

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

John Bailey

conducted by Martin W. Thomas

November 20, 2002

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in partnership with the Library of Congress

(Note: Corrections made to original transcript by interviewee are noted in parentheses.)

Part 1: Introduction:

This interview is being conducted on November 20, 2002 at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, IL. My name is Martin Thomas. I am speaking with John K. Bailey. Mr. Bailey was born on June 4, 1925 in Chicago, IL and now lives in Darien, IL. He learned of the Veterans History Project through Joe Popowitch, who works here at the library and is the coordinator for this project. Joe told him about it when he came in to inquire about getting copies of his discharge papers. He has kindly consented to be interviewed for the project. Here is his story:

Part 2: Entering the Military:

Mr. Bailey, when did you enter the service?

'43.

What time of year was it?

August.

Where were you living at the time?

In Chicago.

What were you doing before you went in?

Well, I worked for the Crane Company. I was assembling valves for ships. ("I was a blueprint machine operator and was transferred to the shop when the war broke out.") And then they drafted me into the service.

You were drafted. Into the army?

Army.

Where were you inducted?

Camp Grant, IL.

Part 3: Training:

What were your first days like, after you were inducted?

Well, they inducted me and sent me home for two week furlough, and then I went to Camp Walters, TX for basic training.

How did you get down to Camp Walters?

By train.

How long a ride was that?

Two days.

And once you got to Camp Walters, what then?

Took basic training. And, boy, they made a man out of you. They built you up.

What were some of the training regimens that you did?

Calisthenics, every morning. Every morning before breakfast.

About how long did the calisthenics last each day?

Oh, maybe 20 minutes. I would say about 20 minutes. Yes.

What else besides calisthenics?

Hand-to-hand combat, rifle range and marches. We would (go on a) 12 mile forced march. And a 26 mile march.

What does forced march mean?

Well, your pace is much faster than a 26 mile march.

Are you carrying a pack?

Full field pack, rifle, everything.

How much weight would you be carrying? Do you have any estimate?

I have no idea. I was a young kid and never weighed it. (laughs) Just go ahead and carry it.

What kind of shape were you in before you went in?

("169 pounds.") Nothing like when I finished that basic training. I weighed 180 pounds.

Part 4: Going Overseas:

So, what happened after basic training?

Well, we were shipped to Fairfield, CA.

How did you get to Fairfield?

By train.

What did you do at Fairfield?

Got on the boat and sailed over the Pacific Ocean. (10 May 1944)

So Fairfield was the debarkation point?

Debarkation point.

What kind of ship did they put you on?

The USS Bliss. I can remember that.

Was that a troop transport ship? Designed as such?

Yes. They dropped us off and went around, and it was sunk on the other side, going to Europe. They went all the way around. They went to New Guinea, and then they went all the way around, and in the Europe theater they were sunk.

Were they carrying troops at the time they were sunk?

Well, we were off. That's what I heard, that they had been sunk. (later recalled that all troops were off)

What kind of attack sunk them? Was it a plane? Or a submarine attack?

I have no idea. We just heard that it was sunk. It could be wrong. There would be records, I'm sure, about the USS Bliss.

How long did your trip take, from Fairfield to New Guinea?

Twenty-three days. Because they have to go this way (gestures to one side) and change course, every so many minutes.

You said "23 days" like it was a memorable time. What was that like?

Beautiful. You know how the Pacific Ocean is. We passed New Caledonia Island. That's where there was a leper colony on that one portion. They were all waving to us.

Do you have any estimate as to how many troops were on that ship?

I have no idea.

Was it crowded?

No. Not to me. You know what I did? They asked for volunteers to work in the butcher shop. I volunteered right away. That was the best place to be. Everybody was sick on topside, and on the bottom the boat is steady. We were on the bottom level. That's where the refrigerators are, and rooms for cutting meat.

Did you have any experience in butchering?

No. There was a man in charge, a Navy man, and he had us cutting meat and whatever.

How many hours a day would you be doing that?

Oh, three or four. I didn't join right away. I was about a third of the way over when I joined, got into the butcher shop. And, boy, that was great. ("We started 7:00 AM in the morning. After work we were allowed to stay and play cards and eat whatever they had".)

What was great about it, besides the fact...?

They fed you well. (both laugh) For the work we did.

You said you heard that the USS Bliss was sunk later in the European theater. Did you have any problems on your trip over, as far as enemy attacks?

