the names--he didn’t have those. I had those. So, I worked with him on that company history. He made several copies and whoever was corresponding with him, he’d pass those on to the boys most of us have those. Before I forget, I located about twenty- six copies of Yank magazine. Would you need those? Would you like to have those?

Mark: We could use some Yank magazines.

Wozniak: Well, I would send them all and then you could pick the ones you want. They’re not necessarily in consistent order. I think they start about August or September 1944 and I think the last one I’ve got is either July or August, 1945. I had the victory edition in there.

Mark: I see. Are they theater editions? Are they from Europe?

Wozniak: They’re Europe.

Mark: Okay.

Mark: What we have is a scattered collection of them so it’s possible that there are some that we could use and some that we already have.

Wozniak: I'll package those one of these days and ship that and you may keep those because eventually my boys -- they don't, other than those cartoons on the back page. They might be something. Two of my boys were in service, the middle boy that's home with me served in the Air Force during the Vietnam war, he wound up on Guam for a while and he served four years. He was in power production. The next one in age, he's married. He lives now in Grafton and has three sons, he works for Northwestern Life Insurance, he's also a certified public accountant, he served for two years in the Army and would you believe it? There was only one military police Escort Guard Company and he was assigned to it. Same designation as I was a Military Police Escort guard I don't know why in Vietnam I don't even know if they ever used any. The only company in existence in the Vietnam War.

Mark: You can send those down to us and if we don't need them we'll send them back. We have quite a few of them.

Wozniak: And that I should probably give that to the local post.

Mark: Yeah, I'd suggest that.

Wozniak: Okay, and so this will be a tape and that'll be in the museum is it?

Mark: Right, right, exactly.

[End of Interview]