

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

FRED BECK

Fire Direction, 111<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, Army, World War II

2003

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**Beck, Fred** (b. 1925). Oral History Interview, 2003.

Approximate length: 57 minutes

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

**Abstract:**

Of his World War II experience, Fred Beck, a native of Port Washington, Wisconsin, attests, "I wouldn't do it again, but I wouldn't take a million dollars for my experience." Beck discusses his Army career as a member of Battalion Headquarters and Fire Direction Center, 111<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division; the 29<sup>th</sup>, one of the most illustrious infantry divisions of World War II. In combat eleven months, from D-Day to VE Day, the 29<sup>th</sup> was one of two infantry divisions ashore at Normandy in the first wave of the invasion. Beck served from January 1943 until November 1945, a period, as he explains, void of any furlough during time of actual hostilities. Subsequent to being "voluntarily inducted," the eighteen-year old headed for basic training at Camp Hood, Texas. Beck sketches his progress from Hood to Shenango Personnel Replacement Depot in Pennsylvania and to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey before embarking at New York on HMS *Queen Elizabeth* in May 1943, bound for Scotland. He recalls the sea sickness he experienced; the *Queen E.* faster than Navy destroyers. He remembers, after being transported to central England, his first experience of an air raid in Lichfield. Stationed ten months at Seton Barracks, Plymouth, in Devonshire, he accounts his exposure to England as making him an Anglophile and expresses respect for the British people. Beck tells of his training in battery computer and fire direction. While considering his training for the forthcoming invasion of the Continent, he alludes to the tragedy at Slapton Sands. Their mission not divulged until ensconced in a holding area in mid-April 1944, Beck was held back from participating in that mission's first wave ashore on Omaha beach in France by a last-minute move to battalion headquarters. He speaks of his experiences on June 6<sup>th</sup> and June 7<sup>th</sup>; floating in the pre-dawn frigid waters of the English Channel after his boat capsized until rescued; the shock of dead men floating all around him and surrounding him on Omaha. Until his unit received new guns to replace those submerged, Beck performed guard duty and slept in foxholes. He sketches the advance, from the opening of fire on June 13 to the fall of St. Lô on July 18 to the capture of Brest, France on September 19. By November Beck was in northern Germany. He talks of being near the Elbe River—the meeting place of advancing American and Russian forces—at war's end; his encounters with the German population; and occupation duties in Bremen-Bremerhaven. Beck was finally given furlough, going to Denmark in September 1945. He returned to New York on November 14<sup>th</sup>, and was discharged at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin five days later. Beck worked postwar at several Port Washington businesses before retiring. For a time he was a member of the American Legion; he still attends unit reunions.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Fred Beck served in the US Army, Battalion Headquarters and Fire Direction Center, 111<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during World War II, and participated in Operation Overlord. Beck sketches the advance, from the opening of fire on June 13 to the fall of St. Lô on July 18 to the capture of Brest, France on September 19. By November Beck was in northern Germany. He talks of being near the Elbe River—the meeting place of advancing American and Russian forces—at war's end. Military service completed, he returned to Port Washington, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Laurie Arendt, 2003.  
Transcribed by Linda Weynand, 2012.  
Abstract by Jeff Javid, 2016.

**Interview Transcript:**

- Arendt: This is an interview with Fred Beck who served with—what was your unit?
- Beck: I was in the 111<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, Headquarters Battery. I was in Battalion Headquarters and Fire Direction Center.
- Arendt: Okay, good.
- Beck: That was part of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division.
- Arendt: And you were in the Army?
- Beck: Yes.
- Arendt: And what years did you serve?
- Beck: I went in the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1943 and I was discharged November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1945. I was in the Army thirty-four months and two days and I was never home. I was overseas twenty-nine months and nineteen days. I had basic training at Camp Hood in Texas and they sent us right overseas. I went overseas with 16,000 other guys on the [HMS] *Queen Elizabeth* from New York to Scotland: five nights and four days.
- Arendt: The interview is being conducted at his home at the following address:  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] The interviewer is Laurie Arendt for the Ozaukee Veterans Book Project. So, okay.
- Beck: I landed in England on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June—that's unimportant—but I say that because in July of '43 Congress passed a law they couldn't send anyone overseas without a furlough. That's how come I never made it home in thirty-four months.
- Arendt: Oh, okay. Well, let's start at the beginning. You enlisted, correct?
- Beck: I was voluntarily inducted, let's put it that way.
- Arendt: Oh, you were voluntarily inducted. [chuckles] Okay.
- Beck: See, there's a difference between enlistment. My brother joined the Navy. He was seventeen and he enlisted until he was twenty-one.

Arendt: Right.

Beck: I was inducted for the duration and six months and any other time the government may deem necessary.

Arendt: Wow, okay.

Beck: So there.

Arendt: And at that time, how old were you?

Beck: Eighteen.

Arendt: Eighteen. Had you graduated from high school?

Beck: 1942 from Port High with Frank Bley [?].

Arendt: That's the fun part about this book. When it's done there's a connection between everybody.

Beck: Joe Demler [photographed as emaciated American POW in April 1945 *Life* Magazine article] was two years behind me.

Arendt: Okay. Good. There's probably going to be quite a few other people that you know. At the time, when you were voluntarily inducted, were you working?

Beck: Yeah, I was working at JE Gilson Foundry. It burned down in 1962. [chuckles] I had a very slight build and it was a little hard. I don't know if I did the right thing but at least I survived, you know.

Arendt: Okay, cuz there was someone that had just died that worked there. It was in the press.

Beck: Guilford Penny [?].

Arendt: That's right.

Beck: I knew him. He was a nice man. It was much bigger than I am.

Arendt: Okay, all right. And you said your brother had gone into the Navy.

Beck: He joined the Navy in February of '43, a month after I left. He was seventeen. He and Roso Pieringer from Port Washington, they were great

friends. They tried to get in the Marine Corps but the quota was filled at the time so then they joined the Navy.

Arendt: Okay, wow. I just interviewed a Vietnam Veteran. He tried to get in the Navy, the Coast Guard, the Air Force, and the only two choices he had was Marines and Army, and he said, "Oh, anybody can go in the Army." I said, "You voluntarily went in the Marines during the Vietnam War?" "Sure!" he said. [laughs]

Beck: [laughs]

Arendt: So prior to you and your brother, was there anybody in your family that had served in the military?

Beck: Well, my dad was in for a couple months in World War I from September to December, and he had two brothers who were in the Army also.

Arendt: So there was a tradition of service.

Beck: Yeah.

Arendt: Did you have any expectations when you went in?

Beck: No. We were very naïve. We didn't know what was going on. At eighteen you're not nearly as intelligent as you think you are.