No, nothing. Never saw a thing but beautiful islands.

You mentioned New Caledonia. Any other islands that you saw?

I don't know, there was a little island with three palm trees on it. I'd like to go back there and stay (laughs). Real small island. We passed right by it.

Did you stop anywhere on the way to New Guinea?

No. No, we didn't even stop at Hawaii, I don't think.

Where did you land in New Guinea?

It was at Buna. Buna Mission.

Was that area secure? At Buna Mission?

They had just secured Buna. Right. ("They sent my platoon to guard duty by a river north of Buna Mission. We were there about a month.")

How did you get off the ship onto shore, then?

Well, they had those ducks. They called them "ducks."

Were you already assigned to an outfit before you landed?

No.

What happened to you after you landed?

They just attached us to the 32nd. Because they needed replacements, because they had lost so many men at the battle of Buna. (Mission)

What month and year would that have been?

Hmm. (pause) Dates are real tough. (late June or early July, 1944)

Well, you went in the service in August of 1943. About how many months later was it that you actually landed in Buna Mission?

Well, it was on my birthday, June 4th. I can remember it was two days after we landed it was June 4th, so that would be about June 2nd that we landed there.

And you went in August of '43, so would this have been June of '44?

Mmmm, August? After basic training, yes. Because it was 17 weeks of basic training and then they shipped us to Jacksonville, FL, and from there I went to Fairfield, CA.

So this would have been about ten months after you went in the service?

Yeah, about.

You said you were assigned to the 32nd to fill in for losses.

Yes, Red Arrow.

How did it get the name "Red Arrow"?

From World War I.

Do you know any of the history of what happened that it got that name?

The division that would be, see, the arrow that is piercing a wall. So they would go in and pierce the enemy's lines. So that's how they got the name "Red Arrow."

Were there other divisions fighting in the same area with you, besides the 32nd?

The 7th Cavalry. (33rd Division)

That was a division also?

Yes.

What was the mission of the 32nd Division?

Just take the area.

Where was your unit assigned?

Well, in the beginning my platoon, we were guarding a river north of Buna, so any Japs coming out of the jungle, we would capture or, you know, kill. But we never saw any come out. None of them came out.

About how long were you there?

Month. Because our division went (forward) into and fought at Aitape, Saidor, Finchaven, and Hollandia. Different companies went in and fought at these areas. I was at Buna, on the river, and they went into Aitape, and went in and fought the Japs, and Saidor, and Finchaven, and then Hollandia, and I picked up (rest of) the 32nd Division at Hollandia. They had fought all these

battles along the New Guinea coast. That's the eastern coast.

You say you picked up the division. You were already assigned to them?

On the duty on the river.

And then what happened when you met up with the division at Hollandia?

We all took off for Moratai Island.

You were done with Buna Mission?

Well we were done with New Guinea. It had been secured. So then we went on to Moratai Island. And that's where MacArthur, he landed there. While we were there, MacArthur landed. At Moratai Island. That was his first landing going back to the Philippines.

Moratai Island is part of the Dutch East Indies?

Dutch East Indies, yes. It's a very small island.

How long were you on Moratai?

(about) Three weeks.

What did you do while you were there?

Well, we just rested.

There was no combat for you there?

No combat. The Japanese (gave no resistance): we destroyed all their food (and ammunition with incendiary grenades; "a real fireworks show") and they went up into the mountains. And they would come out, one by one, you know. There were not that many on that island. It was very small. We held them up there, in the mountains.

You say they came out one by one. To do what?

(To surrender.) They were starving. They didn't have no food.

Were they coming out to surrender?

Surrender, right.

Then after three weeks you left Moratai?

And then went on to Leyte, in the Philippines. (landed 20 Oct. 1944)

How did you travel to get there?

Boat. Those LCI's.

Landing Craft, Invasion?

Landing Craft, Infantry .

Oh, OK. Somebody else told me it was Landing Craft, Invasion, but it's probably Landing Craft, Infantry.

Infantry, right.

What happened after you got to Leyte?

Well, it was already secured. The beachhead was secure, and we went up into the mountains.

You say "we." Was it just your platoon?

Regiment.

Do you remember the number of the regiment?

Oh, 126th. (Co. K, 126th Infantry)

And this was still with the 32nd. So you headed up into the hills. What was your job at that time?

