

FALLS HISTORY PROJECT

How do we actively engage students in the study of history? This is the ongoing challenge that history teachers must face at the secondary level. Historian David Blight of Amherst College suggests that "all historical experience . . . must be imagined before it can be understood." One way to engage students and their imaginations more fully is to connect them to the actual process of "doing" history and relate that process to an increased understanding of their local environment. Indeed, the story of Black River Falls and the surrounding area provides a rich and diverse landscape for historical research.

**BLACK RIVER FALLS HIGH SCHOOL
SOCIAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT**

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in finding new lands, but in seeing with new eyes."

--Marcel Proust

THE FALLS HISTORY PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

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OVERVIEW

The Falls History Project will be initiated during the 2001-02 school year with the intention of connecting our students more authentically to the history of our region. It is our intention that this project will be ongoing, that it will involve a number of teachers and students, and that it will lead to the development of a permanent archive at the high school that focuses on local history. Students will be introduced to the project through various classes within our department and we envision that much of the work will involve the gathering of oral history.

COMPONENTS OF THE PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY WORK

Students who are enrolled in any of our history courses will have the opportunity to become involved in oral history work. The focus of the interviews will depend on the particular aspect of local history that we are dealing with at the time. Our first efforts will be aimed at compiling research related to veterans of the Second World War and the Korean Conflict. We will be working with students on skills related to interviewing, including videotaping and transcribing.

RESEARCHING LOCAL DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Students will be introduced to the sources of history available at the "History Room" of the BRF Public Library, particularly the microfilm archives of local newspapers. In addition, students with a special interest in HoChunk history will be introduced to the archives of the Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources of the HoChunk Nation located at the Executive Building of the tribe.

INDEPENDENT STUDY OFFERING FOR SENIORS

Our department would like to pilot an offering for independent study as early as the second semester of 2001-02 related to the Falls History Project. Advanced history students would research and design a project related to local history and carry it out under the guidance of a department member. This would be limited to 1 or 2 students each year. We envision this as an opportunity for us to encourage some of our brightest students to consider teaching history.

CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

We believe there will be opportunities to work with students and teachers in other disciplines related to this project. For example, since so much of our local history is agriculturally-based, there will be natural connections for students involved in Agriculture Education courses and/or the FFA organization. We see this as a cooperative venture with the Ag-Ed teacher. There also will be a writing component when dealing with transcription of interviews that may easily cross over to work with the English Department.

INTERNSHIPS/VOLUNTEER WORK

We have spoken with Mary Lent and Mary Woods at the Public Library concerning the possibility of summer internships or volunteer work for students at the History Room. We envision this as a possibility for students who may be contemplating studying history beyond high school and have a special interest in learning more about the actual work of historians. We will also be exploring the possibility of working with the Jackson County Historical Society as we proceed with the project.

DEVELOPING A PERMANENT ARCHIVE AT BRFHS

As materials are gathered and compiled, we will work to establish a historic archive at the High School. Students will be involved in organizing and maintaining the archive. In addition to a "physical" archive, we envision developing a "Falls History Project" web site that will be developed and maintained by students.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Falls History Project offers great potential for furthering history education in our school. In addition, it will provide an excellent opportunity for developing connections between the community and the school related to local history. As a symbolic beginning for this project, we will be establishing a permanent display this fall related to Corporal Mitchell RedCloud, Jr., a BRFHS graduate who posthumously received the Medal of Honor for heroism in the Korean War. His life story offers a compelling example of the power of memory in our community.

Submitted by Paul Rykken/ August 2001

FALLS HISTORY PROJECT 2001-02 EDITION

The following interviews represent our first installment of this project. The four veterans of World War II were interviewed by FHP intern Andi Jo Cloud in February of 2002. All men have been lifelong residents of Jackson County. We thank them for their involvement!

FLOYD PRATT

Time of Service: March 1942-December 23, 1945

VILAS JOHNSON

Time of Service: May 15, 1942-February 6, 1946

ELMO JOHNSON

Time of Service: January 25, 1945-August 15, 1946

BOB TEEPLES

Time of Service: October 15, 1940-October 21, 1945



Falls History Project Intern Andi Jo Cloud

Andi Jo Cloud was born on May 6, 1983 in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and was raised by her parents, Shelley Thundercloud and Arnold Cloud, in Jackson County. She is a member of the HoChunk Nation. Her future plans include attending Northern Michigan University and pursuing a degree in business management.

VISIT THE FALLS HISTORY PROJECT WEB SITE TO LEARN MORE!

<http://www.brf.org/schools/hs>





We began this project by focusing on the stories of local veterans. Pictured here is Mitchell Redcloud, Jr. He attended BRFHS in the late 1930s and served in both World War II and the Korean Conflict. He posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his extraordinary courage in battle.



As part of the Falls History Project, we were honored to have Dr. Nancy Lurie with us during our November in-service. Dr. Lurie is an anthropologist who has devoted much of her work to studying the HoChunk people. She has a unique knowledge of the story of the Redcloud family.

**THE FALL HISTORY PROJECT
BRFHS SOCIAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT
BLACK RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN**

Black River Falls High School teachers Paul Rykken and John Pellowski wanted to connect students with local history.
The result-

The Falls History Project

Black River Falls High School Senior Andi Cloud admits she's in the minority when it comes to how most students feel about the subject of history.

"History is awesome," Cloud said with a smile.

In an effort to spread the word, Cloud was chosen to spearhead the Falls History Project, a permanent historical archive of local history at the high school. Social studies teacher Paul Rykken is the Project Coordinator and teacher John Pellowski is assisting.

"Mr. (Social Studies teacher Paul) Rykken asked me to do it at the beginning of the year and I thought it would be something cool and new to do," Cloud said.

"It was an independent study class so I thought it was going to be easy," she laughed. "It's a lot of work and very challenging. I like the challenge of it."

Cloud's involvement began with the second semester. Her topic was World War II.

"I just leaped into the project," she laughed. "I didn't know that much about World War II."

After thoroughly researching the subject, she moved on to the heart of her project.

"I interviewed four area veterans, Bob Teeples, Elmo Johnson, Floyd Pratt, and Vilas Johnson," she said. "Mr. Rykken had contacted them and they were all willing to do it."

The four men relayed their unique experiences with war and everything that goes with it.

"I learned so much from them, even if it was just for 45 minutes," Cloud said. "I heard just what it was like, from the weather to combat, they remembered everything."

One theme was common to their accounts, Cloud said.

"That war is really a devastating thing," she said. "From their stories and talking to them, it's bad."

The next part of the project, and the one she's currently working on, is transcribing the videotaped interviews into a more easily accessible written form. Finally a display with photographs and summaries of



Left: Elmo Johnson recounts his experiences with Black River Falls High School Senior Andi Cloud. Above: Vilas Johnson is interviewed by Andi Cloud. Below: Andi Cloud and Bob Teeples.

their experiences will be constructed and displayed at the high school.

Cloud's will be the first part of this on-going project, which will eventually include a number of students, teachers, and topics of local history. Each year a new topic of local history will be examined.

"A big challenge of teaching history to young people is to get them to feel connected with history," Rykken said. "David Blight, a historian at Amherst College in Massachusetts contends that 'all historical experience must be imagined before it can be understood.' We believe that a project like this can help our students imagine history more fully and begin to appreciate the rich history of this region. Black River Falls has a unique history that needs to be explored by our students."

"Doing oral history is more than simply gathering stories," Pellowski said. "We want our students to see that history is local, it is personal, but that it also connects to the bigger picture of the history of the country."

Rykken said as a "symbolic start to the overall project earlier this year, we chose to focus on the compelling story of Congressional Medal of Honor winner Mitchell Redcloud, Jr." Redcloud,

who earned his diploma from Black River Falls High School, was the subject of the school's Veterans' Day Program and a permanent display of his photo, narrative, and Medal of Honor Citation was created in his honor.

Rykken would also like to thank several others for their help in the project thus far, including Jerry Paar, Ken Schoolcraft, Principal Rob Taylor, Merlin Redcloud, Nancy Lurie, Cheri Zahasky, Mary Woods in the Public Library History Room for her help with research, and of course, Teeples, Johnson, Johnson, and Pratt.

As for Cloud, her portion of the project will be completed at the end of the school year. She said she will be proud of her part in it, and hopefully it will inspire interest in her fellow students.

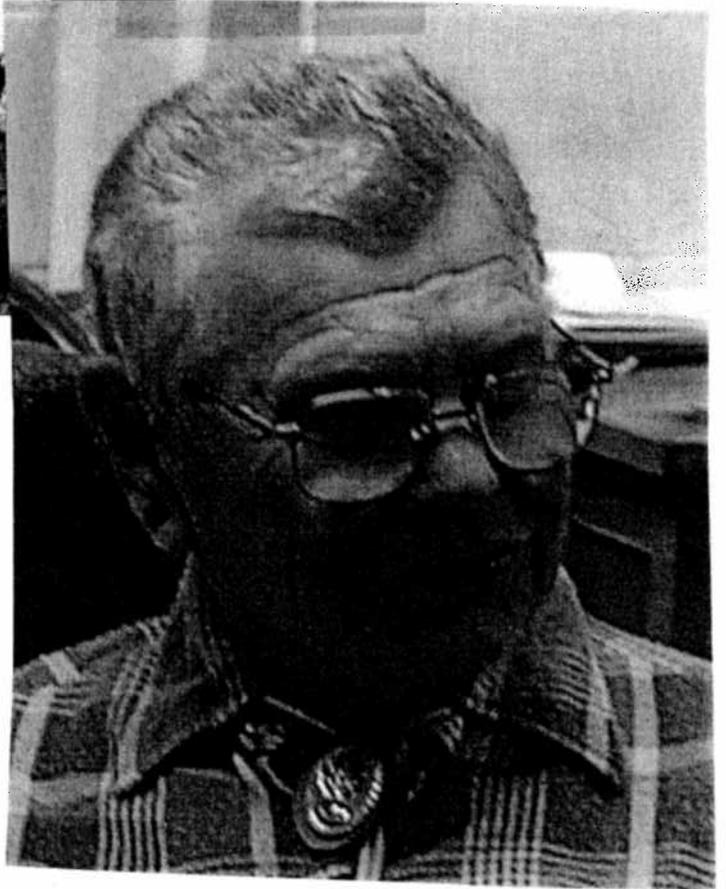
"I wish people would get out and talk with these veterans," she said. "We're losing 1,000 World War II veterans each day. I am very lucky to have done this project."

For more information visit the Black River Falls High School Web Page, www.brf.org and click on the Social Studies Department, and then on the Falls History Project link.



Above: Floyd Pratt and Andi Cloud discuss his days as a paratrooper. Left: A memorial to Mitchell Redcloud Jr. at Black River Falls High School. Redcloud, who attended BRF High School in the late 1930's and early 1940's, fought in World War II and the Korean Conflict. He was killed in combat in November of 1950 and posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.





FLOYD PRATT
BORN IN MONROE COUNTY, WISCONSIN IN 1922
ENTERED THE MILITARY IN MARCH OF 1942

AJ- Why did you pick the service that you were in?

F- *Why did I pick the service, I'm a farm boy I was born and raised on a farm. And as my dad said ever since I was seventeen years old I had my hand in the government's pocket. No I went into the CCC's when I was seventeen, do you know what the CCC's are?*

AJ- No.

