

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DONALD A. MERCIER
Tank Gunner, US Army, World War II
1997

Mercier, Donald A., (1922-1998) Oral History Interview, 1997.

Approximate length: 36 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Summary:

Donald “Don” A. Mercier, a Rice Lake, Wisconsin native, discusses his experiences with the 44th Tank Battalion in the Pacific theater of World War II.

Mercier recalls his thoughts upon hearing of the attack on Pearl Harbor. He describes his time working for the Civilian Conservation Corps of Wisconsin and the National Youth Organization. He touches on enlisting and his induction at Great Lakes Naval Station, Illinois. Mercier recalls his assignment to the 2nd Battalion, 44th Armored Regiment, 12th Armored Division, and basic training at Camp Campbell, Kentucky. He states they started out training with World War I tanks, and he specialized with Ford V8 tanks. Mercier details pre-maneuvers equipment training in Texas at Camp Barkeley, gunner training at Camp Bliss, maneuvers, adjusting to military life, and being re-designated as the 44th Tank Battalion. He tells of experimenting with the effects of concussion at Camp Barkeley and having a shell backfire in his tank.

Shipped to Finchhaven, New Guinea, Mercier portrays the low-quality and limited food aboard the troop trip, seasickness, and a couple incidents that happened in the hold. Assigned to Company C, he describes combat at Hill 225 and Rocky Point in New Guinea: loading the tanks onto LSTs, witnessing infantry casualties, and seeing the expression on the face of a Japanese soldier he killed.

Sent to destroy a Japanese radar station on Morotai Island, Mercier reflects on his small unit’s efforts being overlooked. He tells of diving to find a path for the ships through the coral reefs and training to put snorkels on the tanks. He touches on spending time at rest camps, swimming off the coast of New Guinea, and using inflated mattress covers to go surfing. He comments that Japanese soldiers were “fanatic” and “fierce” and tells of seeing a couple of them taken prisoner. He relates seeing a B-25 crash land, being told to get back because it could explode, and hearing later that several would-be rescuers died in the explosion while trying to pull out the tail gunner.

Mercier speaks of taking Attabrine pills and having an attack of dengue fever. Mercier reveals his unit had trouble getting food supplies while in the field and tells of taking part in a food raid. He characterizes his tank driver as “weird” and remembers having a Christmas feast the day before being shipped to the Philippines.

While in the naval convoy, he comments on the rough seas and danger from Japanese airplanes. He recalls seeing General MacArthur wade ashore at Leyte, and his own presence in a well-known photograph of that landing in Life magazine. He shares his positive impressions of the general, and highlights MacArthur’s efforts to rescue prisoners of war from Manila. While fighting in the mountains, Mercier describes firing on a Japanese convoy, not being allowed to fire on Japanese tanks that were attacking American infantrymen, and feeling regret when he saw the bodies of those infantrymen retrieved.

Mercier states his worst experience was a particularly heavy rocket attack. After V-E Day, he tells of driving his tank through Yokohama, Japan, seeing the destruction in Tokyo, and, while on occupation duty, guarding a couple of local ham thieves.

Mercier touches on his homecoming and declares that he didn't even recognize his brother when he got home. He states that for a while after he got back, he had nightmares and would take cover when airplanes flew overhead. He tells of attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison with the GI Bill, getting married, and having trouble finding housing in Madison. He details having difficulty getting hired and eventually earning a position at a paper mill in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Mercier recalls his frustration with bickering between the VFW and American Legion, organizing some company reunions, and getting involved with preserving his unit's military history with the 44th Tank Battalion Association.

Biographical Sketch:

Donald "Don" A. Mercier (1922-1998) served as a tank gunner in the Army from 1942 to 1945. He was in Company C, 44th Tank Battalion and saw combat in New Guinea, Morotai Island, and the Philippines. After being discharged at the rank of staff sergeant, he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Mercier worked for thirty-one years at Pope and Talbot Paper Mill in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, including fifteen years as operation controller.

Archivist's notes:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility, transcripts often contain small errors. It is strongly suggested that researchers directly engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997.

Transcribed by Mitch Parmentier and Joe Dillenburg, 2007.

Reviewed by Kate Rowell, 2020.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011.

Interview Transcript:

Mark: Today's date is August 18th, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Donald A. Mercier of Eau Claire, Wisconsin; a veteran of the European Theater.

Don: Pacific.

Mark: Pacific—good heavens, you're right. Pacific Theater of World War II. I got that part right. Thanks for coming in. I appreciate it. All the way down from Eau Claire.

Don: Certainly welcome.

Mark: Why don't we start by having you tell me where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Don: I was born and raised in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, a town of about five thousand people. I went to a Catholic grade school there and a public high school. Pearl Harbor I can remember distinctly because I was helping my father clean up, he had a tavern there, we were cleaning it up to get ready for business and we had our radio on and we heard the announcement and I think I knew pretty much right then that I was going to get involved.

Mark: Now at time you were about nineteen or so?

Don: Born in 19—uh February 1st, 1922. So that that was in '47, ah yeah, about nineteen.

Mark: Now as a young man of military service age, the draft had started at this time, so I'm wondering if—what I'm getting at is did you have some idea that war would be coming to the United States, that we would be getting involved, and did you think about how that might effect you before Pearl Harbor?

Don: Not very much, but like I say I felt that I eventually was going to get involved in that.

Mark: It wasn't very long until after Pearl Harbor that you decided to enlist.

Don: Well what happened—

Mark: Or did you decide to enlist?

Don: No, I did decide, but prior to that time I'd grown after high school, it was the deep Depression. So, I went into the three Cs, the Civil Conservation Corps, for the state of Wisconsin.

Mark: Which was when, in about '39?

Don: No, I graduated in '40. So, it would have been late—the fall of '40.

Mark: And what was that like?

Don: [Chuckles] Well I—my cousin and I both decided to enlist together, and at the last minute he backed out. So, I went down to Menomonee, Wisconsin. Our job there was to break rock for rip rapping rivers, and I was too small to handle the sledge or the hammer, so they gave me a pair of safety glasses and a kind of long pliers and I held on the chisel so the guy could hit it. Three months there and then three months down in Sparta, Wisconsin which the Headquarters camp for the CCCs of Wisconsin. I started—well I had trained to be a ham radio operator using the Morse Code and the keys. But eventually I went to distribute telegrams.

Mark: As I understand the CCC, it was supposed to be military-like?

Don: Yes, it was, considerably. You had barracks, and officers, and you did revelry in the morning, and yeah it was military type clothing.

