

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WALTER G. PETERSON
94th Division, Army, World War II
2002

**OH
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Peterson, Walter G. (b. 1926). Oral History Interview, 2002.

Approximate length: 1 hour, 2 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Walter Peterson, a native of Superior, Wisconsin, speaks of his World War II service in the US Army with the 94th Division, European Theatre.

Drafted off the farm, in October 1944, Peterson took his basic training at Camp Wheeler, Macon, Georgia. Following a short leave to his Superior home he was sent east and embarked on RMS *Queen Elizabeth*. After landing in Scotland, he was sent to Le Havre, France via the port of Southampton, England. He relates that he journeyed by boxcar and truck to his first action, February 10, 1945, participating in the fight for the Bannholz Woods near Sinz, Germany. His division was part of the 3rd Army; he recollects hearing the loudspeaker-projected voice of General George Patton warning against cowardice. Remembering the vivid colors of exploding shells in a nighttime environment, Peterson feels this is one of the things that made his basic training insufficient. He was spared great injury or death when shrapnel embedded in his overcoat, trapped in the lining. He touches upon the navigation of a minefield. General Patton diverted from a plan to clear the Saar-Moselle Triangle, instead directed all divisions except the 94th to meet the German offensive in the Ardennes, ordering the 94th to keep the German troops facing it occupied. Peterson, now made a first scout, again escaped death when a shoe mine popped up on the road to Ayl, Germany and dropped without exploding. He and his squad crossed the Saar River at night on February 22; Patton's daylight orders for a crossing of the same field had earlier led to many deaths. Ordered to take a foggy Ockfen next morning, they were instead cornered in a hotel barn and taken prisoner.

Peterson chronicles the course of his captivity: the endless walking; the bad food endured; the food-for-work regimen; his bouts with blindness; the German guards who were "protectors, providers, and executioners;" prisoner subterfuge practiced upon the guards; exposure to P-47s aloft; and arrival at Stalag 5-A at Ludwigsburg a few days before Easter 1945. Peterson and his fellow POWs were liberated at Augsburg by the 3rd Division. He was sent to one of the "Cigarette Camps" in the vicinity of Le Havre, France, from which a troopship set course for the US. While at home in Superior on sixty days leave, Japan surrendered. The remainder of his service transpired at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas and at Fort Ord, California.

He was discharged on December 4, 1945. Peterson attended Superior (WI) State College on the GI Bill. He worked thirty-eight years as a lineman for the Wisconsin Telephone Company, his experience of war having conditioned him for work under adverse conditions. Peterson married in Madison in September 1949. After his wife of 42 years died, while at an ex-POW convention, he met a woman whom he later married. At the

time of this interview, Peterson was state commander for the ex-POWs of Wisconsin and also a national service officer.

Biographical Sketch:

Walter Peterson (b.1926) served in World War II in the US Army. He was in the European Theatre with the 94th Division. After the war he attended college on the GI Bill, married, and worked for the Wisconsin Telephone Company for thirty-eight years.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript, if possible.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002.

Transcribed by Ashley Cook, 2013.

Review and Abstract by Jeff Javid, 2016.

Interview Transcript

McIntosh: We're off and running here, talking to Walter Peterson, and the date is June 10, 2002. Where were you born, sir?

Peterson: I was born in Superior, Wisconsin.

McIntosh: And when was that date?

Peterson: April 11, 1926.

McIntosh: April 11, 1926.

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: Okay. [pause] And when D-Day arrived, you were in high school?

McIntosh: 'Cause you're two years younger than I.

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: No, three years younger. I'll be seventy-nine this year.

Peterson: Okay.

McIntosh: So I was a senior in high school. You were a sophomore—

Peterson: Right—

McIntosh: Probably a freshman.

Peterson: 1944? That would have been—I was a senior.

McIntosh: That's the year you graduated?

Peterson: That's the year I graduated.

McIntosh: Yeah, I finished in '41. That's two years before.

Peterson: Okay, three years, yeah.

McIntosh: Well anyway, what'd you think about that? When you heard about Pearl Harbor, how'd that—

Peterson: Oh, Pearl Harbor? It didn't mean much. I was too young then. I was, oh, ninth grade then. Yeah, it didn't mean much.

McIntosh: Your folks say anything to you about it?

Peterson: A little bit.

McIntosh: The “old man” tell you you might have to go to war?

Peterson: No.

McIntosh: They didn’t?

Peterson: No.

McIntosh: What were you doin’—what did he do?

Peterson: At that time he was working in the shipyard. He usually liked to work on the water on Lake Superior, and he worked for a company that did a lot of dredging, dredging sand to fill in. And also he went to St. Paul [Minnesota] and worked on the Mississippi River dredging and filled in the St. Paul Airport; they had to raise that. So when they were done with that then he came back home, and we lived on a small farm up there.

McIntosh: You were living on a farm then?

Peterson: Yes, a small farm.

McIntosh: Mm-hm.

Peterson: Where we had about five cows that we milked.

McIntosh: Well, when you got old enough then it became your turn. Did they draft you?

Peterson: They drafted me. And I graduated in June of 1944, and they drafted me in August.

McIntosh: In August, they sent you where?

Peterson: To Camp Wheeler, Georgia; Macon, Georgia.

McIntosh: Wheeler, was it?

Peterson: Camp Wheeler, yeah, Macon, Georgia.

McIntosh: Named after Joe Wheeler [a general in the Confederate Army]. Yeah, right. Okay. Then did your basic?

Peterson: Had basic training—

McIntosh: How long was the basic then?

Peterson: That was basically four months, but on our—we went out on our final bivouac, and on the way out of—before we left there we heard there was a major battle. And nothing else was said while we were there. I don't know if it's the last day, but our second to last day or last day they came and got us with the trucks, hauled us back to camp. They had the orders already written, and they flew most of the people back to Chicago. And I missed out on that so they rewrote my orders, and I took the train from Macon, Georgia to Superior. And I was home about two and a half days, then went to Camp Kilmer [New Jersey] I believe it was or Fort Meade [Maryland] and outfitted, and that took several days. Then we went down to the [RMS] *Queen Elizabeth* [Cunard Line ocean liner used as a troopship in WWII].

McIntosh: They put you on the infantry right off the bat?

Peterson: Oh yes.

McIntosh: 'Cause that's what they needed.

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: That's why they didn't bother teaching you anything else [Peterson laughs]. They just took you from basic into—

Peterson: They needed bodies.

McIntosh: Yeah, they misjudged the number of divisions they needed by about three.