FP- *Civilian Conservation Corp. It was like a welfare program at that time lets see that would be 1938, 39, because war broke out in 41. It was about 39-40. From the CCC's I stayed home for three months and enlisted into the army and tried to get into the navy and I didn't have enough education. See I did not go to high school because I was a farm boy and there were no buses then. And then I enlisted in the army and I was took my basic in artillery then went into tank destroyers then they started busting up the tank destroyers, they didn't need them anymore and I enlisted in the airborne.*

AJ-Were you scared to leave Black River, you're from Black River right?

F-*No, I am from in between Shamrock and Cataract.*

AJ-Were you scared to leave home?

F-*No, because I was already in the CCC's, it was controlled living.*

AJ- When you saw camp what were your first thoughts when you first went to camp, basic training?

F- *Well its I guess its like anybody, you're scared, you don't know who's the officers and who isn't, but you get used to it*

AJ-When did you wake up (his realization of what he was in)?

F- *When did I wake up; I woke up after I got into airborne and especially when I went into combat and seen the killing, the destruction of combat.*

AJ-How was your first combat experience like?

F-*What is combat like? Its many different features, people think of World War I, where the fellows were in the trenches. I'll start back, I went through England in 24 hours landed in _____, Scotland, on the Queen Elizabeth and sailed out at South Hampton 24 hours later on an LST landed at _____, France. _____ was a city that was built on a hill like Black River only a bigger hill and down near the ocean there was about three or four house that were standing and the rest was nothing but a pile of rubble. We walked up on the hill and we were going to board trains but we turned around and had trucks for us to go to the front line.*

AJ-What was your first mission, paratrooping like?

F- *First, paratrooping you have to have five successful jumps before you get your wings and the first week of airborne you got to run ten miles in an hour, the second week is a thirty-five foot tour, you are hooked up on a strap, harness, and you fall 15'3," then its taken up by cable and you go down into the saw dust pile. Then the next week is the 250 foot tours, they pull you up, its like a hay fork the trips you got steer away from the towers and land, then the next week you got to make five successful jumps*

AJ-Did you make your five?

F-*I had to; in order to get these wings?*

AJ-Did you have any good luck thing, or anykind of motivation?

F- *Oh yes, I could show you a picture of tank destroyers that had live fire over the, eighteen inches over the top of us we had to crawl through a field under barbed wire then they had dynamite explosions that would raise you about 18 inches off the ground. It was to get you used to combat. Paratroopers do anything to make you quit, they don't want quitters. I can see it, once your in combat; because if you stop when your going to jump you are putting the whole rest of the plane in jeopardy and you got so many seconds to get out of that plane.*

AJ-How was the food there?

F- *Well I was the cook it had to be good. No. The army has the best; there were times that we didn't have food. Transportation gets caught up. You're moving all the time. Do you know what field rangers are?*

AJ- **No.**

F- *There are like a Coleman stove only a lot bigger and this is what you cook on them; you have three of them and a company consists of 125 men some companies have more and some have less.*

AJ- **Was there anything surprising?**

F- *Surprising, let's see, I said after I seen Paris, I'd never go back to farming. That was one thing. No. A lot of things that surprised me, have you seen this movie Band of Brothers?*

AJ- **Not yet.**

F- *Well, in airborne its like you form a connection between all of you and you look out for each other you have or else, see airborne is really an elite service now they got the rangers and things like that. See we were at the very beginning of airborne, as a matter of fact when I jumped we only had to go out one door now they got two doors. Now they got to go out of the tail of the plane, and everything else.*

AJ- **The men that were at basic training with you did they stay with you throughout the whole time?**

F- *No. Different units bust up, its like supply and demand units lose their personnel and they had to have fillers.*

AJ- **Can you give me a memorable moment?**

F- *There are so many of them.*

AJ- **Can you just tell me one.**

F- *Well my second cook was killed right in front of me by an artillery shell. You just stop and think the outfit I joined of a company there were only twelve men left out of it. We had 40% casualties, now you just stop and think of this high school losing 40% of you.*

AJ- **That's a lot of students.**

F- *How would the rest of you feel?*

AJ- **Really lucky, I'd think. With the missions were you assigned your missions? How did they do that?**

F- *You never know the direction you're almost, you wonder you know you're just moving, you just go I guess and you don't know north, south, east, or west; you just go by the sound of the war. Missions the higher up know what's going on but down in the lower ranks you are just like followers.*

AJ- **Now, December 7, 1941 was the bombing of Pearl Harbor where were you that day and what did you think?**

F- *I was in the CCC's that day and I was cooking and right after we got the news we started turning marching and everything else. And wasn't long after they broke up the CCC's and by March I was in the service already.*

AJ- **What was your opinion of FDR's actions in WWII?**

F- *Well you're young you don't realize the politics of it and he was your leader I guess head of the army and you had faith in him.*

AJ- **What was your opinion of Adolf Hitler?**

F- *Adolf Hitler. He in one sense was a very smart man to get all these people to follow him and they followed him right up to the end, that I can never understand why the soldiers fought right up to the end when they knew they were defeated, you think. They say that he was mentally retarded or mentally ill. But he sure had to have something on the ball to make the all Germans follow him. I heard this remark one time; the people were for Hitler and when Hitler turned against the people the people turned against Hitler. You know we all want winners. And you think of Roosevelt and Hitler somewhat they had the same idea they got the nation out of poverty and pulled it up so everyone was working everyone had money.*

AJ- When the A-bomb was dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, what did you think of that?

F- I was right out, when that happened I was on my way back from Europe on a Thomas T. Berry boat and we started out, blackout you know they don't travel with lights. And when the war was declared over they turned on the lights and had one heck of a party. So it meant that, see were scheduled to go to Japan, we were going to jump in Japan.

AJ- Do you think it was necessary for them to bomb Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

F- If they hadn't, I wouldn't have been here, I'll put it that way I don't think they, how many more troops would've been killed?

AJ- A lot

F- Because the Japanese was ready to defend their homeland. It is too bad we had to kill off a lot a people but I think it shortened the war by quite a lot.

AJ- Throughout the war did America take the right steps?

F- Well I'm gonna go back to the Bulge, you don't put airborne infantry against German armored, which our unit was put up against that's just like suicide to do it. But Hitler had to be stopped. You stop and think if Hitler would've got through the Bulge, got gasoline, if he would've got gasoline, how much longer would the war have been?

AJ- Long.

F- You see I mean he had the troops and he had equipment, but he needed fuel.

AJ- Can you tell me your experience in the Bulge.

F-It was cold, it was miserable. Think of you sleeping all night in ten, fifteen degrees. You couldn't get warm, frost bite on the feet. You don't know where the enemy is; it's just a mad confusion in my mind.

AJ- Were you scared? Yeah.

F- Any man says he isn't scared, he's not a...

AJ- In the Bulge how did the nights and days work?

F- They went right together, night and days there was...and it was always foggy, damp. See when the fog lifted they got the airplanes to come in and the airplanes would knock off the tanks. You think of yourself trying to stop a car coming, see for infantry to work against armored.

AJ- Do have a moment from the Bulge, like a story you want to tell?

F- From an airborne jump?

AJ- Sure.

F- It was another mad confusion I would say, one night we burnt down a town the size, oh a little bit bigger than Melrose just because we drew sniper fire we took ____ grenades and went right up the streets and threw them in the windows. The American soldier was not an angel, he done a lot of destruction but I can see why. I mean you live in a different world.

AJ- With the September 11th attacks; do you remember the September 11th, last year, September 11th?

F- Oh, you mean New York.

AJ- Yeah.

F- Okay.

AJ- Can you compare that to Pearl Harbor?

F- Yes, Pearl Harbor was military against military, this one in New York was civilian against civilian. It was the first time that our nation ever suffered destruction on its soil. I guess during World War II, there was a couple of the Japanese submarines fired a couple shots into Oregon or Washington, one or the other. But as far as killing off people, it was the first time our country ever was invaded by a foreign country.

AJ- We're going to go when you were discharged?

F- When I was discharged?

AJ- Yeah, when was it?

F- *December 23, 1945 and I was discharged out at Fort McCoy and I walked, which was about fifteen miles. From Fort McCoy to my home, I suppose I got a ride somewhere. I don't know, really I don't quite remember it at all. Hindsight I wish I would have stayed in the service.*

AJ- Do you remember when you came back to the states?

F- *You bet I remember.*

AJ- How was that, can you tell us?

F- *I'll tell you what it was I sailed out of the United States on the Queen Elizabeth and when that statue went, went by the Statue of Liberty this old boy had tears in his eyes. And when we come back the ship docked at Pier 19 and we were tippin' it over, they had to holler over the loud speaker to get over on the other side of the boat we was all on one side of the boat. And we were throwing German coins out and these people down below was picking them up. And then when we come by the Statue of Liberty on a boat that hauled railroad cars and we was all waving at the Statue of Liberty and throwing kisses at her I guess.*

AJ- With your military experience how did that influence your thinking of war?

F- *I hope with all my heart there is never another war it is such a destruction. Now stop and think of how many young lives are lost in it, for what? And you asked me about Hitler, these young lives are wasted, ain't they.*

AJ- Have you ever made it back to reunions?

F- *Oh yeah I go every year last year it was in Bronson, I took two of my oldest daughters with me, next year its in Kentucky.*

AJ- We can move onto your jacket, now, if you want to explain the stuff on your jacket?

F- *You mean this here, well that's my airbornes, you know what it is, Have no idea?*

AJ- I have no idea, no, I don't know.

F- *Well that's combat infantry badge, you get ten dollars a month more for that and you have to be in combat and you have to be in the infantry to get it.*

AJ- Well what are the ones in the middle?

F- *Ones good conduct medal, this is Europe, see here's the Europe invasion and two battles, European theater. I'm not too great for medals.*

AJ- I don't know if there is anything else you want to tell me?

F- *Well first off, you wanna see that...*

AJ- Your stuff, yeah.

F- *Here now that is taken right in combat (Picture of Floyd in a paratrooper outfit).*

JS- Is that you?

F- *I think so.*

AJ- Yeah.

F- *You see the baggy pants, see we had the definition of devils in baggy pants, now these pockets on the side see when you drop you got to carry a three day supply with you.*

AJ- Were there different kinds of parachutes?

F- *Yeah you have a cargo chute and a personal chute, they always tell the joke about, you know, when you go into airborne; this is an airborne joke, fellow says well you got the mane that's your hook up on the plane. See on that cable. And it will open up but just in case you don't you can wear a reserve and you pull that and they said they have trucks on the corner waiting to take you back. The guy jumps; his mane didn't open, he pulled the reserve that didn't open, he says I bet they lied about the trucks too.*

AJ- Is this your unit? (Picture of camp in Texas)

F- *That was when I was in tank destroyers in Camp Louis, Texas. You see me on there?*

AJ- Umm, oh.

F- *You should copy this its all on the Bulge. Now there's a book that come from _____. You don't believe that I'm old this is me in field artillery, took basic in field artillery in Ft. _____, Oklahoma.*

AJ- This is a picture right?

F- *I think so. Have you heard of leggings?*

AJ- No, well yeah, but I've never seen them.