Arendt: [laughs] Had you ever been away from Wisconsin at all?

Beck: I had been in Michigan once and Illinois once prior to going in the Army.

Arendt: So you went to Camp Hood, Texas.

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: Any thoughts on basic training?

Beck: February, March and April were basic training. I don't know how much detail you want.

Arendt: Sure, we can go into detail.

Beck: I can talk as much as I want?

Arendt: It's up to you.

Beck: From there we were sent to Shenango Personnel Replacement Depot in Sharon, Pennsylvania.

Arendt: Okay. Alright. Were you with anybody from home at this point?

Beck: No, we were all separated. I only met one man I knew the whole time I was in the Army. We were in Camp Pittsburgh outside of Reims after the war. An anti-aircraft battalion came in and I knew one man from Port Washington. Al Makarovich was in that battalion, so I went over to see him. In thirty-four months he was the only man I ever saw.

Arendt: Wow. Now when you were in basic did you have any idea where you would be sent or what you would be doing?

Beck: No. They didn't tell us a thing.

Arendt: So you didn't know until you got your orders?

Beck: That's right. From Shenango we went to Camp Kilmer in New Jersey.

Arendt: So you knew you were heading to Europe, basically.

Beck: Yes. They didn't send us to the East Coast, they sent us to the Philippines. You never know, though, with the Army. [chuckles]

Arendt: [Laughs] Oh, yeah.

Beck: You know they used to say during the war, "The right way, the wrong way, and the Army way." Have you heard that expression?

Arendt: Oh yes. My husband was in the Army.

Beck: Oh, I see.

Arendt: Well, my dad was in the first book, too. Okay. Were you surprised that you didn't get any leave?

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: You were. Were you upset?

Beck: I went over with guys that were killed that never saw home.

Arendt: So at this point were you in this unit yet? Had you been assigned to it?

Beck: No, no. I had to fill out a card that I sent to my parents. On the card they said, "Field Artillery, unassigned." So I knew I was going to end up in an artillery unit but I didn't know.

Arendt: Did your parents write to you? Did your family write to you at all?

Beck: Oh yes: my sister and my dad and my uncle. Very occasionally I got a letter from my brother. My mother was the main correspondent.

Arendt: All right. When you were at Camp Kilmer was it a staging area?

Beck: It was a staging area for shipment overseas.

Arendt: Were you busy? Did you have free time?

Beck: We didn't do anything.

Arendt: You just sat around?

Beck: We just sat around.

Arendt: Hurry up and wait.

Beck: Yes. You know the expression. I tell you I was on KP [kitchen patrol] at Kilmer—I'll throw this in—the day horse meat came in. We had horse meat, and I was one of the informants who told the guys they were eating horse meat.

Arendt: Did they eat it?

Beck: Sure, it's kind of sweet.

Arendt: How did you prepare it?

Beck: That I don't know. I didn't do any preparing; we just washed pots and pans—all the menial tasks that the cooks didn't have to do.

Arendt: How long were you at Camp Kilmer?

Beck: Oh, about two weeks. We must have been at Shenango about two weeks and Kilmer about two weeks.

Arendt: Was it kind of—I want to say exciting but I know when you're in the military you get sick of not doing anything.

Beck: Oh, yes, sure.

Arendt: I mean were you kind of excited that you were actually going somewhere?

Beck: Yeah. One evening we had a leave; we went into New York City. For a small town boy like I was, that was something.

Arendt: What did you do?

Beck: I don't remember, I just know—

Arendt: You had a good time.

Beck: Yeah. I was only eighteen so I don't know if I even drank any beer.

Arendt: Oh, you probably did.

Beck: Yeah, probably—the youth. [chuckles] I went in basic training with a man from Anderson, Indiana; I was with him. He was a lot more outgoing than I was.

Arendt: This man right here—I'll show this— [gap in tape] Were there any special preparations before you left? I mean, you didn't know what was coming. You didn't know that D-Day was going to happen. Did the military have you write any last letters, or did they—?

Beck: No.

Arendt: Nothing?

Beck: They didn't. I was sent to England. In the summer of '43 the 29<sup>th</sup> Division was the only American division in England and they were understaffed. See, originally the 29<sup>th</sup> Division was Virginia and Maryland National Guard. And the battalion I was in was originally Virginia National Guard, y'all. You got the “y'all?”

Arendt: [laughs] Y'all.

Beck: We were put on the *Queen Elizabeth*. I heard then that they carried about 16,000. As I said earlier it was five nights and four days from New York to Scotland and it was very rough.

Arendt: Very rough.

Beck: And I was very sick. And because I had fired a .50 caliber machine gun, I did four on and eight off on a .50 caliber machine gun, and I don't know what I would have done if I'd have had to fire it.

Arendt: [laughs] Were you required to be on deck for that?

Beck: Yes, it was mounted aft on the port side. We slept in the cinema.

Arendt: Oh, really?

Beck: Yeah. Four high: pikes and canvas. There wasn't much room in between bunks.

Arendt: Ok Wow. Other than being sick and other than sleeping in the cinema, what did you think of the ship?

Beck: Well, we ate English food: marmalade. We had only two meals a day, and between throwing up and not liking the food I probably lost a few pounds.

Arendt: I don't like marmalade either.

Beck: No. To this day I don't like it.

Arendt: Now why did you go to Scotland?

Beck: See, we went on the *Queen Elizabeth* and the *Queen Elizabeth* traveled unescorted and they unloaded in Greenock. See, they were faster than the destroyers that escorted them, and they wanted to keep the *Queen Elizabeth* and the [HMS] *Queen Mary* as far away from the German airplanes as they could and out of sight from the German submarines.

Arendt: But didn't they know—

Beck: Well, the Germans must have known when these boats were sailing—they must have had—but we changed course approximately every half hour. The boat would go this way and then it would go that way. They were changing course continually.

Arendt: I'm sure that didn't contribute at all to your sea sickness. [chuckles]

Beck: No. You know we went on a tour to California some years ago and the *Queen Mary* was in Oceanside. I was in the Army with a man from Oceanside. I talked to a man and told him I went over on the *Queen Elizabeth*, and he said, "When?" I said, "In May of '43." He said, "They set a record in May of '43: 16,000 people at one time."

Arendt: That was you.

Beck: Yes. What a prize that would have been for some German submarine commander to say that he had sunk the *Queen Elizabeth* with 16,000 people on it. He probably would have got several Iron Crosses for that.

Arendt: Sure, sure. Definitely. So at that time was the *Queen Elizabeth* and the *Queen Mary* known as a troop transport or was it something that was kind of covered up?