Well, I (pause) what should I say? I (pause) I volunteered to become reconnaissance (pause) I'm trying to think. That was a platoon for reconnaissance (and patrol) behind the Jap lines. I volunteered for that.

Did they ask for volunteers?

Yes. There was two platoons.

They were forming these platoons up to do reconnaissance?

Yes. To go behind the Jap lines, and seek them out, see where they were at.

John, what prompted you to volunteer?

I volunteered for everything. Because I didn't want to tell anybody to go someplace and be killed. So I volunteered. For all. ("On the river in New Guinea I was called in to the officers' tent; they announced that I was to be a corporal of a platoon. I told them I could not tell a man to do something that might him killed")

You told me earlier that you had volunteered to work in the butcher shop on the ship. Were there other things that you volunteered for before volunteering for this reconnaissance patrol?

No. No, that was the second. ("The big one.")

Did they tell you when they were asking for volunteers that this was going to be a dangerous assignment?

Oh, yes. Because you live behind the Jap lines, really.

How many volunteers did they get?

Well, one platoon, which is about 15 or 16 men.

They formed this platoon of volunteers from other platoons, is that right?

Right. Anybody who volunteered into that.

So there were 15 of you that volunteered?

Yes. And there were two of these units. (The other platoon was) ambushed and they were all killed. The other platoon, 15 men. But we were lucky. We had a first scout, I was the second scout, first scout was from Kentucky, and he was a dead shot. Shoot from the hip, bang bang. Two Japs stuck their heads up on the side of a big tree. Picked them off, bang bang, before I even knew they were there. Amazing, right through the head. And from the hip!

What was his name?

I have no idea. He was from Kentucky, and they can really shoot.

Did both of these reconnaissance patrols go out at the same time, yours and the one that was ambushed?

No.

Which one went out first?

I think what we did was, we replaced that first reconnaissance platoon.

When you volunteered, did you know you were replacing a platoon that had been wiped out?

Oh, yes. ("They told us so.")

No survivors?

None.

Were they able to determine how they were ambushed? What went wrong?

Who knows? I don't think anybody ever knew. They might have, but I have my doubts.

Had the bodies been discovered before your platoon went out?

I really don't know.

I was just wondering if they were just missing, or if they already knew that they'd been killed.

Well, they didn't return. To the regimental headquarters. Because that's where you had to report, regimental. Of where there Japs were and how many.

Was part of your mission to avoid contact? Avoid detection?

We never fired a shot. In the jungle it's pretty easy to hide. ("Total silence. No talking, no smoking")

How long did you expect to be out on this patrol?

Well, we would leave early in the morning. Come back in the evening.

Oh. I see. So you didn't have to transport a lot of food. What type of equipment did you personally carry?

I had a carbine. M1 carbine.

That was it?

M1 carbine. Hand grenades.

So these patrols would go out in the morning and be back by nightfall?

Yes. (Remembered later off record that they did not always come back by nightfall.)

How many patrols would you say you did, altogether?

Oh. (long pause)

Were you going out everyday?

No, not everyday, but just about, you know. Just about. If we would contact the Japs, the regiment would go out and have contact with the Japanese, where they were. We had quite some battles with them. They had crossfire, machine guns and, oh boy. ("We lost 84 killed or wounded one day.")

When you found enemy, how did you communicate that information back to your headquarters?

Keep it in your head, and the sergeant was a great guy, too. He knew terrain and, well they had maps with them too, terrain maps, and they could pinpoint where they were at.

Did you have any type of radio communication?

No. No communication whatsoever. We hardly ever talked. Had to be quiet.

Were you ever discovered on any of your patrols?

Yes, the two Japs that we killed, that (were hiding) behind the tree. One Jap had a hand grenade. He was going to hit it on his helmet and throw it, and he didn't make it. Didn't get rid of the hand grenade. ("I was second scout. Good thing. Being first scout and from Chicago would have been bad. Being first scout and from the hills of Kentucky was much better.")

Did it go off?

No. He didn't hit it. He had to hit it on his helmet. (To arm it.)

Were there any other incidents where you were detected by the enemy?

Well, let's see. I'm trying to think. There was one more, but that was after I got out of that intelligence and reconnaissance. I became a bazooka man. There was a pair; my partner carried the tube and I carried the shells, because I was big and strong.

Did you volunteer for this also?

Yes. I volunteered for that. And we used it and, boy, that's one weapon! Fantastic!