F- *Here's two book that would interest you very much. You know what this is?*

AJ- Is it for food, is it like a food thing.

F- *That's your mess kit that's what you eat out of.*

AJ- And you had to carry all this stuff with you.

F- *Yes.*

AJ- Was it heavy.

F- *(laughs)*

AJ- Yeah. Oh my grandpa has one of these (spoon)

F- *Now you think, how are you, there is no place to sit down that's your...and these things here when the hot coffee, they burn your lips. Let me show you a trick here when you go through the line to get food, you put the silverware in your pocket and they pile all the stuff all together. Now see you got to find a seat on the ground, stump, log or something, and you can't put it on your lap so where are you going to put it?*

AJ- I don't know. You got to carry it.

F- *Well the Germans, their silverware was just a fork and a spoon, when they unfolded them one was a handle and the other...*

AJ- Why did you have to wear leggings?

F- *Why? Boots, see you didn't have the big boots like that. Here's the VFW, I've been commander.*

AJ- What is this?

F- *(laughs) Ask that gentlemen there what it is? (laughs) That is a razor, you think this is a lighter, but its not.*

AJ- That's what I thought it was, a lighter.

F- *See it holds the blades, but you have to learn to shave in cold water and when you're going over in the boat you have salt water, in salt water there's no soap, and it can't work.*

Here is the 40 & 8, you know what that means?

AJ- No I don't.

F- *The train will hold forty men or eight horses, that's why they call them 40 & 8.*

There's the USO now there getting' ready to jump, that was a crash right on the field.

This is what it looks like in the air.

AJ- Did you ever get scared of being that high, no?

F- *Now how...Stop and think of it you're gonna jump out of an airplane.*

AJ- Yeah.

F- *Yeah, what?*

AJ- And I get scared and I go back and sit down, I go home.

F- *You can't, you can't, there is fellow that stands in the door, a jumpmaster and there is two handles and his foot follows you out every time. My first jump I always think of it I tried to sit down at the door and the foot caught me right where I sit down and they said I went out like a frog.*

There that's what I wanted to show you that was your chow line. You know when I was a cook you think one of the most important things to a soldier, what?

AJ- Food.

F- *That's right, next comes a letter from home and few other things and getting a bath.*

See your loaded down so heavy you had to be pushed on the plane.

AJ- How heavy were the packs on the back?

F- *Well you had everything, see that's your parachute and that's your reserve in the front and all the other stuff you carried your gun, your ammunition.*

I wanted to show you this one here; look how scroungy the American soldier was, these are Germans, they had overcoats and everything else during the Bulge, they was dressed better than we was.

AJ- Did you ever have any people in your unit that were POW's, captured?

F- *Captured, oh yeah. Prisoners of War would go around and count the bars and then they would look up at the tours and the German people in the tours would think they were writing about them.*

That's a glider, now see were the only unit that ever did a double toe

AJ- What is a double toe?

F- *Two gliders behind one airplane, now you stop and think, they had to keep, there was no motor, they had to keep away from each other.*

See on the drop zone they had to crash and everything else, I'm glad I wasn't a glider rider.

That's that 35-foot tour I was telling you about.

Here's one of my first caps, that's when I was in airborne school.

AJ- How long did you train?

F- *Everyday, you train.*

AJ- How many hours put in a day?

F- *It was more than eight hours a day as I said they done anything to make you quit you was either doing push-ups, kalastetics all day long. Went to a little training, had to be on the run, went to the movie you had to be on the run, anything you had to be on the run.*

AJ- Where did you get this?

F- *Picked it up in Germany. That's the Navy.*

AJ- Oh Germany navy.

F- *Do you know Francis Rave?*

AJ- No.

F- *See I was a scoutmaster for fifteen years and a cub master for fifteen years.*

AJ- Do you have anything else to tell us?

F- *Well as I said my private life now I was born in a log house, my dad when he moved out onto the farm there was 12 acres cleared, him and my mother cleared so that there was about 60 acres of it cleared. And my mother and I used to do the farm work and my dad went out and did _____ work. And then I went into the service and I when I come out; worked as a baker for five years and my health went to heck then I worked for the government out at Ft. McCoy and I've worked at Tomah V. A. I've been a youth counselor, worked out here at the boys camp as a youth counselor for a year.*

AJ- How did your family think of you going into the service?

F- *My mother I don't think wanted me to go in. My father was a discipline, he used to have a razor strap hanging right beside the sink, I'd laugh about my school. Neighbor kid was six months older than I was and he was a nice looking young fellow and the girls, to me life is like a bowl of candy sitting on the table everybody else goes and takes a piece but when Floyd reached up to get a piece he had his hand slapped and one morning we was on the way to school and there was tracks going into this culver. He says I'll poke it out and you hit it when it comes out, well I hit and chased it across the field. When we got to school teacher sent us home, I don't know why but it was a skunk. (laughs) Another episode I was conned in to putting baby mice in the teachers overcoat pocket, it was a man teacher. And he sent me across the road; do you know what red brush is?*

AJ- No.

F- *Red brush it goes up and its red, stems are red and I had to cut 10 switches. Brought em' in and him and I went in the front yard and danced around for a while.*

AJ- You said you made close friends, like a band of brothers. You guys were close.

F- *You got to remember, you want somebody in that foxhole with you, you don't ever want to die alone, I mean, in case you get hurt. We carried morphine right on the front of our helmet and you learn to work with each other if you don't... Well you think of it being in a foxhole out at night*

and you know you're scared as "H." And if you have company it makes a big difference doesn't it?

AJ- Yeah. What did you guys do to entertain yourselves?

F- (laughs) You're gonna laugh at this one, this was when the war was over in Germany and we still wasn't over in Japan. And we lived in German homes they are about 2, 3 stories high and it was like Black River you know on a hill and there was a goat tied way down on the end of a street. They had a contest to shootin' the beard off that goat with their rifles if they hit the goat they were disqualified. No, you find I guess... playing cards and you know... the American soldier they asked one time in north Africa why you don't do things the same way, and I said... or why, how come we win the war? He says, you Americans never do anything twice the same way. And you think of it we're always out looking for new adventure or whatever you want to call it. And when I was cooking and we cooked in a high school towards the end, I remember we had the garbage pit right out in the front yard and you threw a can, an empty can into the garbage pit and kids would get it before it ever hit the ground they were so hungry for food.

AJ- Tell us anything because I really don't have anything else.

F-One time a bunch of us fellows were together and the guy gave a dog some chocolate and these German girls cried because they didn't have chocolate for a long time.

But you said about war until you go through it you don't realize the disaster or... well think, alright if you walked out of here today and he come up missing. You know your thoughts where is he, what is he doing? And you stop and think about in combat your fellow comes up missing, he's killed or something, or wounded something like that. I will have to say to the medics was a great thing in the army and ours I think is one of the best. They say that they ain't suppose to be shoot at, but a lot of them got shot anyway. See they wore a red cross on there helmet and they don't carry a gun.

AJ- Can you give me a story of a mission you were on?

F- Ok now this little story comes to my mind, we was walking up a road and see airborne don't have very much transportation. And I had picked up a high silk hat. You know one of these you fold down and you hit it and it will pop up. I had it on and wearin' it. And the old man now when I say old man that's company commander drove by on a jeep and he says, "Pratt, we only wear government equipment," I took the hat off and walked over and put it on top of a post, I'll always wonder if its still there. Another time we was in a dug out when I say a dug out they're logs with dirt over the top and see we had the British, we fought with the British. We was actually on the British's second army on the jump and here about three, four British and maybe same Americans we could here these tanks going moving I think we were all so darn scared we didn't wanna get out and look and finally we got out and looked and seeing it was American tanks moving up the front.

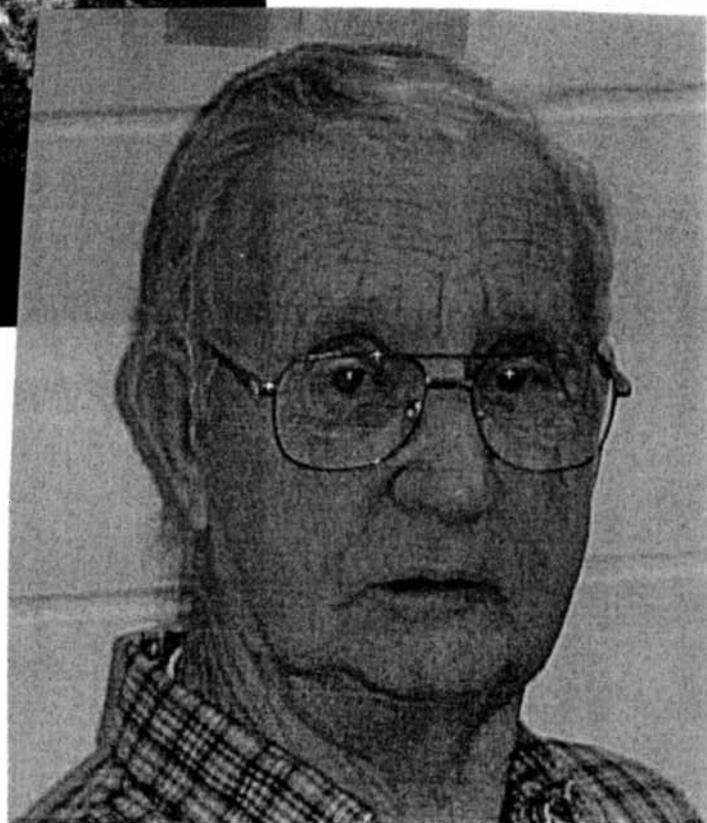
And the... see we road, the unit when they was moving out they got on Churchill tanks, tanks and they had a good combination when they run into trouble the fellows jump off and go ahead and eliminate the trouble and another bad habit they had is that they chewed off the church steeples, now why?

AJ- I don't know

F- See that's where the observation tower is like enemy observation, they can see more of you. So that's the first thing they'd do was shoot of these steeples, there's some elaborate churches in Germany. As I said we destroyed so much, I guess in some ways I'm glad that I wasn't over in the Pacific because we...I've slept in everything from a manure pile to a feather tick bed.

AJ- Did you get much sleep?

F- You sleep whenever you get a chance.



VILAS JOHNSON
BORN IN MELROSE, WISCONSIN IN 1919
ENTERED THE MILITARY IN MAY OF 1942

AJ- Did you enter the war; were you drafted or did you enlist?

V- I a...I went for exams in September of '41 and I was rejected. Six months later they changed the classifications and I went and turned my number in and went in May of '42.

AJ- What service did you draft in?

V- I originally was in the quarter master and after about two months they split the quarter master and took all the army vehicles and stuff and put them in the ordinance department and because of my background, mechanical background, I went into the ordinance department.

AJ- Are you from Black River?

V- No, I was born and raised about 17 miles west of here in the town of Franklin. But I've lived in town off and on several times during my life and worked for the city; electric power plant for almost thirty years.

AJ- When you left home were you scared?

V- No, I wasn't scared.

AJ-How old were you?

V- I was about 22.

AJ-What did your family think?

V- Well originally when I left home they didn't think I was going to go into the service I went to Milwaukee for exams and with the understanding that I would stay in Milwaukee and work. And I passed the physical and went right on to camp right the next night.

AJ- When you left home and you were going to camp what were your thoughts?