Mark: Now also as I understand, not to dwell on this too much, but I'm interested in this. It was designed for two groups of people mainly, young people and World War I veterans. Were there a lot of World War I vets there?

Don: Not that I'm aware of the camp that I was in at least. I think there were World War I troops, like more in Menomonee and matter of fact I think our officers, we had officers, were World War I people that could very well be. But when I got to Sparta it was mostly young people like me. Prior to—well after I got done with that, I went back to Rice Lake, still no work. So, I joined the--what's called the National Youth Organization where they would put you to work. For example, I would scrub walls in public buildings for 25 cents an hour.

Mark: Keeps you off the streets.

Don: That was about it, you know you couldn't get work.

Mark: Now your father owned a tavern you said?

Don: Yes. Yes.

Mark: Now one of the things we hear is that taverns do well during the Depression. Is that true in your father's case?

Don: Let's put it this way, he survived, and there were a lot of people who were having trouble surviving. By this time though, you were talking about the war, Prohibition had ended, and taverns were legal. During Prohibition time he had made home brew. So, he was pretty much in that area for a long time [laughs]

Mark: Able to scrape by—[unintelligible]

Don: That's right, that's right.

Mark: So, you enlisted in '42?

Don: What happened I went down to—my cousin again said we had a good ride down to Norfolk, Virginia and there was a job there, so we went down there. I got a job and he got homesick for his girl, so he went back home again. So here I was second time all by myself. But I got a good job, and the war got serious after Pearl Harbor and I decided that I think we should enlist before they call us. So, we both went to Chicago. Well we went to Eau Claire first and enlisted there and then went down to the Chicago area, the Great Lakes Naval Station to enlist.

Mark: Why don't you just walk me through that process and the induction into military life?

Don: I was trying that, and all I can remember is there were a lot of young guys. You were constantly going, shifting, from one line to another. You'd get your shots, and you'd go here, and you'd get your assignment. You'd see all of these guys standing in line, a lot of the time you were stripped. It was a new experience for me although you got a little bit of that in high school phys ed, you know, but still I don't remember too much about that.

Mark: And after you got inducted you had to go off to basic training somewhere.

Don: Yup, I was assigned to Camp Campbell, Kentucky to the 12th Armored Division. And their cadre had come from Fort Knox but all the rest of us were raw recruits and went into training there.

Mark: And so, you got your introduction into armor at that point.

Don: Right away.

Mark: Did you know that when you were going in? Did you ask for armor?

Don: Nope, I thought maybe they'd use me in communications being I had this training. But no, I determined afterwards that they put you where they need you. What we used to say in the Army is that "somebody that could cook they'd put

into maintenance and somebody that was in maintenance they'd put in the kitchen." [laughs] And sometimes the food verified that.

Mark: So, Camp Campbell?

Don: Yup Camp Campbell, Kentucky. It was a new camp. And like I say I was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 44th Armored Regiment, 12th Armored Division. And that Division was born there September 15th, 1942.

Mark: What sort of training did you do, now you were a gunner?

Don: Yeah. Well, what we started out with was World War I tanks, believe it or not; they did not have enough tanks right available for us to train with, so we had very little equipment. But gradually that was built up and over the period we were at that camp, we trained with quite a few tanks, Ford V8's. My specialty was the medium tank; that was what my company had. We had Ford V8's, one double band of cylinders. It was a Chrysler. And it was supposed to be that if one bank didn't work then the other one would, and it was very unsatisfactory so that didn't last long. Then we also trained with radials that had a seven-cylinder airplane engine in it, and that was air cooled. We like the Ford the best.

Mark: This training lasted how long?

Don: Well, basic training must have lasted, I don't know, maybe a good six months. Let's see, I went in on October then next spring we went in a two-week camp called Hellcat Camp. There they'd put the men and the equipment to a test. I mean you were out there for two weeks in tents.

Mark: These were maneuvers?

Don: No, this was pre maneuvers. This was where we found what these tanks could do. You know, you'd run them through the woods, and cross rivers, and all this kind of stuff, and you'd have night convoys and you'd do some—I don't recall so much there doing you know, fighting each other just for the training proposes. That was followed by maneuvers. Now maneuvers was where our company would fight another company. And I might say that our company, how can I say that?—I'd say the 44th Armored Regiment became well known for being very good, being a good outfit. I think that proved later on to benefit us in a way. After maneuvers on 11th November 1943 the 44th Armored Regiment became the 44th Tank Battalion. That means that we were a separate unit all by ourselves. We had 800 men, 48 officers, and 3 warrant officers. Although we followed the 12th Division to Camp Barkeley, Texas for further training we pretty much did our own training. We left Camp Barkeley, Texas in March of 43, and went to Vancouver Barracks, Washington.

Mark: I just want to go back to the basic training for just a little bit, did you have any trouble adjusting to military life, for example the discipline and the language and this kind of thing?

Don: Well, actually my six months in the CCCs really benefited me and I think I was much more prepared for that than a lot of the guys I was with.

Mark: Did some guys have trouble?

Don: Absolutely. One guy hated it so much that he would stand in front of the mirror every morning and say, "My gosh, I'm losing weight," and he pursued that every day and it wasn't long he was out of the Army on a medical discharge. He had convinced himself that he was not doing well.

Mark: Now was he a draftee?

Don: He was probably a draftee. I'd say that most volunteers did pretty good. As a matter of fact those kind of people were the kind that if a training, like if you were physically able to go for an Air Corps job they'd go, they'd go for it, where a regular guy might not.

Mark: Now I was in the service myself for a long time after you were; I was in the Air Force. It wasn't anything rigorous or anything. One of the things I remember though is that people come together from all different parts of the country, and sort of the melting pot of America is often times in the ranks. I'm interested in your personal experience; did you get this sort of people from all around the country?

Don: Oh yes, actually where you came from didn't make a difference. The biggest uh—you ran across the southern dialect and the people from New York and you always kidded each other. Actually, this one guy would say tire or tie and we didn't know if he meant tire of a vehicle or the tie that you wear. And of course, we always would kid each other about how we spoke. Most of our people came from the Northeast, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and there were a few of us from Wisconsin and some from Oregon. They come from all over. Basically, they take the most then if they can't get enough from there to fill the division, which I think was something like twelve thousand men, well they'd pull in whatever they needed.

Mark: Okay, so we've gone through your training--

Don: You've mentioned basic training. Basically, basic training was learning how to follow the rules. How to take orders. You'd march everyday, you'd get up for reveille, you'd clean the barracks every so often and have inspection; I'd gone through that in the C's. And you'd go on road marches. Some of those would get pretty long and hard. I used to really enjoy when they went over the obstacle

courses. You know, everybody has to go through that obstacle course for physical fitness if nothing else and I always enjoyed those.