Beck: Oh, the Germans must have known. This was in '43. They must have known. The 29<sup>th</sup> Division went over in September of '42, before I was ever in the Army, and they went out on the *Queen Mary*.

Arendt: So then they know, they know.

Beck: Yeah, but they cut a cruiser in half: One-thousand one-hundred [?] British sailors died—drowned. It's in this book. [HMS] *Curacoa* or something—I'm not quite sure of the spelling and pronunciation.

Arendt: I can probably find it in—

Beck: But they cut a British cruiser in half. The cruiser was zigzagging and cut across the front of the *Queen Mary* and they cut it in half. And during war times they don't stop to pick up survivors.

Arendt: Right, wow. So when you landed in Scotland, what happened?

Beck: Well, they put us on a train for central England, and we were put in a replacement depot at Lichfield. And the first night in Lichfield they had an air raid in the area and that was a welcoming to England—the first night I was there.

Arendt: What did you think when that was happening?

Beck: I was plenty scared. [chuckles] Nothing landed near us but the sirens went off and you could hear the anti-aircraft guns firing, you know.

Arendt: Did you stay in Lichfield?

Beck: No, just a day or two.

Arendt: And then where did you go?

Beck: Then I was sent to Plymouth, England. Did you ever hear of Plymouth?

Arendt: No.

Beck: Well, it's a big seaport in Devon—Devonshire. It was a big British naval base before World War II. You don't need all the details but we were at Seaton [Plymouth, Devonshire] barracks—

Arendt: Did anything strike you about England?

Beck: Oh, yeah, I loved England.

Arendt: You loved England?

Beck: I was there a year. My one son-in-law calls me an Anglophile. I liked England. It beats a lot of places. It was nice.

Arendt: Okay. What did you like about it?

Beck: The climate. And you weren't getting shot at. [laughs]

Arendt: [laughs]

Beck: I liked the people. You don't realize what war is about until you see the bombed out buildings. I have a lot of respect for the British people: civilian and military.

Arendt: They're very gracious people.

Beck: Yeah. We were there in '89 with our daughter in London. You don't have to put this—

Arendt: No, I'm still finishing my last sentence.

Beck: Okay. Anyway I met a woman in the street in London and I told her I was there for a year in '43 and '44. She said, "The England today is not the England you knew in '43 and '44." They have so many—

Arendt: Immigrants.

Beck: Immigrants: that's a polite word. [laughs] Anyway it has changed a lot.

Arendt: Okay. So were you stationed at Plymouth, England?

Beck: We were there ten and a half months. Crownhill was the name of a suburb of Plymouth.

Arendt: Did you stay in barracks while you were—

Beck: We were in a permanent English camp.

Arendt: Was it comfortable?

Beck: Yeah, well, considering you were in service it was quite comfortable.

Arendt: When did you start training for D-Day? You didn't know it?

Beck: No, we didn't know it. But I had basic training and tankers to [inaudible] so that was anti-tank. So when I got there I was supposed to be assigned to the anti-tank platoon. Shortly after I got there the Army eliminated the anti-tank platoon so they needed men in fire direction center. I mentioned fire direction center earlier, and I was trained as a battery computer and fire direction.

Arendt: Was that something that interested you, that you were good at?

Beck: It wasn't that complicated that you couldn't be good at. We had five people and a captain in fire direction. Horizontal control operator. I'm going too fast for you.

Arendt: Five people and a captain. And who was in your—Was that considered a team?

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: What were the roles; what were the jobs?

Beck: Well, one was a horizontal control operator and one was a vertical control operator, and then there were three battery computers.

Arendt: What did you use: pencil and paper?

Beck: And a slide rule. I was C battery computer. I don't know why, but Captain DeCamp must have liked me because sea battery number two gun did all the adjusting. See when you got a fire mission—the coordinates were approximate and then these two men plotted it and then they gave us some information and then we—

Arendt: And then you had to correct it.

Beck: Yeah and we took it from there. Then they'd fire and the guy would say fifty over, fifty short, and you'd adjust accordingly until you got it where the observer thought that it would be effective. And that's what I did. We did twelve on and twelve off.

Arendt: What did you do on your off-time? Did you sleep?

Beck: Sleep. Went back into Holland for showers when we were in Germany. Sometimes they took us for hikes to keep us from getting soft, I guess. You know I have an ETO [European Theater of Operations] card; that's an identification card. I went in the Army I weighed a hundred and thirty pounds in January and in December my ETO card said I weighed a hundred and forty-three pounds.

Arendt: Oh-oh.

Beck: [chuckles] So the Army food and life must have been beneficial in some ways.

Arendt: They were good to you.

Beck: Yeah.

Arendt: Ok. All right. Take me forward and tell me what was going on.

Beck: Well, we didn't really start training much for the invasion until late in '43 and early in '44.

Arendt: OK. Alright. Were you part of that training that happened that actually was—

Beck: You mean where men were killed at Slapton Sands [site in Devon of secret pre-invasion exercise that resulted in seven hundred-forty-nine official deaths as a result of German torpedoes and friendly fire].

Arendt: Yeah, that's it.

Beck: That was the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. Some torpedo boats got into a convoy and they sank some LSTs [Landing Ships, Tank] and I think four hundred guys from the 4<sup>th</sup> Division were killed. That was hush-hush.

Arendt: Yes. One of the men in the first book did a talk at that Military History Club and he had some of those maps with the "BIGOT" [highest clearance: one meaning—British Invasion of German Occupied Territory] on it because he wasn't at Slapton Sands but he came in after that. So you were not part of that.

Beck: No.

Arendt: When you did start training what were doing?

Beck: Well, we would practice landing first from an LCT [Landing Craft, Troop] and then from Ducks [DUKWs]. You know what a Duck is?

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: Yeah. Well, we had thirteen Ducks in our battalion. There was twelve howitzers in a battalion and each one was on a Duck. Then there was one Duck for battalion headquarters which included fire direction. I was in fire direction. We'd practice going on and disembarking.

Arendt: What is a speed thing?

Beck: Speed?

Arendt: Speed. Did they want you to be fast or did they want you to be accurate or what was your goal in the training?

Beck: Well, to get acclimated, to get used to it, and hopefully to know what you were doing. But war is utter confusion. It never goes the way it's planned.

Arendt: So at this time did you have—obviously you were preparing for an invasion. Did you have any idea where you were invading?

Beck: No idea. I told you we were in Plymouth ten and half months?

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: Well, that was mid-April when we left Plymouth and we went to a staging area. It was a tent camp and we were no longer allowed out and no one was allowed in for a month and a half. And then they told us where we were going.

Arendt: What did you think? What was your reaction?

Beck: Well, everybody was a little scared. [chuckles]

Arendt: [laughs] Okay. Could you swim?