V- It didn't bother me any, I figure there as many boys going I might just well go.

AJ- How did your training days run?

V- They run good; I was use to hard work and basic training to me was real easy I thought I was on vacation.

AJ- When did you first go overseas?

V- In, must have been in October of '43.

AJ- Where exactly did you go?

V- Went to Oran, north Africa originally and set up a motor vehicle assembly line in Oran and then we left Oran and went through the Mediterranean into India.

AJ- How was the food over there?

V- Well at times it wasn't bad and at times it was terrible depending on when the rations come in and where we were situated.

AJ- Was there anytime you ran out of supplies?

V- No, not that I know of.

AJ- What was your first mission?

V- Well we setted up a line in Calcutta to assemble vehicles. Then we found most of our vehicles were coming through Australia already assembled, so they changed our company to motor vehicle maintenance so we just repaired vehicles instead of assembly.

AJ- How did they assign missions?

V- Well...

AJ-Did they just say you got to do this.

V- Yeah that's about it the vehicles would come in and we was picked for certain jobs. And at one time the -----, they had big maintenance shops in fact they had 7 of them throughout the Middle East during World War II we had one in Calcutta and they were training native labor to repair parts and stuff. And the training was about two weeks and of course they really didn't learn enough in two weeks to do a good job and we were getting so many vehicles or parts from them that were going bad right away. So we took 50 men or 20 men out of our company and put us in General Motors plant as inspectors. I worked there for six months.

AJ- What was the normal time for assembly, how long did it take to assemble?

V- *Oh it didn't take long we had a line setup and I don't know how many vehicles we could do a day. And in this reconditioning plant they had beautiful equipment in there they had turning crankshafts, and ----- cylinders, and all the necessary stuff when parts came out of there they done there job they were just like new. It was quite a challenge but it was interesting.*

AJ- Were you ever in combat?

V- *No*

AJ- What did you do then?

V- *Just maintenance work Vehicle maintenance work.*

AJ- Was there any entertainment, what did you do for fun?

V- *Well, we were so busy for a long time we didn't have to worry about time for fun. But we had the usual things in the company we set up our own theater and we even had a social room that we fixed up in Calcutta, which was pretty nice.*

AJ- On December 7, 1941; was the bombing of Pearl Harbor what were your thoughts?

V- *I don't really recall myself, I don't know where I was at that time. Let's see that was before I was in the service I was working someplace probably cutting logs someplace.*

AJ- What was your opinion of the Germans?

V- *I never had anything to do with the Germans. My entire length of service was in the mideaest they called it the CBI theater which was China, Burma, and India. And I spent all my time there when I was out of the states.*

AJ- Can you tell me your experience in the CBI?

V- *Well we was primarily a work battalion and we did get a lot of work and we moved a lot of supplies. A lot of supplies went through India and Burma into China. And the last few months I served over there I was on the eighth mile mark on the Ledo road; we had our shops there and we was maintaining trucks going on the Ledo road into China.*

AJ- It says something in this article about the Rhona?

V- *It was a British ship, what they done they had 7 British ships that picked us up in Oran, North Africa and the Suez Canal had been closed and they finally got that open. Our opinion of that was the way it was explained to us they tried to send convoy through the Suez canal which was a much shorter distance than to go all the way down the southern edge and they thought they could go through the Mediterranean undetected. We had no escorts of any kind and it didn't work out that way that one plane come in off the island Korea, circled around behind us and dropped one bomb. And we thought that the bomb was going to hit our ship and we standing on deck watching it and the bomb hit the ship. The ship the Rhona was just a little bit to the right of us and a little bit ahead of us, the bomb missed the front of our boat and hit the that boat broad side. It was tragic to see we couldn't do nothing just watch it but...*

One of the networks had a picture of that, they got a picture of that there; but that's the opposite side of the Rhona. The one that I can remember seeing was on the right side of the ship and they was...it seemed like they didn't have no control over the men or anything on the ship, everything was just a mess. I think there was over a thousand men that went down on ship.

AJ- When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki what were your thoughts?

V- *I don't really recall the particular time I know we was expecting something to happen pretty soon.*

AJ- Did you have any opinions of FDR?

V- *No I ... we felt he was a good commander he was doing a good job.*

AJ- Do you think America took the right steps throughout the course of the war?

V- *Yes I really do. I'm a little disappointed when they sunk that ship over there with so many men going down, that we didn't have some escorts or something, you know, but its just one of them things, I guess.*

AJ- September 11th, the September 11th attacks can you compare that to Pearl Harbor?

V- *Well, I suppose in a sense it was something like Pearl Harbor, but I really don't know. It's hard to believe that they was able to come in and accomplish what they did with the terrorists at the time. What I realize is with the equipment that everybody has nowadays they can expect almost anything.*

AJ- When you came back to the states during the end of the war, what did you think?

V- *Well I was glad to get home. It was a funny thing you see I went..., went out from the east coast and come back into the west coast, I went all the way around the world and came in Seattle. Then they came with the troop train into McCoy to get our discharge.*

AJ- When were you discharged?

V- *The sixth of February in '46.*

AJ- Have you ever been to any of the reunions?

V- *No, I never have.*

AJ- How do you think being over there; overseas away from home in the war has affected your life?

V- *I don't feel it has affected my life really in any respect except I missed almost four years.*



ELMO JOHNSON
BORN IN THE TOWN OF IRVING, WISCONSIN IN 1916
ENTERED THE MILITARY IN JANUARY OF 1945

AJ- When did you enroll in the service?

E- *I was drafted in 1945.*

AJ- What service did you join?

E- *In the infantry.*

AJ- How did your family feel about you going into the war?

E- *Well they didn't feel very good I had a wife and two children. I had to take my basic training in Alabama so my wife came down there she was down there for about a month and I had seventeen weeks down there, then came home on the furlough before I went overseas.*

AJ-How old were you?

E- *27, 28.*

AJ- What was Alabama like?

E- *Oh Alabama it was January I was kind... that was the only good part of it I thought was going south. But it was damp and cold down there we was out if Anderson, Alabama, Mt. Topachaw and it was cold and icy. So we wished we were back in Black River.*

AJ- How did you arrive at camp, did you drive there?

E- *No, we took a bus from Black River over to Ft. Sheridan that's where we were sworn in and we left Black River in the morning and that night we were on guard duty at Ft. Sheridan.*

AJ- How did training days go?

E- *They had eight different platoons I think; we were in the platoon called the Builders; I just happened to be a musician so I got into Builders so a... Then they had Pioneers and different people had different things in life that they fit into. We had 17 weeks of training there and then we had to furlough, came home then we were shipped overseas.*

AJ- What was the difference between a builder and a pioneer?

E- *The other ones?*

AJ- Yeah.

E- *Well the Pioneers they were, they were, they worked around the yards and things like that, guard duty and things around the yards, they're some other ones I forget which ones they were. But they called ours the builders because we were the musicians.*

AJ- When you left the states where did you go?

E- *We went to Ft. Riley Kansas first, we were there for about a week. Then we went to Ft. Ord, California. From there we went to Vancouver Barracks in Washington then we shipped overseas.*

AJ- On the USS Baxter?

E- *On the USS Baxter.*

AJ- How was that ride?

E- *Oh man nice. Funny part about it was we got out about three days from Vancouver Barracks in Washington and in the Pacific Ocean headed for Hawaii and I saw a fellow going up the ladder that was in the crew of the ship and he looked just like my cousin from Minneapolis and I couldn't believe that be him because I hadn't seen him for probably ten years. And I hollered, "Brute" his name is Pete, but I hollered Brute his name was Brute (Pete). And he didn't turn around, you know he was going up the ladder so I finally hollered "Pete" and he turned around and sure enough it was my cousin. So while we was on our way over he and some of his buddies and the crew there; they bring us up ice cream every night and everything on the way and we had quite a trip over to Saipan. First we stopped on Hawaiian Islands at Hickam Field, in the Hawaiian Islands.*

AJ- How was Saipan when you got there?

E- *Well Saipan the war of course was over, the war was over like in Saipan from November I think, and we didn't get there till the next August. And then on the leave of Saipan; I was there about six weeks then I went to Iwo Jima.*

AJ- What did you do in Saipan?

E- *I was in the band there; the 285th AGF band.*

AJ- So you just travelled around then?

E- *Yeah, well we played taps at special services we played everyday everyone of us played the biblical morning and night. And we played every Saturday we played a dress parade on Saipan. And I was there then the band director got shipped home and then...and I got the job as tech sergeant being band director they wanted me to take the ward officer but I didn't want to get tied into the army so I just said no I wouldn't. I was there then six weeks I think as band director. Then they shipped me to Iwo because that band director went home.*

Funny thing when I got on Saipan I was in the chow line; with about, must've been thousand replacements over there, we were lined up for miles and here come a jeep and just about ran into me and it was Gene Nortman from out here that owns the Sunset Tavern in Black River and his brother Orville was with him and he had already gone to the gate room to check me out with three or four of my buddies so we went to his marine base he was head sergeant, first sergeant. And we had breakfast with him for three, four days so instead of standing in line it was pretty nice.

AJ- So when did you go to Iwo Jima?

E- *I went there in November of '45 and I was there until April of '46. Then we went back to Saipan on the way home and I was there for about a month I think. And first thing I got on Iwo Jima when we landed on that little air strip up there why oh... the telephone operator come over and said "Elmo Johnson wanted at the telephone," I thought well my goodness my wife calling me over here or somethin' you know, and it was Arnie Galston from Black River and he was attached the hospital over there, he was a sergeant over there. And so I was in the band you know, all the time and I directed the band the 77th AGF band there on Saipan or on Iwo till I went back to Saipan on the way home.*

AJ-What were your duties as band director, what did you do?

E- *Well we didn't do much the war was actually over but we had every, every Saturday morning we'd have a dress parade.*

AJ- What is a dress parade?

E- *Where the different companies would come and parade a little.*

AJ- Bob Hope, did you get to meet Bob Hope?

E- *Yes, he was on Iwo with is show in fact he was...he was... I think he was probably the nicest man I've ever met in that business, I mean he was just like you seen him when you see him on the GI's and he come up there, he said "Well"he said, "All you got to do is give about a half an hour program," and he said, "Jerry Conan will takeover," and Francis Langford they were with him and that's the way it was.*

And I met quite a few of Jackson county people in these places where I'd be directing the band and they'd come up and say what are you doing over here, you know, they've been there for a while. Like there is a brunette from Millston and there few from Melrose and it was really kind of interesting if I hadn't had a family I pry would've stayed there.

AJ- Do you have any memorable moments from your band experiences?

E- *Well when we were on Saipan of course, Don Hoven from Blair lived in Blair, he came up and wanted to play so he sat in with us in there and he knew somebody there. And also there was the navy was... had there boats landed around Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Waterloo there and we met a lot of... I met a lot of sailors or fellows going in the navy from Sparta; Sullivan's, and some of them. In fact one of the Sullivan's he was building a boat down between Kenya and Saipan. And he build the boat and he worked on that thing for six months everybody said he was going to try it, and get his own way home you know, and he worked on that boat for about six months then when he went to launch it why a... it sunk on him. His name... he still lives in Sparta I see him once in a while his name is Don Sullivan.*

AJ- Do you remember the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

E- *Do I remember it?*

AJ-Yeah

E- *Oh yeah, sure?*

AJ-Do you know where you were?