Mark: That one also teaches teamwork too.

Don: Absolutely, which was absolute requirement. I think that's one of the things that draws them in together. You become a team.

Mark: Um, so we left off in this chronological progression, you went to Washington state--

Don: I want to bring up one episode we did while we were at Camp Barkeley [Texas]. Some of us, the gunners and the tank commanders, went to Camp Bliss in southern Texas, I think. The purpose of that was to train with .50 caliber machine guns 'cause that was what we had on the top of our tanks. So, we were training there for aircraft training to be able to shoot down planes that would attack our tank. So, they had airplanes pulling targets. Well, in two days we'd shot down all the targets and we were supposed to take three days to do it in. I think we were a crack outfit, myself. So anyway, we got a day off for that.

The other thing that really happened at Camp Barkeley, which was I say extraordinary, is that we put something like four of our tanks on the train and went up there and there was a kind of a big field out there with a sand mound in the middle, and there were American and Allied Generals there. And the purpose of our mission was to prove that one 05 cannon fire with the shells exploding above us in the tanks would not hurt us in the tanks but would kill any enemy that were on the ground around us. Well when the shells exploded, the concussion would, you could feel your pants legs flap from the concussion, but other than that it didn't bother us. Our tank through a track in the sand and our driver was a crackerjack of a driver, one of the best in the unit, and he made a reverse turn and slipped that track back on, which normally would have to take a couple of mechanics to do. The other thing that happened is we had blank 75 [mm] shells to fire, cause it was a simulated attack. The shell in our tank backfired, and well you felt the concussion on that. It singed our eyebrows and hair, and we came out and we were black all over, and my system gunner says, "Am I dead?" [chuckles] After that we went up to the state of Washington, Vancouver Barracks, where we got a little bit of R and R and received some summer issue, which was different than we had previously used for summer issue. So that made us wonder where we were going.

Mark: I was just going to ask; at this point did you know where you were going?

Don: Had no idea. The funny part of it is, we trained with the 12th Armored Division; they went to Europe. Yup, and they made names for themselves there part of the time a little bit under Patton. They became known as the "Mystery Division." We used to talk about that. We were very happy that we didn't go over there, because

to maintain tanks and do that fighting in the wintertime must have been a terrible thing. So, we were happy about that. But we did get our summer issue and from there we went to, that was the first time we'd seen WACs, first time. From there we went to Portland, Oregon and had another couple days off and on the 22nd March 1944 we boarded the *Quota Peru* which is a Dutch, 10,000 ton Dutch vessel that had been converted from a freighter to a troop carrier. I think it carried about 1700 men another outfit plus ours, cause we only had a little over, well just under 900 people. And on that the food was pretty bad. We only got two meals a day. Breakfast had wormy oatmeal and the second meal had wormy bread, and boll weevils, and all this kind of stuff and was on short supply. We always used to say that the officers were probably eating ice cream and having it good and here we were trying to get enough food. So one time, you know you're in holds in the bottom of the ship where they got these steel cots that are about, if you are a fat man you are going to have trouble getting in some of them, they're that close together. So I was always in the top bunk being the littlest guy. And so this one day the guys from the supply unit or whatever came down into our hold. And there were freezers there that were locked and that's where they kept the food, and as they were going past our bunks to go back to the kitchen we attacked them. And I'm not kidding, the boxes of fruit were actually torn apart right in their hand and loaves of bread; we'd grab this stuff and went back into the corner and I suppose dared them to come and get it, and they didn't come and get it. But after that they came down with armed guards.

Another incident there is in the middle of the hold, surrounded by bunks was a elevated thing that you could just sit on and eat, it was perfect and just the right height, and I had just finished eating when the guy next to me leaned over and heaved in my mess kit and he said, "Excuse me." And he says, "I'll wash it for you," and I says, "That's fine." I didn't get sick. So anyway, he washed it out and then I must have washed it out three times besides that. Which reminds me of another thing, when we left Portland, Oregon we were going down the Columbia River and as you got near the ocean you could start feeling the swells. By the time we go out there, there were so many people sick from sea sickness that the head, or the bathrooms were up in the front in the ship and there were quite a few there, an there weren't enough toilets, their were sometimes three heads above each toilet, you know poor guy on the bottom. Some guys would actually pass out and they'd be laying in this stuff that was floating back and forth. Again, how I didn't get sick I'll never know, because just going in there was more then you could stand. We traveled across the ocean to San Francisco, where we refueled, and then went under the Golden Gate Bridge, and that was the place where we said, "Well, where are we going? And how many are going to come back under that bridge?" That's the first thing you think of. We zigzagged across the ocean all by ourselves; by the time we got to our final destination we'd been fifty-two days on the water with one period of getting off, Port Moresby I think it was, for a mail call, first one in over a month. Then got back on and finally landed in Finchhaven, New Guinea. We boarded trucks with all our gear, and when we jumped off the

back of the trucks, we'd sink into six to eight inches of mud and it was just pouring, pouring.

Mark: Now you got there about what time of the year?

Don: Well, I'm trying to think. If we left in March and it took fifty-two days, I think it was in May that we got there. Yup, it was in May.

Mark: Now the Japanese were still on New Guinea--

Don: Oh yes, you bet they were!

Mark: It wasn't till '44 when they were cleared out.

Don: Oh yeah, they were on New Guinea. That was the reason we were there. The Infantry was running into opposition that was really was tough for them to handle, and we supposed to come in and support them.

Mark: So, you landed there and how long was it till you got--

Don: Well, if we landed there in May. In June, my company was the first company then to go into combat, and what they'd do is load us onto LST sometimes. Sometimes they'd use cranes and load us into the Liberty ships. So, we'd travel different ways. Sometimes we'd travel on a little landing ship tank that would carry say four tanks, but the big ones could carry I think about two companies or maybe even more. Our unit, my company, Company C, went into fighting in June and there were two big battles there that--That's were I first saw the infantry in action, and I'm telling you I respected those guys. I could see them walking in. Here I am in a tank, you know? Pretty well protected, and these guys would be slogging through the mud up, fighting their way up these hills. And the Japanese built bunkers that you could fire artillery at them and bomb them with aircraft for days and days, and still an infantry unit couldn't get into it. Just, it was unbelievable. So, our tanks, using our 75s at close range could do a lot more for them with our machine guns. There was Hill 225 and Rocky Point were the two big battles for us there, and I mean they were bloody. That was terrible, that was our introduction. The first time I saw a Jap, I had a 75 millimeter cannon and a 35 millimeter machine gun, coaxial, if one went the other did and the machine gun every forth bullet I think, was a tracer and in close range that was a nice way to sight you in on your target. This guy was walking in the jungle towards our tank and my tank commander said, "Shoot him! Shoot him!" And I said, "Well are you sure he's not an American?" And he says, "Yes, he's a Jap!" So, I sighted the gun at his feet and pulled the trigger on the machine gun and lifted it up like that and saw the expression on his face, and well you know, he almost disappeared. Couldn't sleep that night. I had to crawl into a bunk with another guy. Our sleeping we did, we had these jungle hammocks, it was rubberized bottom, netting on the side, and a rubberized top that you could tie to trees or you could hang it, but usually we

just set it on the ground. So, I crawled in with this other guy that night, cause I couldn't sleep. I could see this guy coming all the time.