Had you had any training?

No. That was something that they just brought in and said, "Here, this is all you do. You hook the wires on this way and put the shell in and let her go, pull the trigger."

No training in aiming it?

No. My partner did the aiming and I just hooked up the shell.

Was that a new weapon at that time?

Yes. We just got it.

Had you ever seen one before?

Nope. It's a tube. You know, a tube about that long (spreads arms). ("Actual size was 4 to 5 feet.") And about that big around (shows with hands). ("Actual size was 3 1/2 to 4 inches.")

Was its purpose primarily to defeat armor?

Well, this goes right through trees. There was two Japs behind a tree. Shot at that tree and, boy, they were smoking back there. Full of holes. Amazing! And that tree never fell down. You know how those trees are? In the jungle they're about that big around (spreads arms) with the roots that grow out. ("About 30 inches in diameter".)

What kind of tree was it?

I don't know. It's a tropical tree. It wasn't a coconut tree or a palm tree.

You say they thought they were safe behind the tree?

Oh, yes. Now with shooting a rifle, it wouldn't go through, because it was that big around.

Now, with your arms you're showing about maybe 18 inches in diameter?

Right, 18. ("More like 30 inches.")

Did the enemy have any armored vehicles there?

In the jungle they had a tank. Well, that was later, when I was injured, but up in the mountains they couldn't get any tanks up there.

So the bazookas were issued primarily for getting soldiers hiding behind a tree?

Right. Trees, right. Or even if they were in a pillbox.

Was it effective against a pillbox?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Did you and your partner ever use it against a pillbox?

No.

But you had heard that it was?

Yes. Well, yeah (laughs) it surely would if it would go through a tree, you know, that 18 ("30") inches in diameter. Yeah, you had to do a lot of things on your own. You know, learn as you go. And the sad part of the whole thing, when the division is reinforced with new recruits, the first two weeks there's not many that make it. They don't know what to do or how to act in battle.

You're saying the casualty rate is higher for them?

Much higher, yes. New recruits, and before you know it, you only have a few continuing on. Killed or wounded.

Did the sergeants try to get those recruits assigned to or under the wing of veterans to make their chances better?

Yes, but even so. The old timers, they knew what to do, and just automatic, you know.

What are some examples of what the old timers already knew how to do that the new recruits didn't?

Oh, stay low. Stay low.

The recruits didn't understand the need to do that?

Yeah. Yeah, you gotta stay awful low. Crawling, if nothing else, you know. Because machine guns, you know, they go over you. I did a lot of crawling. And it was a lot of mud. The only time we bathed is when we went across a stream.

That was the only time you could get clean?

Yeah, you could see the dirt in the stream from us.

This was in Leyte, right?

This was in Leyte.

How long were you there altogether?

Hmmm, I don't think that's even on my discharge papers, how long I was there. I was 11 months overseas in combat, 11 months. I was 27 months in the service.

You were three weeks in Moratai, and I forgot what you said in Buna Mission, but you were there maybe nine months in Leyte?

Well, a lot of it was Moratai Island. And then, you know, there was transportation.

Do you think you were there six months?

Could be, yes. Well, you know, that overseas also goes in after I was wounded. They shipped me back to Biak Island. That was the 1st Field Hospital, and I was there, oh, a long time.

That was the name of it, 1st field.

1st Field, yeah. Biak Island. I know I had 30 days of penicillin, so I know that was one month.

Well, let's go ahead and cover when you were wounded. Was that the first time you were in actual combat, when you were wounded?

Well, Moratai Island, I was in combat there, and then...

You were actually in firefights on Moratai?

Well, no, not really. But we were on guard, you know. The Japs would come out, you know, but they wanted to...

On Leyte, was that the first combat engagement, when you were wounded? Or were you in others?

No. Well, I was in others, but I was always on the perimeter, because I was in intelligence and reconnaissance.

After reconnaissance you went to the bazooka team, and were you in any engagements when you were on the bazooka team?

Well, yes, with the Japs behind the trees. See, we were up in the mountains. They actually dropped the bazooka and the shells to us, because we were up in the mountains. And then we had to learn on our own how to use it. They give you instructions, you know.

Let me stop and ask you about that. They dropped the bazooka to you out of an airplane? Parachute?

They had to drop us ammunition, too.

And food?

And food, right.

What other supplies did they drop you?