E- *I was in Black River then I was...I was still working... I was in the military and working in Post Office before I left. So I remember that then when we got over there we stayed at Hickam Field on the Hawaiian Islands on the way over for a week or two.*

AJ- How was it there?

E- *Well it was you know, of course there were the... Pearl Harbor where the ship and that had been bombed and everything there was still remains of that there and it this was just a year later I guess probably. My memory isn't exactly... But we were there for two; three weeks, four and we got headed for Saipan and then we got on the dateline and they always said if they cross that dateline twice you get paid double pay the sailors on that USS Baxter.*

AJ- What was your opinion of Adolf Hitler?

E- *Well I always said if he was...if he would've known how powerful he was then; of course I was never in European theater but ah...man he had things just about the way he wanted it but he didn't have enough to take England that's where he lost out you know, of course we lost a lot of good things...a lot of good men in England. Good band leader Glen Miller was over there he took off from some air field in England and he lost his life. Glenn Miller, do you remember Glen Miller and the band or...maybe you probably don't remember him. He played "In the mood," and all those good numbers. But Hitler, he had everything his own way, but he didn't know how powerful he was that's what my estimation of him is.*

AJ- What about FDR?

E- *Well he was the president he was crippled and everything but he did the job he was in there for a long time and when I...on Saipan there was... the marines took Saipan and Iwo Jima but on Saipan there were two cities there was Sharonganola and Garopan and they were just bombed just about wiped out and then they had all the people there the from women and their children they had them in these camps that the United States put up. So when I left Saipan went to Iwo why there were they were all just being fed and all were in different camps because there homes had been destroyed by the United States army, the marines and the marines of course had lost so many people on Saipan or on Iwo Jima we got some from Black River there: Harry Carson, and Dobson boy, and Hanson boy I took pictures of their graves when I was over there had a little cross on them and signature.*

AJ- How was the weather in Saipan?

E- *Oh, beautiful, beautiful weather.*

AJ- And in Iwo Jima?

E- *Well Iwo wasn't as nice as Saipan, there was only about, I think 100 miles difference there, and we'd go out and we'd fly out to these different islands Guam, Guam was one of the Mariana Islands and we'd go to these different islands. Like I said before there was quite a few Tom Sampson, Arnie Galston, some other ones from Black River, I don't remember; I guess now I can't remember them. That was quite awhile ago.*

AJ- Did you like Saipan better than Iwo Jima then, yeah?

E- *No I wouldn't think because there wasn't, Saipan these towns were all sugar mills was there industry over there. There was all just ruins left... when they took Saipan they really did a good job of that and of course they took all these kids and women there and put them in these camps and when I left there they were still being fed everyday by the United States. A lot of the men they worked right along with the army then trying to get things going again. The industry was the sugar business and...but both those big cities had just been really attacked.*

AJ- When you were in the band did you have three shows a day or how did that work?

E- *No, no once in a while we'd have a USO show would come in then we'd always play an hour or half an hour before their show and a lot of them we'd play there music for with them. But like Bob Hope had his own, like Terry Coleman and Francis Langford and some of them.*

AJ- Peggy Lee?

E- *Peggy Lee was there, I got some pictures of her there, and Kay Keyser's band was there, and there is quite a few many and some other very good talent from the United States. Dancers and men...what do I want to say...they were entertainers, but they weren't well known but they were real good. So there was something everynight going on, on the island but we were glad to go home.*

AJ- When did you leave, Iwo Jima was the last place you were at?

E- *No, Saipan.*

AJ- Oh, Saipan was the last.

E- *Funny thing was when we left Black River when we got drafted Ray Northrope, Toby Northrope was the fire chief in Camp McCoy but his home had been Hixton so I knew him real well and we got drafted from Black River on the same day, we went to Fort McClellan Alabama came home on furlough and went back to Chicago and got our troop train there and went to Fort Riley and then to Fort Ord then to Vancouver Barracks and we were together all the time and he wasn't in the band or anything but he just happened to... wherever I was he seemed to be and when I left Saipan to go to Iwo Jima I told him I says probably wouldn't see you again, I'm going up to Iwo Jima, and his head hung low, and so when I got shipped, ready to go home from Iwo I went back to Saipan on the way see, and Truman Skuldic from Hixton was the mess sergeant there and when I went down there to visit, I knew where he was so I went down and I talked to him and he says, "Hey Toby Northrope's in here," I said, "He is," and so he said, "C'mon I'll take you over there," so Toby was down at the end of the mess hall, eating and he was talking to some guys and Truman went and sat down next to him and I sat on the other side of Truman and pretty soon Toby saw me and he got up and he come and he hugged me and he said, "Where you goin'?", I said, "Home," I thought he'd break right down and cry. "Home," he said. I said, "Well I probably have to wait for you," in which I did too, I mean, we were there for about six weeks before we got out of there, of course he stayed there all the time when I was on Iwo and he was there when I come back.*

AJ- So did all of you leave at the same time?

E- *No but I mean.... It just happened this way, I mean it just happened that he, like when we left Anderson, Alabama we came home on furlough together and went back and went to Fort Riley but... and we got discharged together down at Fort Sheridan that's where we were sworn in and we got discharged there. So we came home together.*

AJ- How was the ride home?

E- *Oh, the ride home of course it was really good. We took the troop train all the way from Fort Ord, California on the way home and went through Colorado; went through some mountains and Nebraska and come up into Iowa, but boy when we got to Wisconsin that's when everyone wanted... they were all happy.*

AJ- Big party?

E- *We had parties when we got home I'll tell you that.*

AJ- When were you discharged?

E- *1946, August 13th.*

AJ- What did you do after?

E- *I, see I was a rural mail carrier when I went in so I got, my sub carried it while I was gone, who was Oscar Halverson from down in Irving. So I went back to work I carried mail for 47 years before I quit and lived in Black River all my life except for when I was in the Army, so...we kind of like it here.*

AJ- What bands were you in?

E- *The 285th in Saipan and the 77th and this Major Loudon who I told you got killed in an airplane over there he was... he had played with Lawrence Welg and Elmer Getz played with is he had Lawrence Welg before Marvin Florn did, he played accordion with them so...and they were from South Dakota.*

AJ- What is AGF?

E- *Army Ground Forces, then the AGF Army bands and then they had Navy bands and Air Force.*

AJ- So were the Navy bands on land with you or were they on water.

E- *No , no, we were the only bands on the islands where we were, there was 27 pieces, 27 men on each band there was one tech sergeant and one staff sergeant, 7 T5's and 6 T4's the rest of them were PFC's, 27 all together.*

AJ- What are T4's and T5's?

E- *Four or five of each that's the T4's or T5's is like a buck sergeant or a buck private PFC's well they are PFCs. We didn't draw any duty that's what was nice about being in the band all the rest of them were just KP for a week or so you know you'd have be on KP everyday.*

AJ- What is KP?

E- *Kitchen duty; you know.*

AJ- Cooks?

E- *Cooks, scrub the pans and wash the dishes.*

AJ-Do you have band reunions?

E- *Do we have any? We have never, nope. Well the thing was the original bands over there see they went home on rotation see we were just replacements really, so every once in a while one of them would get discharged from over there, for some reason they'd get there orders for where they was going. We had quite a few different replacements but we had a lot of kids from...well like New York and Brooklyn that were 18 and 19 and I tell ya those kids just sobbed themselves to sleep, it was terrible.*

AJ- How do you think the band influenced the soldier like the morale?

E- *Oh, the soldiers all of them when they'd here a band they'd always come if they could get up to us you know they'd always request numbers like Harry and the Churberban and In the Mood things like that they was always requesting numbers... yeah they all liked music.*

AJ- Did you get big crowds then?

E- *Oh yeah sure. Every especially if there was a social...in fact Bob Hope was the best show that ever was, Bobby and then there were Les Cohen and the Debutantes, wonderful one... Peggy Lee and some of them they were...they would be in a troop of three or four women probably one dancer, one singer, and an emcee. You never knew what the entertainment was gonna be, each time one would leave and somebody else would come in.*

AJ- How did your wife like you coming home? Did she like that a lot and your kids?

E- *Oh sure, my daughters were... well Brenda was probably eight months old when I went and Barbara was three and a half... so they were about three and five when I came home, three and six.*

(Show and tell of Pics)

E- *I had a band here and I called it Elmo Johnson's Swingmasters, so I got over there and I called it Saipan's Swingmasters. This fellow right here his name is Don Hoven he was in the infantry over there but he played saxophone for me before he left over there and I never knew he was there he came up there one night and here he come with his tenor sax so, he played with us all the time over there he wasn't even in the band but he played with us*

AJ-//////////

E- *On Iwo Jima we each had two men and a tent, we had these square tents up there. Here is a picture of my tent mate on Christmas we had our own Christmas over there.*

AJ- What are these bottles right here, on the bottom?

E- *That's beer isn't it. (laughs)*

AJ- Oh is it(laugh)

E- *His name is Raymond Ferrelli he lives in Hogden, Utah*

AJ-//////////

E- *This trumpet I got for special services over there and I put it in our tent and he was looking at that there.*

AJ-//////////

E- *I've been in the band less than a year and I got, see they wanted me to be a ward officer and direct band but I wouldn't take that because if I would, I probably wouldn't have been able to get discharged early, so I got the tech sergeant rating over there and then I had one staff sergeant under me.*

AJ-//////////

E- *So..then here is Jerome Bjerke's son from Black River he was in the Marine band in the Army. But...he played echo for me all the time when I play at the cemetery*

AJ-//////////

E- *and here is the picture of my family at the Black River Cemetery and here is the picture of the firing squad at the Black River Cemetery with the background is the Black River High School band there.*

AJ-//////////

E- *I was playing a biblical at Fort McClellan, Fort McClellan, Alabama I was playing for a celebration or something down there.*

AJ- **Who is this?**

E- *I don't know who that was, just another GI*

AJ-//////////

E- *There's another one of Black River cemetery that's Axel Dressler in the background there.*

AJ- **How long have you been playing the trumpet?**

E- *Since 1927. See that's Peggy Lee, she died a couple, three weeks ago.*

AJ- **Yeah I was asking my mom about her and that's what she said.**

E- *She was over there with one of the troops over there. Here is the Marine cemetery on Iwo Jima that's all the crosses*

AJ- **all the crosses**

E- *theres pictures of the dead they were at the foot of Mt. Suribachi*

AJ- **where is Mt. Suribachi**

E-*Mt. Suribachi is on Iwo Jima that's where the Japanese had dug in and they had hospital deal right there and everything they were really dug in there, boy I'll tell ya. That was... we lost a lot of men there.*

AJ-//////////

E- *Here's.... this is right on top of Mt. Suribachi background is where the Marines put the flag up that's on the end there. See you can see the flag here now. The position right there is...that's where they put the flag, you see the picture the marines putting the flag on Iwo that's right where it is right there.*

AJ-//////////

E- *And here we had the birthday party for the general over there his name was General Ervine and he gave us a little speech afterwards.*

AJ-//////////

E- *There was this umm... that was the same party for General Ervine*

AJ-//////////

E- *This is Major Louden he was the head of special services on Saipan*

AJ-//////////

E- *There is one on...this was taken way on top of Suribachi but...this area...*

AJ-//////////

E- *These were other trumpet players that played in the band, the young one, black headed, Louie Black he was from Brooklyn and the other one was from Chicago, Illinois.*

PSR- **I'm just gonna snap a picture or two if you don't mind.**

E- *Not a bit. (laughs) That's another one on Suribachi and I guess you probably looked at that already. And here was Ben Bach and Elmo Johnson, for a while when I came back here I was commander of the American Legion in 48', 1948 but the Legion... World War two fellows were*

still... World War one I should say they were here some of them but they didn't have enough for a firing squad. So Elmo Johnson and Ben Bach they would go and pull the flag or Bob Amo and Bob Teeples was very active in that so there would be two fellows pulling the flag and I'd play taps. But we got a real active Legion now very good outfit and they got a good firing squad. There's the picture, that's taken right back here, here's where the Marines put the flag up on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, Mount Suribachi.