Mark: Well that sort of gruesome nature of combat that you described there, as time went on, now you were in other battles too. Is it possible to get used to that?

Don: No, like I mentioned I felt sorry for those infantry men. I can remember one place where we were, this wasn't jungle. That stuff that was in New Guinea was mostly jungle, jungle and big terrible hills, mountainous hills, but every once and a while you'd get into an area that was more level. I remember this one time, this could've been in the Philippines, I'm not sure, but here I am sitting in this tank, and when the bullets hit it--- it sounds like hail, now that would be machine gun fire and rifle fire and even a rifle that shot an armor piercing would make a hole almost $\frac{3}{4}$ an inch deep in the side of your tank. But I saw the war through a periscope, which has a limited vision. All I can see is what's in front of me. If I'm on a hill, I can't even see that because my periscope won't get down. And I can remember seeing these infantry men on either side of me and they'd be, you know, trying to dash from one spot to the other and all of a sudden I'd see one keel over and I'd say to myself, "I wonder if that guy ever got home?" You know I really felt sorry for those guys, the infantry.

Mark: So, when you're fighting, you were using sort of armor, infantry all mixed together, so in a landing who'd go in first?

Don: Well, really what's got to happen if you are going to make a landing is ah-- It all happens so fast you know? I'd say that the tanks don't go in first because they could have mines there that would blow your tanks up and you'd be of no use. I'd say there's infantry units of all different kinds that go in and secure the beach, then we'd move ashore.

Mark: So you fought for a while in New Guinea, and the Japanese were eventually cleared out of there--

Don: Yeah, that's right.

Mark: And then you were on to the Philippines eventually. How long of a gap was that?

Don: Well, first of all, we fought from June-- I don't even remember when we went into our first rest camp, but it seemed like a long time. What happens is, after they secured an area they establish a base there. And you've got rest camps where there's tents with cots which are comfortable, and you have good food, and you have a little rest but you're also in the meantime training for the next job. So our next move from New Guinea was the Isle of Morotai [in the Maluku Islands, Indonesia]. Now our unit, I got to go back a little bit. Our unit was one company out of six companies in the battalion, and we were the first one to go. We never saw the rest of the battalion till the end of the war. So, that meant every night we

had to secure our own perimeter, you know, set up guards. I still as I look back don't really, didn't realize that we must have had cooks with us. Now whether they gave us some of the kitchen guys and said, "You stay with them." I don't remember that we had medics with us, but I do know I found out later that there were medics with the battalion, so we must have had a medic or two with us, but I didn't realize that. Anyway, our next step was the Island of Morotai. If you look on a Pacific map it's so small, you're not likely to see it. That island was twelve miles from the Island of Halmahera, which was supposedly a lot of Jap troops there. And from a distance you know, we were further away from any American troops than we'd ever been. You know, we were way out in front you might say, all by ourselves. We landed with the Marines there, but all the *Stars and Stripes* and newspapers published, "The Marines landed on Morotai." That was one of the bad problems of being a small unit attached to the big units, you never heard about the 44th Tank Battalion in any fighting, and that's something I've been trying to correct for many years. So the Island of Morotai, in New Guinea, the natives were very dark, and they moved in-- A village might move in a big group you know? To go and see something or whatever it was. And you could smell them coming, they had a very distinctive odor. But in Morotai the people there were more Polynesian and lighter and attractive people. I don't recall how much-- It didn't seem that that landing was particularly difficult. So while we were there in Morotai we had to uh--- my tank and two, three others were put on a small landing ship and moved up to the north of the island because there was a radar station there that was important to the Japanese, and we were supposed to wipe it out. When we got there, we couldn't get the tanks ashore because of the coral reefs. You didn't want to run into one and get stuck. So, we would dive under the water and try to find a way for the ships to get up so where we could go ashore.

Mark: So, you were actually doing the diving yourself?

Don: Well, yeah.

Mark: You weren't trained for that?

Don: Not really, it wasn't that big of thing. Fortunately for us there was very little opposition there so we were able to land alright; that didn't take long. But they had a whole lot of boxes of tuna or something like that but we didn't dare eat it because we thought they could have poisoned it, but we did knock that thing out of commission and then went back down. From Morotai we went back to New Guinea and as we--the people on the ship, the sailors I suspect, told us that the place was just full of typhus, which really worried us, and that there were 30,000 imperial guards there, the elite of Japanese troops. So, we thought we were really in for trouble. It turned out it was a training and rest area again, so when we landed there--it was a rest area and like I said further training. They put snorkels on our tanks. It was a device that was about six feet high and had an air vent at the top, and the purpose of the snorkel was to make a landing on a beach head in eight

feet of water and not get drowned. Turned out we never needed them. I can tell you a few stories about New Guinea too.

Mark: By all means.

Don: Most of the war, almost all of the war except, especially New Guinea, was almost on the beaches. The mountains were so steep you couldn't penetrate that part. So that's where the Japanese were and that's where we did most of our fighting and our resting. I'd say actually if you really looked at it, being that there were Japs all over the place, we were hardly ever out of rifle fire or the Japs. We even had one Japanese come get in the chow line one time. [laughs] Those guys were really weird. I saw an infantry man again, a sergeant and another guy; we had just taken our tanks and moved up on an airstrip and found out we had gone over some buried bombs and never hit a one. Boy, I tell you there's a lot of luck involved in this. So, we were able to back out, and this one sergeant had found a dugout where there were a couple Japs in there, and he tried to get them to come out and they wouldn't. He went in after him. Well, that's got to be a lot of guts, he went in there and dragged them out.

Mark: Dead or alive?