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: And when it became obvious that they needed about three divisions, they didn't have 'em.

Peterson: Okay. Then landed at Greenock, Scotland. The next morning I was in Southampton, so that was my tour of England [laughs]. And I was on a boat with a foreign crew, wasn't English, was somebody else, and they gave us baked apple. You couldn't even eat that. It was [laughs] just plain rotten.

McIntosh: Rotten apples?

Peterson: I don't know if they were rotten or not, but they're not edible as far as we were concerned at that time, or I was.

McIntosh: Where did you land in France?

Peterson: Then we landed in Le Havre and were put in boxcars and went to Givet, France—

McIntosh: What division?

Peterson: Fort Charlemont.

McIntosh: Okay. What division were you in?

Peterson: I was in the 94th Division.

McIntosh: Right off the bat?

Peterson: Right off the bat. Well, stayed at Fort Charlemont for several days.

McIntosh: You were a replacement.

Peterson: I was a replacement. Then took the truck to Veckring, France where the headquarters were at that time. And when I got off the truck there was a voice on the loudspeaker, "Anybody who surrenders to the enemy is a coward." And I asked the squad leader that met me, I asked him who was speaking. He said that was General Patton. They had lost a battalion and turned out he didn't know what the facts were but met the company commander, I think I only saw him once, I believe, at that time. Then about February 10th was my first action.

McIntosh: Where?

Peterson: Bannholz Woods.

McIntosh: Your division was part of the 3rd Army?

Peterson: Was part of the 3rd Army, right.

McIntosh: And when was that?

Peterson: I joined the division February 1st of 1945, and then February 10th was my first action because we had been pulled back.

McIntosh: What was the situation then? You're a rifleman, aren't you?

Peterson: I was a rifleman. And that first action was—I'd never seen artillery fire in the middle of black night. You could see vividly the red and the black colors of the exploding shells. Very frightening, and that was enemy.

McIntosh: I'm sure, sure that was scary.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: How about the noise?

Peterson: That was a distance away so the noise wasn't bad. It was just seeing those flashes. And basic training, they only fired one artillery shell and that was in the daylight [both laugh]. But—so this was entirely different and as a new life. And I felt—

McIntosh: So everybody in your company in the battalion was just as green as you were, right?

Peterson: Quite a few, yes. Then, also, I got hit in the shoulder that day.

McIntosh: The first day?

Peterson: Yeah. On my one—left shoulder, I believe. It hit me—it hurt.

McIntosh: Piece of shrapnel?

Peterson: Piece of shrapnel, about three-quarters of an inch square. And it hurt, but it didn't—it just poked through the overcoat fabric and laid in the lining. So that was my souvenir for the day. But then in the afternoon we walked back out of there, and then we did miscellaneous things. I had to sit by a telephone one night and listen. It was to an outpost. And about early in the morning while it was still dark, two guys said, "Here's somebody coming." And a little while later there was shooting, and they killed two Germans.

McIntosh: What were your orders?

Peterson: My order?

McIntosh: Shoot at anything that—

Peterson: I don't know.

McIntosh: Oh.

Peterson: There were [laughs] no orders, just sit and listen on the phone.

McIntosh: Oh, just listening on the phone.

Peterson: Just listen on the phone. That was all I had to do. So then later, we had to go up into the woods. We were between two white tapes that had been cleared by the combat engineers and ordered to shoot from the hip to keep the—have the Germans keep their heads down. And I think we lost several men that morning in the dark.

McIntosh: What were the tapes for?

Peterson: Well, just guidelines, left and right, so we'd stay between the tapes.

McIntosh: So movin' around at night?

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: Get away from the minefields.

Peterson: Right. So, anyway I remember pushing one rifle to the side as I walked forward because I didn't see anybody fall, but after they—later that morning we heard that some of our guys had been killed. But got out of there again. And another time, that time, had to go with the combat engineer. He was looking for mines, and we crawled down through a trench, and he was using his bayonet, and he eventually found a helmet that had a hole through the center of the head, and the Germans had buried that. But that's all we found during that time, or morning. Then later, about February 15th or 17th, something like that, two months after the Battle of the Bulge started—go back a little bit. Patton was ready to start to clear out the Saar-Moselle Triangle on December 17th. But then he heard about the Battle of the Bulge, and he changed directions, and he left the 94th Division where it was, and all the other divisions went into the Bulge. And the 94th had the orders to keep the Germans occupied.

McIntosh: Not pushing ahead, but just hold 'em.

Peterson: Hold them there. And so on February 17th about, in that period of time, we started, we were at the Saar-Moselle Triangle, and they made me first scout, first target [laughs].

McIntosh: Yeah, I was gonna say, a "scout" is a nice term for a guy who's supposed to draw fire—

Peterson: That's right.

McIntosh: So you see where the hell they are.

Peterson: Yeah. Fortunately we did not see one German. But when I walked past one place where a group of Germans had been killed, and I figured that was by artillery, 'cause of the way they were lying down.

McIntosh: Sure.

Peterson: But I just walked past them and came to a town by the name Ayl [Germany], but before I got to Ayl, going around the corner of the road and a S-mine [Schumine 42, a German antipersonnel mine; also known as a "Shoe-mine"] popped up out of the ground about four feet up—

McIntosh: "Shoe-mine"?

Peterson: "Shoe-mine".

McIntosh: Step on it?

Peterson: No, I was away from it about twenty feet, but it dropped back down to the ground without exploding.

McIntosh: [inaudible] Yeah, they misfired [inaudible].

Peterson: Right. So—

McIntosh: Those nasty buggers.

Peterson: [laughs] Yes. They were full of ball bearings as I understand. We came to Ayl, and the Germans were shooting in with their 88s [anti-tank, anti-aircraft, and artillery gun], and so we probably got a little bit of their artillery barrage, and that stopped shortly afterwards. There was an American tank there, and it was right by a manure pile, and when the artillery came in I dove underneath the tank for protection. So that didn't bother me at that moment [laughs]. Anyway, during the night we received orders to cross the Saar River. So Patton had been sending troops over across this open field in that afternoon before darkness, and of course many of them got killed 'cause the field was about a quarter mile deep to the river, or wide. So once we got to the river then we had to paddle our way across in small boats, assault boats that carried—

McIntosh: Where'd you get the boats?

Peterson: The engineers brought them in.

McIntosh: Ah, yeah, right.

Peterson: So two engineers and eight infantry. And we packed mostly from the west shore to the east shore, and then the two engineers—

McIntosh: They didn't want to build a bridge?