That was about it.

Food and ammunition and weapons?

Yeah, weapons, right.

So you wore the same uniform the entire time?

Oh, yeah. (both laugh) There was no showers to go to. That's why I say, whenever we crossed a stream, that's where we'd be washed. But most of the time it rained. You know, it would rain and we'd wash off. ("Every day".)

Let's talk then about the day you were wounded. Where were you that day?

We were on a ridge. And the Japs, they shot in three knee mortar shells. And I was in one of those trees where the roots were out (above ground). I was in there.

You had taken cover in there?

Taken cover in the roots of the trees. And one shell exploded up on the hill, and came right through the big root, you know, that, they're about that wide (shows span of 6" with hands). And goes right through and got me in the leg. and then my butt. One piece of shrapnel.

One piece of shrapnel got you where on the leg?

I'll show you. I'm not going to show you my butt . (interviewer laughs).

Oh, that's quite a chunk. (scar is on lower leg near ankle)

If it had gone over here it would have taken my leg off. If I was another inch over, it would had have taken my leg off. But that went through the tree, that piece of shrapnel.

Now, the shrapnel that hit your ankle, was that the only wound you got at that time?

No. The one on the butt. I was laying in there with my leg up, and it went through the leg and took the meat off the butt. Same piece of shrapnel.

When they fired those three knee mortar shells, was that the first time that your platoon was aware that they were there?

Oh, no.

You were already engaged in a firefight?

Yeah, they had a tank down there too, but they weren't using the tank. But they had a Banzai attack after they threw in the knee mortar shells.

A Banzai attack, is that a suicide attack?

Yes.

How many enemy soldiers were there?

I have no idea. ("About 25.")

How many made the charge, would you guess? Did you see them making the charge?

No, I was in the perimeter. But that's where we got it, because they dropped them into the perimeter. That's why I got hit. But they made the Banzai attack, there were quite a few casualties on the front lines.

What was your assignment that day? Were you still a bazooka man?

Well, no, we had gotten rid of it.

You were a rifleman again?

Yeah. The carbine. Still with the carbine.

About what time of day did the mortar attack occur?

It was toward evening. Dusk. And after they dropped those shells in, then they made the Banzai attack. It was dark by then. (pauses to remember) Actually, it was dark when they dropped those shells in. Sure. That's right.

What happened after you were wounded?

Well, the medic took care of me.

How long did it take for the medic to get to you?

Oh, he was right there, like that.

What did he do?

Patched me up, put that, uh, what is that..?

Sulfa powder?

Sulfa powder. Sulfa powder they put in the wounds. And patched them up and that was it. And gave you a morphine shot.

Did you get morphine at that time?

One shot. At the time, yes.

Now you were up in the mountains. How did they get you to an aid station?

Two and a half days. The Filipinos would come up and take the casualties down.

They carried you down?

On a stretcher. They made a stretcher. They got some poles. They chopped down trees and made poles out of them and then they'd use ponchos and wrap it around. And that's how they took me down. And they took me all the way down to the capital. What was the name? Taclobin. Taclobin is where they took me.

So the medic comes out immediately and patches you up and gives you some morphine. How much time then until the Filipino litter bearers..?

Next day.

So you were there overnight. Were you in pain?

No.

Because of the morphine?

Morphine, I think. I was in really no pain. Well, really, there wouldn't be pain, as much as if it were a bone. It never touched the bone. It was all flesh. So, when you're injured with a bone, that's where it's painful. I know. Lost that (shows stump of missing finger). Conveyer fell on it. (both laugh). That hurt.

So you spent the night there, and then in the morning..?

The Filipinos came up, and they would protect you. They had their own rifles and everything. Had guards. The young men were the guards.

Young Filipino civilian men? Guerrillas?

Yeah. And the older men would do the carrying.

How many wounded were they taking down?

Oh, my. I really don't know. ("I was one of the first to go down.")

But there were others besides yourself?

Others, right. Oh, yes.

Did you communicate with any of the other wounded US soldiers?

No. You couldn't talk. You don't say nothing. No noises.

You said it took a day and a half to get you down?

It was about two and a half days. We were quite a ways up, in the mountains. They just take you through the day, and you slept in the jungle at night, you know. There were guards.

After the morphine wore off did you have any pain at all?

No. Nothing. Other than bouncing over a log once in a while. Because there was always logs over the path, you know, they had to carry you over. But that was the only pain.