Don: No they were alive, and he dragged them out, and then I suppose he brought them back so they could be interrogated, but the thing that amazed me was that they had their rifles but the barrels were packed full of dirt. That's why I say I could never quite understand the Japanese, they were very fanatic.

Mark: Now they didn't surrender very often and that's why I asked if they were dead or alive.

Don: That's right. No, no, no. Well he had to go in and drag them out. Apparently, they didn't have the means to kill themselves, their guns didn't work. [laughs] Really weird. There was one time there that--whenever we had the chance to relax, we took full advantage of it. I can remember it was on the beaches of New Guinea when we had mattress covers. See in those areas where there was a rest area you would have a cot with a mattress on it. And it had a cot and cover on it. You could take that cot and cover and get the thing wet and run and fill it with air and tie it shut. Now even though it wasn't tied shut you could get out in the ocean and catch a big wave and surf in on those things just like an airbag, and that was fun. The other thing is we'd like to swim a lot, but you had to be very careful because more than one man drowned by being carried out by the undertow. We'd go and swim on the beach and there was a big--well, a lot of it was rocky and in this one spot there was a big hole in the rock that was pretty square. It was just like a big room that would fill with water and empty with water and fill with water and empty with water and when it emptied of course it would raise up and would flow up and that was always a nice ride. This one day we were going swimming and we heard somebody holler for help. There was another rock there, this one was

above ground, and it had a big V-like crack in the side in it. And this G.I. had gone down to wash clothes and a big wave must have come in and shoved him in there and wedged him in there. And if we wouldn't have come when we did he would have probably never made it. Okay, so now we are at New Guinea after we'd been to Morotai.

Mark: Well, I just wanted to add a couple more questions in that sort of recreational area. How did you keep in touch with folks back home and keep track of what's going on?

Don: Mail, your letters were censored. We did a lot of writing of letters and the biggest thing to look for was mail call and you often wondered how in the heck it would keep up with you, how did it follow you?

Mark: Well did it?

Don: Yes, oh yes, we got mail from home pretty regular. Except like on Morotai, that's probably where we didn't get any mail there, we weren't there that long. But uh, one other thing that we saw there at that camp was-- There were always airstrips near those camps. And these B-25s would take off and bomb the areas around you. And they carried I think 4 to 500-pound bombs. And this one time he crash landed, and like I say we were right there so we decided to go see what had happened and as we were running towards it a fellow was running towards us from the plane and he said, "You better get back, those bombs are going to go." Apparently, I found later he was the pilot and had a bad leg, but he was able to get out and he was going to get out of there. We did go back after it exploded and the firemen who were trying to put the fire out to save the guy in the tail or all that, and putting water on it trying to put it out. When that went, they got blown up with it and their bodies were burnt to a crisp. I tell you a lot of these guys were heroes that a lot of people don't realize how some of them died. It's a terrible thing to see. I'll go back to one other thing too. When we got into this Finchhaven camp, you know the first one in New Guinea, they gave us Attabrine. Now Attabrine was supposed to be an anti-malaria pill and I took mine religiously. Maybe some of the guys didn't do it as often as I did, and they'd get malaria and when they got home, they suffered pretty bad from malaria for two or three years. I felt I was one of the lucky ones.

Mark: Now, why wouldn't they take them?

Don: Well that I don't know, all I know is I took mine. But you know how pills are. Or you forget or whatever, but I took mine.

Mark: Well apparently one of the things is it's supposed to turn you yellow.

Don: It did. When we first got there, I decided to look up an Army buddy, well a friend from my Rice Lake High School days. He was with the 32nd Division and I found

out they were there and his name was [__Haudian??] so I decided to look him up and I found him and I look at him and I says, "My God, you're skinny and you're all yellow." And he says, "It won't be long you'll be the same thing." And that was from the Attabrine.

Mark: But after the war, to jump ahead a little bit, you didn't have malaria problems?

Don: Uh no. I was going to tell you about one other thing. When we traveled up the coast of New Guinea doing our fighting, generally a river was the center of the battle. The [__Wasky??] River and a whole bunch of other rivers, we probably fought at four different locations like that. And airports, too, were there. At night when we stood guard the mosquitoes were so bad that you'd put on that DEET, I guess they had it then, it was a base anyway. You'd put that all over yourself and avoid any bare skin and over our raincoat, and in that hot weather to put on a raincoat you knew you really had to protect yourself. That's the place where I had dengue fever and I had one attack of dengue fever when I got home.

Mark: Now what are the symptoms of that?

Don: Dengue fever, they called it the bone crusher. Your joints ached tremendously, just ache, ache. I think it lasted maybe a couple days and it didn't really--I wasn't bed ridden or anything. It just made your life miserable for a couple days. From there then after we had the snorkels on our tanks, they put us aboard--I'm trying to restructure that--I think it was December. We had a good Christmas that, you know you have Spam every day about three times a day. You have these reconstituted eggs for breakfast.

Mark: Is that in the field?

Don: In the field, and wherever we were. You ate better when you were in these camps because they had more food. Basically, when we were out by ourselves and waited for calls from other units, our cooks had trouble getting food. So this one time six of us, it was on the island of Morotai, and the ships would be off shore and they'd use these large army ducks [DUKWs], an amphibious vehicle, load them with supplies and run them to a ration dump, and we knew they were doing that so one night six of us, two of them flagged them down with flashlights, one guy on each side talking the driver and assistant driver, asking for directions. While they were doing that the other four were unloading the back end. [laughs] That was the only time we really had, we had bacon and slab, a big slab of bacon in impacted salt. We had a case of fruit cocktail, I forget what else we had but we were really happy for a little while.

Mark: Good old American ingenuity at its best.

Don: Yeah, oh yeah. I had a weird driver; you never knew what he was going to do. He got seasick and stayed in the hospital on ship there almost every day going over

cause of sea sickness. But we were in New Guinea and had accumulated a few Jap rifles and sabers, so they had this big rope ladder on the side and it was quite scary going up that thing, and we had all those things strapped on our back and we got up onboard ship and we traded all this material for food from the sailors. I don't remember how we got the food down, whether we strapped it to our back or threw it overboard, I don't know, but while we were up on deck he jumped over. So, he came back up I said, "Clyde, why did you do that?" He says, "I just wanted to be sure that if we were on sea and had to abandon ship, I could do it." [Laughs] So after Morotai and then back to Sansapor for training, this Christmas we had real ah--- you know, real butter, real milk, turkey, gravy and potatoes, it was really something. The next day we boarded our LST this was going to be the convoy going to the Philippines. There was at least 900 ships there and as I understand it was the largest convoy in any war up to that date.