Beck: Never.

Arendt: No?

Beck: Never.

Arendt: I can't swim either. Okay, that was problematic.

Beck: I told you I was C battery computer?

Arendt: Hmm-mmm.

Beck: Well, the last invasion exercise I was with sea battery in a gun Duck—in a Duck with a gun. So they revised that for the invasion and they put me in battalion headquarters.

Arendt: Ok. Was that a good thing?

Beck: Yes, it was, because I'm getting to a point.

Arendt: Okay. Okay.

Beck: Swanson Altice was a Virginian—you don't need his name. But he took my place, and he's still there.

Arendt: Oh, wow.

Beck: See they took a direct hit from a German gun and the guy that survived said that he was machined-gun to death in the water. Had I gone on the invasion the same as I did in the last practice I wouldn't be here talking to you.

Arendt: Wow. Ok. So. The D-Day invasion, it was a day late wasn't it?

Beck: Yes it was.

Arendt: What happened the day before?

Beck: We were on the boats.

Arendt: And you just sat in the Channel and floated around?

Beck: Yes, that's right.

Arendt: Ok. Tell me about that morning. Did they feed you anything special?

Beck: I don't remember, but I don't think anyone was in the mood. See, we were launched at about—here, I got it—

Arendt: Oh, sure, please—

Beck: I got this page here. This is about the 111<sup>th</sup> Field. "The guns were afloat at 3:30 in the morning."

Arendt: Okay. This would be on the 5<sup>th</sup>, right?

Beck: On June 6<sup>th</sup>.

Arendt: On June 6<sup>th</sup>.

Beck: Yeah. [Inaudible] “Ducks were driven into the LSTs and they backed off.” And some of them backed right straight down because it was so rough. But each gun Duck had fourteen men and forty rounds of ammunition.

Arendt: How many rounds?

Beck: Forty.

Arendt: Forty, okay.

Beck: And of the twelve guns we only got two on the beach.

Arendt: Oh, wow.

Beck: But if you’ve got a few minutes you wanna read this?

Arendt: Yeah. I will.

Beck: Now or later. This is the disaster of the 111<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery.

Arendt: I think I’ll read it now and take some notes. [pause in recording] So, and I’m going to just review this so it’s on the tape. Can’t swim; so you were in the Duck and you capsized, correct?

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: Was your gun mount—? No there was nothing—

Beck: Well, I carried a rifle but everything I had went—We didn’t have a gun in our Duck.

Arendt: Yeah, cuz you were the headquarters.

Beck: Yeah. Yes.

Arendt: And you were picked up by the Navy. How long were you in the water?

Beck: Oh, I'd say about a half an hour. At 4:30 in the morning in early June the English Channel is still quite cold. I was cold. They put me in a bed and slept there until the afternoon.

Arendt: You said you had a belt with compressed air capsules around you?

Beck: Yes, two of them. There was a rubber [?] divided in sections. I've seen them on TV but you just squeezed this and then that was released and then you popped right up.

Arendt: Then did you float at that point?

Beck: Yes. I remember grabbing something wooden—a piece of wood or something—to help buoy me up a little bit.

Arendt: At that point was everybody in your Duck—did they survive?

Beck: In my Duck, yes. Everybody in our—We were too far from the action to be killed by enemy action. That was about ten or eleven miles off the coast.

Arendt: So, when you were out there at that point you were surrounded by the people from your group.

Beck: Yeah.

Arendt: But were you seeing the planes go overhead?

Beck: Well, this was at 4:30 in the morning: it was still dark.

Arendt: Still dark.

Beck: You could hear it.

Arendt: You could hear it?

Beck: But it was still dark. You couldn't see anything.

Arendt: You couldn't see like other boats or—

Beck: Oh, yeah. I mean certainly if they were very close. You could see—An LST was a comparatively large boat. Them you could see.

Arendt: Alright. So you were picked up and you said that they put you in bed and you slept till that afternoon?

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: After you woke up, what happened?

Beck: Well, they fed me. [chuckles] By that time I was hungry; and then—

Arendt: Were you on board a Navy ship, at this point?

Beck: An LS—Navy or Coast Guard. There were a few Coast Guard vessels there, but I believe it was a Navy LST.

Arendt: Oh. Okay. And were all the members of your crew basically doing the same thing?

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: Just kind of resting and—

Beck: Yeah.

Arendt: Did you have marmalade? [laughs]

Beck: Not on an American ship, I don't believe. [laughs]

Arendt: Okay. And they fed you, so this was probably around supper time?

Beck: No, this was in mid-afternoon.

Arendt: Mid-afternoon, okay.

Beck: Because our vehicles, you know, the trucks, they were on—did you ever hear of a Rhino ferry?

Arendt: No.

Beck: It's a big barge with air-tight compartments. All of our trucks and jeeps and everything was on there, so they put me on there. Then we went towards the beach and we got hung up on an underwater obstacle with this barge, and luckily it wasn't mined, or maybe it was mined and the mine didn't go off.

Arendt: Or it had already—well, if it had already gone off it wouldn't be there.

Beck: No. And then we backed up and—

Arendt: At that point, you were sleeping and then you ate. Had you heard anything about what was going on at the beach yet?

Beck: No.

Arendt: Do you know what kind of obstacle it was?

Beck: No. It was not visible that I could see.

Arendt: You backed off and then were you able to go forward?

Beck: I don't know if went forward or not but I know we spent the night in the Channel.

Arendt: Okay.

Beck: The battleship [USS] *Arkansas* was moored—not moored they were moving—but they were near us and they were firing their 14-inch guns over us. You could actually see the 14-inch projectiles and you could feel the heat from when the 14-inch guns fired.

Arendt: Did you have any idea at that time, in hindsight, that you were part of something really historic?

Beck: Oh, certainly.

Arendt: You did?

Beck: Sure. I didn't really realize how important it was.

Arendt: Something was going on.

Beck: Something was, yeah. And we finally did make it about 10:30 the next morning.

Arendt: Where did you land?

Beck: Vierville [Vierville-sur-Mer, Normandy]. It was where we were supposed to land to begin with. Vierville Draw.

Arendt: Do you know how to spell that?

Beck: No, but I'll tell you. V-i-e-r-v-i-l-l-e.

Arendt: And then Draw is, D-r-a-w?

Beck: Yeah.

Arendt: Did you rendezvous with anybody from the original—With them or anybody?

Beck: [Inaudible] Rhino ferry. Most of the people from headquarters [inaudible] see we were from headquarters, but we were the only ones in the Duck. Everybody else was on this barge, so we were with our own people.

Arendt: Okay. So you landed, and then what happened?