Peterson: The current was too fast and too wide. This was the night of February 22, and so we went across, and then two engineers took the boat back and got another boat prepared to take across. We followed the railroad tracks, and there was mortar fire coming in from the Germans. But it wasn't too close to us so we walked up to a white building in back of the town by the name of Ockfen.

McIntosh: What was the name of that town?

Peterson: Ockfen. O-C-K-F-E-N.

McIntosh: Ockfen. Unusual name.

Peterson: And we got—well, got up during dark, and the fog was quite dense so the next morning we got orders to go in and take the town in this foggy condition.

McIntosh: Your company or your—

Peterson: Our squad.

McIntosh: Your squad.

Peterson: Yes.

McIntosh: How many in a squad? Twelve?

Peterson: No, there were about six.

McIntosh: Six?

Peterson: Six. And we took some buildings, and then we came to a large building—

McIntosh: How'd you keep from getting too far ahead?

Peterson: We didn't know.

McIntosh: You mean you could have been behind or ahead?

Peterson: We could have been behind or ahead, and we took some German—

McIntosh: It was up to the sergeant to decide where the hell you were.

Peterson: Yeah, we'd just take buildings, and we hoped there was other soldiers taking buildings.

McIntosh: Use a compass and a map—

Peterson: No, we were right on the edge of town. So we could see where the town was but it was still—

McIntosh: So you just picked a street and hoped that everybody else did too?

Peterson: The town could have fitted inside of the Capitol Square [Madison, WI]. It was just a small town, just like Ayl was a small town. But Ayl was a beautiful town. We were over there in '93, my daughter and I, and it was still a beautiful town. But Ockfen was the other way—just the opposite. But anyway, we came to this building that looked like a hotel with the cow barn on the end, close to the street, or next to the street. And the sergeant ran upstairs, and he says, "There's a German tank coming." He come running down, and by the time we ended up in the cow barn a German soldier was outside bouncing bullets off the wall. There was two or three cows in the barn too, but they were lying down. And then a voice at the back door where we came in was yelling, "Comrade." And we held a hasty meeting, and he suggested that we better give up otherwise we'll be killed here 'cause the tank would have been shootin' into the building. And so we went out the back door, left our rifles behind, and then we went to a small building—

McIntosh: What do you mean you left your rifles behind?

Peterson: 'Cause we gave up.

McIntosh: You gave up?

Peterson: Yeah. Because the tank outside the door and the German soldiers were shooting—

McIntosh: Oh, I didn't realize the tank had reached the door, the front door.

Peterson: Yeah, he was there outside.

McIntosh: And who was in the back door?

Peterson: A German soldier was at the back door, too, where we came—

McIntosh: One? Or several?

Peterson: One.

McIntosh: Just one.

Peterson: One or two. There were two there, one in front of us once we got in the—

McIntosh: But, you didn't think about shootin' your way out of the back door?

Peterson: Well, he said we better give up, so we did.

McIntosh: The sergeant?

Peterson: The sergeant said that, yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. Do you feel you made a mistake or not?

Peterson: Sometimes I do, yes [laughs]. But then again, no.

McIntosh: Well, if six of you, all of you firing, I would think that would—could eliminate those two guys and keep on runnin'.

Peterson: Well—

McIntosh: Well, it didn't. So what did they do with you?

Peterson: We were lined up in the building, and we took off our ammunition belts and whatever that was military. And this German soldier saw my wristwatch, and he wanted that, and so I gave it to him, the time was 11:30 in the morning.

McIntosh: You remember the date?

Peterson: That would be February 23rd.

McIntosh: Twenty-third, okay.

Peterson: Yeah. And as we were standing in the building a German soldier of higher rank carrying a machine gun and the bullet belt wrapped around his shoulder and the side of his face was bloody as the dickens, but it was dried, and he looked like sure death for us. And there was an explosion outside the door. I don't remember that one because I had my eyes on this guy with the machine gun. And I had a momentary period of loss of memory, and you think that was bad—my friend from Tomahawk [Wisconsin] he touched his hand to the top of his head, and where his four,

five fingers touched his head he had five white spots there the rest of his life. And anyway, the shell landed outside door. It broke a German soldier's rifle into fragments, and then we all got out of there. That German with the machine gun disappeared.

McIntosh: You left your rifles, though?

Peterson: Oh yeah. We'd surrendered. We were in surrender.

McIntosh: I understand that, but were you running away again?

Peterson: No, no they were taking us back away from the fight.

McIntosh: Oh, they were taking you back.

Peterson: Back, yeah.

McIntosh: I misunderstood.

Peterson: Yeah. They were taking us away from the fighting.

McIntosh: I see.

Peterson: And we came to a—went back into a large hill, and there was an American artillery plane, spotter plane, prop in the distance. And this old German fellow and the [inaudible] with him, told us, "Lay down and don't move," and he was just about crying 'cause if that plane would have spotted us they would have brought in our artillery, and we would have been killed by it. Also, to follow up on this Battle of Ockfen, the regiment was pretty well decimated. About two weeks or so later we saw our first sergeant. He was also a prisoner. So I don't know all what happened there yet, but the whole regiment was pretty well shot up—

McIntosh: So what did they do with you?

Peterson: Well, they took us back there to this large swamp, and there was a road going south, and that evening we came to a German field kitchen, and the old fellow that was our guard, he went and got hamburgers for us.

McIntosh: How many of there were you?

Peterson: There was five of us. And the German soldiers asked how come they want food for us. And well the Germans—our guy brought it to us, and we ate that, and they tasted good. Then we started walking east, and during the night we walked all night, and we met two German Tiger tanks going towards the river, towards Ockfen, one towing the other one 'cause the

Germans were short on gasoline. We came to this schoolhouse which looked like for kindergarten kids with a walled in school. And there they fed us rotten potato soup, mainly all water. And the squad leader found a dead bone so he was picking the gristle off of it, and the soup—whatever you call potato soup—most of the potato was all black, and part was good. Well, after several days when sitting down or lying down, when I stood up I would go blind. About after a week, if we were there that long, and then once we got out of there and my vision would come back to normal again ‘cause we’re eatin’ black bread then.

McIntosh: You’d be blind for how long?

Peterson: Oh, five to ten minutes. Once I stood up, I’d hang on to the doorknob or onto the wall.

McIntosh: You were okay when you were lying down, but when you got up, you couldn’t see a thing?

Peterson: That’s right.

McIntosh: And then remarkably that came back—

Peterson: That came back, once we got out of there, but—

McIntosh: Did anyone ever explain how that happened?

Peterson: No.

McIntosh: Who knew something?