PSR- I gotta ask you one question just out of my own curiosity; did you play with Peggy Lee?

E- Yeah, well she played...

PSR- She sang, I mean you were a band behind her

E- Yeah, sure, I got some other girls...

PSR- See I was from North Dakota originally and she was from North Dakota, I heard her name originally was Norma Engstrom then she became Peggy Lee, and when I heard that I thought, well there she is. She just died.

E- Yeah I know she did.

PSR- Wow, interesting. How about Bob Hope?

E- Bob Hope was the best of all of them.

PSR- Did you meet him?

E- Yeah he was on Iwo, he came right down to the band tent he said well he says, you know how he talks, he look at you, just full of it, you know...well he said you'll guys have it easy he said play about half an hour, forty five minutes when Jerry or Francis get there they'll take over and play a couple and then that's about all there's to it from then on he's up there himself and I'm telling ya, he was something. And the worst of them we had was Kay Kyser.

PSR- Oh really.

E- He was a smart, you know what I mean....

PSR- Not a likeable guy.

E- Well he said to us, he said you think you guys can play this stuff, I says I know every musician I got here can play anything you put in front of us and he didn't say anymore to me, but he was

PSR- He was kind of cocky

E- Remember he had that ishcabibble, high trumpet and we'd talk to him he says oh god its hard to work for him.

PSR- Well thanks. Andi whenever you're done you can just shut off the camera.

E- You bet. Do you have that one, here's another one of...this was Armistice Day, I think it was Armistice Day, I'm not sure, that one was on Iwo Jima. That was on some program over there I'm not sure.

AJ-////////

E- Here's the picture of the company, we're still continuing the taps of course that's when I played a thousand, number thousand. I'm up to one thousand two hundred and something now, two hundred sixty or something.

AJ- For what?

E- Taps at funerals and different things like for school activities and Armistice Day, I go up to the Highgrounds out in Neillsville and play.

AJ- What number are you at now, past a thousand, December 1999.

E- Lawrence Jones who was in World War I he started, Dick Nelson was the solo trumpet in the high school band, is a picture of the high school band in there? I wonder, yeah that's it, that's the original high school band of Black River, maybe you wanna show that on the bottom there. There was 39 pieces, we had a band director by the name of Ritzenthauer and Dick Nelson blew taps on Memorial Day and Armistice Day and he graduated in 1931 and I've been blowing them ever since that's quite a while 1931 to now. But I really have been appreciated and I know that people have wrote me some letters and it makes you feel as though you've done something real worthwhile.

AJ-////////

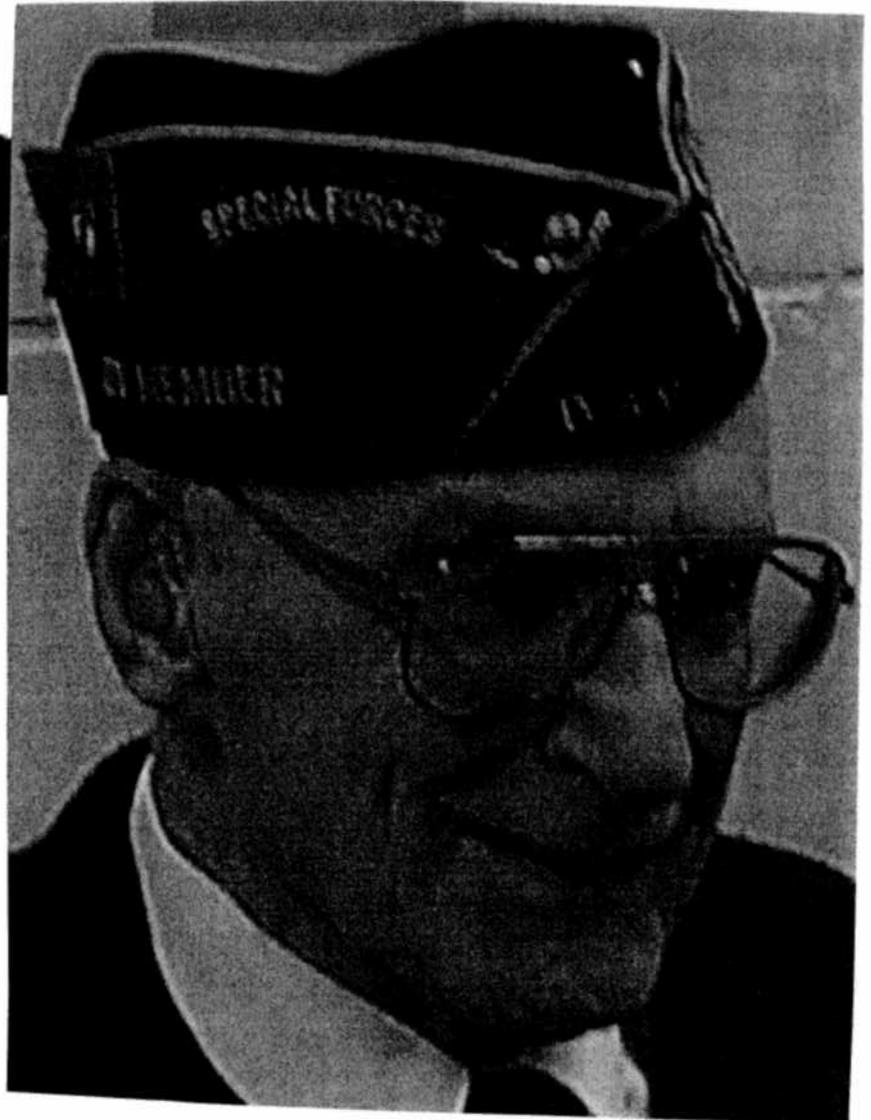
E- *Black River has got a very good VFW Post now and a very good Legion Post, both are very active. Melrose has got a dandy legion and all these towns, even Northfield they got there own Legion; Hixton, Alma Center, Taylor*

AJ- **Do you practice on the taps?**

E- *Do I practice? No, there is nothing really to taps.*

AJ- **Did you know any of the soldiers, any of the five or four soldiers that were killed in Iwo Jima?**

E- *Sure, I knew Harry Carson and I knew Luther Dobson's son I forget his name... and there was one other from over there... Harry Carson graduated from high school with my brother and he was killed over there with the marines.*



ROBERT WOODROW TEEPLES
BORN IN HATFIELD, WISCONSIN IN 1918
ENTERED THE MILITARY IN OCTOBER OF 1940

AJ- How did you get into the army?

B- *In the 1940's a friend of mine by the name of Royce Orden and I went up to Marshfield to join the National Guard and the next day we were inducted into the federal service so in 19... that was October 15, 1940 when we were inducted in the service.*

AJ- What service did you join?

B- *That was the National Guard, you see on the next day it was federalized the Guard was federalized that's because the war was getting....close to us so they figured we'd probably have to go in for kind of a... it wouldn't be a hobby, I know.*

AJ- Where were you stationed at camp, training?

B- *Training? Oh I took that at Camp Livingston and Camp Oregon, Louisiana then in the fall and spring we went to Camp Livingston in Louisiana and that's where we took our basic training.*

AJ-How was the training?

B- *It was good we did a lot of bayonette practice sometimes you'd do that for a week, bayonette practice. Then we went to train in hand grenades and pistols different things like that.*

AJ- When did you first go over seas?

B- *Went overseas in April of '42. We went to Adley, Australia, it took us 15 days or... 30 days to get over there, we went on a large liberty ship, there is probably 35- 40,000 troops on there. And at that time they were having the Coral Sea battle so we had to have blackouts every night. By then we landed there and after we landed there we went through more training, jungle training.*

AJ- Now what happens during the blackouts?

B- *Black-outs, why, the ship they just signal a little bit flash signal they don't have lights on the ship at all. The ships there was a large convoy the whole division went over at that time*

AJ-What did you do in Australia?

B- *Well we trained and of course we made the routes and went to different places and visited the people were really nice there they took us into there houses and gave us food and drink.*

AJ- How was the food?

B- *It was good, it was good food.*

AJ- What did you normally eat?

B- *Well, let's see they were great for... different, they had a different name for pancake but I can't remember what it was, but anyway we had quite a few of them.*

AJ- Where did you for from Australia?

B- *From Australia we flew on an airplane to Fort Morby, New Guinea and after Fort Morby, New Guinea we flew over the Owen-Stanley range to Buna or close to Buna. Buna was where the Japanese were, Buna. So we come within 60 miles of Buna and then we started moving up to Buna. The first time I come under enemy fire why... that was... you see when we first went up in there the Japanese had their supremacy so they... we were supplied by Australian crawler boats that went up along the shore line during the night time evening time and then we went on the shore line they'd stay in like the cold or something where the natives had places for them to be. So this particular night it was our job to on load those boats and we had... they couldn't come all the way into the shore so we took our two men boat, smaller boat, two men boat to go out to this crawler that was out there carrying ammunition, food, and that stuff, so when this particular night I and another friend of mine was called to go back and forth. It was night and we had to have a light on shore just a flash and then we would go out and when we'd come back why... they'd flash it on shore, so on this night we a... we was out there and I had just a... reached up for a box of ammunition and when I did I had seen some little speckles in the water, speckles, it was probably... see the phosphorus would come up at night or when any boats would go through, phosphorus would come up and there were speckles so I wondering I just about asked my friend that was with me what the heck that was about that time my KO they were... we found out that there were two PT boats, Japanese PT boats they opened up with tracers, the tracers were*

whistling all around us so I threw the whole case down and dived into the water and I swam under water a for a ways and I start to come up about the time I come up I'd seen the blue streaks going down into the water and that's where the Japanese were firing those tracers, why, when they'd go in the water they were blue, blue. I was going to come up and I'd see those blue streaks so I just stayed under as fast as I could as long as I could, and I come up under the water and take a deep breath and go down again, it was the same thing I just headed for shore the whole time, as I came up this one time why the whole wake of the PT boats through us back over, I was doing a lot of praying then. I dived down in the water and finally got almost to shore and the PT boats kept flying and when I got to shore I run up to...and it was all lit up because the boat was on fire, they had ammunition on and a...it started to explode and of course I, we had ropes up there so we could find our way back to our sliton, but we didnt need them because it was so lit up. You know and I went back to my slipped trench I figured the Japanese were going to make a landing so I stuck my bayonette on and I started firing at PT boats as they went by it was about that time the Japanese sent some planes over and they started dropping bombs in there and then, so we.. the PT boats went out in the water and disappeared so we hid in the slit trenches to keep away from them there were quite a few of them killed.