Beck: Well, then I was shocked.

Arendt: You were shot?

Beck: Shocked. Not shot: shocked because the bodies were still floating by 10 o'clock [?] the morning. The next day they hadn't gotten around to cleaning things up yet. It was quite a sight to see all those bodies, and parts of bodies. We had men killed on the beach.

Arendt: When you landed at that point was it a secure area then?

Beck: Not too secure because, like I told you, we lost ten guns out of twelve. We did a little guard duty. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of June they brought in [inaudible] from England and we went back into the line on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June.

**[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

Arendt: So from the point you landed until the 12<sup>th</sup>, what were you doing beyond guard duty?

Beck: Not much. Sleeping in our holes. While we had no guns the Army ran in the 230<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery from the 30<sup>th</sup> Division to support our Infantry. The 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry had no artillery support because we had no guns.

Arendt: Then on the 12<sup>th</sup>, what did you do?

Beck: Then we got the new guns and we occupied a position behind the Infantry and we started firing on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June. Our battalion fired better than 100,000 rounds in less than 11 months.

Arendt: So when you occupied that position, where was the position? Right there?

Beck: No. The lines were inland a couple miles. I don't remember what our first position—

Arendt: Okay. But you had moved inland at that point?

Beck: Yes. I don't remember what our first position was.

Arendt: I know you lost ten out of twelve guns, but in terms of the men that were lost did you lose a significant—?

Beck: Not many, not many.

Arendt: Is that just because you were so far out?

Beck: That's because we were out in the Channel. But some of our men went in with the infantry and we lost men that went in with the infantry. Our battalion commander was a lieutenant colonel and he was killed.

Arendt: Oh, really?

Beck: Our first sergeant was killed and another man drove over a land mine driving a Jeep: he was killed. A number of guys were killed on the beach.

Arendt: Once you were actually in France, tell me the progression. Where did you go?

Beck: We would move up slowly behind the infantry and every time they would get ahead of us we'd occupy a new position.

Arendt: So you went through France?

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: And then where?

Beck: After St. Lo fell the 18<sup>th</sup> of July—I remember that because that's my brother's birthday—then we were sent to Brest. See, that's a big naval station. The armored divisions bypassed a lot of men at Brest and we and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> Division were sent to reduce Brest.

Arendt: And then what happened?

Beck: After Brest fell we were, in the Army's way of doing things, we were sent to Holland.

Arendt: Did you ever—I mean, you weren't infantry—but did you ever get near the concentration camps at all?

Beck: No. I saw some Displaced Camps in Germany near Nordhausen, but they weren't concentration camps as such. They didn't torture anybody there. They were abused, you know, but they weren't physically abused. They didn't have food; they didn't have decent living conditions.

Arendt: At this point was it more just work, sleep, work, sleep? Or did you ever go back and get break time at all?

Beck: No. But we had portable showers and occasionally we'd get a shower. And by the time you got one you needed one, too. You know, you didn't get your clothes off: you slept with everything on.

Arendt: Were you able to communicate at all with home at this point? Were you getting letters?

Beck: Yeah, we could write, but communication was not very good.

Arendt: Did your family know at this point that you had been part of D-Day?

Beck: Yeah, because it was in the paper. It said the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 29<sup>th</sup> Division were participants in D-Day. See, I sent a picture home. I have my insignia, which I sewed on myself, I'd never—

Arendt: Good for you!

Beck: I'd never sewn a stitch. But you know, when you're young you don't have your mother to sew your—

Arendt: That's right.

Beck: So I sewed this on and I sewed my stripes on it. The picture I sent home—well, where is it? I thought I had it.

Arendt: There are some pictures right there. Right there.

Beck: Oh, here. Yeah, this must be the picture I sent home and then they—

Arendt: Well, look at you!

Beck: And then they figured out that I was in the 29<sup>th</sup> Division and it said right in the paper at the time. The Germans knew who we were. They weren't giving any secrets away.

Arendt: Sure.

Beck: Here's me in Germany. Which one is me? See, I told you that was an ill-fitting helmet. I'm on the left. It came down on my head too far.

Arendt: [laughs]

Beck: I had that tilted back, you see, but this I'm getting ahead of myself now. But we were in Holland and then we went into Germany and then we moved back into Holland.

Arendt: Obviously this is during the war, but did you have any perceptions of those countries at all?

Beck: No.

Arendt: No? Just—

Beck: We were in rural areas in Holland. I liked Holland. I've been there since. But we were strictly in rural areas on the German border.

Arendt: Now, are you of German descent?

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: Did it seem strange at all? Or did you ever wonder—?

Beck: No, didn't bother me.

Arendt: —or where you family was—?

Beck: My sister was here last week and we were talking. Our grandfather was born in Germany in 1853 and he came from Saxony which is in northern Germany where we were.

Arendt: Wow.

Beck: My mother was Luxembourg so I'm half Luxembourg and half German.

Arendt: Oh, there you go. There you go. Ok, good. Did you end your tour in Germany?

Beck: Yeah. But I was gonna get to this piece. That was in November of '44.

Arendt: Sure.

Beck: November of '44 was the wettest November in forty years.

Arendt: In Germany.

Beck: In Germany—northern Germany. We had precipitation for twenty-eight days—measureable. Not precipitation—measureable precipitation—twenty-eight days out of thirty.

Arendt: I think we're headed into that right now. [chuckles]

Beck: See, we each had two blankets and we had a German blanket. This is Don Marettes [?] from Herkimer [?], New York. But he was in fire direction from midnight to noon, and I was in fire direction from noon to midnight.

Arendt: So you job-shared.

Beck: So we shared the hole but we weren't in the hole. We shared our blankets and we built the hole by ourselves. See, fire direction was in a tent. But after we got in Germany in winter we were always in buildings with coal heat. So that's my favorite picture.

Arendt: I like that picture. You mentioned the German blanket. Did you acquire anything? Did you use anything? Did you borrow anything from the Germans while you were there?

Beck: Well, I have a helmet and I have a gas mask and I have a Nazi flag, and I have a Belgian pistol. We weren't supposed to bring it home but I think many contraband items found their way home.

Arendt: [chuckles] I was talking to the son of one of the guys in the first book and he said, "My dad put all these weaponry in a box and just put on a mailing label, and it got home. He didn't think it was going to, but it showed up."

Beck: My cousin was twelve years older than I am, and I sent a German helmet home. I boxed it up and sent it home. Not long ago he told me we were the most popular kids in the north side [Arendt laughs] my brother and I because we had a German helmet.

Arendt: Sure.

[Pause in recording]

Beck: It's not loaded but we won't do anything with it. It took me a long time to figure out how to take that apart.