Peterson: No, I asked the doctor, my ophthalmologist about it, and he said he didn’t know [laughs]. So he didn’t—I have a cyst in one eye that I can—I’m very tired then I can notice it, just the different color of it, a dim spot.

McIntosh: You mean looking in a mirror?

Peterson: No, straight out, like at the wall.

McIntosh: Part of the [inaudible] vision has a—

Peterson: A little dark spot in the center.

McIntosh: I’ll be damned.

Peterson: Not black, but it’s grey.

McIntosh: And that was just temporary, that'll go away?

Peterson: That'll go away, yeah. Just when I'm extremely tired that'll show up.

McIntosh: But you weren't ever hit in the head?

Peterson: No, no. There was a little cyst back there, probably still is, I don't know.

McIntosh: I can't believe that was related to any diet, or anything like that. Doesn't make sense.

Peterson: I asked him about that diet did it, and he said no.

McIntosh: I believe there was some anomaly there 'cause it seems to be a positional thing. That would suggest there was something in your body that's doing that—

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: Like a cyst of some kind.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah. That's unusual, I've never heard that.

Peterson: Mm-hm.

McIntosh: Okay.

Peterson: But anyway, yeah, we kept—then we started out(??) after that we had two new German guards, and they had been to the Russian front, and we also picked up another prisoner who could speak fluent German.

McIntosh: A prisoner?

Peterson: A prisoner, yeah.

McIntosh: He a Russian?

Peterson: No, American prisoner.

McIntosh: Oh, another American.

Peterson: He came—was all by himself so as we walked along, you know, they'd add another prisoner.

McIntosh: Got tired of hiding and—

Peterson: Well, whatever happened, wherever he came from, and he spoke fluent—could speak fluent German.

McIntosh: Oh, maybe he was a spy.

Peterson: No [both laugh], I don't think so. But him and the two guards, they talked and talked. And finally along the road we came to two, I don't know if they were old or Hitler Youth kids or what they were, but they carried guns, and they were looking for a fight, and they asked us why we were fightin' the Germans.

McIntosh: You mean these were youngsters.

Peterson: Yeah, well they were around sixteen to eighteen years old.

McIntosh: So they were very combative.

Peterson: Yeah, and things got a little edgy, and our two guards said, "We're getting out of here." So they got us away from those two younger guys, those two Germans.

McIntosh: What do you mean got 'em away from there? If you tried to do that, they'd shoot you.

Peterson: No, no. Our two guards saved us from these—

McIntosh: Oh, I see, I see. They became your protectors.

Peterson: Oh, yes.

McIntosh: Where were you heading? West, towards the Americans?

Peterson: We were heading east, away from Americans.

McIntosh: Bad move, that's where the Russians are.

Peterson: Well the Russians were nowhere's in sight yet [laughs]at that time.

McIntosh: Ah, okay.

Peterson: We were headin' towards the Rhine, in the general direction of the Rhine. But we came to a larger, which was not a large stalag [a German prison camp, especially for noncommissioned officers and privates], just a small one. And there they furnished us a blanket each, small blanket.

McIntosh: What was the name of that stalag?

Peterson: I don't know. It was not a full-sized stalag. It was just several hundred people in there, Americans in it.

McIntosh: Give you somethin' to eat?

Peterson: Yeah, we heard that we could volunteer to go down to a millinery factory that had been bombed and pick up the bricks and that stuff, and we'd get some potato soup. And it was operated by women. The woman in charge asked me how old I was. Well, it took a little while to decipher what her question was, and I finally told her I was eighteen. And evidently I looked pretty young at that time, and she thought I was too young to be fighting. Anyway, the food was good, just that one meal we got there. After that, evidently our American Army was coming too close so we went down the road again, and went towards the Rhine. And we crossed that during the night then by train and kept going east and south. And just to stay continuously—sometimes we could see the artillery flashes at night, so we had to stay ahead of that. But eventually we stayed at a—got to be a larger group when we stayed at a farm, several hundred people. And during the night two rangers escaped.

McIntosh: Two what rangers?

Peterson: Two American rangers escaped that had been prisoners.

McIntosh: These are people you hadn't met.

Peterson: Well, they were in our group.

McIntosh: Oh.

Peterson: See, our group had grown to about a couple hundred people now.

McIntosh: Oh, you didn't tell me that.

Peterson: Oh, okay.

McIntosh: Where were you picking all these guys up?

Peterson: Well it was that small stalag.

McIntosh: Oh I see, they emptied that out.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: They were moving the whole group.

Peterson: Yeah. They were moving the whole group.

McIntosh: Oh, okay. Sorry about that.

Peterson: That's okay.

McIntosh: So now two of the boys decided to—they're gonna head west.

Peterson: Right. And we never saw them again, but anyway, the farmer lost several chickens that night, and I don't know, somebody got ahold of 'em anyway. They disappeared. But the next morning we had morning count and you had ten men in a row, four deep, so actually forty people in a group. And so the German [inaudible] goes down through the counting, and the back row usually you had a couple people short, and after the first count the German soldier would go back to the guy in charge and tell him the amount of people in his group. When he was done, the back row would change to another group so the back group count would change just to keep confused the Germans 'cause—

McIntosh: You're just havin' fun.

Peterson: Yeah, just confuse 'em. When he'd come back and he'd come back with a different count. And then recount, recount, recount. So we spent several hours there getting recount, and they finally decided that the total sum was always the same [laughs]. But that was our way of harassing the Germans. Eventually we left there, and came to a stalag, and—

McIntosh: Which one was that?

Peterson: That would be at Ludwigsburg.

McIntosh: Tell me that name again.

Peterson: And I think 5-A [or V-A, German numbering for the stalags].

McIntosh: Stalag 5-A, that's good enough.

Peterson: Yeah, okay. And that was a full size stalag. Then we came—got there a few days before Easter 1945.

McIntosh: Just about right at the end of the war then.

Peterson: Yes. And we were there about a week, but on the Easter morning while we're out for morning count, four P-47s [US fighter-bomber planes] came

along and bombed something across the river from where we were. And you could see the artillery flashes, the machine gun flashes, hittin' the fuselage of the planes as they dove down to drop their bombs. But all four planes made it past down to whatever they were looking at and dropped their bombs and flew away. One looked like it had been hit a little bit but not bad. Then we were there till after Easter. Then about the middle of the week, then the whole camp vacated.

McIntosh: The guards suddenly disappeared?