AJ- Were there many casualties in your unit?

B- Oh yeah we had a lot of turnover casualties you know... I was over there 32 months then I come on a furlough home and I figured that I'd be able to stay back in the states I had a choice either taking the furlough or going home than having to come back again but a... I figured well heck two more months if I stayed for two more months then I could go home permanently but I figured two more months I might be killed or wounded, so I decided I'd go home on furloughs, so I went home on furloughs and I thought maybe my girlfriend would marry me and I was sure that Uncle Sam would never send me back after all the malaria attacks I had, but I was wrong on both counts because she didn't marry me and Uncle Sam sent me back

AJ- How many times did you get malaria?

B-Oh I had five attacks of malaria and one attack of ganghi fever, and I when you had those attacks of malaria why... your temperature was so high, over 110 I believe it was way up there and then you have...when you get through with the fever it would be as if you were freezing to death, chills. So ganghi fever that was worse, you get bit by a ganghi fly then you get that fever its just one day but everything was black you couldn't see.

AJ- So you got blinded?

B- Yeah you just were blinded you couldn't see nothing you could hear what was going on but you couldn't see anything. But when I got back from furlough a couple of my friends lying there dead along the trail they had been shot by sniper, one friend that I had by the name of Whitey Evans he and I always did scout positions for our company when they went on patrols but I found out that when I got back that he'd been shot by a sniper on the island of Haiti and I would have probably would've been with him at that time, so I was fortunate

AJ- Was there any near death experiences that you had?

B- Well, I guess my last patrol I was on that was on the island of Luzon that was after I got back from my furlough it was on the Ver-Delivery trail they called it you seen that book 32nd division and... so we'd come up to this place the night before and we were coming up to the plateau like why... a Jap came out behind the trees and threw a grenade, so we all hit the dirt, you know and that darn Jap got over the edge and we didn't get a shot at him, but we got back and it was kind of like a valley and a plateau up above, and this plateau of the valley, this particular night we were on one side and the Jap was on the other side of this little ridge right, and we kept throwing hand grenades at each other all the time and one of them one of our machine gunners was sitting over there and then of course there was always mortar flashing going on and the guy almost dozing you know all of a sudden trigger come in front of him and bam he really opened up on that machine gun, man we lost a lot of men that night then the next morning word come down from the battalion that I was suppose to take a patrol up over that ridge so we all got our gear together

and had a moment of prayer and started up over the ridge and my two scouts were out in front of me and I was... behind me was a brownie automatic rifleman and behind him was his assistant, so as we come up onto this ridge or level plateau like there was a mound of earth there and it was smokin', I figured well heck that must've been a Jap buried one of their own troops here that had probably been killed by artillery last night, and I told the boys to be on the look out I says they're around here someplace so we kept coming up onto that plateau as the DR man's assistant come up bing, hit him right here he went back over the edge, no sooner than that bang and my BR man got hit right in the shoulder he started to cry and got down on his hands and knees and flop, dead, and by that time the machine guns were opening up on us from both sides and more rounds was coming in and I said we got to get off this so I motioned for the scouts to come back and they started back and they got back by me alright one guy a bullet ricocheted off of his helmet and he was alright bounced right off of his head, but he made it back alright, but it sounded just like a wires rattling together the machine gun bullet over the top of our heads you know so the brush was dropping all around us so a...I was, I started drag the BR man back with his harness he had a harness where carried all his shells they kept catching in the brush you know... finally I almost got back and bam I got knocked out by the mortar round that bursted up ahead, then that was the end of that.

AJ- What happened after you got knocked out?

B- I woke up in a tent, the light bulb was back and forth and I couldn't hear anything and there were ringing in my ears you know...so I went in there the medical station let me out went back to my outfit again.

AJ- Did you know any POW's that were in your unit?

B- There weren't many POW's in our unit either side there weren't many POW's one time we was offered a break off land if we brought in a couple of guys. So some guys brought in some POW's but I don't know if they got back to land.

AJ- So you went to Australia, was it Japan, no you didn't go to Japan, you went to Asia right?

B- Asia, no, after that Luzon campaign then I got a commition, a direct commition at the...I was suppose to stay over there but I hurt my neck and I found out it had been broken on a patrol, before and a...so they...they sent me home on a hospital ship and I was in the hospital for a while in Clinton Iowa when I was there why..i come home off and on. I talked my girlfriend into marrying me, so we were married in Clinton Iowa.

AJ- Did you have many furloughs, how many furloughs did you have?

B- Furloughs, how many furloughs, oh, golly I don't know I had quite a few furloughs, but I don't remember how many mostly there were more furloughs in the states than anyplace, when we were in the states training. After we went overseas we didn't get no furloughs it was all business then.

AJ- Did you keep anything that was a good luck thing?

B- I carried the bible, it was that one over there. I always carried by my heart that was my good luck charm.

AJ-You got a CIB, what is a CIB?

B- That's a combat infantry badge, combat infantry, this is a miniature one, that is miniature combat infantry that's for just what it says being in combat, infantrymen only infantry can get those.

AJ- How did you get yours?

B- By being in combat I mean I was an infantryman, infantrymen, see... the 32nd division, was the red arrow infantry division, so I was with the 128th infantry, I got the red arrow in that case, and the Reg. medal crest of the 128th infantry is in there too, that tells about... maybe you can make copies of that.

AJ- Now when did you finally get back to the states.

B- I got back to the states in August 1945, I was overthere 37 months all together.

AJ- Where all did you go when you were over seas?

B- *I went to Adley, Australia and Sydney, Brisbane, Northern part of Australia, I forget that place up there, Port Morby, Buna, close to New Guinea, Itopi, oh...Itopi and Saydor, those were all on the island of New Guinea for three months I was with a special forces unit it was called Alma, it was sixth army alma scouts, when I was with them we went behind Japanese lines and recorded and got information on what they were doing, and what kind of equipment, what kind of shape they were in, good health and all that stuff, each time one of the alma scouts teams would come help the other one embark and disembark from...we did a lot of rubber boat training, and that's what we used.*

AJ-Rubber boats?

B- *Rubber boats, yeah, and of course we would have to go in, the first mission I was on was the admiral of the island, then I was just one of the teams that was helping the other we flew up there on a PBY, admiral of the island. A PBY is a four engine plane, that fly and land on the water and let that other team off there that was Japanese hell there the admiral of the islands, so we flew up there and landed on the water then, so then we went back to the base, flew back to base and the next morning we went back again it was storming terrible storm there was lightning all around us, I was sitting in the one of the blisters on the side of the PBY then all of a sudden why something flash by and one of the crew members was in the other blisters said did you see that I said yeah I see something but I didn't know what it was, he said well it was probably a Jap plane he said then about that time one of the radar men came back and he said that he picked that plane up five miles and he said it had come right straight for us, and anyway we picked that team up and we landed and we went on the PT boats that was navy's PT boats, patrol boats as they call it we put a rubber boat on that, our team was about six men. One in charge and five other men and ah... so as we go in there we floated why the waves took two of the rubber boats up over the landing. I hit a rock with my finger, smashed it, that hurt the whole mission that we were on then we stayed there and we landed at night we stayed there all night it looked like a big channel, it looked like we landed under a naval base. A Japanese naval base it turned out that it was a tree that had been busted, been broke off so in the morning why then we started back over the trail and we went we went over that trail, you could see where the Japanese had really used it a lot, and we went back a little further and we seen a Jap cutting a tree there but we didn't monkey with him we just circled around then we went up around, we were suppose to stay in the trails up in this area here why there was, they called it coon eye patch. Coon eye was this really sharp, you know, if you just touch it it'd cut your skin, it was as high as the ceiling. So we went on the trail we had to go on the trail, just as we come up over this one little hill up there was little camp site there the Japanese met us on the hill, so our lead scout he knocked off three of them right away and the rest went back over the hill so we figured we'd have to get out of there right away and when we was going up a valley by a river our own plane bombed us straight so when we finally got back to our rendezvous point and after five days. PT boats picked us up, we didn't smell too good either, cause we was wet the whole time, you know, we had worn our clothing the whole time.*

AJ- Do you remember the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

B- *Yeah I was in a theater in New Orleans at that time and the whole lights went on and a guy come out on the platform and shouted all service men return to your units immediately the Japanese have struck Pearl Harbor so heck there was no way to get back we had to wait for our train to come anyways, so..., but..., we got out of the theater anyways that was December 7, 1941, after that they figured the 32nd division was going to be sent to the European Theater so we went up to Fort Evans, Massachusetts and we were slated to go to Scotland for training before jumping into the European Theater. Then the Japanese were getting so close to Australia that they decided to send the 32nd over there so we went all the way across the United States through all kinds of country, night and day on the train and we landed at Fort Ord, California then that's where we took off from Fort Ord, California, 22nd of April 1942.*

AJ- How was the ride for you to go to Australia, what were your thoughts

B- *Well my thoughts were that it looked like it was the real thing but I was glad to be apart of it because later at home you hear how things are coming, why it's not something you hear now, we hear the news in Afghanistan and nothing we can do about it here. There I knew I was going to be apart of something but there I knew I was going to be a part of something so I was pleased that way.*

Maybe you want to look at some of those things....those are dog tags for identification, see they have your serial number, blood type, next of kin, if you got killed in combat they'd keep one by the body and send one to registration. Compass was one of the important things. More soldiers were killed by that than anything else. Wind proof lighter.

AJ- Can you tell me when you came home?

B- *Yeah of course I've been home on furlough, that was Christmas in 1944, when I was home I made the rounds.*

AJ- What was your opinion of Adolf Hitler?

B- *Oh Adolf Hitler, If I had a chance I probably would've shot him, how about you?*

AJ-Probably the same as you. When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki what did you think of that?

B- *I thought that was the best thing that could have happened at that time but it saved thousands of American soldiers, hundreds of thousands American soldiers, so that saved a lot of guys.*

AJ- Do you think FDR was a good leader?

B- *Oh yeah FDR was a good leader, as far as I know anyways.*

AJ- Do you think America took the right steps at the war?

B- *I'm sure they made a lot of mistakes but we won they must of did a lot of good things*

AJ- Do you remember the September 11th attacks of last year?

B- *That was a national tragedy too, we didn't know who the enemy was, we know who they are know it was the terrorists, back then it was the Japanese.*

AJ- When were you discharged?

B- *When was I discharged? I was discharged on October 21, 1945. so I was in five years and five days.*

AJ- Were you discharged in fort McCoy?

B-*No I got my discharge when I was in the hospital in Clinton, Iowa.*

AJ- With your military experience what is your thought on war?

B- *When you take the life of another human being that's really a traumatic experience the first one I shot was a boy I think you'd say, when I was with Whitey Evans, whitey got on top and he had his arms up in the air and he had something in his hand it looked like a grenade, and I shot him, I came closer and saw it was a can of rations.*

AJ- What did you do after you were discharged?

B- *I went to work for the telephone company I worked with them for 32 years and I also was in the National Guards, I've been in the service for 40 years.*

AJ- Have you ever been to any reunions?