Arendt: German [inaudible].

Beck: My wife is deathly afraid of guns. Some day it'll end up being thrown in a trash heap somewhere.

Arendt: Oh, no, no. Give it to the museum, give it to—

Beck: Do you know Ron [inaudible]?

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: I had a bunch of *Yank* magazines and other magazines and I gave them to Ron. He gave them to some organization.

Arendt: Oh, that's good.

Beck: They were just sitting here and doing nothing so—

Arendt: Oh, yeah, sure.

Beck: [sound of knocking, banging] See that? That is this picture [?].

Arendt: So how long were you actually—? Were you there when the war ended?

Beck: I was near the Elbe River when the war ended.

Arendt: Near the Elbe River?

Beck: E-l-b-e. That's where the 69<sup>th</sup> Division met the Russians.

Arendt: Yup.

Beck: We were four thousand or five thousand yards behind the infantry so I never saw the Elbe River, but our division was positioned on the Elbe River.

Arendt: What did you do when you found out that the war had ended?

Beck: Well, we went to church.

Arendt: [chuckles] You did?

Beck: Yes. You're a Catholic, aren't you?

Arendt: Yes.

Beck: I must tell you: the Cratersfields [?] live in Port Washington. Did you ever hear of the name?

Arendt: Hmmm-hmm.

Beck: Well, their brother Conrad was in my class. He was in the Marines during the war but he joined the [inaudible] after the war. He comes to visit to me—he was here a couple weeks ago—whenever he’s home. Our division artillery chaplain was Father Kenny, and he knew Father Kenny.

Arendt: Really?

Beck: Yeah.

Arendt: Oh, is that neat.

Beck: And I remember Father Kenny saying—Easter of 1944 in England he said, “There’s a lot of Christmas and Easter Catholics here.” He knew. He didn’t come by us a lot because, you know, he had four battalions—3,200 men—to take care of. And division artillery headquarters: about 3,500 men. But he knew when he came to visit us and say Mass, he knew how many were there.

Arendt: He knew he’d have a good crowd.

Beck: He knew there was a good crowd as the invasion approached.

Arendt: Ok. So, when you went to church were you actually in a church or did you just have Mass?

Beck: No, this was a German church.

Arendt: A German—was it a Catholic church?

Beck: Yes. Sure.

Arendt: Did he say Mass?

Beck: What?

Arendt: Did he say Mass?

Beck: No, no. This is a German priest.

Arendt: A German priest.

Beck: We carried our guns but it was a German church and the priest was German also.

Arendt: Did he say the Mass in German?

Beck: In German.

Arendt: Did you understand—

Beck: Well, then everything probably was in Latin.

Arendt: Latin – yeah.

Beck: I mean it hasn't been too many years yet that it's in the native language.

Arendt: When you went to church were there a lot of Germans there?

Beck: There were Germans there, yeah, as I remember it.

Arendt: How did they treat you?

Beck: Well they were—I shouldn't say not nice. They were afraid of us. Right near the end of the war, we were in a small town. The cooks wanted to move into a butcher shop to set up the kitchen and the Germans wouldn't do that. So the staff sergeant in charge of the cooks pulled out his pistol, shot a hole through the ceiling, and that was it.

Arendt: Then they had their butcher shop.

Beck: Then it was our kitchen, not a butcher shop. But they would do KP and they would take the coffee grounds home after we threw them out. You know, after all those years of ersatz coffee even our grounds tasted good to them.

Arendt: Yeah. So did you speak German at all?

Beck: No.

Arendt: Were you with anybody that spoke German? I mean, could you communicate with the Germans?

Beck: I know in France we had a guy by the name of Frenchy Gallere [?]; he spoke French fluently. But in Germany? No. I don't remember.

Arendt: Then after the war actually ends what was your role? What did you do?

Beck: We were occupation. You ever hear of Bremen?

Arendt: Hmmm-mmmm.

Beck: Ever hear of Bremerhaven?

Arendt: No.

Beck: Bremerhaven is a smaller town across the bay from Bremen. We became part of the Bremen port command. We occupied that area while they tried to fix the port of Bremen up for use by the Americans.

Arendt: Did you enjoy doing that?

Beck: Well, it was—we didn't do much. We conducted a few searches. Get out about 4:30 in the morning and the Germans didn't like that—we coming to their house, you know. We confiscated a few shotguns. These were docile Germans. They weren't your die-hard Nazis, but still they didn't like being aroused at 3:30 in the morning, or 4:30, and taking their guns away. Other than that we didn't do a lot. Played baseball and things like that.

Arendt: Really? Ok.

Beck: And I went to Denmark.

Arendt: You went to Denmark? Ok.

Beck: Yes. In September of '45 they were offering furloughs to Switzerland or Denmark. And when my turn came I would have preferred to go to Switzerland: I did get there years ago on a trip. But I did about a week in Denmark: Copenhagen and Tivoli Gardens. It's a big amusement. I had a drawing of me made by an artist in Tivoli Gardens. I didn't realize until then that I was well-blessed with a nose. [laughs]

Arendt: [laughs]

Beck: He did a side view of me and I had the Beck nose my dad had. My grandpa had it, my aunt had it.

Arendt: Well, they always seem to take that one feature and just exaggerate it.

Beck: Yes. He thought he did exaggerate. I hope he did.

Arendt: [laughs] Okay. Good. Did you like Denmark? I mean—

Beck: Oh yes, very much.

Arendt: Had Denmark been touched by the war or was it pretty unscathed?

Beck: We went across the border into Denmark and the bus stopped and I bought milk. That was the first milk I had drunk in twenty-seven months. We got powdered milk which did not take the place of real milk.

Arendt: No.

Beck: That was the first milk I had in twenty-seven months.

Arendt: And being from Wisconsin, too. I mean you were used to a lot of milk.

Beck: Before I went in the Army I never drank coffee.

Arendt: My husband's from Port Washington. When he went in the Army he hated the milk. The milk was terrible. [chuckles]

Beck: Okay. What's your husband's name?

Arendt: It's Doug Arendt.

Beck: No, I don't know him.

Arendt: And his parents are Al and Agnes.

Beck: Yeah. I know who they are.

Arendt: They're dairy farmers.

Beck: Please say hello. That was their grandson who was—

Arendt: Their son.

Beck: Their son who was killed.

Arendt: Yeah. Yeah.

Beck: Yeah, I knew Al. I don't know them but we'll say hello when we pass and that's about it.

Arendt: Sure. Okay. So you went to coffee because there was no milk?

Beck: Well, you had to drink something and coffee was the only thing offered so I drank coffee. But if you never drank out of a canteen cup with hot coffee in it you don't know how hot the canteen cups can get.