Peterson: No, no, not yet. They probably became our guards in a long column. The column kept getting larger and longer all the time with different groups of people. One place farther down into the story, after we left there we got out customary loaf of bread for five or six guys. We always took turns cutting the bread, and whoever did the cutting always had the last slice, and there was never an argument. But that was our main diet, was that German black bread [Kommissbrot]. And I should mention about our guards: they were our protector, our provider, and our executioner. Our protector, like when those two German kids that tried to pick a fight with us and they saved us from them. Our provider, they found the loaves of bread for us. And our executioner, in this one place they shot the Hindu. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

McIntosh: Hindu? What Hindu?

Peterson: From India.

McIntosh: Yeah, I know about that. What's he doing in the middle of Germany?

Peterson: They were with the English army.

McIntosh: Well you didn't mention that [Peterson laughs]. That's what I wanted you to tell me.

Peterson: Oh, okay.

McIntosh: [laughs] When did you pick up the Brits?

Peterson: Oh, probably at this last stalag, Stalag, 5-A.

McIntosh: There were several Brits in there?

Peterson: Oh yeah, well, there were Russians and British, Africans, and Hindu.

McIntosh: Anyway, what prompted them to shoot the—

Peterson: I don't know.

McIntosh: Oh. Did you all enjoy watching that, or did they do that—

Peterson: No, they did that before we got into the camp, or that field. So the next day we had a day off while they cremated this fellow, the Hindu.

McIntosh: Oh, that was nice. At least they gave him his rites in the way his country would have done it.

Peterson: That's right.

McIntosh: I'm surprised they just didn't dump him in the field.

Peterson: Well, they didn't do that. They allowed them to cremate him. I was curious; I walked to the fence to see what they were doin'. They had long poles poking into the fire, so to keep the fire going. That satisfied my curiosity. Then I went back to where our group was, and there was a Sikhs there, S-I-K-H-S, and one was combing his hair and it was very greasy; I think he was using margarine for hair grease, and he combed it out and then wrap it around his head and put his turban on. And then shortly after that they had some oatmeal in their pack and little short sticks, and they dug a square hole about four inches by ten inches and lit a fire, and they boiled the oatmeal, cooked the oatmeal. So they were equipped, and I was envious about that 'cause oatmeal is a very good food.

McIntosh: Who had the oatmeal?

Peterson: The Sikhs did.

McIntosh: How did they get oatmeal?

Peterson: I don't know, from the British, probably sent it in. But they had oatmeal.

McIntosh: But they didn't have any for you?

Peterson: No. We didn't get a taste.

McIntosh: You could have shot 'em and then taken the oatmeal.

Peterson: [laughs] No, we couldn't have shot 'em. No rifle, no guns.

McIntosh: Ah, of course not.

Peterson: But anyway, I was very envious of 'em anyway. And then we started out the following day again. Also, when we slept with our small blankets, we

slept outside 99 percent of the time no matter what the weather was. And it was real bad when early part(??) then we'd get into a shed, something like that, but never into a home or a warm place.

McIntosh: But this is after you left the Stalag?

Peterson: No, after our capture. We never—

McIntosh: Oh, this is before you got in Stalag 5?

Peterson: Yeah, right. Then we'd put a couple blankets under us and about three blankets on top of us, one for each one of us. And they were thin blankets. Then we'd lay on our right side with one arm underneath our head for a pillow and the other arm over the body in front of you. So that's how we stayed more or less comfortable. We never took our clothes off; never took our shoes off because they might disappear during the night. But that was how we worked that at that time. But as we continued on south, it was just everyday stuff. Once, again, four P-47s came along. And the P-47 was a radial engine fighter, and they cruised probably about two to four hundred feet above the ground and just looking for targets. And if they saw targets they took care of it. But that was their sole duty, and they were mainly about ten to fifteen miles ahead of the front line.

McIntosh: Yeah, but what about you? I don't worry about the P-47s. I've talked to a P-47 pilot. I know all about them.

Peterson: Okay. But anyway, they came along and disappeared. They came back and dove straight down, and the Russians were up in front of the column. They dove straight down at a target underneath the bridge or whatever it was, and everybody scattered, and then they flew away, and we regrouped again. And when we got up to where the target was, the P-47s had peeled off a corner of a building, and a woman came to that part of the building shaking her fist at us, and a German farmer had a pitchfork and the back of Russian, pushin' him back into the column. But after that we left there. We were getting close to Augsburg [Germany]. Of course we didn't realize what towns were ahead of us. But—

McIntosh: The war was just about over here in the middle of April.

Peterson: That's right. So—

McIntosh: April 8th is when it was all over.

Peterson: May 8th [V-E Day, Victory in Europe Day], yeah. So we had dysentery and diarrhea real bad, and of course I—one town I had to stop and relieve myself, and a German women walked past me, but she was polite so she

looked straight, eyes right in front of me. Nothing was ever said. And then we got to Augsburg, and they said anybody who was sick can get out of the column. So I got out and went into a small stalag right in Augsburg. And I was there about two days, and on the morning of the third day an American column came through so we were liberated at that time. But anyway, the second day when I was there I found a bucket and filled it with water and took my underclothes off and for the first time in four and a half months and put it in the bucket to soak overnight. Then the next morning, the 3rd Division came through, liberated us, and I went back to where that bucket was and looked at the water. It was rather green [laughs]. And so—but then a lieutenant came from that 3rd Division. He says, “What would you want?” We told him we’d like to have pancakes for breakfast and showers. And about two hours later they showed up, and they gave us our first meal and the showers. Evidently I’d washed off those underclothes and rinsed them out and used them again once they were dry, but we had our showers, and then we stayed there in Augsburg for awhile, several days. We explored it a little bit; we didn’t go very far. Then they moved us to another town close by, and there was a British soldier that evidently had been a prisoner too. He went into a house, and got back out a little while later with the dishes from the household. So he took that back to England evidently. Then I met an American. He had a Hitler Youth .22 [caliber training rifle] that was similar, very similar to a Mauser, but it belonged to a Leberecht(??) Franker, Hitlerjugend [Hitler Youth]. And I took that home with me along with several swords and bayonets that I got from this guy. Evidently he didn’t want to go back to the States right then, he wanted to stay in Europe and look around.

McIntosh: Business was good.

Peterson: Yeah [both laugh]. So then we eventually—after about a week then we went out to an airport, got in the C-47s [troop transport plane; the military version of the DC-3], and flew to Camp Lucky Strike [one of the “Cigarette Camps” that were debarkation, staging, and embarkation areas for US troops] by Le Havre [France], and there they deloused us and took our showers and clean clothes—

McIntosh: When did you get to Lucky Strike?