Mark: This was the Leyte Gulf?

Don: No, Leyte was a separate deal. Remember my company was in New Guinea and that area. All the rest of the battalion were being attached to other units. They were in Leyte. See they formed--Leyte had their own convoy and so they were coming from Leyte and we were coming from New Guinea, and those convoys were going to converge in Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines. Actually, we got there I think two days before they did. It turns out that one of our tanks in B Company was the first American troops into the capitol city on Leyte, Tacloban, and that same tank was the first American troops to get into Manila. We set quite a few records actually, our outfit. But we didn't know that was going on. So, when we were onboard these ships, it was very rough seas. You could look down in a trough and see a ship, maybe it looked like he was a hundred feet below you and next time he'd be way up in the air, you know, on top of a wave; it was really rough. I still don't know how come we didn't get seasick. But worse than that was the kamikaze planes. They would come in a whole lot of them at one time, and the sky would be black with exploding shells from the anti-aircraft firing from the ships. These Japs would come in and first they would machine-gun the ships, then they'd drop their bombs or their torpedoes, and then they would dive into the ship and commit hari-kari [hara-kiri], you know kill themselves, they were those kamikazes. Like I say there were a lot of them, and all this was going on all around you, and here you are on deck really nothing to do but just hope nothing comes at you. But we saw a lot of that.

Then when we landed in Lingayen, we stopped out in the beach, or the water in the Gulf first and that was the first time I'd seen rockets. The Americans would have these ships that would have a bank of rockets and they shot those rockets and cannons from the naval vessels and aerial bombardment and strafing. They did that whole area in Lingayen Gulf while we were still out there in the water. I remember the front of our LST it was 740, the thing was open, there's a ramp that goes down and then the sides open this way. I was standing on that ramp with my tank commander and I don't know who else, and I saw this naval motor launch go

by and MacArthur was in it. So, they had pulled up to this little pier and then they backed away and they let him out so he could wade ashore because the cameras were rolling. That's the picture that shows up on the front of the *Life* magazine. If people remember that, and you wouldn't know that was me standing back there because I'm such a small figure, but I remember that.

Mark: Hmmm, interesting. Well that sort of brings up a question I was going to have for you anyway. Your opinions on MacArthur specifically and more generally the command, that sort of thing. MacArthur is very controversial, you either love him or you hate him, and I find that with troops who were actually in the Pacific at the same time. So, you're just one guy but I'm interested in your impressions.

Don: I never really thought much about it again. I saw him once in Milwaukee go by in a parade. He was controversial but the way I look at it is, he did one big job for us and he expected a lot of his men, but on the other hand he made decisions that I think saved thousands of lives. And sure, some of these cost lives but there's [laughs] no way to fight a war without losing, but I think that he was a remarkable man. This is a story told to me by--I got to tell you this because it was quite important, and then I'll get back to our landing. After we landed the rest of the battalion came ashore and they had moved in towards Manila, maybe thirty miles, I'm not sure, and they were bogged down there trying to-- You had to get lined up, you know, all the troops because, again, we were always attached to someone else and in this case it was the 1st Cavalry. When I say we, it happens to be the rest of the battalion because we went our own way again, which was unbelievable.

So anyway, MacArthur met the 1st Cavalry, General Mudge I think it was, and our leading officer Colonel Ross. It would have been Colonel Ross, I think, Lieutenant Colonel, I don't know. Anyway, he was the commander of the 44th that was there. MacArthur wanted a surprise attack, he wanted a column that would go into Manila and free 3,700 plus Allied and American prisoners of war. He knew they were on the verge of starvation; he was very much in contact with these people. I've meet a lot of those internees since and you wouldn't believe the sadness of their stories. Anyway, they were on the verge of starvation, and MacArthur a surprise attack in there to free them up, and this was all through Jap territory. One of the captains of the light tank platoons of the 44th told me that he was there when MacArthur was getting this lined up, and it was going to be a three-prong attack on Manila. And whoever got there first was to go directly to the Santo Tomas University and break through and rescue those guys. This captain said to me that whenever MacArthur spoke, he spoke to his aide, and then the aide delivered the message, then the message would come back through the aide. In other word, MacArthur never spoke directly, now that's what he told me. In any other case I don't know but that is what happened there. And they did break through and rescue those people with a very limited amount of casualty on our side. So anyway, now to get back to my story, when we landed there we never did see the rest of the battalion. We joined another group of infantry people and

went East and then South and we did all our fighting in the mountains north and west of Manila and fought our way down that. Well, the rest of the battalion was on their way to Manila.

Mark: Now you fought the Japanese in New Guinea and then the Philippines for quite a while and of course the war is progressing and Japanese fortunes is declining and I'm wondering, from your perspective, if you noticed a sort of decline in fighting capabilities in the Japanese?

Don: Well I'll say no, no they were fierce no matter where you went. Like I say, we fought our way down the mountains. I can remember some specific battles, you know there was so much of this I try to remember how I live from day to day and I can't, but I do remember some instances. And there one of the biggest memories is, we had my platoon of five tanks, and I was always in the first platoon in the first tank. My tank commander was a lieutenant and he's the one that lead the rest of the men for whatever. But then sometimes you'd break apart again but still we were always up in front. We had our five tanks and there were five 105 cannons on tracks, and I've been trying to think of the name of those vehicles and I can't. But anyway, they were in effect armored because of the armor on the side, but they fired these--it was open on the top, not heavy heavy steel like ours, and there were five of those guys there. For some unknown reason, a Japanese company was filing single file across a ridge about 250 yards away. Well, that's perfect for us. So, on a signal I fired the first shot and they all followed and that column disappeared, it seemed like. So, another sad memory for me there is that after that was done, they sent four infantry guys down to reconnoiter, and they were going down and we could see this. And we saw some Japs coming down towards them and my tank commander said, "Let us knock those Japs out." He wouldn't do it, the commander of the other guys, the infantry wouldn't let us shoot. "You might hit my men." Never would have happened. We saw them get killed.

Mark: The Americans?

Don: Yes, I can still remember to this day, we sent a tank down, put their bodies on it, and when they came back with the bodies on the back of the tank and their feet were kind of hanging over and flopping around and I says, "For what?" To this day, I'm sorry I didn't just tell him to go to hell and shoot those Japs because I could have. Sad memory.

Mark: The Philippine campaign went on for a long long time, they were still fighting up until August.

Don: I think March, March, I don't know about August.