B- *Couple of them in Beloit, but as the years went by there wasn't any body that I knew so I quit going to them.*

AJ- Is there anything else you would like to share?

B- *No, about the only think I can say is I'm proud to be an American, I'm proud to have fought for America and god bless America.*

AJ- Well, Thank-you.

B- *Thank-you.*

AJ- Where was this?

B- *That was somewhere in New Guinea its got a...you see in the background there it was a native village but you can see in the background there they had bamboo poles.*

When I was in the service when I first went in there were some natives, they called them Winnebagos and there was Wilbur Blackdeer, Clifford Blackdeer, Irvin Blackdeer, and some

White, and Soup Thundercloud, Emanuel was his name but they called him Soup and Benny Winneshiek and a Soup and Clifford Blackdeer they were with this division all the way through the campaign but the other ones they left...some of them were over there and then some of them left before we came back, George Green he was one of them from the Dells Dam area he was one of them Australian crawlers and the Japanese struck him and they never found his body. But Benny Winneshiek was a good friend of mine, did you know Benny Winneshiek?

AJ- Yes, I do.

B- He was the chief finally. He was very comical we had some comical times together over there in Australia which I won't repeat. Yeah well you couldn't find no better soldier than those boys. Oh benny and I when we came back we'd talk about different things over there and get a big kick out of it I was sorry to see him pass away but we all got to go someday, that's about all I know.

Preface

T.A. Rykken was born in 1924 in Wittenberg, Wisconsin at the Bethany Indian Mission. His family moved to North Dakota in 1930 and he attended elementary and high school in Petersburg. He was 17 years old in 1941 and had started college in Moorhead, MN at Concordia College. His story was recently documented for a book by Dr. James Hofrenning that chronicles the stories of young men from Concordia who served in the military during the war. Rykken lived in Black River Falls from 1962-1973 serving the Evangelical Lutheran Church parish. This is a transcript that he completed in the summer of 2010 at the age of 86.

The war had begun in December of 1941. Needless to say it was a shock to us at Concordia College. There is a photograph somewhere on the campus of a group of young men gathered around a radio, listening to the dread account of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Historians have told us since that there were clear indications such an attack was coming but it was a shock to millions.

I was seventeen years old and went on to attend college for two years but by the summer of 1943 it seemed to me that it was time for me to join in to help. In August of that year my induction took place in St. Paul, MN and I got on a train for Texas. After an eye-opening six weeks as to vocabulary (I had been raised in a parsonage, attended a Christian college and spent two summers at home), exercise and household duties for which I was not prepared I went to a college training detachment in northeast Oregon.

Five months was the average time there but we spent only two months there. The reason was clear: whereas we had hoped to become officers in the Army Air Corps there were, according to rumor, a 50,000 oversupply. We were headed to the realm of the enlisted rather than to become officers.

On to California; after a time of sorting us out it was determined that I would become an armorer-gunner, the man on board our future airplane to be well acquainted with caliber 30 and 50 machine guns, as well as the 20 mm. cannon, employed on some aircraft. My previous experience along those lines was shooting gophers with a single shot .22 rifle.

So I got some training and was fascinated with the technology of arms. George Bernard Shaw was been quoted in his day talking of the primitive quality of typewriters as compared to that of armaments. He was right then and I suppose today as well, although computers have made vast advances.

After a time in St. Louis we went on a long train ride: specifically to Ft. Myers, Fl, by way of Chicago. The trip took five days and five nights and we arrived in the heat of summer. Further gunnery training took place, including test flight over the water, firing our guns into the water for practice. We wondered how many fish gave their all for the war effort!

After a brief stay (the army called it TDY, temporary duty) at Myrtle Beach in one of the Carolinas a brief furlough back to North

Dakota was given. That was the last time I saw my father who had been in poor health for some time.

We shipped out from Newport News, Virginia on a relatively small ship. There were about 1500 servicemen aboard. 500 of us were air crew and the rest infantry. We of the air crew status had been through a lot of motion sickness flights and the infantrymen had not, with predictable results. We were in the North Atlantic in November and the sea was rough. I was reminded of stories I had heard of my grandparents making a similar trip and better able to understand what they had gone through.

Naples, Italy was our destination. We stayed there briefly and went on to Caserta, a few miles to the east. Our ultimate destination was to be the island of Corsica. There is an aside here, one of many in the course of any war. A pilot of one of the B-25's was eager to be a fighter pilot, whether out of the possible glamour, or because he wanted to be alone on a plane we don't know. However, he stole a jeep from the motor pool, drove into Naples, and, like the Prodigal Son, spent his time in riotous living. He found some young ladies who liked the idea of jeep ride with a handsome airman. He went to one of their homes, secured some pink paint to cover the jeep numbers, and continued his adventure for a couple of days. Like the prodigal of old he came to his senses, began the return to Caserta, but wrecked the jeep on a rock pile. There followed a hearing and it was determined that he could not fly a bomber and be responsible for the crew. Later he was assigned to be a fighter pilot. Someone works in a mysterious way!

Corsica was the birthplace of Napoleon and is well known for its climate and beauty. It was a French island and had been overrun by the German army who had then been overcome. There was evidence of their presence by wrecked vehicles, one of which was the remains of the well known Volkswagen.

We got to work securing our quarters, tents that were placed on wooden floors. We were given canvas cots along with air mattresses which were very comfortable. It was a strange kind of war in which we found ourselves: fly out, drop bombs, return to relative comfort. But there were other sides to the conflict.

The weather was cool but not cold. We needed some heat in the tents. Some genius had devised a system of tubes and valves that directed airplane fuel on to a sand base in can that had other uses previously. It worked and we lost only one tent to fire!

We got right to work. Daily postings of bombing missions were there for us to see. Most of the missions were to northern Italy in the Brenner Pass. From ancient times this had been a route used for troops and materiel. Hannibal had been there, they told us, with his elephants from North Africa to subdue Italian troops.

In the course of time I flew 49 bombing missions. This was not the fulfillment of a complete tour duty for crews of medium bombers. Our missions lasted from three to five hours while the larger planes had missions that lasted much longer and they had fewer missions for a full tour of duty.

We had a six person crew of three officers (pilot, co-pilot and navigator-bombardier) and three enlisted men (top turret gunner/crew chief, side gunner/radioman, and tail

gunner/armorer). Our targets were marshalling yards, other gathering spots for enemy vehicles and personnel, and ammunition dumps. We knew there were people down there too, but no one discussed that. After all, it was war. In fact we were not sure how things were going to be. There was doubt for quite some time as to whether we would be successful.

We flew from Corsica to Italy. The flights were not long because the B-25 had a limited range. There were no provisions for refueling in the air.

Many of our flights were described as “milk runs”. This descriptive term comes from rural railroads that stopped to gather milk cans to take to a creamery or cheese factory. There would be little or no damage or danger to such a run.

This was not always the case. Before taking off in the airplane or at the direction of our pilot while in flight we would put on flak jackets. These reminded me of the coats of mail often pictured in medieval settings. In fact there was a great similarity to them, and they were heavy to wear. Their purpose, of course, was to protect the wearer from bits of “flak”, or metal fragments sent skyward from the ground. We flew at a relatively low altitude and our plane had no provision for oxygen. If we should go to a height of 8,000 feet or more we could really feel the effects of those heavy jackets.

Not all of the flights were easy. I recall the first time I saw flak in the sky, the bursting of anti-aircraft explosives. There was a thick steel plate in front of me as I sat on a type of stool in the tail of the plane. For maximum protection one could duck behind that plate when flak was heavy but that first encounter was mesmerizing. I couldn't take my eyes off the scene, and I was fortunate that nothing hit our plane on that occasion.

The Italian air force was on the wane by the time I got to Corsica. The Germans had been there as well but things were winding down for them as well. In fact, I never fired my guns as approaching aircraft. Opposing pilots were aware of our armament. We flew in a box of six planes and each plane was equipped with six caliber .50 machine guns but we were still in danger from ground fire. On one mission our plane was struck in an oil line which caused that engine to fail. Our pilot “feathered” the propeller on that engine which meant that the blades were hitting the air at an angle of as to cause the least resistance.

Our navigator quickly determined a pathway to Switzerland, for we were fairly close to that neutral nation. Had we flown there we would have been interned for the duration of the war. It was a tempting prospect. However our pilot skillfully got us over the mountains on the way back to base. On one engine we gained over 500 feet. On that same flight we saw, after we landed that a piece of shrapnel was penetrated the plane about eighteen inches behind me. Had it been necessary to bail out I had the best place of all. I simply would have reached over my right shoulder and yanked a red handle there. It would have caused the canopy above me to fly off and I could have followed out into the air. We never practiced that procedure because it had to be done right the first time. It was a maneuver I was happy to neglect.

In March of 1945 our whole outfit was transferred to the east coast of Italy, on the Adriatic. That was historic country but we were in a war and chances to do a lot of sightseeing were

limited. I was only nineteen and then twenty years old and in retrospect wished that I had more knowledge of the history and geography of the area we were in. I did have the opportunity to spend three days in Rome and five days in Venice which were part of what was called R and R—rest and recreation. Needless to say the time was well spent.

The reason for our move as an entire unit was that it was clear that the war was coming to a climax, and we could be closer to our targets. During that final time we sometimes flew two missions a day which we would not have been able to do from Corsica. The final days of our air raids were larger than usual. Heavy bombers from the south flew high in the sky; we flew at lower altitudes, and were escorted by fighter planes.

Things were winding down in the European war. In fact several of us were granted a three day pass to Rome at that time. While we were there Italy capitulated; there was great jubilation, and a parade which we saw from beginning to end. It was seemingly spontaneous, and special attention was given to a large group known as partisans. They had been leaders in the resistance to the Axis powers and now were seen as heroes. They were characterized by red kerchiefs around their necks and were noted as communists. It was not clear to me that they had any connection to the communism of the Soviet Union, but there may have been. Italy is a Roman Catholic country, and communism and Catholicism don't mix; it may have been a case of strange bedfellows,

That ended my participation in war then, but, as I stated earlier, my tour of duty had not been completed. We who flew in medium bombers were scheduled to fly seventy missions, and I had flown only forty-nine. I write only, realizing that I had been fortunate, or protected, or blessed, whatever it might be said. However, that meant that I still had a tour of duty to complete, but there was no need for tail gunners in Europe then. So we made plans to go back to the United States, and find out then what our future would be.

We left Italy in June, flying back by way of North Africa, the Canary Islands, Greenland, and Connecticut. From there we traveled by train to New York to Minnesota, and back to my hometown in North Dakota. What lay next was still unknown? Rumor was that we would leave California, travel to India, and go up the Burma Road by truck to Chungking, and continue flying missions from there.

While on furlough I visited my uncle in Alexandria, Minnesota.

Shortly after we got back from a few hours of fishing the news came of the dropping of the atomic bomb in Japan and the end of the war. It was marvelous news, and the need for me to complete my tour of duty had ended suddenly.

Many have speculated on the meaning and the consequence of that war. A wise man said once that only the undertakers really won. Perhaps that is a cynical view of World War II, but at the time there was great doubt about what the world would be like if the Axis Powers would win. There was great cost and many deaths, many who were wounded, and many tears shed. God grant an answer to the millions of prayers for peace in the world!