Peterson: Camp Lucky Strike? April 28th. April 28th is when I was liberated, and it’d be about a week later. Then we was there a number of days, got the clean clothes—

McIntosh: You lost a week?

Peterson: About a week, yes. They fed us lots of eggnog to fatten us up.

McIntosh: So you weren't so scrawny when you got back to your mom?

Peterson: [laughs] That's right.

McIntosh: You couldn't write the Army and tell 'em how bad they treated ya.

Peterson: No. Then we got onto a ship. Going through the North Sea it left Le Havre, out of Le Havre. The boat was bouncing around quite a bit. I got seasick, vomited, and from that day forward I can stand any storm and ride it out real good. But the food was excellent on the ship; they fed us well and plenty of ice cream.

McIntosh: Were you discharged shortly after you got to the States?

Peterson: No, we came to Camp Kilmer again, and I had lost these three front teeth from a car accident.

McIntosh: From what?

Peterson: These three.

McIntosh: Yeah, from what did you lose 'em?

Peterson: From a car accident back when I was sixteen years old.

McIntosh: Oh, I see.

Peterson: And the facings of them had popped out when I ate the black German black bread. First day I lost two of 'em, the third day I lost the third one. So I just had a bridge there to cut the bread with. But they replaced the facings on the teeth for functionary, physical, and put us on a train to Chicago and transferred to another train to Superior [Wisconsin]. And I was home for sixty days, and at that time Japan surrendered. Then after the sixty days I went to Fort Sam Sheraton, Fort Sam Houston at Houston, Texas, or San Antone [country slang for San Antonio], Texas. And then was there for a month, and from there I went to Fort Ord, California where I became a mail clerk, and then—

McIntosh: You didn't have enough points to get out?

Peterson: No, not at that time. Then after about six weeks or two months there, December 4th, I was discharged. And then I took the bus back from San Francisco back to Superior.

McIntosh: Have you kept track of any of your buddies from your—

Peterson: Yes.

McIntosh: Your company?

Peterson: Yes. Ed Daigle, he's now passed on. He was the fellow who touched his head, with the white spots. He's passed on, he had Alzheimer's, and he died a year ago. And the squad leader lives outside of Cincinnati, Ohio.

McIntosh: You keep in contact with him?

Peterson: I do.

McIntosh: Oh, how nice.

Peterson: But—

McIntosh: Does your division have an annual meeting?

Peterson: Yes.

McIntosh: The 94th?

Peterson: Right. But I've never been to one of them.

McIntosh: Oh, I see. They send you their magazine, I'm sure.

Peterson: Oh yes, yes..

McIntosh: You keep track of some of the guys.

Peterson: Right. But the squad leader, he don't want nothing to do with the military. He says that's a thing of the past, and I try—I'm a national—

McIntosh: Everybody's different.

Peterson: Yup.

McIntosh: So did you use your GI Bill when you got home?

Peterson: Yes, I went to school for a year and a half.

McIntosh: Where?

Peterson: In Superior. Superior State College.

McIntosh: What did they teach you?

Peterson: [both laugh] Not much.

McIntosh: That girls are still fun?

Peterson: Girls are still fun, right [both laugh]. That much was a lot of partying and that stuff, and then I ran out of money. So then I hired out to the telephone company, and worked with them for thirty-eight years.

McIntosh: In Superior?

Peterson: No, never in Superior. I started at River Falls, was there for two months. Then I came down with appendicitis, and after I recovered from that then I went back and I was there about a week. Then I went to Ashland. Then from Ashland got into another crew again, a roving crew.

McIntosh: What was the job at the telephone company?

Peterson: Lineman at that time.

McIntosh: Out in the—

Peterson: On the highway.

McIntosh: In the country?

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: Climbing those poles?

Peterson: Yes.

McIntosh: That's not good for your health.

Peterson: Well, [laughs] we did it.

McIntosh: I understand that, but you were almost in more danger in that than you were in Germany.

Peterson: Well, I'd lived outside all the time anyways so [laughs] the cold—

McIntosh: Didn't bother?

Peterson: Didn't bother me that much.

McIntosh: I would think climbing that pole when it's twenty below and windy and blowy and snowy, it's just an ideal setup for an accident.

Peterson: Oh yes. Well, we slowed down a little bit. But, yeah, we went from Mellen [WI] down to Marshfield rebuilding that telephone—

McIntosh: Rebuilding the line?

Peterson: Rebuilding line. And on January 1st of 1949 transferred to Appleton and worked there for six months, and they told me there's no room in the inn, pick a town.

McIntosh: Pick a town?

Peterson: Pick a town.

McIntosh: So what was the company are you working for?

Peterson: Wisconsin Telephone Company.

McIntosh: Wisconsin Telephone. I didn't know that—

Peterson: Yeah. So I wanted to come to Madison. So I didn't want to go back to Superior. I felt it was—

McIntosh: You kept gettin' bigger and bigger cities.

Peterson: Right. But there was no future in Superior.

McIntosh: Your folks had gone?

Peterson: No, no, they still lived there.

McIntosh: They still live there?

Peterson: No, they're gone now.

McIntosh: Yeah they're gone now—

Peterson: I've got two brothers—

McIntosh: But the time you were making this decision—

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: They were still alive—

Peterson: Oh yes.

McIntosh: And they were angry ‘cause you didn’t want to come home?

Peterson: No, no.

McIntosh: No?

Peterson: No, no.

McIntosh: Oh, very understanding.

Peterson: Yes.

McIntosh: Now, tell me about being married. You must have married by now.

Peterson: No, not yet.

McIntosh: Not yet [Peterson laughs]. So, then you go to Madison.

Peterson: Yeah, June I went to Madison. Then September 10th of 1949 I was married.

McIntosh: Made an honest woman of her?

Peterson: Well, I suppose [laughs].

McIntosh: Good. What was your job here in Madison?

Peterson: My job—her job, she worked for [Wisconsin Citizens] Public Expenditure Survey as a first job. Arch Ely, and he was quite a character. And I still worked at the telephone company doing house installation at that time.

McIntosh: You were indoors by then.

Peterson: Yes. In and out. But—

McIntosh: Oh, before we leave that, is the phone company a good company to work for?

Peterson: Yes, it was.

McIntosh: People I’ve talked to who have worked there have always been reasonably happy employees.

Peterson: Yes.

McIntosh: They said they were treated well, they weren't chintzy, and they paid their employees well, and they appreciated 'em and all that.

Peterson: Mm-hm, yeah.

McIntosh: Good, that's good to hear.

Peterson: Then I worked for them for thirty-eight years.