Arendt: [laughs] Yeah. Well, my dad is a military collector and he's got all those things. When I was a kid, you know, I would play with the canteens. They were aluminum and they were hot.

Beck: Oh, sure.

Arendt: Yeah. All right. So you wrapped up your tour of duty in Europe, correct?

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: Back in Germany.

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: And then at that point were you released or did you—?

Beck: They had a point system. You may have heard of it?

Arendt: Yeah. So you—

Beck: Depending on how much overall service you had and depending upon how many months you were overseas. So I don't remember how it—

Arendt: You probably had more than enough points.

Beck: But we came home, and in the Army's wisdom—we were in northern Germany—you know where I sailed from?

Arendt: Where?

Beck: Marseille, on the Mediterranean.

Arendt: So were you bussed?

Beck: We were taken by train.

Arendt: Okay. Wow.

Beck: To Camp Pittsburgh. It was a camp outside of Reims which is in northern France.

Arendt: And that's where you met that guy.

Beck: Yes, that's where I met Al Makarovich. From there we were put on a train and sent to Marseille. That's the ultimate Army wisdom, you know. They probably didn't know we had come from Germany.

Arendt: Right. They just saw you as from Camp Pittsburgh.

Beck: Yeah. We were going home and when an opening came up on a boat out of Marseille they sent us.

Arendt: You took it. [chuckles] How long did it take you to get home? Do you remember?

Beck: Eighteen days.

Arendt: Oh. Was it rough?

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: Did you have a hard time again?

Beck: No. I was sick but I didn't throw up. But it was a—I'll show you a picture of it. I got a picture of it. I had a friend from Baltimore; the boat is docked in Baltimore now.

Arendt: Oh, really?

Beck: It was refurbished and it's in Baltimore now.

Arendt: What was the name of it?

Beck: [SS] *John Brown*, Liberty ship. I went overseas on the *Queen Elizabeth* you know. It was so rough I was sick. But I'll tell you one little story.

Arendt: Sure.

Beck: On Thanksgiving Day 1943 we had turkey. And in the afternoon they read the Articles of War to us. You know, how you're supposed to behave. I was the third man to leave. I never made it to the men's room. We had turkey that had thawed out and was refrozen and I had ptomaine poisoning.

Arendt: Ahh.

Beck: And I threw up on the floor before I ever got to the men's room. Half our battalion was sick. I sat there on the toilet, if you'll pardon the crudity—

Arendt: Oh, that's fine.

Beck: —with the pail between my legs and both ends were working at times.

Arendt: Oh. Well, you were getting rid of it.

Beck: Yes. It was the worst. It was worse than being seasick. But in Germany in Christmas in 1944 we again had spoiled turkey. Joe Decka [?] was the deck sergeant. Joe was so sick that when he had to use the bathroom he couldn't even get up. They picked him up and put him on a pail. It's kinda—See the refrigeration at that time wasn't good.

Arendt: Wasn't good, yeah.

Beck: Other than illnesses, that was as sick as I ever was. The following morning sick call was unbelievable.

Arendt: [laughs] There's a waiting list.

Beck: Yeah, there was a waiting list for sure. But you talk about sick call: our battalion surgeon was killed in France.

Arendt: Oh, really?

Beck: Yeah. He was a captain. Captain Sabatino. He was killed in France.

Arendt: When you sailed from Marseille where did you land? In New York?

Beck: New York.

Arendt: And then where did you go?

Beck: November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1945. And it was raining and the Red Cross was passing out coffee and doughnuts.

Arendt: Did it feel really good to see the Statue of Liberty? [laughs]

Beck: Oh yes. I saw it on the way out. It was foggy when we came in. I don't remember if I saw it on the way in but I must have, you know.

Arendt: You know, I've been in New York twice and it's much shorter than I thought it was. You know, you see it on TV and you see it in all the specials and you're thinking it's this—well, it's just kind of short. [laughs]

Beck: I was up in it some years ago when we [inaudible]. Not up to the top: about half way up. After we landed then we went to Camp Kilmer again. I was within a couple barracks of where I was when I went overseas.

Arendt: Okay.

Beck: And Kilroy was there.

Arendt: Oh really? [laughs]

Beck: Yes, he was all over.

Arendt: [laughs] Okay.

Beck: See, I was inducted at Fort Sheridan and we were supposed to go to Sheridan to be discharged but the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division was coming in from the Pacific and they were at Sheridan so they sent us to Camp McCoy which is now Fort McCoy.

Arendt: Yeah. Had you ever been in that area?

Beck: No, no.

Arendt: Pretty woody and wild.

Beck: Yeah.

Arendt: So you went to Camp McCoy, and then did you just find your own transportation home at that point?

Beck: Yeah. I was discharged on the 20<sup>th</sup> and they gave us a ticket on the train to Milwaukee.

Arendt: Did your family know you were—

Beck: Well, they knew. I had called up. They knew I was in. They didn't know just exactly which day I was—

Arendt: But they knew you were heading home.

Beck: Yes.

Arendt: Okay. So when you got to Milwaukee did you take the inter-urban home?

Beck: I took a bus.

Arendt: You took a bus.

Beck: I took a bus. And it was full. I sat in the middle aisle and one woman started talking to me. I didn't know anyone. She was a year behind me in high school.

Arendt: Really?

Beck: Yeah. Helen Rule [?]. She doesn't live here anymore—she's married and lived in California—but I didn't expect to see anybody I'd know. After she introduced herself, well, then I remembered her from school.

Arendt: So what happened when you got home? What day did you get home?

Beck: On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November. I was discharged on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November. Thirty-four months and two days.

Arendt: What happened when you came home? Did your family throw you a party?

Beck: No, not really.

Arendt: No? [laughs]

Beck: My brother was still in the Navy and the next day we went to a funeral.

Arendt: Oh, no.

Beck: Some relative of my mother's died so my dad insisted that I wear my uniform. So I had my coat on and I had five overseas stripes on my jacket. Here, where is it? You can't see it on this picture but—

Arendt: Well at least you gave people something to look at. [chuckles]

Beck: Yes. Well, my dad was proud of me. My mother—I don't know if you know where Track [?] International is?

Arendt: Yes.

Beck: Well, we lived on Oakland [?] Avenue and my mother walked to church every day during the war. My brother was in the Navy and I was in the Army and she walked to church every day.

Arendt: To Saint Mary's?

Beck: What was that?

Arendt: To Saint Mary's?

Beck: Yes. She must have done a lot of good praying because we both made it.

Arendt: Ok. Your brother wasn't at D-Day, was he?

Beck: No, he was in the Mediterranean. He was on an LCI [Landing Craft, Infantry] and he would run troops in to Salerno and Anzio. He was also in on the invasion of southern France on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945. I have a good memory at times.