Mark: Well the 32nd Division was fighting--

Don: In a different part, yeah, that's possible. I'm looking only at my own little area. Well that very night then, after we had that little battle, we were camped as usual and all of a sudden, we heard this terrible shrieking, and we knew right away that it had to be a rocket. We had never experienced rockets, never. But it couldn't be anything else. You could hear the shrieking as it went out of the tube and it would go up and there'd be no sound, and all of a sudden it'd come back down and it'd go [makes swooshing noise] on its way down, but the explosion was awesome. We saw shrapnel after that that would have been as big as maybe two feet long, three or four inches wide, and an inch thick; that could have cut a man in half just like nothing. Shrapnel all over the place. Everything got tore up and, boy, I tell you that day everybody was digging tunnels or you know ditches to hide in and every time that you could hear, they did that all day long, set those rockets up, and mess kits would fly one way and everybody would dive into a hole. They even almost buried trucks to protect themselves. That was the worst experience I really had in the whole war.

Mark: So, you fought until how long? I mean, the Japanese finally surrendered in August.

Don: We fought I think, the battle for Manila for us ended I think in March. And we went into an area that was a rest camp again. The Filipinos had built some huts for us for, tents you know and that, and that was really nice. That was the first time we were back with the battalion. And we had it nice there, but we were thinking about what was next. We knew that if we ever had to land on Japan it would be a fierce battle because we knew that not only the soldiers but the civilians would take whatever they could and fight us, and we'd have to kill them too.

Mark: Now was that something you had trained for?

Don: Well I think that was our next step. I think, because I can remember August 15th we were sitting here, I think the day was a Sunday, and all of a sudden we heard all this yelling and hollering and the guys running back and forth, "The Japs surrendered! The Japs surrendered!" And we hadn't been in there that long. Just prior to that we had done some fighting, so that took care of that. Then we landed, we boarded some LSTs again and landed in the Yokohama harbor and I can remember driving our tanks from the ships you know up through the streets and the Japanese were there waving little American flags and bowing as we went by.

Mark: What was your reaction or impression?

Don: You wondered what was going to happen. I mean you saw all these people bowing to you, but you wondered, "How serious are ya?" They were the victims now, they were the ones that had been beaten and we were the victors.

Mark: Now this couldn't have been too long after they surrendered?

Don: September 15th I think we landed, so a whole month.

Mark: So, you did some occupation of Japan.

Don: Yes, yes. I was sergeant of the guard one night, well one day and night, and my men brought in two Japanese. One young guy who was very arrogant and one little old man who kept bowing to me. And we couldn't talk, so he'd motion that it was cold out and he wanted to put wood in the stove to keep the fire going, so I said, "Fine, fine." And he had to go to the bathroom so I took him out and let him do that but I always kept the two together so I could watch them. But anyway, we went back in and after that I put them in the back of the truck, and I didn't know what I was going to do with them, I had never been told. So I decided, well, nobody knows but me. So, I stopped the truck. They had a ham that they had stolen, a big ham. So, I stopped the truck and I waved my .45 and hollered at them as if to tell them don't do this again. So, I says to the young guy, "Take off," and he did, boy he disappeared in a hurry, then I gave the older man the ham. I thought these people got to be starving and maybe that will make them look a little better at us.

Mark: So, in the occupation you stationed where precisely?

Don: Tokyo.

Mark: Right in Tokyo. Did it look devastated?

Don: You wouldn't believe it. Miles and miles of nothing but rubble, you could go in town in the morning like on a pass and all of a sudden, there'd be nobody around, all of a sudden there were people all around you, how they had survived in that rubble, I'll never know. There were some areas where there were some buildings standing but the rubble was all over. We were there from September and then in December I got my chance to go home. A two-week trip by ship, some went by plane I guess, but I had a two week trip by ship. Went to San Francisco, spent a couple days there, got onboard a train, went to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and what surprised me is that there were German prisoners waiting table. Got my discharge there and I think I got home the day after Christmas, and there were my mother and my father and this tall guy standing there waiting for me, I had my duffle bag and it turned out I said hello to my mother and dad and started walking away, and this guy says, "Well, aren't you going to say hello to me?" It was my younger brother and I hadn't recognized him.

Mark: Yeah, you had been gone quite a while, actually.

Don: Well yeah, I don't even remember when I had my last pass, but I was eighteen months overseas so it had to be and you know all the way in Camp Barkley I don't think I had release from there.

Mark: So, you were finally discharged in January of '46?

Don: I'd say December of '45.

Mark: Right around that time, huh?

Don: Yeah.

Mark: So, if you've got a little bit of time, I've got some questions about the post-war period. A lot of these interviews end when the war ends--

Don: Right, I can spend a few minutes yet.

Mark: Um, once you got discharged, what were your priorities for getting your life back in order?

Don: Well, at that time I didn't have any. I can remember I got one attack of dengue fever and my mother said I had nightmares, and for I don't know how long it lasted that whenever a local airplane would fly over I'd tend to dive into a ditch because when we were on Morotai, we were strafed and bombed every day three four times and at night too, so it took me a while to get adjusted.

Mark: About how long do you think?

Don: Well let's see, we got twenty bucks a week for twenty weeks from the state, nothing from the feds, so I know, well I got to start looking ahead now, what am I going to do? So, I tended bar for my dad for about six months, and I remember I asked him for 60 dollars a week and he almost fell off his chair. [laughs] But I decided I got to start going ahead so then I went down to Eau Claire, Wisconsin. I lived in Rice Lake again and took a test to find out what I was qualified for, and in any event I decided to go into social service, but get my schooling at the University of Wisconsin at Madison under the GI Bill of Rights.

Mark: Now the GI Bill, this is interesting. When you talk about the post-war World War II period, this one always comes up. So, I'm interested in when you first learned of the GI Bill and its educational provisions. Did you know about that before you were discharged?

Don: No, not that I can recall. It was after, probably when I went to Eau Claire. Anyway, I took advantage of that and then I got married in February of '47. That was early in my schooling, so you can't survive on 100 dollars a month or whatever it was, especially if you have a family, so I had to work part time. I worked part time all the way through school. Now the funny thing was that I must not have applied myself the first three years and then I decided well, maybe I should apply myself a little bit, so the fourth year I did get honor roll. Then I got a job in Milwaukee. Turned out they needed somebody for a rate case that was

coming up. This was the transport, the busses and trolley cars and all that, that business, and they hired me and they let me go. After that rate case was over they didn't need me so this guy, this office manager, he was something else, so he brought me to his desk one time and after ten minutes I realized he was telling me I was done. So, I says, "Can't I say I left?" He says, "No, we're letting you go." So, I started looking for another job and finally I ended up at the Schlitz Brewery, and I said to the lady there who was the public relations, or whatever, the people that hire. I told her that I had been let go and she says, "Well that doesn't sound very good." "Well, what, do you want me to do, lie?" She says, "Why don't you go back and check the records." And I'll be darned if they didn't show that I had left, they hadn't fired me. That one man-- I had tried for a job at AO Smith, a big company there in Milwaukee, and I had gone through everything and they must have called him and he gave me a bad review and I lost that job. All one man caused me a lot of misery. So then after that I finally decided Milwaukee was too big a city and I went back to Eau Claire again, which was the biggest city in the Rice Lake area and finally got a job ____ [???] with the paper mill and after-- I was there thirty-one years and the last fifteen years I was an operations controller.