McIntosh: Thirty-eight in Madison?

Peterson: In Madison, mainly in Madison. I had to go down to Darlington for about two-three months during the Korean War because one fellow had to go into the military.

McIntosh: Oh, you took his spot.

Peterson: Took his spot. But otherwise, I've been in Madison all the time. And did wiring in offices, another fellow and I did all the wiring in the new part of the airport, air terminal. Then after that, transferred into teletype, and then teletype, and we put in modems, and then I was retired after that.

McIntosh: Give you a gold watch?

Peterson: Oh yeah [laughs].

McIntosh: Good. [both laugh] I would think after thirty-eight years they could at least spring for a watch.

Peterson: Yeah, they did that.

McIntosh: Great. Well, I bet you were a very valued employee.

Peterson: Well [inaudible] the last about five-six years I was a high priced secretary and make up the workload for the guys.

McIntosh: Sure. Well, you knew everything.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: You were really valuable. So when you retired, what did you do? Nothin'?

Peterson: Oh way no no no, no, no, no. My wife had, before I retired, she came down with osteoporosis and multiple myeloma, and her mother was not much better. So I take her up to Rochester, Minnesota to Mayo Clinic, and basically she got bad enough they give her radiation in the pelvis, and after ten treatments—about the eighth treatment was bad, and the ninth and the tenth and before we had left home she says she’s gonna die up there and she did.

McIntosh: Oh, that’s too bad.

Peterson: So. And I asked the doctor, “How am I going to get a bedpan under her?” “I don’t know.”

McIntosh: Wonderful [Peterson laughs]. He was too young.

Peterson: [laughs] He did the radiation; he didn’t worry about that part of it.

McIntosh: They don’t know anything about people. People who work in x-ray know nothing about people.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: They’re just bodies to them.

Peterson: So then my mother-in-law went into a nursing home in Appleton, and I go visit her once a month.

McIntosh: You drive up to Appleton once a month?

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: To see a mother-in-law?

Peterson: Yeah?

McIntosh: Almost unheard of [Peterson laughs]. Almost unheard of.

Peterson: [laughs] Well, that’s what they said.

McIntosh: I didn’t talk to my mother-in-law. I’ve had two mothers-in-law; I didn’t talk to either of ‘em unless I absolutely had to.

Peterson: Yeah, right. So anyway, she died September 8th of 1992, two days before our anniversary, again we’re September 10th. But then two and half years ago, I was a delegate for the ex-POW from our chapter. We went to, another fellow and I, drove down to Baton Rouge [Louisiana], and I

walked around a corner, and there was a woman in a wheelchair talkin' to two people that I knew from Madison and Texas. They lived both places. And we got married about nine months after that meeting.

McIntosh: Where was she from?

Peterson: San Antone. So she lives up here with me now.

McIntosh: Well, if you got married, she more or less ought to—

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: If she had normal relations.

Peterson: Yeah, she had a—her husband was a POW—

McIntosh: Uh-huh. Oh. So how'd your second marriage go? Better?

Peterson: It goes very well.

McIntosh: Good, that's nice.

Peterson: Goes real good. Yeah, and she gets around good with her electric chair. So—

McIntosh: Why is she in a wheelchair?

Peterson: She had polio when she was—fifty years ago. When she was twenty-nine she had polio.

McIntosh: Twenty-nine years of age? That's unusual.

Peterson: Yeah, when twenty-nine and she was pregnant at that time—

McIntosh: Wow.

Peterson: About seven months pregnant, somethin' like that.

McIntosh: She deliver the child okay?

Peterson: No, that was cesarean.

McIntosh: Did she have any more children?

Peterson: No, not after that.

McIntosh: You keep in contact with your daughter-in-law?

Peterson: Oh yeah. She calls her practically every day [laughs]

McIntosh: Calls her mother every day?

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: Where does she live?

Peterson: This side of San Antone. She has all her friends down there.

McIntosh: Sure. Does your wife wish that she could travel down there more?

Peterson: We traveled down there five times two years ago.

McIntosh: Five times in one year?

Peterson: Five times in one year.

McIntosh: That's more than is required for the average husband.

Peterson: [laughs] Yeah, I know, I know.

McIntosh: You must have done somethin' wrong; you're paying a big price here [laughs].

Peterson: Well, the last time was—went down and she got locked in the car; the sliding door has a ramp on it, and the door wouldn't open, and so that happened at noon. We couldn't get her out of the car so called Triple A [American Automobile Association], and nobody would handle sliding doors, and all the dealers were closed.

McIntosh: Of course.

Peterson: Yeah, so we finally got smart and drove right on to San Antone, called the hotel on the way, and they had the room for us waiting there. We got there at 10:00 at night. So then spent the next two days gettin' the door fixed. But then we went on to Tuscon [Tucson, Arizona] to the National Convention. Then we drove up, up to Colorado Springs, sightseeing on the way. And I have a sister-in-law, former sister-in-law, there. She's remarried. And then into Denver, saw the nephew there, and then up to Loveland where her grandson is, and then north from there up into Montana to friends of hers up there. And into North Dakota or South Dakota, Jamestown [ND], and saw my father-in-law's niece, that I'd seen only once before.

McIntosh: Did you have any children by your first marriage?

Peterson: Yes, boy and a girl.

McIntosh: Where are they?

Peterson: My daughter works at the Portage prison [Columbia Correctional Institution; Portage, WI] right now in the medical part of it. She worked at the university in the eye clinic for ten years in admissions.

McIntosh: And your son?

Peterson: And the son is a chiropractor in Oshkosh.

McIntosh: In Oshkosh?

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: Oh well, then you have a chance to see your kids.

Peterson: Oh yeah, right.

McIntosh: Oh, that's nice.

Peterson: Yeah, they're not too far away.

McIntosh: Sure. Well, you go up to Appleton to see your ex-mother-in-law—

Peterson: Well, she's gone too [laughs].

McIntosh: Oh. You don't have to see her anymore?

Peterson: No, no.

McIntosh: Well, you see your son in Oshkosh.

Peterson: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Oh, that's nice.

Peterson: Yeah, we'll be going up to De Pere the 15th. Right now I'm State Commander for the ex-POWs and also a National Service Officer.

McIntosh: For the ex-POWs? For the state of Wisconsin, you're the boss POW?

Peterson: Ah, right now [laughs].

McIntosh: Right this [inaudible], but a year later [inaudible]?

Peterson: That's a yes. That will expire August 15th.

McIntosh: Okay, then teach me about this. How many do we have in Wisconsin?