Arendt: You do!

Beck: Sometimes. Sometimes I amaze myself, you know, and sometimes I don't amaze myself.

Arendt: Well, it's kind of funny—

Beck: You know Fred Schaefer?

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: Well, he was history teacher.

Arendt: Yeah. He's my teacher.

Beck: Anyway, Vern Arendt and I and Joe Demmer [?] appeared before his history class on two occasions. You know some of them, most of them I would say, were very intent. Some stopped and shook hands with us after class was over. I thought they were very interested.

Arendt: See, that would have been so much more interesting than when I was at Port High School.

Beck: Who taught history then?

Arendt: Mr. Schaefer. But he—

Beck: Oh, he did then.

Arendt: —would come in in a coon skin cap and sing these songs to us. [chuckles]

Beck: I still see him in church once in a while.

Arendt: Do you? Okay. And what did you do when you got home?

Beck: I tried going to school but I never was that bright.

Arendt: Well, did you get the GI bill?

Beck: Yes. Then I worked at Harnischfeger Houses. You know where Simplicity is now?

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: It's the Harnischfeger plant; it's now the Simplicity machine shop. Carol worked there in the office.

Arendt: So you met her after—

Beck: Well, in 1946 she graduated from high school. My cousin had some extra tickets, so I went to graduation. I didn't know what else to do. My cousin's name was Ester Hanson [?]. Bill Bley [?]: you know Bill Bley?

Arendt: Yeah, I know who he is.

Beck: Well, Ester Hanson was my cousin. H-M: her maiden name was Hamm H-a-m-m. I don't remember seeing her there. But in 1946 they used to have picnics in the Columbia Park up here. John Decker and I were there and I went to school with her sister. Her sister is two days older than I am. Second—she was married to Doug Stecker [?] from Cedarburg. You hear the name Stecker from Cedarburg?

Arendt: No.

Beck: Well, anyway, she introduced me to Carol. That was in '46 and then in '47 she worked at Harnischfeger and that's how we started to go out together.

Arendt: Oh, okay.

Beck: We had six children. After Harnischfeger, then I worked at the Gilson Foundry. I ran the piece [?] work system. I worked there eleven years. Fenny [inaudible] you know [inaudible] Fenny [?].

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: He worked there. I ran the piece work system there for eleven years and then it burned down and then I started at Simplicity. I worked there for better than twenty-four years. I'm retired seventeen years. Seventeen years in June.

Arendt: Well-earned.

Beck: Simplicity was a good place to work.

Arendt: Yeah, I've heard that.

Beck: It had very good benefits.

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: Gil Niederkorn was a very generous man.

Arendt: I've heard that. Now have you gone to any reunions at all?

Beck: We have a small group that meets at Angola State Park. It's the last exit on the Indiana Turnpike before you get into Ohio. We meet every August or September. I'll be there Tuesday after Labor Day. Since 1964 I've missed two or three times.

Arendt: Wow. Do you belong to any Veterans organizations?

Beck: I should, but I didn't.

Arendt: You should!

Beck: I used to belong to the Legion after the war. I never belonged to the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]. I know I should. Did you ever smoke?

Arendt: No.

Beck: I told you we were in fire direction: twelve on and twelve off?

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: One other man and myself out of the six were the only two who didn't smoke. So I inhaled a lot of smoke. My dad smoked, my brother smoked, my sister smoked.

Arendt: The Port Legion is very smoky even when there's nobody smoking.

Beck: My brother was up to three or four packs a day.

Arendt: Oh, my.

Beck: He died at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at Waupaca. He never married and he was a heavy smoker. He had Parkinson's disease. He had pneumonia which was his actual cause of death but it was brought on by the Parkinson's.

Arendt: Sure.

Beck: Roso Pieringer [?]: I mentioned him before.

Arendt: Yeah, I know who he is.

Beck: He and I—he and Clarence were big friends. We went up to see him. They had told us, “Come up, Clarence is not doing well.” So we got there one morning at 11 o’clock on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October. We got upstairs to the fifth floor. We got there at 11:30 and he had died at 11 o’clock.

Arendt: He knew you were coming.

Beck: I don’t know. Anyway, they said, “Do you want to touch him?” I said, “No.” They said, “Go ahead.” His head was still warm.

Arendt: Oh really?

Beck: He was an RM-1: Radioman 1<sup>st</sup> Class on an LCI. I don’t know if you know what an LCI is. It’s a little naval vessel with ramps down either side.

Arendt: Okay.

Beck: He says he came across the Atlantic in February in ’45 from Europe; they were bound for the Pacific. And he said, “Sick!” He never got sick but some of the guys were really sick. He says they tore the cables loose on the floor in the dining area.

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: Then he was in the Pacific but he never saw action in the Pacific.

Arendt: What was your brother’s name?

Beck: Clarence.

Arendt: Clarence. C-l-a-r-e-n-c-e. I always try and mention them in the—

Beck: He was in thirty-six months during WWII. He signed up, like we called it enlistment before—

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: He enlisted till he was twenty-one. So he was in from February of ’43 to July of ’46.

Arendt: So he was on a minority cruise.

Beck: I don't know what.

Arendt: That's when—

Beck: But then he joined the Naval Reserve and he did seventeen months during the Korean War at Little Creek, Virginia, which wasn't too hard to take.

Arendt: No. I did an interview last week with someone who said, "I was on a minority cruise: I signed up when I was seventeen and got out when I was twenty-one."

Beck: Okay.

Arendt: Okay. Terrific. Anything else you care to add? Are you glad you had the experience?

Beck: Yeah, oh yeah. Like Vern Arendt says, "I wouldn't do it again but I wouldn't take a million dollars for my experience." You can quote Vern Arendt if you want to use the quote.

Arendt: So tell me, okay, you wouldn't do it again—

Beck: I wouldn't want to do it again; something similar to that.

Arendt: I think that was in the paper a couple nights ago.

Beck: Yes. But anyway, that's a very apt quote, you know.

Arendt: He's actually my—oh, boy—father-in-law's second cousin. Vern and Orville Arendt's father—

Beck: I know Orville too.

Arendt: He's going to be in the second book. His is done.

Beck: I knew his wife. His wife went to school with me.

Arendt: Oh, really?

Beck: Lucille.

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: She was [inaudible] in my class in high school.

Arendt: Their father is my father-in-law's uncle.

Beck: Nick.

Arendt: Yeah.

Beck: Nick Arendt.

Arendt: Yeah. And then my grandfather-in-law was—shoot [inaudible]. I can't remember my father-in-law's name.

**[End of Tape 1, Side B]**