Mark: I want to go back a little bit, to life on the UW campus and the GI bill; you weren't the only veteran on campus.

Don: I'll say not.

Mark: Why don't you set the scene for me as you remember?

Don: In those days they had to put up Quonset huts because there were not enough buildings to take care of this big input. But other than that, I had no way of judging how it compared with anything. But I do know there were a lot of us guys there and attended a lot of classes, and I think that the professors did the best they could to handle us and other then I know everybody else was struggling like me so **[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]** Actually I know Madison pretty well, when we were in camp here we lived, first we couldn't find a house to live in. And I can remember every morning I'd stop in there was a non campus house that they had people in there and you could go in and see what housing was available. Well every morning all I'd have to do, they knew me, I'd just go in and they'd either shake there heads yes or no and if it was yes, I'd go in. By the time I got there on the city bus it was too late, so I borrowed 400 dollars from my mother and I bought a car. I think I pushed it further then I drove it, it was such a lemon, you know; I don't know anything about cars. Anyway, finally I got this--we bought this trailer and we moved out towards the city of Oregon on a farmer's field and there was a gas station near by. We used their restroom for all our bathing purposes 'cause there was nothing there, the farmer didn't have anything. When you'd open your window it would hit the next trailer's window it was so close. So finally, this car of mine [laughs] wasn't going anywhere so I decided I'd sell it and I remember you couldn't get the darn thing started. The Ford garage said there was something wrong with it and it would cost 250 dollars to fix it. Well I

can't do that. So, I drove into a used car lot and left it running and I said "How much will you give me for it?" And he says, "50, well how much you want?" I said, "500." And he says, "that's ridiculous." And I said, "Not any more than your offer." So, I did go to another guy and he offered me 250, I said okay. So, I shut it off and went and cashed the check right away, didn't want to take any chances. Then we moved out to this Midvale trailer camp which there were nice guys out there and it wasn't too bad. We had two oil tanks on horses, you know, to provide fuel. And for some reason or another---you had this gas tank, you know propane tank, mine would freeze up overnight and I was working. I'd get up at midnight and Dorothy couldn't make coffee for me. So, I'd have to go out there, take it off, bring it in, warm it up, and put it back on. Nobody else seemed to have that. So finally, I discovered if I put a coffee can upside down over it, it took care of that. Then we had a flood one time where the fire department had to bring in row boats to get us out, and then we had to find a place to live there. I guess we could have gone to a motel but there was people I had rented with before I got married that said we could stay there for a couple weeks.

Mark: I think that's a mall now, if I'm not mistaken.

Don: Yes, it is. As a matter of fact, that's right. The field across from it was a corn field in those days, right across from where we were, and now it's a big mall.

Mark: Now there were other aspects of the GI Bill and I don't want to pry into your personal finances or anything but just out of curiosity, did you use the GI home loan at some point?

Don: No, because at the time, I don't know if things were depressed or what but when I finally got to Eau Claire I remember I had to go to one bank to borrow money just to survive, forget the home, that was a long way off. And they wouldn't lend me money because a cousin of mine that had the Mercier name apparently had been a bad loan risk. So, they wouldn't lend me money which didn't make sense, because I had a good credit rating at that time, so I went to another bank and they loaned me the money. I remember my first--well about my fourth check it would have been, in December I got a big double check or something like that and I asked the boss if he made a mistake he said, "No, that's a Christmas bonus." Was I happy, boy we really had tough sledding for--eventually then our biggest problem for owning a home was I could never accumulate enough money for a down payment. Finally, there was a fellow that came into town with 650 dollars down would do it and so we did it. And that was our first home. That was kind of a pre-fab type home. Then, my company got sold two or three times and each time things got better for me and finally built another house, and finally got old enough to retire at the age of 63 and--- about last year I got some bad news that I had a health problem and I could no longer take care of this big home, so we sold that and bought a condo and that's where we are now.

Mark: Um, just a couple last things here. Veteran's organizations on the form I had you fill out, you mentioned that you didn't join any.

Don: That's right. When I was in Rice Lake after the war I went first to the American Legion and then to the VFW, and they were bickering so much between them trying to get these guys to join them that I says, "that's not for me." Well after that then I didn't think about it, but in 1978 I put together the first reunion for my company. We had another one in '80 and found out that the battalion had an annual reunion, we joined them. Since that time, I've been highly involved with military history of our organization, primarily to try to gain the credit that we should have had that we couldn't get because of being a small unit. But as of this date I've accomplished, which I think is quite a bit, we're on a memorial in Washington D.C., 44th Tank Battalion, South Pacific. One in Abilene, Texas near the entrance to Fort Dyess or Air Base Dyess that says 44th Tank Battalion. Most of the big military museums we've got stuff in. So far, I feel I've been very successful. That's a big push of mine.

Mark: [???

Don: That's right. I've got records at the University of Tennessee where I did the video interview. And I forget where the --- I think the tape interview was with Abilene Christian University that is now going---Abilene is building a big military museum and 12th Armored Division, my original unit, they're going to include us in a big museum there. We've got Fort Hood we got stuff, and the Admiral Nimitz museum of the South Pacific we've got-- They had a tank there just like ours and they wanted to name it Battling Basic, which is the tank that broke into Santo Tomas. I says, "Fine, but you have to acknowledge it's not the original Battling Basic." So, I think we made a lot of progress.

Mark: Well I just got one last thing and I'm not sure its going to lead to anything, but I interviewed a veteran from Rice Lake named Herman Elwin who was a common service officer. Does it ring a bell?

Don: Don't know him.

Mark: Yeah he was a veteran's _____[??]

Don: Yeah, no don't know him.

Mark: Thought maybe you ran across him.

Don: No.

Mark: Well that's all I have then do you have any questions or anything?

Don: Well that's fine, nope, worked out fine for me.

Mark: Me too, thanks for coming down.

Don: Yeah, enjoyed it.

[End of Interview]