Peterson: The last count, we had 669 members, national members.

McIntosh: That's right. There's probably others that just didn't care to join?

Peterson: That's right. And we're looking for them.

McIntosh: Sure. Most WW II?

Peterson: World War II, you know Pacific and the European.

McIntosh: Some Korean?

Peterson: Yes, and Vietnam.

McIntosh: How many would you say?

Peterson: Korean, we have one in our chapter—

McIntosh: One in Wisconsin?

Peterson: No, just in our chapter, in our Madison chapter.

McIntosh: Oh Dennis [Darrell] Krenz? He's the only one I've interviewed.

Peterson: Yeah. I don't recognize that name.

McIntosh: Yeah, he's in my book.

Peterson: Okay.

McIntosh: He's got a hell of a story.

Peterson: Yeah, we have your book at home.

McIntosh: Yeah, good. [Peterson laughs] But anyway, Dennis [Darrell] Krenz is the only Korean POW that I've interviewed.

Peterson: Okay. And then being a service officer, I just wrote a claim for a fellow from Footville [WI].

McIntosh: What was he from, what war?

Peterson: He was the Pacific.

McIntosh: Oh, World War II.

Peterson: Yeah. World War II, Pacific.

McIntosh: And this is Footville?

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: Do you remember his name?

Peterson: Ballew, B-A-L-L-E-W. Ballew, McIntosh Ballew.

McIntosh: 'Cause no one has ever given me a name from Footville. That's not very far from here.

Peterson: Not too far, yeah, it's right close to the border, the Illinois border.

McIntosh: Yeah, I ought to be able to get him up here if I call him.

Peterson: I would think so.

McIntosh: Do you have his phone number at home?

Peterson: Yes, I do.

McIntosh: I'll call you, if I don't forget this conversation [Peterson laughs]. I'll call you at home, and you can give me that number.

Peterson: Okay, yeah, I'll give you that number.

McIntosh: Okay, and—

Peterson: He's a rather interesting fellow.

McIntosh: Any 'Nam POWs?

Peterson: No, no. I don't have that.

McIntosh: None in your organization?

Peterson: Oh, yeah. I'll look back through, and I'll find some for you.

McIntosh: Well, I was wondering how many your organization has from Vietnam.

Peterson: Yeah, no, Vietnam? Oh, yeah. Don Heiliger.

McIntosh: Yeah, Don. He's the only one I've interviewed.

Peterson: Yeah, that's the only one I know right now. There's a fellow we—

McIntosh: In the state. You know, there are eighty organizations I could—

Peterson: There's a fellow in Eau Claire, or up there around Eau Claire that was Don Heiliger's roommate.

McIntosh: What's his name? I'll call you. By the time you get home, and I call you, you get that name for me.

Peterson: Right, right. So yeah, all the stories are the same, but they're all a little different in their—

McIntosh: The POW stories are remarkably the same.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: At least there's a little variation.

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: But I can tell ya, they all had cabbage soup and hated it, and occasionally they put a potato and occasionally a little meat, and they hated it, but that was it.

Peterson: That was it.

McIntosh: And they only got it once a day.

Peterson: Like this fellow, he ate rice, and he said something like cucumbers.

McIntosh: Where? In Vietnam?

Peterson: No, in Japan, in Singapore.

McIntosh: Oh he was in Singapore?

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: A Japanese guy.

Peterson: Yeah, yeah, over in that direction.

McIntosh: Oh, I gotta talk to him.

Peterson: Over in that direction. He mentions the River Kwai.

McIntosh: Most of the Japanese POWs were in the Philippines or in Japan working at the shipyards.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: In loading—

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: Or in the coal mines. There's a coal mine in Southern Japan.

Peterson: In Nagasaki, we met at this last convention a fellow that was in Nagasaki when the bomb went off.

McIntosh: Wonderful.

Peterson: And he was underground.

McIntosh: Better yet.

Peterson: Yes [both laugh]. So I asked him—

McIntosh: He could still be burned from latent radiation.

Peterson: Well, I asked him if he had thyroid cancer. He says, "No, I'm okay." But he says my friend who was up on top, he has it.

McIntosh: Thyroid cancer?

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: All right, is there anything I forgot to ask you? Did the Army train you well for what they asked you to do?

Peterson: No, I don't think so.

McIntosh: You think that was slipshod training?

Peterson: Well, for the amount of time that we had, it was good.

McIntosh: Mm-hm. But you weren't trained—I think they pushed you along. I don't think you were ready to go to the line—

Peterson: No.

McIntosh: With just basic training. You should have been through an advanced eight weeks, I think, in between, don't you?

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: That would have helped you a lot.

Peterson: Oh, yes. Yeah, there was no—we were just a body. Get the bodies up there. 'Cause they were taking bodies out of the Air Corps and making 'em C-47 pilots and wherever they could use—glider pilots.

McIntosh: They got panicky.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: The guy I interviewed, this one fella in the book, lives in Madison. Clarence Kailin, he's about ninety now.

Petersen: Mm-hm.

McIntosh: It was the Spanish-American War [Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939]. He was over with the—Kailin had the [??] Lincoln Brigade. They were communists or socialists, whatever.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: Went over to fight the fascists in Spain. They took a ship to France, put on a train, got to the border of Spain, were given a rifle and 500 rounds of ammunition and taken by truck to the front lines.

Peterson: Yeah.

McIntosh: No training.

Peterson: Right.

McIntosh: Zero. Gee—

Peterson: [laughs] Do your best.

McIntosh: But, load the gun this way, and then shoot anything that moves over that way.

Peterson: Mm-hm, yeah.

McIntosh: My God, I'm surprised any of 'em survived that.

Peterson: Yeah. My brother, oldest brother, he was a B-17 pilot, and he was shot down June 16th, ten days after D-Day, and he got into the French underground. And one time they wrapped—he had to go to Paris, and they wrapped him with German Deutsche Marks, and he was just a courier then, and he got onto a train, and his guide was a woman. She sat up in the front of the passenger car, and he sat in the last seat so there was no contact between the two of 'em. And when she got off, he got off. Maybe she made the contacts up in Holland someplace, and they took the money off of him, and then she got the tickets paid back to Paris from those people, and he got his, and she got hers. But anyway, on one of those German Deutsche Marks was an accordion [possibly one of the musical background images printed on WWII Deutsche Mark bills] with very small creases in it all the way across to make it look like used money, and one of those little creases, it says "Printed in Maryland." So it was all genuine counterfeit [both laugh], American printed. So—

McIntosh: Well, thank you, sir.

Peterson: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]