You say they carried you all the way to (mispronounces name) Tacloban?

Taclobin. Taclobin is the name of the town.

How do you spell that?

I have no idea. (laughs) Taclobin, I can remember the name of it.

When they got you to Taclobin, what happened then?

Well, let's see, they took us off of Leyte, and I guess they took us down to the airfield and airlifted us to Biak Island, to the First Field Hospital.

What happened to you there?

They operated on me. They took some skin off of my right leg and put it over my left leg where the injury is at. Skin graft, they call it. Worked good, still there.

What kind of facility did they have there? Was it a permanent structure? Or a medical tent?

That was a structure. Wasn't a tent. All the beds were under tents.

The beds were in tents, but the operating facilities were in a..., was it a Quonset hut type building or a...?

It looked like a regular building they had built there for it. It was well built. And while I was there at Biak Island, there was one Jap plane that came over, over the, I guess it was a plateau on Biak Island. He flew from, I think it was New Guinea. See, Biak Island is in a little peninsula of New Guinea. And this Jap plane came over and dropped two incendiary bombs on the airfield. Killed and injured over 200 airmen. And then those doctors worked for three days. Oh, it was terrible. And when I heard that plane I hollered "Jap plane." Everybody was getting under their beds.

How close to the airfield was your hospital?

Oh, I don't know. A couple of miles maybe.

But you were able to hear the plane. Did it pass over the hospital?

Oh, yeah. Passed right over our tents. Dropped the bombs and he was gone. I don't know where he came from, but he did his job. It was terrible.

How long, John, were you in the hospital at Biak Island?

Quite a while.

Weeks? Months?

Oh, three months. Two and a half to three months. Because I had one month of penicillin shots. They try and keep you there and get you healed up, but it didn't work. Or I'd have been back in service.

Why didn't it work?

I don't know. I have no idea. Because there's, I don't know, it was a fungus infection that I had in the butt. The leg was all healed. That healed up right away. See, they had to sew the butt together.

We ran out of tape right as you were telling me about the fungus infection. You say they actually had to sew your butt together. How big a wound was it? How many stitches?

I have no idea.

About how long is the scar?

Well, it's about like that (shows a length of 6" and depth of 1" with hands).

Big and deep.

Oh, yeah. It takes the flesh out. And then they just pull over the flesh and sew it together. I have problems sitting (laughs) too long (both laugh), you know.

So you were in the hospital 2 1/2 to three months. How did you pass your days while you were there? What did you do?

Um. ("Played cards with the patient next to me.")

Did they have any physical therapy?

No.

Nothing like that?

No. I was in bed.

Did you read? Or play cards?

Well, yeah, I played cards. Played cards and worked jigsaw puzzles.

Did you have any entertainment while you were in the hospital?

No.

No entertainment? Any famous people come to visit the hospital?

Diana Lynn. ("Actually, this happened after I returned to the United States, at the Veterans' Hospital in Topeka, KS.")

Diana Lynn?

Yes. She's the one that came through. Came in and sat on the bed and talked.

Did she actually come and sit on your bed?

Oh yes.

How long did she talk with you?

Oh, maybe 15 minutes.

Really.

Oh yeah.

What did you talk about?

Oh, just that I was alive...

Well, with Diana Lynn sitting on your bed I guess you knew whether you were alive or not.

(both laugh)

Alive and well. (laughs) Yeah. Quite an interesting person. I don't remember what we talked about but, you know.

Did she give you a kiss?

No (laughs). No.

How many other patients were in the ward?

No, this was a room. I was in a separate room. It wasn't a ward. I was in a room.

The reason I asked was because I was wondering if she spent up to 15 minutes with each patient she would be there all day.

It seemed like quite a while.

I imagine you appreciated that.

Oh yes. Oh yeah. Never forget her.

One thing I should have asked you about before was your communication with friends and family back home. Was your family notified that you were wounded?

Umhmm, yes.

Had you had any communication or correspondence before?

Oh, just writing letters. We'd get letters back and forth.

The so-called V mail?

Yeah.

How often did you write or receive letters?

About once a month. Because, you know, they had to find you. That was a tough job for that postal system, to find where you were at. If you were up in the mountains in combat there was no way you could get letters. We had to come back into the rest zone, more or less, to get letters.

Who did you correspond with?

My mother. I was the only child. I wrote her quite a few letters. I had time, you know.

After your convalescence stay was over, what did they do with you then?

Well, we went to (Topeka, KS) uh, what was the name of that...?

You say they sent you back to the States?

To the hospital.

How did they transport you back from the islands?

That was by air, all the way.

Did you land anywhere on the way?

Yeah, just the Hawaiian Islands.

How long did you stay in the Hawaiian Islands?

Overnight. They didn't keep you very long because there was a steady stream coming through.

Anything memorable happen while you were in the Hawaiian Islands overnight?

Oh yes. Joe E. Brown came in.

Joe E. Brown the comedian?

Comedian. Yes. He shook hands with all the, there was about eight of us that came in.

Eight wounded?

Eight wounded. He shook our hands, and he had tears in his eyes.

He had tears in his eyes?

Yes. Because his son was killed over there in New Guinea. In the mountains. The Owen Stanley Mountains.

What branch of the service was he in?

He was an entertainer.

No, I mean the son that was killed.

Oh, he was in the army.

Had you heard he had been killed before you met Joe E. Brown the entertainer?

Yes. Because they named the Owen Stanley Mountains for Joe E. Brown...

The son's name was Joe E. Brown also?

I don't know if it was, but they called it the Joe E. Brown mountains.

What did they do with you after they got you back to the States?

Took me to the hospital in Topeka, KS.

How long did they keep you in the hospital in Topeka?

Boy. (pause) That, maybe a month. And then from there...well, they operated on my butt again at Topeka, KS.

Is that a military hospital there?

That's a military hospital. I don't know the name. Just Topeka, KS, that I can remember. And then from there, they sent me to San Antone, TX. For rehabilitation. That's where you get the rehabilitation.

What did the rehabilitation consist of?

Exercise.

More calisthenics? (both laugh)

Not really, but just, you could have free passes, you know, into San Antone. There was no limit. Well, then from San Antone, I was discharged at Camp Plauche. (7 Dec.1945)

How do you spell it?

Camp Plauche. P-L-A- Plauche. French. (laughs) And I was discharged from Camp Plauche.

I'll ask you about your discharge in just a second, but you just mentioned that at San Antonio, you called it San Antone...

San Antone.

San Antonio, where the Alamo is?

That's where the Alamo is. San Antone, right.

And that's the first time you've mentioned anything about getting to go out into the town. You never had the opportunity before?

I couldn't walk. I was on crutches.

And before that there was no place to go?

Right. Well, you couldn't get out of bed.

So, what did you do in San Antonio when you got out of the hospital?

Oh, walk around. They have a river that goes around.

The River Walk?

The River Walk, yes.

How did the locals react to seeing a soldier out walking?

Perfect.

They knew you had been wounded?

Oh yes.

And you would be wearing your uniform?

Yes. I always had the uniform.

Did any of them stop and talk to you and ask you about it?

They invite you into their home. Sure.

They were very appreciative of what you had gone through?

Oh yes. They were great down there.

So then you were transported to Camp Plauche?

Louisiana. To be discharged. Louisiana. I got around. Got to see a lot of towns. A lot of cities.

How long were you at Camp Plauche?

Probably a week.

What did you do there while you were waiting to be discharged?

Went down to New Orleans, and went through the French Quarter, and ate at some of the restaurants down there. We had free... you're on your own.

Any interesting experiences in New Orleans to share?

Umm, French Quarter is quite an interesting place. I don't know how it is today, but in those days it was great.

When you were discharged, how did you get back home?

Train. Yeah, train ride back.

Commercial train or troop train?

Troop train. Well, no, not a real troop train. A regular train. Lot of service people on it. Probably a regular train.

Did your family know that you were discharged, before you got home?

Well, no. No.

Were they surprised to see you come home?

Well, I wrote a letter and told them. I don't think I phoned home. But they did meet me at the train.

What was that like?

Oh, great. Yeah, my mother was, being the only son, you know, wow. That was something for her, that I came back.

Who met you at the train besides your mother?

Father. That's it. Mother and father.

John, what did you do in the days and weeks after you were discharged?

Hmm. Well, we used to go out drinking. Scotch and water. A friend of mine. He was in service. Bill Mc Doughill. We used to go out. He was in service too.

Was he a friend of yours from your neighborhood or from the service?

From before I went into the service. We used to play together. And I knew him for quite a number of years.

Did you go back to work, or go to school?

Well, I went to school. I took a two day test at Chicago University, and they told me, from what they got from the test, my best thing was, go into mechanics. Work with my hands. So, under the GI Bill I took watch repairing. Under the GI Bill. And I still repair watches today. Today, you only change batteries (both laugh). But years ago you put in balance staffs, mainsprings, and clean them.

What was the name of the school, and how long did you go there?

Olson Jewelry School. One year course. And the government furnished me with all the tools, and the workbench and everything. I got everything.

Did you go in business by yourself, then?

No. I always did my own watch repairing. Actually, I got into the millwrights, carpenters, 1693 Millwrights.

When did you start with them?

What year? 1954.

What did you do between the time you got out and 1954?

Well, I had other odd jobs, you know, until I got into the millwrights.

Were you repairing watches during that time?

Oh, yes. I worked at a trade shop downtown in the Venetian Building. I worked there for three years. Repairing watches after I got out of school. And that's where you learn how to repair watches, because the trade shop gets watches from the jewelers that can't fix them. So then we fix them in the trade shop.

I don't know if I got this or not. When did you get discharged? What month and year?

Oh boy. I don't think I gave it to you. Boy. It would be nice if I had my discharge papers, because it's all on there.

You said the war was still going on when you got discharged?

Yes. Wait a minute. It ended when I was at....Yeah, I think I was at New Orleans, down at Camp Plauche. When they dropped the bomb, it was.

We talked about your career. You went to school and learned watch repairing, and worked at that, became a millwright. And you got married. When did you get married?

1949. Been married 54 years. That can't be right. Gee whiz. 53. Yeah, 53, that's what it is. That's a long time.

Any children?

Two girls.

Grandkids?

I have two grandsons and two granddaughters.

John, did you ever join any veterans' organizations?

American Legion.

Do you still belong?

Yes.

Are you active? Attend meetings?

Yeah, I do. Yes.

Have you ever attended any military reunions?

Never. Never been able to. And I want to get in contact with the Red Arrow, because they're from Milwaukee. They're right close. That's Wisconsin and Michigan.

I think Joe Popowitch or I can help you with that. I've seen some Web sites you can go to.

I'd like to. Maybe they have some get-togethers. Might even be able to see somebody I knew.

Well, I think I've covered all the points I know of to cover. I'll close by asking you, how do you think your military service and the experiences you had affected your life?

Made a man out of me.

How so?

Well, you get to see what life is really all about. I became injured, but I'm still here, and not the worse for wear.

John, is there anything that you would like to add that we didn't cover so far in the interview?

(pause) I don't know. It's quite an experience to go through what you go through, and come out alive, and be able to talk about it. I went in as a private, and I came out as a private, and I did my job. Best I could. But that volunteering was for everything. I remember one time we were in Leyte on the beach, and they asked for volunteers, there was Filipinos there, and they had one of those pontoons, boats with the... what do they call them?

Catamarans?

Catamarans. And they thought there were some Japs in a camp, or a village. We had to go around the peninsula. We had to go out around, just two of us and two Filipinos. Paddled around, went over there. There were no Japs there. So they paddled us back and that entrance to the beach was no wider than this room. And they brought us in right in the middle. You could hear the waves crashing up against the rocks. There was rocks on both sides. We'd have hit those rocks we would have been goners. But those Filipinos, they knew exactly where to come in. And the water on the beach, just little ripples, you know? But the white waves (were) crashing up against the rocks where we had to go in. That was something else.

When you went over to this village to see if there were Japanese soldiers there, what would you have done, just two of you, if there had been any?

I don't know.

Gone back and reported it?

Yeah. (laughs) That's about all. But if there were Japs, I don't know if we would have gotten back.

Well, John, that's all the questions I have. I thank you very much for participating in this interview.

I hope I, I can't remember all the dates. If I had my discharge papers, it's all there, a lot of it. All the medals I received, the Purple Heart.

You received the Purple Heart. What other medals did you receive?

The Asiatic Pacific Medal, that's with three Bronze Stars, three landings. And Combat Infantry Badge and there was something else. Oh boy, if I had that, it's all on that discharge paper. Boy oh boy, I hope I can get that.

I hope you can too, and between Joe and I, we can try to find it.

Then I will give you more information, fill in some of the light spots. (Information has been located and added to this transcript.)

Well, thank you very much, John, and we are going off record.